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**THE ROLE OF ANCESTORS
IN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY:
AN EVALUATION**

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Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis the role of ancestors in African Traditional Religions are evaluated from the perspective of African Christology. From a general literature study approach African Traditional Religion in African theology is explained. The concept of Jesus as ancestor is also discussed. From this view and other aspects of African theology, Christology is explained. African Christianity is also evaluated. The role and ontology of ancestors in African Traditional Religion are then discussed. From a Christian, and especially a Christological perspective, biblical aspects concerning the debate on ancestors are explained. Monism rather than dualism regarding the human being is suggested with the implication that the dead “sleep” until the resurrection.

OPSOMMING

Die betekenis van voorouers in die Afrika Tradisionele Religie word in hierdie proefskrif vanuit die perspektief van die Afrika Christologie benader. Vanuit 'n algemene literatuurstudie word die Afrika Tradisionele Religie in die Afrika teologie beoordeel. Die begrip Jesus as voorouer word ook bespreek. Die Christologie word dan vanuit hierdie begrip en ook die Afrika-teologie benader. Die Afrika Christendom word ook beoordeel. Vervolgens word die rol en ontologie van voorouers in die Afrika Tradisionele Religie bespreek. Bybelse perspektiewe op die debat oor die voorouers word vanuit 'n Christelike, en veral 'n Christologiese perspektief benader. Ten opsigte van die mens se bestaan word 'n monistiese eerder as dualistiese uitgangspunt voorgestaan met die implikasie dat die dooies “slaap” tot by die opstanding .

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby handed in for the qualification PhD in Missiology at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for qualification at/in another University/faculty.

I hereby declare that I cede all copy right of this dissertation to the University of the Free State.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
OPSOMMING	ii
DECLARATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	3
1.3 Motivation	5
1.4 Problem statement	6
1.5 Research question	8
1.6 Limitations of the study	9
1.7 Purpose of the study	10
1.8 Objectives of the study	11
1.9 Value of the study	11
1.10 Research design and methodology	13
1.11 Study outline	16
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1 Approaches to African Traditional Religions in African theology	20
2.2 Continuity	22
2.2.1 A dialogue of two equals	22
2.2.2 Our fathers and mothers who art in heaven – Jesus the Ancestor	26
2.2.3 Christ the Proto-Ancestor	27
2.2.4 Christ the transformed ancestor and the transformer of ancestors	29
2.2.5 Christ the brother ancestor	31
2.2.6 Ancestor worship not to be abandoned	33
2.2.7 What to do with African ancestors?	34
2.2.8 Jesus the only and true ancestor	36
2.2.9 Conclusion	38
2.3 Discontinuity	38
2.3.1 Continuity position as satanic	38
2.3.2 Relevant and biblical Christology	39
2.3.3 The living dead have no dealings with the living	41
2.3.4 Nature of human beings and the state of the dead	45
2.3.4.1 African anthropology	45
2.3.4.2 Monism in African Christianity	47
2.3.4.3 Lack of clarity on the intermediate state	51
2.3.4.4 Monism and dualism debate	52
2.4 Conclusion	53

CHAPTER 3	UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY	55
3.1	What is African Christianity?	56
3.1.1	African Christianity vs African theology	56
3.1.2	Origin of African Christianity	57
3.1.3	Development of African voice in Christian theology.....	59
3.1.4	African theology	60
3.1.4.1	Negritude movement	61
3.1.4.2	Failure of African theologians.....	62
3.1.5	Struggle for authentic African Christianity	63
3.1.5.1	Theology of inculturation	63
3.1.5.2	Syncretism	66
3.2	What is African in African Christology?.....	68
3.2.1	Continuity theology	68
3.2.1.1	The role of ancestors in African Christology	69
3.2.1.2	Divination in African Christology	71
3.2.1.3	Christ as an Ancestor.....	73
3.2.1.4	Conclusion	75
3.2.2	Discontinuity theology	75
3.2.2.1	The negative elements in ancestor cult.....	76
3.2.2.2	Inherent bias in inculturation theology.....	77
3.2.2.3	The challenge of universalism.....	79
3.2.2.4	Rejection of ancestor cult	79
3.2.2.5	Can Christ be viewed as an ancestor?	80
3.2.2.6	Problem of syncretism	81
3.3	What is Christian in African Christology?	83
3.3.1	Centrality of Christ	84
3.3.2	Centrality of scriptures	8786
3.3.3	Intermediate state.....	88
3.3.3.1	Understanding dualistic anthropology.....	88
3.3.3.2	Dualism in African Christianity	89
3.3.3.3	Utilisation of Christian dualistic anthropology in African Christology	90
3.3.3.3.1	Christianization of ancestors	90
3.3.3.3.2	African ancestors and sainthood.....	91
3.3.4	Why dualistic anthropology is attractive	92
3.3.4.1	Missiological significance	92
3.3.4.2	Pastoral significance	93
3.3.5	Monistic anthropology: a critique of dualistic anthropology	94
3.3.6	Conclusion.....	9695
CHAPTER 4	UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE AND ONTOLOGY OF ANCESTORS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION.....	98
4.1	African religion or African religions?	99
4.2	Current status of African Traditional Religion.....	101
4.2.1	Resilience of African Traditional Religion	101
4.2.2	Popularity of African Traditional Religion	102
4.3	African ontology.....	104

4.3.1	Core African beliefs.....	104
4.3.2	Hierarchical structure of African Traditional Religion	106
4.3.3	Ancestors or the living-dead.....	108
4.3.4	Centrality of ancestors in African Traditional Religion	109
4.3.5	Anthropocentricity of African Traditional Religion.....	110
4.3.6	The individual and the community.....	114
4.3.7	African anthropology.....	115
4.3.8	The state of the dead.....	116
4.3.9	How does one become an ancestor?	117
4.3.10	The mystical powers in African worldview	120
4.3.11	God the Supreme Being.....	121
4.3.12	Divinities or nature gods	122
4.3.13	Conclusion.....	123
4.4	Role of African ancestors in African Traditional Religion	123
4.4.1	Role of ancestors in stages of human development.....	123
4.4.1.1	Birth and growth.....	124
4.4.1.2	Puberty and initiation	124
4.4.1.3	Marriage.....	125
4.4.1.4	Death.....	126
4.4.2	General role of ancestors	127
4.4.2.1	Protectors	127
4.4.2.2	Custodians of African tradition and ethics	128
4.4.2.3	Intermediaries	129
4.4.3	Worship or veneration of ancestors	130
4.4.3.1	Importance of ancestral rituals	130
4.4.3.2	Ancestors as recipients of sacrifices.....	131
4.4.3.3	Ancestors as centre of worship in African religion	133
4.4.3.4	Relationship between ancestors and other divine beings	135
4.5	Significance of ancestors in the African worldview.....	137
4.5.1	Existential significance.....	139
4.5.2	Sociological significance.....	140
4.5.3	Eschatological significance	141
4.6	Some challenges in ancestor cult.....	141
4.6.1	Capricious nature of ancestors.....	141
4.6.2	Ancestors and morality.....	142
4.6.3	Mortuary rites	142
4.6.4	Qualifying for ancestorship	143
4.7	Ancestors in African Christology	144
4.7.1	Importance of ancestors for African Christians.....	145
4.7.2	Who are the ancestors in African Christology?.....	145
4.7.2.1	Live an exemplary life.....	146
4.7.2.2	The act of Christ	146
4.8	Conclusion.....	147
CHAPTER 5 AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE		
.....		149
5.1	Communion with the dead.....	150

5.1.1	Deuteronomy 18:9-22.....	150
5.1.2	Leviticus 19:26, 31	154
5.1.3	Isaiah 8:19,20	155
5.2	Intolerant attitude against mediums.....	156
5.2.1	Why the dead cannot communicate.....	156
5.2.2	Scriptural cases of communion with the dead.....	157
5.2.2.1	Matthew 17:3.....	158
5.2.2.2	Luke 16:23.....	159
5.3	Christological pitfalls in communing with the dead.....	160
5.3.1	Idolatry	160
5.3.2	Trust in God.....	161
5.4	Dilemma for African Christology.....	162
5.4.1	Ancestral rituals have no basis	163
5.4.2	Divination prohibited.....	163
5.4.3	Christ, mediator not ancestor.....	165
5.5	Doctrine of the intermediate state.....	165
5.5.1	Biblical evidence for monist anthropology	166
5.5.2	Dualism in Old Testament.....	167
5.5.2.1	Ecclesiastes 12:7.....	167
5.5.2.2	Genesis 35:18	167
5.5.2.3	1 Kings 17:21	168
5.5.2.3.1	Biblical meaning of ‘nephes/ruach”	168
5.5.2.3.2	Man not possessing a soul but a living soul	168
5.5.2.3.3	Nepes in man the same as nephesh in animals	169
5.5.2.3.4	Nepes as life.....	169
5.5.2.3.5	Nepes as aspective	169
5.5.3	Dualism in the New Testament	170
5.5.3.1	Matthew 10:28.....	170
5.5.3.2	Matthew 22:22-33	172
5.5.3.3	Acts 7:55-59	173
5.5.3.4	1 Thessalonians 4:14	174
5.5.3.5	Hebrews 12:1.....	174
5.5.3.6	Revelation 6:9.....	175
5.5.3.6.1	The location of the fifth seal.....	176
5.5.3.6.2	Language of symbolism	176
5.5.3.6.3	Cry versus praise	176
5.5.4	Evidence for the doctrine of intermediate state.....	177
5.5.4.1	Intermediate state in the Old Testament.....	178
5.5.4.1.1	‘Sheol’ in the Old Testament.....	180
5.5.4.2	Intermediate state in the New Testament	182
5.5.4.2.1	Luke 16:22-23	182
5.5.4.2.2	Luke 23:43.....	183
5.5.4.2.3	Did Christ go to heaven upon death?.....	184
5.5.4.2.4	Did Christ teach that the dead people go to paradise after death?.....	184
5.5.4.2.5	Did the Spirit of Christ go to heaven upon death?	185
5.5.4.2.5.1	Place of the comma.....	186

5.5.4.2.5.2	2 Corinthians 5:1-8	186
5.5.4.2.5.3	Housing metaphor	187
5.5.4.2.5.4	Clothing metaphor	188
5.5.4.2.5.5	Homeland metaphor	189
5.5.4.2.5.6	Pauline psychology.....	190
5.5.4.2.5.7	1 Peter 3:18.....	191
5.5.4.3	1 Samuel 28:3-24.....	193
5.5.4.4	Samuel not Saul's ancestor.....	194
5.5.4.5	Mediums prohibited in Israel.....	194
5.5.4.6	Saul was forbidden from consulting mediums	195
5.5.4.7	Medium called up the dead Samuel.....	196
5.5.4.8	Samuel speaking to Saul.....	198
5.5.5	Conclusion.....	200
5.6	Christological implication of the dualistic and monistic anthropology.....	201
5.6.1	Pastoral significance	201
5.6.1.1	Comfort to the bereaved	202
5.6.1.1.1	Death as sleep	203
5.6.1.1.2	Promise of second coming - not presence of Christ	204
5.6.1.1.3	Raising of Lazarus	204
5.6.1.1.4	Comfort in Pauline epistles.....	205
5.6.1.2	Purposeful living	205
5.6.2	Doctrinal significance.....	206
5.6.2.1	Teaching on death.....	206
5.6.2.2	Hope of resurrection	207
5.7	Conclusion.....	208
CHAPTER 6 TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY		210
6.1	Overview and critique of previous recommendations.....	211
6.2	Existential relevance of ancestors.....	214
6.3	Affirmation of the needs of Africans.....	215
6.4	Affirm the relevance of Christ.....	216
6.4.1	Christ's will versus human will	216
6.4.2	Theology of suffering	217
6.4.3	Social involvement	218
6.4.4	Existence of spiritual powers.....	219
6.5	Affirmation of the supernatural and magic powers of spiritual entities	219
6.6	Rooting the scriptures in African Christianity.....	220
6.7	Recognition and Respect for African Traditional Religion.....	221
6.8	Conclusion.....	221
BIBLIOGRAPHY		223

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Hierarchical depiction of the African worldview	111
Figure 2	Man's centrality in the African worldview	113
Figure 3	Relative theism.....	136
Figure 4	Asymmetrical mediation	136

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

“Is there a contradiction between Christianity and African traditional beliefs, or are they mutually exclusive?” This was a question posed by the anchor of the morning talk show on at SAFM radio the day after the centenary celebrations of the ANC that took place in Mangaung on 8 January, 2012. South Africa is a country of many religions and to a great extent all are afforded equal ‘air-time’. On this day of the ANC celebrations, the nation was treated to a rich tapestry of religions.

What seemingly led to the discussion the day after the celebrations was the blending of African Traditional Religion with Christian rituals performed on the day. There were two invited guests at the studio and both were Christian ministers. One represented a view that saw no contradiction between Christianity and African traditional beliefs, especially between Christ and ancestors. The other guest excluded ancestors from any form of Christian worship.

The two views seem to have represented the views of most of those who called to air their views. The debate as it turned out, was not about African Traditional Religion and Christianity but rather the role ancestors should play in Christianity. The two guests are both Christians and the question is whom represented authentic African Christianity.

It is more than 2000 years since Christ was introduced to the Africans who had their own religion that centred on ancestors. The debate on the role of ancestors and Christ has not abated. Inculturation is an attempt to assist the Africans to live the gospel message in a way that is ‘truly African’ and ‘truly Christian’ Wachege (2001:29). What then is truly African and truly Christian in African Christology? It is a fact that there is no common agreement in Africa, and South Africa in particular, on what is ‘truly African’ and ‘truly Christian’. A failure to adopt a proper approach to inculturation, according to Wachege (2001:33) will lead African Christians to a crisis of ‘double identity’. This crisis is a life of

a dichotomized Christian and African. Maybe the question is – can one be truly African and be truly Christian, and if so, what does that mean? Can one worship or venerate ancestors and centre one’s life in Christ at the same time?

The term ‘African Christian’ has become common but there is no agreement as to where the emphasis must be put. The question asked by Galgao (2012:6) is simple yet profound, when he asks, “Are Africans Christians first or Africans and then Christians, or simply Christians?” His conclusion is that seemingly Christ plays second fiddle to ancestors in African Christianity.

There is no unanimity among African theologians on this question. One view maintains that an African religious worldview should provide the framework for Christianity in Africa (Turkson & Wisjen, 1993). This view posits that Africanisation of Christianity should depart from African Traditional Religion and not primarily from the Bible.

Another view seeks to interpret African traditional religion from a Biblical perspective. This view, as argued by Gehman (1989:53), seeks to “replace African worldview with biblical worldview”. Nyirongo (1997:1) strongly argues that the former group is twisting the gospel, thereby deceiving many Africans.

Two basic groups view the role of African ancestors in African Christianity differently. The latter largely maintains that the dead are with Christ but have no contact with the living (Nyirongo, 1997:86). The former maintains the opposite – that the dead continue to be with the living (Orobator, 2008:115). Triebel (2002:196) concludes that the “Holy Communion is the place where living together with the ancestors can be combined with faith in Jesus Christ”.

Life in the African worldview is not compartmentalised into sacred and secular, it is viewed as a whole. The danger facing African Christians might then be compartmentalised spirituality, one African and the other Christian. The question then is – what is the role of Christ in African Christology and what is the relevancy of ancestors?

The debate as to whether the ancestors have any role in the life of the living community will never be settled as long as the belief in the immortality of the soul is maintained. The belief in the immortality of the soul, which is central in both the African anthropology and Christian anthropology, needs further biblical examination.

The evaluation in this study is not limited to the 'African' part of African Christology. It looks at the 'Christian' part as well, to determine whether it is true to the Bible or not, especially when it comes to the issue of death and the dead. The real question confronting African Christianity, as Galgao (2012:6) puts it, is how biblical is missionary Christianity?

This chapter outlines the background to this study and focuses on the motivation, purpose, and research methodology, and lastly it presents a reflection at the problem statement.

1.2 Background to the study

I grew up in a township called Guguletu, situated on the outskirts of Cape Town, about fifteen kilometres from the city. Guguletu is a sprawling urban township in the Western Cape, created in the early 1960s as a result of the Group Areas Act promulgated by the white South African government. The majority of the residents, if not all, came from the rural Eastern Cape about 1 000 kilometres from Cape Town.

Most of the residents had come to this part of the country seeking employment and had to have a 'pass', which was a permit to reside in the area as long as they were employed. They were not allowed to own property, except to occupy the rented houses provided by the government to those who qualified.

There were very few educational institutions for the blacks, and as such most of those who managed to get some decent education had to go to the Eastern Cape for schooling. I grew up as many young black boys admiring men who had been in prison, which was the township 'culture', and those who had undergone ritual circumcision, which was the Xhosa culture. Going to prison and going to the 'bush' (where circumcision took place) had come to symbolise true manhood for many young black boys. Ritual circumcision features

prominently in African Traditional Religion, especially among the Xhosa-speaking tribes and is linked to ancestors (Gitywa 1976:207).

It was the dream of every black parent (amongst others) to see the day when his or her boy child would become a man through ritual circumcision. The rate of school dropouts and those who never even started school was extremely high in those days. There were no 'dropouts' as far as this rite was concerned. Failure to observe the rite, which was something very rare, was seen as a shame both to the family and the boy.

The ritual usually lasted between three and four weeks. The money spent on this practice per child, in my rough estimation, would equal at least three years' tuition fees. The practice was and is still held in high esteem by both those who regarded themselves as Christians and those who do not.

There are four factors that offer the specific background to this study. The first one has to do with my own upbringing. As a young black boy, I was also the product of this environment, and as such I looked forward to the day I would become a man. I grew up in a semi-Christian family with my mother (and not my father) as a Christian. As a firstborn amongst the sons, it would have been the pride of my father to see me through this ritual. However, I had become a committed Christian (Seventh-day Adventist) a year or two before I was due for circumcision. I could not see myself observing the ritual circumcision and remain true to my Christian faith. My father, who was not a Christian, respected my position. At the time I had not realized the significance of my action, which was not even supported by the church.

The second factor was an experience I went through two decades later, when two young men approached me asking why they should observe ritual circumcision. They were due for the ritual and were looking for support from the church not to observe it. I was not able to give them the needed assistance since there was no position that had been taken by the church on this issue. The church in many ways encouraged and celebrated the observance of this rite. The two boys ended up observing the ritual, disappointed and discouraged.

The third factor that informs the background to this subject was the tragic death of the son of my friend while going through the ritual. According to the custom as practiced by the Sotho-speaking people, the mother of the child is not supposed to be told of the death of the child. The deceased is to be buried privately without the knowledge of the family. No period of mourning is allowed, no proper funeral can be organized for the deceased. The mother who at the time was married to a Christian minister and a Christian herself was devastated by this event. This tragic event in my mind demanded an explanation; the religious reasons for the observance of the rite far outweighed the death of the child. If this were true, then these reasons had to be brought to the surface and analysed to arrive at a justification for the continuation of this practice.

Lastly, in South Africa there are annual statistical reports on a consistent basis of the death of initiates during the process of circumcision. The disturbing reality is that the Christian community has not taken a decisive position on this except to align itself with the practice in most instances.

1.3 Motivation

The history of how Christianity came to Africa and how it affected indigenous cultures continues to affect the way African Christians worship God. African Christianity, despite this negative social history, is experiencing phenomenal growth on the continent. The question is whether Christianity has found a home in Africa or has it lost its saltiness and has become part of the African worldview? The study is propelled by the desire to evaluate the theological and biblical justification for the continued promotion of veneration of ancestors in African Christology.

Thus motivation for this study is threefold: Firstly, African theologians promoting ancestral ascendancy in African Christology have not convincingly shown how the Bible supports this position. Exegetical and theological studies are very limited, such that ancestor cult is accommodated in Christianity without a critical appraisal of the problems and challenges it poses even for the African Traditional Religion adherents. This study

aims to ground its contribution on the solid Biblical and theological foundation that views ancestor worship as a subject of redemption and not continuity.

Secondly, the ontological arguments around the issue of ancestors have not been taken seriously by most African theologians. An uncritical assumption is made based on the traditional biblical anthropology. As a result, the existence of ancestors is adopted without a clear biblical justification. The major contribution of the study is the basic argument that the encounter between Christianity and Africanity is an encounter between two religions and two centres of worship, Christ and ancestors. Any confusion on this issue will lead to a form of syncretism and idolatry. The study argues for the ontological non-existence of ancestors, thereby eliminating the competition and confusion between the role of Christ and that of the ancestors in African Christology.

Lastly, the study recommends an African biblical Christianity that eschews the existence of ancestors while arguing for a Christ that meets the needs that were originally thought to have been met by ancestors. This is the biblical model of African Christianity that both those who see a continuity between ancestors and Christ, and those who advocate for a discontinuity, do not emphasize.

1.4 Problem statement

The question is well put by Turaki (1999:258) when he asks: “Should Christ assume the role and functions of the traditional African ancestors or should the ancestors assume the Christological qualities of Christ?” At the centre of this debate is the understanding of the role of ancestors in relation to that of Christ. The phenomenological growth of Christianity in Africa has not weakened the centrality of African ancestors in the mind and life of the African Christian.

African theologians like Ramathate (2008:227), have argued, “The church in Africa cannot be truly Christian if it ignores the role of ancestors.” On the other hand, the Bible seems to be unyielding in its stance that one cannot serve two masters (Mk. 8:29; Mt. 16:15). This dilemma is bound to render African Christianity less Christian if not against Christ. The fear of death and the dead continues to hold a grip in the soul of the African Christian.

The fear of sickness and death is seen as the main cause of apostasy and a return to traditional belief in the living dead (Gehman, 2009:ix). This has led to the observation that the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa is nothing but a “bubble without content” (Galgao, 2012:23). The Christ as perceived in African Christianity will slowly give way to the African ancestors, for no religion can remain schizophrenic for a long time.

How long will the African Christian continue living faith with a ‘split personality,’ quizzes Magesa (2004:79), as he concludes his research across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. One of his key findings, which may have led to this question, is the observation that Christians continue to call upon ancestors in times of difficulty in one way or another. Dual allegiance, two-hat Christians; all of these refer to the struggle an African Christian still goes through as he/she seeks to relate Christianity to the existential issues faced within an African context.

The problem thus facing African Christians, which sums up the problem statement for this research, regards the role of ancestors in relation to that of Christ. The problem is not so much how to reach the Africans who do not know Christ but rather how to reach the Africans who know Christ but are steeped in ancestor cult.

A pivotal question that all African theologians should engage in is the one asked by Gehman (1989:109): “What is the solution to the African Christian problem of returning to the living-dead during the times of sickness and death?” He further observes “that since 1960 various theologians in Africa have been asking this question”. Their solutions, he argues, were “similar to Roman Catholic theology with a liberal accent of universalism”.

The solution, as argued by Gehman, may represent just one of the two solutions. The other solution offered is that of accepting the existence of ancestors while arguing against any meaningful role they can play among the living. This solution also creates a dilemma for Africans who are communal by nature to be told that their ancestors are alive but have nothing to do with them.

The problem then facing African Christianity, which is the focus of this study, is not the unfaithfulness of African Christians to biblical teaching, but the faithfulness of the African

church to doctrines and teachings that are not supported by the Bible. Both the African part in African Christianity as well as the Christian part are influenced by the African worldview. The Christian ontology is attractive to African theologians because it is in agreement with the African ontology. This ontology is in itself an unbiblical proposition. The problem is not that it agrees with the African worldview, but that the Bible does not support it.

The dilemma facing African Christianity is how far it must go in seeking African approbation. Should Christ be sacrificed on the altar of African Traditional Religion in the process? African Christianity needs to articulate its position with clarity when it comes to the centrality of ancestors in its Christology. This it needs to do for two main reasons; firstly, to be a credible witness to Africans who are still steeped in African Traditional Religion. This will be done by showing a better way and helping the African realize his or her deeper longing holistically and effectively. Secondly, to develop a theology that is not only localized and only understood within the continent but one that can be appreciated and taken seriously outside of the African continent. This will qualify the African Christians as missionaries not only to their own fellow Africans but also to the world in general. Failure to do this will render it less Christian and just an extension of African Traditional Religion.

1.5 Research question

The veneration or worship of ancestors is one of the pillars of the African spirituality. The living-dead continue to live among the community and have a great influence in their lives (Gehman 1999:3). African community, families and individuals would disintegrate and cease to exist without the guidance and protection of the ancestors. Studies have shown that this belief continues even after the conversion of most Africans. The majority of African theologians and some who have had extensive missionary work in Africa argue for continuity between veneration of ancestors and Christianity. Dissenting voices within the African continent are few and far between.

The research question that this study seeks to examine is why does the belief in ancestors have a grip on the African soul? This question leads the research to examine two other issues as a way of responding to the question. The first issue deals with what is African in African Christianity. The second issue deals with what is Christian in African Christianity.

This research proposes two critical reasons for the continued veneration of ancestors by African Christians. Firstly, the practice is premised on the belief that the living-dead are not dead. The influence of the elders based on age and experience in the life of the community or family and individuals does not stop at death but continues as long as living-dead are remembered. Secondly, the perceived failure of Christianity in addressing existential issues faced by the African believer, leaves the African Christians with no option but to resort to the tested and tried solutions within the African worldview.

1.6 Limitations of the study

There are three limitations that are assumed in this study. Firstly, African Christianity, and indeed African theologians, are not concerned only with ancestor cult and Christology. African liberation and black theology are significant elements in African Christianity. The study is limited only to those aspects in African Christianity that have to do with the African religion and culture within the African worldview.

Secondly, it is also a documented fact that Africa is a large continent comprising of different and at times conflicting religious beliefs. The difference is not only seen between nations but within nations, among tribes and language groups. The role played by ancestors may differ from one tribe to another, while other tribes may not even have elaborate religious beliefs or rituals in honour of ancestors. This study is limited only to those African groups where ancestors play a very important role.

Thirdly, the study does not directly pursue methods of presenting Christ to Africans steeped in African Traditional Religion. It seeks to examine better ways of understanding Christ by African Christians such that they can be effective missionaries to their own African compatriots. A biblically authentic African Christology will create a framework for effective discipleship to the Africans that become Christians.

1.7 Purpose of the study

African Christianity has become a recognized entity and has made Christianity an African religion. This is attested by the phenomenal growth witnessed in the last decades. Hillman (1993:18) predicted during the early 1990s that by the year 2000 there would be more Christians in Africa than in North America. It is now estimated that there are more than 390 million Christians in Africa. The question earlier raised by Magesa sums up the purpose of this study. The question is – How long will the African Christian continue living faith with a ‘split personality’? Straddling between Christ and ancestors is not the best way to live.

African Christianity, despite its phenomenal growth, lacks wholeness and completeness. This brand of Christianity receives condemnation from both the African Traditional Religion adherents and non-African Christians. African Christianity seems not African enough nor is it Christian enough. The purpose is to bring healing and wholeness to the African spirituality and soul.

Western missionaries have been condemned for most of the approaches they adopted in reaching out to indigenous people and their cultures. Could the same be levelled against African Christian pastors and theologians? Are the methods and theology of African theologians centred in the Bible? The study seeks to create internal coherence in the articulation of Christology within the African context. The problem is not with the African Christians but with the African theologians; there is no clarity of speech, hence lack of clarity in practice.

The church’s teaching and understanding of biblical anthropology and Christology plays a significant role in either encouraging or discouraging the veneration of ancestors. If the African pulpit is not opposed to church members consulting the living dead then African Christians cannot be said to be ‘double hat’ Christians. On the other hand, the temptation to ‘resurrect’ the dead increases if the Christ proclaimed behind the African pulpit lacks the power and interest to deal with African issues. In both instances the blame lies squarely with the African Christian church and not so much its followers.

1.8 Objectives of the study

There is no doubt that African Christianity is the synchronisation of two worldviews: the traditional African and traditional Christian worldview. The main goal of this study is to evaluate the role of ancestors in African Christology within the biblical framework. The aim is therefore to examine the theological and biblical foundation of African Christology. The study assumes several objectives: the first objective is to evaluate the two worldviews, seeking to understand their plausibility and consequential benefit to the Africans. The desirability of the African worldview opening up to a biblical worldview and allowing it to shape it from within is examined.

African Christology is a product of the process of inculturation – how Christian is this product and how African should it be? This brings us to the second objective which seeks to understand the principles that should guide inculturation. It also evaluates the missionary assumptions that undergirded the whole process of inculturation.

The third objective focuses on the nature of biblical anthropology and how it compares with African Christian views on life after death. What are the biblical reasons given for the belief in the immortality of the soul? The objective then is to develop a clear biblical hermeneutic and sound biblical exegesis in dealing with Scriptural texts that are seen to be supportive of the belief in immortality of the soul.

The last objective seeks to envision an African Christology that is biblically sound and yet culturally relevant. This is an African Christianity that is motivated by a deep fear of God and a respect for African culture that is in line with God's will. This seeks to answer the question: How should Africans relate to Christ or who should Africans say Christ is? These four-fold objectives will be met only when the question regarding immediate life after death is clearly answered.

1.9 Value of the study

The African worldview is believed to have made it possible and easier for Christianity to be inculturated in Africa. Kane (1978:215) notes that "Christianity has made more converts

in Black Africa that in all the rest of the Third World combined.” African Christianity can only thrive and continue to expand as it reaches out to other world cultures. The study will have value as it seeks to root African Christology in the Bible while ensuring its relevancy to the African culture.

This will ensure that what comes out of the continent will indeed enrich other cultures and not replicate the same problems that have been experienced within the continent. African Christology will not be seen to be producing the same split spiritual personality that it is notorious of, within the continent. The essential value of the study is the encouragement it gives to the African Christians to be missionaries. This will not be another phase of imperialism but a sharing of the African view of the gospel, which is genuinely biblical. African Christology will become native while remaining a stranger in the continent (Boshart 2010:17).

The survival of the soul after death, as taught in traditional Christianity, has bolstered the Africans’ belief in ancestors. The study has value, as it highlights not only the non-existence of ancestors but how Christ has become the only true ‘Ancestor’. It also highlights that what Africans seek in their ancestors can be fully and richly achieved in Christ. The real value of the study is therefore to reveal Christ as One who more than meets the African needs.

Secondly, the study will also have value in the life of the African Christian creating pride and confidence as he/she worships God the creator. This worship will be done without any desire or need to look back and seek approval from ancestors or fear of such. The African Christian will experience freedom as it is in Christ and will celebrate his faith with no fear of cultural contradiction.

Lastly, the study enhances my appreciation and respect for the African Traditional Religions and also brings deeper understanding of Christian faith doctrines. The study will have value to both African and Western Christians as it argues for a radical way of looking at death and the nature of humans. The real value of the study is therefore to reveal Christ

as the only true ‘ancestor’ and therefore who more than meets the spiritual, social, as well as psychological needs of the African.

1.10 Research design and methodology

This study assumes a doctrinal approach. It seeks to examine and evaluate the doctrinal presupposition upon which the practice of venerating ancestors is based or even opposed. Mission as revealed in the Bible is the product of the biblical text. It can therefore honour God if it subjects itself to the authority of the Bible. The cultural and socio-political disaster that ensued as a result of missionary endeavours in Africa were as a result of separating mission from divine mandate. As a result the Bible ceased to have authority on how mission is conducted. The study seeks to ascertain that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in the current discourse on contextualization.

Literature by Africans within the continent and some non-Africans who have worked extensively in Africa abounds today. This study adopts a literary analysis research methodology confining itself to the literature written by African theologians and theologians in Africa. Non-African theologians’ contribution is in the area of Christian anthropology.

This is not a study on African traditional religion but rather on how African theologians have used the Bible in providing a solution for the belief in ancestors. The study focuses on how the Bible is interpreted and applied to African cultures and beliefs. Turaki (1999), in his book *Christianity and African Gods*, argues that the focus of his book is not on how the Bible is interpreted but rather “on how the Bible defines Africans in terms of their cultures and religions”. Contrary to this view, it is the argument of this research that the Bible is interpreted, a particular hermeneutical approach is adopted in order to understand its meaning. The Bible does not speak; it is interpreted.

The presuppositions one adopts do influence one’s methodology and findings. It is one’s presupposition and not the phenomena observed that usually engenders heated debates and disagreements (Gehman 1989:21). When indigenisation of Christianity was the agenda for African theology, cultural hermeneutics, as opposed to biblical hermeneutics, became the

preferred method of research. African Traditional Religion and worldview are used as prolegomena to the interpretation of Christianity and understanding of Christianity (Gehman 1989:17). A compilation entitled 'inculturation' edited by Turkson and Wisjen (1993) adopts this approach. African culture and philosophy are used to interpret the Bible.

On the other hand, there has been the Africanisation of Christianity, which is a political agenda focusing on institutional Christianity. A political hermeneutic focusing on the three selfs, being self-propagation, self-supporting and self-organising (Bosch 1991:450) became the basic methodology. This was not the best method in realizing genuine African Christology without the fourth self which, Bosch (1991) calls self-theologizing. The Bible provides the framework for the evaluation of African Traditional Religion and worldview.

The hermeneutics adopted in this study is influenced by the Seventh-day Adventist approach to biblical interpretation. This study is presented therefore from an Adventist perspective. However this is not to be viewed as a defence of Adventism but an attempt to refocus the minds of Africans on the relevance of God's Word in our lives. The Seventh-day Adventists worldwide published a book *Understanding Scripture: an Adventist approach* on Biblical interpretation ten years ago with the contribution of about twenty theologians. This book provides the reader a broad view on Adventist hermeutics. The church believes that "for a correct interpretation of Scripture the Scripture itself is foundational (1 Corinthians 4:6)" (Hasel 2005:36). The Seventh-day Adventist church has therefore adopted three foundational principles in its hermeneutic: Sola Scriptura, Analogy of Scripture and Clarity of Scripture.

Solar Scriptura for Adventists, among other things, retorts Hasel (2005:37) presumes that in the interpretation of faith, "Scripture carries the authority that transcends and judges any of the church's tradition". This principles also assumes that Scripture interprets Scripture and that Scripture is "sufficient as the unerring guide to divine truth" (2005:37). On the other hand, the unity of Scripture assumes a "fundamental unity and harmony among its various parts" (2005:37). Commenting on the unifying power of the Bible, Bemmelen (2005:87), says: "In a centrifugal world, often brutally at odds with itself, genuine adherence to God's Word brings peace and respect for every person".

Caesar (2005:277), argues for the “importance of anchorage” in any attempt at contextualizing the gospel message. Seventh-day Adventists see in Paul’s Athenian discourse recorded in (I Corinthians 9:20-22), the five pillars of this anchorage. The first pillar has to do with God’s personhood. Paul uses a masculine singular in describing God compared to the neuter in reference to the god of the Greeks (2005:277). The second pillar is God’s creative work which reveals Him as all sufficient, “needing nothing and not served by human hands but all depend on Him” (2005:277).

The third pillar has to do with God’s inclusiveness seen in Him having made us all of “one blood”. All people in their various traditions and cultures are “united in origins” (2005:278). The fourth pillar reveals God as the Lord of all and as such calls all to account, He is the judge of the whole world. Lastly, God’s authority is confirmed by His “redemptive miracle “– this miracle is available to all who will seek after Him.

The interpretation that Seventh-day Adventists embrace is one whose contextualization starts with God and not culture or political situation. It is a hermeneutic that starts with “Creation and not liberation” (2005:278). It is Scripture and not our cultural experience that is the standard and norm for Christian faith. It is for this reason that the Seventh-day Adventists accept the sixty-six books of the Bible as authoritative and normative and as belonging to the closed canon of the Scriptures.

Different theological methods have been used in the study of African traditional religion in addition to the two mentioned above (Gehman 1989:33). Comparative study of religions can be seen in the works of many African theologians. For instance, Goba (1979:7) describes his methodology as “phenomenological” which requires that whatever religious phenomena are examined, to be described as they “really give themselves”. He further argues that “Christian African theology ought to be a phenomenological theology which seeks to explicate the essence of faith”.

One of the weaknesses of this recommended approach by Goba is that it seeks to force African theologians to a cultural anthropological corner. This would render them non-committal and thus different from historical and descriptive methodology. It should be

emphasized that African theologians are basically reflecting on what is within their own 'soul'. It is a reflection of what makes their belief and faith reasonable and communicable.

This study assumes a theological and biblical methodology which is evaluative in its approach. The presupposition that forms the basis of this study is that the Bible is God's inspired word, infallible and written by inspired authors (2 Tim 3:16) who wrote as "they were moved by the Holy Spirit".

1.11 Study outline

This study contends that the African worldview continues to shape the contours of African Christology. It can be argued that African Christology is nothing more than Africanized Christology. It is the mission of Christian religion to reach out to other cultures and worldviews for the purpose of transforming them. Christian mission seeks to restore that which is good in all cultures and judges that which is evil.

A critical evaluation of African worldview coupled with a sincere commitment to the biblical worldview will yield an African Christology that can be a blessing to the whole world. Magesa (1994:57) argues for a distinction between popular and official inculturation, preferring the latter as the solution to the African Christian church. This study contends that the fusion of both popular and official inculturation under the critical eye of the Bible provides the needed interpretative framework.

Chapter 1 of this study forms the background of and outlines the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. The methodology and the framework of the study is highlighted.

In Chapter 2 the focus is on the literature study. African theologians have written much on African Christology. The literature is limited regarding the area of ancestors and their perceived role in the African worldview and African Christology. There is no unanimity, however, among African theologians as to the role of ancestors in African Christology. The literature, however, highlights the unanimity of African theologians on the ontology of African ancestors. The literature also exposes the controversial nature of the dualistic

biblical anthropology that underlies the belief in the intermediate state and hence the ontology of ancestors.

Chapter 3 seeks to discover the basic elements that constitute African Christology. This chapter focuses mainly on what is African in African Christology and what is Christian. African Christology tends to rely heavily on the role and ontology of ancestors whose background is African Traditional Religion. The Christian part as evidenced by the dualistic anthropology may appear to undermine some key biblical doctrines. Modern studies in biblical anthropology are shown to question the traditional view as reflected in dualistic anthropology by providing an alternative view, which is monistic.

In Chapter 4 an examination of African Traditional Religion is undertaken since it forms the bedrock of African Christology. The role, as well as the ontology of ancestors in African Traditional Religion is examined. The ancestors promoted in African Christology appear to be different from those in African Traditional Religion. The chapter also shows that the veneration of ancestors is more inclined toward worship than just mere veneration. This poses a challenge to African theologians who seek to promote the incorporation of ancestors into Christianity. This is seen as a competition between two centres of worship: Christ and ancestors. Syncretism appears to be an ever threat to African Christology.

Chapter 5 offers a critical biblical evaluation of the role of ancestors in African Christology. The chapter also attempts to explore the contours of the belief in the doctrine of intermediate state. There is lack of scriptural support for the supposed role of the ancestor as argued in the communion with the dead. The intermediate state, with its doctrinal pillar of dualistic anthropology, is also shown to lack clear biblical support. A monistic anthropology is argued that appears to militate against the implication of dualistic anthropology on major doctrinal and theological teaching of the Bible. The chapter shows that African Christology is less Christian and more African and lacks clear biblical support.

The last chapter provides the conclusion to the study and recommendations and suggestions for areas of further study. The recommendations deal specifically with the perceived role of ancestors and their ontological existence.

Here is thus the outline in brief:

1. Background study
2. Literature study
3. Understanding African Christology
4. Understanding the role and ontology of ancestors in African Traditional Religion
5. African Christology from a biblical perspective
6. Recommendations and conclusion

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

After analysing the different African Christologies, starting from West Africa, Central, East and South Africa, Machoko (2010:156) asserts that all African theologians he has reviewed, give “Jesus Christ the image of Ancestor”. It would appear that any African Christology worth its salt must wrestle with the idea of the ontological existence of ancestors and the role they play in African Christology.

The literature shows that the challenge facing African Christianity in general and African Christology in particular, is its proclivity towards ancestor ascendancy. This becomes evident when there is a perceived crisis facing the community or the individual. It is thus the appearance of syncretism and dual religious allegiance that raises questions about the quality of African Christology. These questions emanate both from within the continent and outside.

The literature also shows that there is no unanimity among African theologians on the role that ancestors play in African Christology. There are those who argue for continuity between ancestors and Christ, while others argue for discontinuity. While one view argues for incorporation, the other argues for rejection of ancestors. The main objective is to respond to the challenge of dual religious allegiance that is observed in African Christianity.

The literature also reveals a debate outside of the continent of Africa that indirectly seeks to offer an effective biblical solution to the problem of dual allegiance. The debate, which is largely found amongst Western theologians, centres on biblical anthropology. The main question debated is whether the Bible supports a dualistic anthropology or a monistic one. The traditional dualistic anthropology has in recent years been challenged as being insufficient and lacking biblical support.

Monist anthropology is adduced as one that harmonises with biblical Christology. This is opposed to the African anthropology which is in line with the traditional dualist

anthropology. Monism not only argues against the role of ancestors but also views the existence of life after death as the product of dualistic anthropology.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the approach that African theologians assume when studying African Traditional Religions. The second corpus of literature focuses on the African theologians and theologians in Africa who see continuity between African Traditional Religions and the Bible. The continuity that is argued and promoted is that the objective existence and ascendancy of African ancestors in African Traditional Religion extends to African Christology as well. The end result is a hierarchy of ancestors with Christ as the great Ancestor at the top.

The third corpus of literature – African theologians or those who have served in Africa – argues for discontinuity between African ancestors and the Bible. The basic argument advanced is that the living dead do not play any role in the life of the living. It is argued that the Bible discourages any link or connection with ancestors.

The fourth body of literature represents a debate between a monistic and a dualistic anthropology. African anthropology, which shapes the belief in the afterlife, finds a connection in the Christian dualistic anthropology. Those arguing for continuity, as well as those in favour of discontinuity share this anthropology. The majority of African theologians are dualists leaving the monist/dualist debate largely to Western theologians.

2.1 Approaches to African Traditional Religions in African theology

The question on how African Christians should approach the study of African traditional religion has occupied the minds of African Theologians for decades. Turaki (1999:33) observes that the majority of “theologians and scholars of African Theology” tend to use the Bible very sparingly. These books, he argues, are written from the perspective of African Traditional Religion and cultures and not from the biblical perspective. Gehman (2005:19), while applauding the many books on African Traditional Religions, laments the fact that only a few are written from a Christian perspective. This approach lends itself more to being relevant but not true to the Bible and Christian theology. The approach

inevitably observes an undisturbed continuity between African traditional religions and biblical Christianity.

The second approach, as argued by Turaki, is more of a reaction to the first one. It seeks to take the Bible seriously but fails to respond to the challenges and concerns raised by African Traditional Religion. This approach sacrifices relevancy for 'biblicalness' (Turaki 1999:34). Biblical texts are applied to the African religions and cultures without a proper and realistic understanding of the African religions and worldview. Many of the Western theologians have been guilty of this approach.

A balanced and holistic approach is needed. An approach that takes both the Scriptures and the African Traditional Religions seriously is needed. Gehman (2005:17) raises two fundamental questions worth noting: the first is whether the Bible "provides a valid and adequate response to African traditional spirituality" and the second is whether African beliefs or some aspects of it can be accommodated within Christianity. Responding to these questions will yield to both relevancy to the African culture and truthfulness to the authority of the Bible in the study of African traditional religions.

The observation by Gehman (2005:19) is that there is limited literature on African Traditional Religions written from a strictly biblical perspective. He further notes that there is no literature that "relates African traditional religions directly and exegetically to the study of Scripture". This may be viewed as being over-reactive and too assuming. However, the point is that even among the literature where there is a distinct biblical perspective on African Traditional Religion very few, if any, apply a critical exegetical approach to the Scripture as it relates to the these religions.

Parratt (1995:56), who has spent more than 20 years in theological education in Botswana and Malawi, laments the dearth in African literature and scholarship in the area of biblical exegesis. Most Africans scholars, he notes, have focused more on the study of African religions to the exclusion of biblical exegesis. He notes that there is "some way to go before the affirmation of the basic role of the Bible in African theology becomes a practical reality." It would appear that both the African Traditional Religions and the

biblical text have not received a critical and intense evaluation and a form of reconceptualisation.

The uniqueness of this approach is that it not only targets African Traditional Religion for biblical scrutiny but also subjects the very Christian tradition under the same scrutiny. What sometimes parades as African Christology is nothing but African Catholic/Protestant/Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity. The theological product envisaged in this approach is African biblical Christology, where the Bible is allowed to determine what is true in both the African cultures as well as Christianity. The succinct observation by Nürnberger (2007:17) that a time has come for an “intense and extensive reconceptualisation of our theological heritage,” needs to be taken seriously. The church’s understanding of Christianity needs just as much scrutiny as the African Traditional Religion does.

2.2 Continuity

This represents the second corpus of literature that sees incorporation of ancestors into Christian liturgy as the solution to the problem of dual religious allegiance. This argument is based on the following assumptions:

2.2.1 A dialogue of two equals

Magesa (2010:73), writing on the topic *African Christian Spirituality*, perceives the dialogue between African spirituality and Christian spirituality as a dialogue of two equals. He sees this dialogue as a “methodological pillar for constructing an African Spirituality.” He observes that both forms of spirituality represent a “human attempt to relate to the transcendence of God” (2010:68). One of the main characteristics of Christian spirituality is their worship of a personal God, according to Magesa (2010:70). In African spirituality it is the community that the adherents seek to relate to (2010:1). Community here includes “ancestors, yet to be born, land and property”.

Magesa argues that a “mutual and harmonious co-existence of these two forms of spirituality” should be the main goal in African Christian spirituality. The task of the

dialogue is the removal of basic contradictions that make it difficult for the African Christian to practice spirituality (Magesa 2010:73). This problem, as observed by the author, is caused by some Africans in their attempt to follow two contradictory religious approaches, leading to what is known as ‘dual religious consciousness’. This dialogue of equal partners prevents the subjugation of one form of spirituality by the other. Jesus Christ, instead of doing away with ancestors, can be viewed analogically as one who occupies the highest rank in the ancestral hierarchy (Magesa 2010:76).

The understanding of Jesus as one who occupies the highest rank in the ancestral hierarchy opens the way for meaningful prayer and worship to the African Christian. According to Magesa, since Jesus occupies this position, He receives the main focus of prayer, and is thus not the only focus of Christian prayer. Magesa observes that “Jesus is the one who gives power to our human ancestors, enabling them to extend kindness and care to us” (Magesa 2010:76). Due to this relationship, Magesa argues that the “highest form of reverence” and what he calls “worship proper” is reserved exclusively for Jesus. The reverence and worship given to ancestors will therefore reflect their mediatorial role, and is thus not absolute.

In an earlier article presented in a congress held in 1993 entitled, “The present and future of inculturation in Eastern Africa”, Magesa (1994:58) makes a distinction between popular and official inculturation. He observes that popular inculturation is a system of life that African Christians develop when faced with contradictions and inconsistencies arising from the two sources of spirituality. He notes that what often comes out is sometimes a “system of life whose characteristics mirror either or often both sources of their spiritual existence” (Magesa 1994:58). In a case where both sources are mirrored, he notes that the balance tends towards African religious sources.

Here is an example of a prayer quoted by Magesa (Van Pelt 1971:46) where both God and ancestors are addressed simultaneously:

Please, god, Almighty, the giver of all things.

What shall we do? Send us clouds because the land is drying up.

You are all powerful, almighty
And you, our ancestor N.N.' you all did what we are doing;
Why do you leave the land to perish?

In his conclusion, Magesa reminds African Christians of their obligation to the two forms of religious spirituality when he says:

The goal of "all spirituality is human communion with God, and that this communion may be achieved in different ways. For all Christians it is of course through the agency of Jesus Christ. But only those categories that definitely contradict Jesus' message of love and fullness of life need to be removed from both classical Christian and African indigenous spirituality in the process of constructing an authentic African spirituality (Magesa 1994:78).

Magesa's argument for a dialogue cannot be faulted. The reality of the two sources of spirituality is a fact that cannot be gainsaid. The denial or minimisation of the African spirituality by most Western Christianity has often produced a 'split' African Christian. A proper and relevant African Christian theology must address this dual reality. Any serious theologian or scholar cannot leave the question of the relationship between ancestors and Jesus untouched. The dialogue between these two sources must be engaged in, if a true African Christian identity is to be developed.

The argument by Magesa for a methodology that construes this dialogue as taking place between two equals can be misleading and confusing. The arguments raised are not very logical and convincing. That there are two sources to contend with is a fact, but to argue for equality between the two is stretching the point too far. While Magesa argues for a co-existence of these two sources, he depicts Christianity as more than an equal to African spirituality. According to his scheme, Jesus is the main focus of prayer; He receives the highest form of reverence and worship proper. Magesa does not give the reason for this inequality between two sources that are supposed to be equal, according to his view.

It is not clear why ancestors should form part of the African Christian prayer and why they should receive worship to whatever degree. If Jesus is the one who dispenses gifts through the ancestors, is it conceivable that the ancestors might refuse to convey these to the

legitimate recipients? It is not clear who has given the ancestors this responsibility and as such to whom are they accountable? The African Traditional Religions do not spell out the relationship between ancestors and Christ: Christ is not known in such religions. The Bible also does not seem to give an indication as to how Christ relates to ancestors. One wonders how Magesa arrives at a conclusion that Jesus dispenses gifts through ancestors. What is the basis of this assertion?

As far as Magesa is concerned, inculturation is basically a popular exercise undertaken by African Christians when faced with contradictions and inconsistencies arising from the two sources of spirituality. The resulting form of religion, he argues, does not mirror either Christian spirituality or African spirituality. Clearly the Bible has no role in this exercise; it seems to be intuitive with the potential of producing a form of religion that contradicts the Bible.

According to Magesa (1994), Jesus' love assumes a basic hermeneutic principle in determining what should be removed in both sources. The argument for Jesus' love is not adduced as a hermeneutic principle. It is not clear in the end whether Jesus' love represents another source of spirituality giving rise to three sources. The role of the Scriptures as far as Christian spirituality is concerned is not given space in his argument. That Christian spirituality relates to a personal God and African spirituality to a community seems to be just a matter of choice as far as Magesa is concerned. Both are viewed as ways of approaching the Transcendent. It is not clear therefore how one arrives at the proper understanding of Jesus' love.

Magesa's arguments for equality between these two sources can lead to serious theological problems. This he highlights in his earlier study (date) where he observes that popular inculturation tends to be skewed towards African spirituality. This is an apt reminder of what happens when worship of two masters is encouraged. This is inevitable in system that has no absolute criterion to judge and determine what is true and acceptable in any spirituality.

2.2.2 Our fathers and mothers who art in heaven – Jesus the Ancestor

A Nigerian Jesuit theologian, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, in his book *Theology brewed in an African pot*, argues for a link between saints and ancestors (2008:113). He firstly shows the scriptural basis for the belief in the communion of ancestors. To this end he uses two texts, one from the apocrypha, Sirach/Ecclesiasticus) 44-50, and the other from the New Testament, Hebrews 12:1 (2008:112). In the first instance, Orobator (2008:112) observes that in the first text “celebrates Israel’s faith in their ancestors” Sirach/Ecclesiasticus offers a list of “godly men whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten...” In the book of Hebrews, these ancestors are referred to as a cloud of witnesses. Their life of exemplary and dedication is celebrated.

Orobator (2008:14) argues further that ancestors are those who have lived exemplary lives, and as such should be celebrated. These ancestors, he adds, do not only qualify for having lived righteous lives, but they are said to be close to the Supreme God. Accordingly, the role of the ancestor becomes that of an intercessor due to proximity to God and protector because of the tie the ancestor has with his lineage (2008:112).

This somehow puts the relevance of Christ in question. However, Orobator argues for the significance of this Christology in Africa. He asserts that faith for an African can only be appreciated if the role of Christ in the African life is clearly explicated (2008:73). He further asserts that the problem in Africa “has to do with how we can reconcile the relatively new personality of Jesus with what Africans have known and lived as their way to God long before the advent of missionary Christianity.

In resolving these seemingly contradictory belief systems and to stop the schizophrenic identity that Africans have struggled with for ages, and the religious haemorrhage he suggests that Christ should be viewed as our Ancestor. In his understanding, Christ does not render the ancestor irrelevant nor takes over their function, but “he perfects all that there is in the African conception of ancestor” (Orobator 2008:77). The ancestor cult remains imperfect and not obsolete and somehow assists in the Christological appreciation of the role of Christ.

The two texts that Orobator uses (Sirach and Hebrews) seem to point to the exemplary life the ancestors lived. They do not seem to indicate a clear role the ancestors play in the lives of those who are alive. Ancestors seem to be imprisoned in the past; the lives they lived can serve as an inspiration and nothing more. But in his argument he moves from the memory of the ancestors to their day-to-day involvement in the life of the living, as protectors and intercessors. This is not warranted either by Sirach/Ecclesiasticus or the book of Hebrews. These two texts simply refer to the lives these “saints” lived and not what they are currently doing for us. We are inspired by the good deeds they did – not by what they are currently doing on our behalf or for us.

Orobator’s solution of seeing Christ as an ancestor does not offer theological clarity. If Christ is the perfect ancestor, should Africans continue to make use of the imperfect cult of ancestors? The problem of straddling two opposing worldviews remains, as the African still has to ride two horses; the imperfect and the perfect at the same time.

2.2.3 Christ the Proto-Ancestor

Benezet Bujo, a diocesan priest from Zaire, elaborates further on Christ as the Ancestor. Bujo builds his ancestor Christology on the positive aspects of African Traditional Religion, which he maintains that they “far outweigh the negative elements” (1992:31). He argues that even the negative elements are often exaggerated, and some of these are found in Christianity also and are even worse (1992:31). He asserts that ancestors are models for the living, that the ancestor cult has both eschatological significance as well as liberation aspects (1992:30-31).

It is to be noted that Bujo distinguishes between good and bad ancestors and that he bases his ancestor Christology on good ancestors. He uses the term “Proto-Ancestor” referring to the role Christ plays in the life of African believers (1992:79). Contrary to Bediako’s Christology (Bediako 1995), which sees Christ as the only and the true ancestor, he sees Christ as Proto-Ancestor. There seems to be room in his Christology for other ancestors. This is to be expected after the praises he has heaped on the ancestors and the positive impact they have on Africans.

Bujo sees the title 'Proto-Ancestor' as not only comparable to titles in the Bible, but even more relevant than titles such as *logos* and *Kyrios*. Bujo does not seek to equate the importance of ancestors to that of Christ. He maintains that "the legitimate yearnings of the African ancestors are not only taken up in Christ, but are also transcended in him" (1992:84). It is this quality that enables the African to be truly Christian and truly African.

Bujo argues at length and shows how Christ as Proto-Ancestor assumes the function of the ancestors. He shows that much is expected of an African believer, which goes beyond the ancestor expectation once he becomes a Christian (Bujo 1992:128). Christ indeed perfects the function of the ancestors but this does not render them irrelevant, according to Bujo. He concludes by saying that "Africans who live in communion with their ancestors should not think that becoming a Christian means abandoning the ancestors" (1992:129). Bujo's basis for the above statement is that "Biological life comes to us directly from our ancestors, but our real life, the life of the spirit, comes to us through Jesus Christ..." (1992:129).

Bujo rarely, if at all, uses biblical texts as the basis for his Christology. The only text that seems to indirectly refer to the ancestors that he uses is Hebrews 1:1,2. Though there is no mention of ancestors in the text, he includes ancestors as one of the instruments God used in the past to communicate to us. The chief instruments of-course being Jesus Christ.

The cult of African ancestors is the sole basis for Bujo's Christology. For him the African Traditional Religion has more positive elements than the negative ones, and in this respect is on par with other religions, not excepting Christianity. There is no attempt in his study to evaluate the cult of ancestors; instead it is the cult that evaluates Christianity and the gospel. He does admit that there are bad ancestors, but this of course does not contaminate the African worldview. The Bible is full of people who lived lives that were not exemplary and it is not to these that we turn for inspiration, argues Bujo.

Bujo has somehow created a very unique role for ancestors, which has its basis in African worldview. He asserts that Africans who have communion with ancestors directly derive their biological life from them. This would then provide a theological justification for the

practice of veneration and honouring the dead. The ancestors are not only living but impart life to their lineage. Bujo does not expand this notion but does make a distinction between what Christ offers and what ancestors offer. It is to be noted that life, according to Bujo, does not flow through the ancestors but directly from them, but spiritual life flows through Christ. This somehow posits that the ancestors occupy a position of a Creator in the life of the Africans. If this is true, then they too deserve worship and adoration.

Christ therefore receives pre-eminence since spiritual life is better than biological life. This has no scriptural basis and seems to undermine the power of Christ to give life or as the source of both biological and spiritual life. This inadvertently creates two centres of ‘worship’ and two masters to ‘worship.’ Failure to honour and venerate the ancestors will lead to one losing one’s life. This is the basis for the ancestor cult. This therefore legitimises the rituals and the connection with ancestors, as Bujo himself asserts that those who accept Christ do not have to stop believing and honouring their ancestors. The question that must be asked is whether in Bujo’s Christology serving of two masters is a possibility.

2.2.4 Christ the transformed ancestor and the transformer of ancestors

Collis Machoko, an Anglican priest from Zimbabwe, currently (2015) teaching at Hunting University in Canada, argues for a “Mudzimu Mukuru” par excellence Christology. He views Christ as the Great Ancestor par excellence. He is in agreement with Bujo and Bediako’s Christology but takes it a little bit further in his book *African Traditional Religion and Christian Religion*. He developed his Christology by adapting the model developed by H.R Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* (1951). He categorises African Christologies among the five ways of looking at Christ and Ancestors. He puts Bujo and Nyamiti, amongst others, under those who view Christ as Christ of ancestors and as Christ above ancestors.

Machoko views Christ as the transformed Ancestor and the transformer of ancestors. He maintains that it is only as ancestorship is transformed that a Christological remedy for the existential problems unique to Zimbabwe can be found (Machoko 2010;167). In an

extended interview that lasted for ten years (between 1990 and 2000) he interviewed Anglican bishops, priests and laity as to their views on Christianity and ancestors. This research led him to observe and conclude that Christianity is not the only path to Mwari (God) (Machoko 2010:123).

Machoko asks a very poignant question: “What are the roles and function of African ancestors when Jesus Christ becomes the *Mudzimu Mukuru* par excellence? Are Africans to discard their ancestors when Jesus becomes the Great Ancestor par excellence? His response is negative; he argues that African ancestors are not to be discarded, instead they become saints (Machoko 2010:163). He encourages Christians from a pastoral view to pray to their ancestors and to venerate them, while admitting that the ancestors are not the end point, but Christ is.

According to Machoko the reason for the above argument is that the Shona people in Zimbabwe view ancestors as junior gods. He further observes that the Shona ancestors are more than venerated; they are worshipped as junior gods (Machoko 2010:54). In short, Machoko is encouraging the Christians to worship the ancestors as junior gods and to not just pray to them as saints. This level of ancestors (junior gods) limits them in many ways and as such, Christians still need to approach Christ. Machoko admits that Shona ancestors are sometimes despotic and display sinful tendencies (2010:188). Christ is the only one who is perfect and as such Zimbabwe Christians do need Christ while still clinging to their ancestors.

Commenting on the biblical notion of ancestors Machoko observes that the term ‘ancestor’ in the Bible denotes a “long dead person from who one is descended.” (Machoko 2010:175). This is in direct contrast to Shona ancestors who are viewed as junior gods. The Shona ancestors remarkably differ from ancestors in the Bible: they are not dead and they have assumed a divine status.

Machoko does not deem transformation to mean discarding of the ancestors. They remain pivotal in the Shona worship and approach to Christ. It is clear that Machoko’s Christology not only transforms ancestors but it also transforms the Bible and Christ. The Bible is

forced to adopt the ancestors on their own terms and instead of viewing them as long dead should see them as divine beings. Christ has to find a function for ancestors in order for Him to be relevant to the Shona Christians. It is not clear how Shona ancestors become saints and how they are supposed to relate to Christ and Christianity. Could it be their divine status that gives them this recognition? Machoko does not expatiate.

The biblical injunction that forbids any contact and communication with the dead is deemed irrelevant and is not given any attention in Machoko's Christology. While Machoko still maintains the powerfulness of Christ, His power is somehow curtailed by the ancestors and their demands to be included in worship. Machoko leaves us with a Christianity that is African but not biblical.

2.2.5 Christ the brother ancestor

Charles Nyamiti, a Catholic theologian from Tanzania, East Africa, examines the African idea of ancestors in his book *Christ as our Ancestor*. Nyamiti's burden is to develop a Christology from an African perspective. He does this by using the African traditional belief in ancestors as a basis for developing an African Christology.

Like Bujo, Nyamiti sees Christ as Brother-Ancestor par excellence. According to Nyamiti, Christ more than meets the aspiration Africans sought for in traditional ancestors. Nyamiti argues that while the brother-ancestor of Christ supersedes traditional ancestrology, it does not efface it. There is still room for African ancestors, even in African Christology. In this understanding the African belief in ancestors and Christian understanding of the saints share some commonality. Nyamiti's theology, which is informed by the Catholic tradition and belief in saints either in purgatory or heaven, makes it difficult for him to efface African ancestors on the basis of the supremacy of Christ.

One of Nyamiti's contributions to the study of Christ and ancestors is the discovery of Christological themes not stressed in traditional Christology. He argues that it is the African understanding of brother-ancestrosip that throws more light to the teaching of Christ compared to traditional Christology. He observes the role played by the African understanding of brother-ancestor as being synthetic. Traditional Christology, which is

ontological and speculative, tends to emphasise the divinity of Christ, hence a theology from above. The contemporary theologies celebrate the historical and humanity of Jesus, hence theology from below. (Nyamiti 1984:53).

Nyamiti's Christology is based on African Traditional Religion and not on the Bible. In this way it is relevant to the African context while contradicting the Bible. It is still not clear what role the ancestors play or why their function is still significant. If Christ meets the needs and aspiration of the African why are the ancestors still needed? His argument that ancestors are an African version of the Catholic saints is inadequate. He moves from an African tradition to a Catholic tradition with no reference to the Bible.

Uchenna Ezeh, a Nigerian theologian, in his book *Jesus Christ the Ancestor*, argues that viewing Christ as an ancestor opens a creative dialogue between Christianity and African culture. This is based on the supremacy of ancestors and the role they play in African worldview. Ezeh's main contribution in the African Christological discourse is his attempt at locating the ancestor Christology within the classical Christological debates of the 4th and the 5th centuries. He argues that the adoption of the term *homoousios*, which is non-biblical by the council, opens up the terrain for Africans to use vocabulary and categories within their own African worldview to express the uniqueness of Jesus. For Ezeh, it is the incarnation of Jesus Christ that qualifies Him as an ancestor, and as such he is more inclined to seeing Jesus as brother ancestor.

He further argues that Jesus is not merely a brother, one who is like us, He is also not just close to God as mediator, but He is God in person. This places Him above the traditional notion of ancestor. He is both like and unlike the traditional ancestors. Christ may in his human nature be likened to African ancestors, but it is in his divine nature that He is profoundly differentiated from African ancestral tradition.

Ezeh's major contribution is the creation of the ancestor Christology and its importance. The existence and the role of ancestor is assumed. His basic argument is that how the Bible views ancestors is not as important as how we should view Christ in relation to ancestor category.

Victor Ezigbo, a Nigerian theologian in *Re-imagining African Christologies: conversing with the interpretations and appropriations of Jesus Christ in African Christianity*, observes three basic models in African Christology – the neo missionary Christology, culture Christology and liberation Christology. He further divides the culture Christology into two Christologies, namely the guest and the ancestor Christology. He argues that ancestor Christology “strikes a familiar chord in the ears of many Africans” (2011:75). He further points out that the understandings of Jesus Christ as chief ancestor, proto-ancestor, brother ancestor and true ancestor makes ancestor Christology a popular model in African Christological discourses.

Ezigbo, however, does see some limitations to this model when he observes that the function of the ancestors is more ethical than soteriological. Ancestors do not have redemptive function as Christ does. He also notes that Christ is not just a mediator or “a mere middleman” (2010:80). Ezigbo observes that ancestor Christology relegates all Christology to the level of functionality and ignores the ontological identity of Christ, and viewing him as an ancestor limits his function. Ezigbo concludes by saying that, “It is christologically inadequate to discuss the work of Christ in isolation from his person” (2010:80).

Ezigbo sees African Christologies in general as solution-oriented Christologies. He argues for a different Christology which he calls the “Revealer Christology”. (2010:295). This Christology posits that Jesus should be perceived as both a solution and a question to the African Christians’ perceived needs. His Christology critiques the one-sidedness of most African Christologies and the tendency to create a dichotomy between Jesus’ divinity and His humanity. Jesus is seen as the Revealer of divinity and humanity and thereby destroys the false divide between ontological Christology and functional Christology.

2.2.6 Ancestor worship not to be abandoned

Eugene Lapointe, a French Canadian Catholic priest who spent many years serving within the context of the Basotho people in southern Africa, believes Africans can worship both Christ and ancestors. His study is confined to the Basotho and he insists that the Basotho

pray and worship their ancestors (1995:43). He sees nothing wrong with Christians who continue to pray to the ancestors. Lapointe does not detail the role of ancestors and their continued relevance to the lives of the Christians.

Lapointe (1995:50) maintains that ancestor worship is not found anywhere in the Bible. He concedes that even in the book Maccabees, the closest idea to ancestor worship is prayer offered on behalf of and not to the dead (1995:50). In spite of this admission, Lapointe maintains that the Bible does not condemn ancestor worship. He bases his main argument on the belief that the ancestors continue to live and enter into relationships with the descendants (1995:50). The point is if ancestors continue to live and have a relationship with the descendants why should they not be honoured? The argument again pivots around the belief in the ontological existence of the ancestors.

While one may not fully agree with Lapointe, he does make a point. The biblical injunction is that children should honour their parents. If at death the parents do not die, that honour is still due them. If indeed the Bible does not condemn ancestor worship and that indeed ancestors are not dead but alive in a different state, then Lapointe's argument stands. But if the Bible does condemn ancestor worship and that ancestors have been put out of action by death, then Lapointe's arguments are unbiblical. It is the aim of this study to show that such arguments have insufficient biblical evidence.

2.2.7 What to do with African ancestors?

Buti Tlhagale, Archbishop of Bloemfontein in South Africa, contributes two chapters on different topics in the book, *The church and African Culture*, edited by Mohlomi Makobane. The first of the two chapters investigates ancestors and paschal mystery. Tlhagale observes that sacrifice to the ancestors plays a pivotal role among Africans (1995:53). This ritual involves the slaughtering of an animal as a way of communicating with the ancestors (1995:55). He asks the question whether this blood ceremony should be limited to the home and advocates for an incorporation of this into the Catholic Church.

Tlhagale believes that this would not create any confusion between the blood of Christ represented by the Eucharist and the blood offered to the ancestors (1995:57). He argues

that the sacrifice to the ancestors is metaphoric and relates to issues that pertain to social well-being. He cautions that the “sacrifice to the ancestors should not be elevated onto a universal plane” (1995:58). He clearly has no problem in baptising this ritual into the church.

Tlhagale, however, makes some rather startling statements against the notion of ancestral significance. Here is list of some of these statements (Tlhagale 1995:171-2):

1. Faith in God... has dethroned the ancestors from the human-made pedestal.
2. Their god-like status as superhuman beings has been reduced to the status of deceased human beings... and belongs to the world of the spirits.
3. It no longer becomes necessary to indulge in elaborate rituals which serve to pacify the malevolent spirits.
4. Christ brings freedom from the fear of the dead.
5. Christianity teaches that long life on earth is as result of adhering to the gospel values and not because of the sacrifices offered to ancestors.
6. The dead do not talk back.
7. Ancestors neither inflict sickness nor prescribe a cure.

The above observation by Tlhagale seemingly contradicts his own recommendation that sacrifices to ancestors must be baptised into the church. He argues that there is a metaphoric significance to these rituals as they assist the practitioners to enhance their well-being. If people are freed from the fear of the dead, then what is the point of engaging in elaborate rituals that are costly and meaningless? Tlhagale, though, observes that the claims of healing attributed to ancestors must be coming from a social order that gives rise to these specific illnesses (1995:172). If this observation is true, then bringing the rituals into the church is honouring the very social order that is responsible for such illnesses. What could this social order represent, if not ancestors and God, then who? Could this be the evil spirits or forces? If so, should Africans be encouraged to venerate such forces, one wonders.

In yet another article from a different book entitled, *The idea of God in African Traditional Religions*, Tlhagale contributes a paper titled, *God, Ancestors, 'iZangoma' and the Eucharist*. Here he outlines the consequences of knowing the truth. Truth about God reveals who ancestors are and the truth about human beings; this would include the significance and function of ancestor or even their existence. It would also shed light on the nature of man. The following are the consequences of knowing the truth as outlined by Tlhagale:

1. It frees the superstitious mind from the spell cast by the roaming spirits.
2. It depopulates the African cosmos of the multitudes of the wondering evil spirits and introduces a new order.
3. Reveals God as the Father of both the living and the dead.
4. God is revealed as the decisive reference point and not the ancestors.

The ultimate implication and consequence of knowing the truth is the burial of ancestors, what he calls the “third burial”. The first is the physical burial of the dead. The second is the symbolic incorporation into the community of ancestors. The third burial is that ancestors have no place among the living. They therefore cannot be making demands on them. They cannot also appear in a form of non-poisonous snakes or animals, they are no longer part of the living (Tlhagale 1995:53).

Once more this line of arguing militates against the view that rites pertaining to ancestors should be baptised into the church. Ancestors are stripped of any veneer of importance and relevance. One notices this progressive development of Tlhagale’s understanding or view on the role of ancestors.

2.2.8 Jesus the only and true ancestor

Kwame Bediako (2004:30), a Ghanaian, in his book *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa* devotes two pages on Christ as an ancestor and sole Mediator. He writes, “...the cult of ancestors, from the intellectual point of view belongs to the category of myth...” By referring to the cult of ancestors as a myth, Bediako is not referring to the ontological objective existence of ancestors but rather to their functionality and their perceived role in

African Traditional Religion. He argues that “The potency of the cult of ancestors is not the potency of ancestors themselves but the potency of the cult is the potency of the myth.” (2004:30).

Bediako further asserts that this myth is not limited to the function but also touches on the belief that departed human spirits operate in the transcended realm, (2004:31). Here Bediako clearly states that the ancestors do not operate in the transcended realm. The emphasis is on operation, not so much on existence. One is left to wonder if the ancestral function as maintained in African Traditional Religion is a myth and the transcended existence also a myth. If ancestors do exist as implied by Bediako, where do they go and what is their function if all that is believed by Africans is mythical?

The mythological understanding provides a critical basis for Bediako’s Christology. He notes:

“Since ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors”. (2004:31).

Christ therefore more than fulfils the mythological role played by ancestors in the traditional worldview. Bediako’s arguments render the question of the existence of ancestors irrelevant. Since these, according to him, do not operate in any transcended form nor is their function a reality, then the way is open for the second death of ancestors.

The above Christological argument does not adequately address the perceived role of ancestors in an African worldview. The cult of ancestors is an experiential reality and not a mythological one in the African mind. Ancestors are known to have blessed or cursed those closest to them. They have appeared, have spoken and still hold a position of power and authority over their lineage. If ancestors are not real and not true then Bediako needs to demonstrate convincingly who are these dead people who communicate to their lineage? The mythological argument, more than anything else, obfuscates the meaning and role of ancestors.

2.2.9 Conclusion

The books reviewed all share the common view that the best way to deal with dual allegiance is incorporation of ancestors into Christian liturgy and theology. While most of these writers observe the limitations in African Traditional Religion, they argue for congruency and continuity between the two forms of religion. These theologians seem to have resorted to the strategy “if you cannot win them, join them” as an effective solution to the problems faced by African Christians.

2.3 Discontinuity

Discontinuity is a reaction to the position that seeks to create synergy between Christ and ancestors. The main thrust of this argument is that this position is not consistent with the tone of the Bible.

2.3.1 Continuity position as satanic

Nyirongo (1997:1), writing from what used to be known as the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education in South Africa (currently the North-West University), argues against continuity between African religions and Christian faith. Nyirongo from the onset sets out what motivated him to write the book, “it is the denial of the cardinal truths of the Gospel by some well-known African theologians” (1997:1). He believes that these prominent African theologians are used by the devil to continue to deceive the African people. It is the scheme of Satan to prevent the Africans from believing the true Gospel and these theologians are playing right into his destructive plans” (Nyirongo 1997:1). The argument he seeks to refute is that African Traditional Religion is the foundation for Christian faith.

He maintains that arguments in support of the evidence of true knowledge of God amongst Africans have no biblical support. Though the African called upon God in times of distress and acknowledged His existence, he did not seek and trust Him as the Lord and Saviour of Life. Instead he devoted his attention to non-human spirits and ancestors. Nyirongo points out that the African’s religious experience is that of idolatry and can be associated with

pagans. He maintains that no one can worship God aright unless God opens his eyes and directs him to worship Him. Clearly in this regard Nyirongo does not subscribe to the notion of general revelation used by God as seed for the gospel. He seems to limit God only to the written and special revelation. He does not explain the motivation in the African to seek to worship God even though imperfectly.

Nyirongo (1997:54) concedes God is so awesome and as a result Africans believe that they need mediators who will represent them before God. These include deities, spirits and ancestors. These intermediaries guarantee the social or material welfare of man. Nyirongo accepts the fact that man needs a mediator to be accepted by God (1997:56). His question is – who according to the Bible, has God appointed to be the mediator and what is the reason for appointing him? He presents Christ as the true, only and better Mediator – because of His sinlessness, His death on the cross and because He takes away our sins and because He is eternal God (Nyirongo 1997:58).

2.3.2 Relevant and biblical Christology

Yusuf Turaki, Principal investigator, Jos ECWA Theological Seminary, Nigeria. in his book *Christianity and African Gods*, argues for a biblical and yet relevant Christology. His basic methodology is centred not so much on how the African views and interprets the Bible but on how the Bible views and defines African cultures and religion (Turaki 2006:2). He observes the two extreme views in the work of most African theologians. The first is the tendency to want to be relevant to African traditional religion by neglecting what the Bible teaches.

The second view is to disregard the African worldview in its entirety. It embraces the Bible while ignoring any positive value in African Traditional Religion. According to Turaki, this yields to either Christian theology or African theology. He proposes an African Christian theology. He deems it both true to the Bible and also relevant to the African Traditional Religion. He argues that dual allegiance is festered by lack of clear biblical teaching on African Traditional Religion. He also asserts that most Africans live under the influence of African Traditional Religions and yet are ignorant of its influence (2006:7). So

in his view the ignorance is both on what the Bible teaches and also on the penetrating influence of African religions.

Turaki maintains that as long as the African spiritual needs that were met in African traditions, are not met in Christianity, these traditions will persist. So Christianity cannot do less than what the African Traditional Religions delivered to the Africans. To achieve this, knowledge of African Traditional Religion is necessary.

He argues though that “prayers or invocation to the ancestors or through the ancestors; food or drink offerings and/sacrifices and libations; communication with the spirits of the dead”, is forbidden in the Bible. If ancestors receive prayers and libations then that is idolatry, Christ is the only mediator. If they had become spirits then dealing with them is forbidden, as they fall under “familiar spirits” which are strictly forbidden in the Bible (Turaki 2006:254-59).

He argues that there is no Christological link between ancestors and Christ. There is a link between Christ and the High Priest but not with ancestors. Saints in the Bible are never referred as ancestors nor were the Patriarchs regarded as mediators. Ancestors of African Christians cannot be included among the Saints, and even if they are they do not have a role among the living.

Turaki is clear that Jesus cannot take a place in the gallery of ancestors or be incorporated as one of the ancestors. He is different and unique. He cannot be likened to ancestors and does not have their likeness. Turaki later asserts that Jesus takes the place and replaces the traditional intermediaries and ancestors.

Turaki’s observation that there is no Christological link between the ancestors and Christ required more study, which this research undertook. The perceived function or role of ancestors seems to correspond to the role and function of Jesus Christ. While Turaki appears to be correct in distancing the Bible from ancestral veneration, he could probably be taking this point far to deny any link between the function of ancestors and that of Christ.

2.3.3 The living dead have no dealings with the living

Richard Gehman, an American theologian who spent more than 30 years in Kenya, observes “that what has been written under the name ‘African Christian Theology’ has been in favour of Roman Catholic with a mixture of universalism. This theology includes the ancestor in a Communion of Saints with the hope of salvation for everyone.” Gehman (2005:xv). He is one of the very few authors in Africa who has devoted about 300 pages addressing the issue of death and the state of the dead. One of the keenest observations by Gehman is that the ancestral belief is rooted in the belief in life after death. This is very important as Gehman will have to show whether this belief has biblical support or not. He does subscribe to the belief in the immortality of the soul; for him the deceased are either in hell or heaven. He stresses the point that the ancestors, in whatever place they are after death, cannot have a relationship with the living.

Gehman warns the church in Africa not to follow in the steps of the Christian church by mingling traditional beliefs with Christian beliefs (Gehman 2005:90). He observes that the doctrine of the “Communion of Saints” as embraced by the Roman Catholic Church, lacks scriptural support and is an extension of pagan practices (2005:94, 107). Bringing the ancestral tradition into the church follows the very path that the church followed during the Dark Ages, which led to accommodation and compromise. His point is that the solution offered by many African theologians is a Catholic solution embedded in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints (2005:107).

Gehman erodes the foundation upon which ancestral veneration is based by showing that the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints is not scriptural. He argues that 2 Timothy is the probably the only New Testament text used for this doctrine. He goes on to show that this text does not support this doctrine. Onesiphorus mentioned in the text, was not dead but alive (2005:137-139). Another possible support is taken from the Apocrypha, which the Protestants have rejected. This was never part of the Jewish Bible and Jesus never quoted from it and such using the Apocrypha as a foundation for this doctrine exposes its unscriptural fibre (2005:139-141).

Gehman analyses texts such as Luke 15:10, Hebrews 12:1,2 and 1 Corinthians 15:29 and argues that these do not support the idea that the dead can see what is happening here on earth. The ‘cloud of witnesses’ the Hebrew writer refers to according to Gehman does not refer to the spectators but to the witnesses: those who have gone through the same experience (2005:144-5). Gehman’s conclusion is that the Bible teaches that “the dead cannot normally communicate with the living” (2005:158). Gehman does allow for exceptions hence the word ‘normally’ “which are unusual instances of the special power of God” (2005:158).

One question that Gehman seeks to address is why the Bible prohibits the living from speaking to the dead, or the dead from speaking to the living. He gives two reasons, the first being that the Saints cannot be disturbed from their rest and the second that communication with the dead “is spiritual harlotry and it is being unfaithful to the God who saved us” (2005:179). Arguing the basis for the second reason, he refers to the following texts: Jeremiah 8:2; Isaiah 8:19; Leviticus 19:2; and Deuteronomy 18:10 where it is stated that instead of consulting the dead, the living should consult God. That is why consulting the dead is seen as spiritual harlotry.

Gehman asserts that the “real proof that the dead cannot speak with the living is the biblical teaching concerning the state of the righteous after death” (2005:171). For this reason Gehman devotes more space proving the above statement. He believes that the understanding of the “state of the dead between the time of their death and the time of the resurrection of the dead”, provides the “solution to the fear of sickness and death and the living-dead” (2005:247).

First of all Gehman explains what death is according to the Scriptures. He makes a distinction between physical death, which is the separation of the spirit from the body, and spiritual death, which is the separation of the soul from God (2005:249). Through repentance one can move from spiritual death to life in Christ and will not die but will live forever (2005:250). On the other hand, those who do not repent, suffer eternal death, where “spiritual death is made permanent in a place of torment” (2005:250). According to Gehman the righteous do not die; they live forever in the presence of God. The wicked also

do not die; they live forever separated from God, which is the meaning of hell. It is clear that Gehman believes that no one dies and that it is only a matter of where one lives, either with God in heaven or without God, in hell. This is clearly the belief in the immortality of the soul.

Gehman then focuses on the intermediate state, “which is the state and the place of the dead once they have died physically” (2005:252). He adds that the Bible does not reveal much about this state. It would be very interesting to find out why the Bible says little about this state, especially when one observes how Gehman views it. The intermediate state refers to the existence of the dead without bodies until resurrection. The righteous wait for their bodies in heaven, while the wicked wait for theirs in hell (2005:54). Using texts such as Philippians 1:21-23, Luke 23:43, Revelation 14:13, and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, Gehman concludes that life in heaven is much more wonderful than life on earth and is a conscious existence (2005:255-63).

The intermediate life that is enjoyed by the believer far supersedes the life they had on earth before death. According to Gehman what constitutes this bliss in heaven is the experience of being with Christ and the anticipation of future reward (2005:259). The future reward is resurrection with the promise of spiritual bodies. It would appear that in spite of the superior form of existence or life, the redeemed in heaven still need to have a body to have full joy, and this they will realize when Christ comes again.

It is interesting to note that Gehman, with all the emphasis on Scripture, does not give a single text as support for the belief in souls that are in hell. The texts he gives are for the souls that are supposed to be in heaven but none for those who are in hell. If the Bible teaches that there are souls in heaven, Gehman has failed to show it. Secondly, the texts Gehman uses to show that the dead Christians are in heaven mention nothing about the soul. Paul does not speak of his soul desiring to go to heaven; he talks about himself. The promise Christ makes to the thief on the cross is not to the soul but to the thief. Here the human beings are addressed as a unit and not as soul and body. For consistency, Gehman should argue for a complete person either in heaven or in hell and not only a part of him.

Thirdly, the dichotomy between soul and body is likely to render Gehman's argument invalid. This is seen in him trying to explain the "house" or "building" Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5. According to Gehman this cannot be referring to the body, as some would argue, but rather to the house that Christ prepared, according to John 14:1-3. In John 14:1-3 Christ promises to come back after He has prepared the mansions in heaven. There is no mention of deceased people going to inherit those mansions before Christ comes for the second time.

Fourthly, the question is whether the dead can speak to God or sing praises to Him. If they can, what prevents them from speaking to their living loved ones? Should the communication with them not exist even at a higher level due to their exalted position? If part of their joy on earth was to be able to communicate with their loved ones, why should they be denied this in heaven? Gehman's arguments here could actually be the needed fertilizer for ancestral ascendancy.

Lastly, Gehman observes that the resurrection is the blessed hope for both the living and the dead Christians. While this can be appreciated as far as those who are living are concerned, it does not become clear why the dead in heaven should look forward to resurrection. Gehman has argued that their existence is more blissful than the one they had while on earth, what disadvantage do they still have? What does the spiritual body give to them that they did not have or enjoy while in the presence of Christ? John 14:1-3 presents being with Christ as the ultimate and the reason for Second Coming; if this is true, why should the dead who are already with Christ look forward to the second coming?

Gehman's view of death and the intermediate state seems to have limited the effects of death to just the physical body. This has also reduced the blessed hope of the second coming of Christ as just the continuation of the life that dead Christians had in heaven. The belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which this research argues, lacks clear scriptural support, and seemingly distorts Gehman's view on death and the state of the dead.

Gehman's anthropology, which adopts a dichotomous view of human nature, does not seem to be supported by the Scriptures. This view is similar to the African view as observed by Gehman, which bases its worldview on the immortality of the soul.

Those arguing for discontinuity do so on the basis that the position is contrary to biblical Christology. While ontological existence of ancestors is affirmed, it is their functionality that is denied. Ancestors are alive to God and in His presence but not for the living descendants. The continuity and discontinuity positions are currently the views held in African Christology. There is, however, a common view as far as anthropology is concerned, being the dualistic anthropology.

2.3.4 Nature of human beings and the state of the dead

Within the context of this research the debate on the nature of human beings and the state of the dead focuses on the debate between dualistic and monistic anthropology. The ontology of ancestors is premised on the African anthropology which is dualistic in nature. This is the same as the one held in traditional Christianity. There are, however, a few African theologians who maintain a monistic understanding of human nature which does not allow room for the existence of ancestors.

2.3.4.1 African anthropology

Tokunboh Adeyemo devotes a chapter on death and destiny in his book *Salvation in African tradition*. Though the focus is not so much on death, this chapter reveals Adeyemo's theology on the ontology of ancestors. Looking at the African beliefs on death, he observes that there is a strong notion of continuation of the soul (1979:72). The belief is that the soul cannot be destroyed; it continues to live after death.

On the other hand, Nyirongo contrasts the African view of death and the state of soul to that of the Bible. Death for an African, he maintains, is a transition from the physical life to the spiritual life. The bond between the dead and the living is not severed by death it continues undisturbed even after death (Nyirongo 1997:58). He notes that for the African

the soul is immortal. There is no room for hell, heaven or resurrection in the African concept of death.

Nyirongo believes that the Bible divides death into two states: physical and spiritual. When a Christian dies, God takes care of his soul. Nyirongo uses the following text as the basis of this observation: 1 Peter 1:14, Romans .8:10,13 and 1 Corinthians 16:15-20 (1997:84). Spiritual death refers to being dead in sin, according to Nyirongo. It is also the outcome of spiritual death; the second outcome is second death which is everlasting torment in hell.

Nyirongo asks the following question: What happens when we die physically? He maintains that man is a unit and is not made up of different parts. This is how he explains this rather complex idea: “the body makes man visible and functional on this planet; the spirit signifies his religious nature; the flesh, his frailty and the soul his living being”. (1997:84). There is no scriptural basis for this assertion by Nyirongo, even though he claims the Bible as the foundation of his notion.

When a Christian dies, observes Nyirongo, he goes to be with the Lord (not just part of him, (Luke 16:19-31). The fact that his physical body is in the grave does not make him less of a person. While he waits for resurrection he is conscious of himself and God’s care and presence (but has no contact with the people on earth). At the resurrection he receives a new body – he receives immortality as a gift. If there were no resurrection, the Christian would remain mortal and his faith would be meaningless.

What about the soul of a non-Christian? His soul goes to hell. Whilst waiting for resurrection he is in torment, fully aware of himself, but cut off from God’s love and fellowship. At the resurrection he receives a body fit for eternal torment in the lake of fire (1997:86).

According to Nyirongo there is nothing that ancestors can do for the living, since they are either in heaven or hell. His view about death is no different from the African in so far as the immortality of the soul is concerned. The difference is on the role played by ancestors, according to him they are either in hell or heaven and have no relationship with the living. He has gone further than most African theologians in discussing the intermediate state

from the biblical perspective. He has managed to deal with both the ontological existence, in his case non-existence of ancestors and their role which would directly address their relevance.

While Nyirongo condemns the methodology adopted by some African theologians when it comes to ancestral worship, he seems to have adopted the same method as part of his counter-arguments. There is no clear biblical evidence or any serious textual exegesis but only an occasional reference to the Bible. It is not clear why there is a need for resurrection when souls cannot die. If there is no material difference between life in the intermediate state and resurrection, then resurrection is redundant.

According to Turaki (2006:254), ancestors fall under the spirit beings. Turaki does not elaborate on the intermediate state of the dead. He simply asserts that the fate of dead ancestors is in the hands of God and He will be the judge. Turaki, however, stresses that ancestors, as far as the Bible is concerned, have no role to play in the lives of the living.

2.3.4.2 Monism in African Christianity

Most of the African theologians support a dualistic understanding of the nature of human beings. This includes even those who are opposed to the ancestor cult. There are, however, a few that support a monist view and base their arguments for the non-existence of ancestors on this anthropological understanding.

Kwabena Donkor, a Ghanaian native, writing from an Adventist viewpoint, argues that the main reason why some Africans continue to live with some measure of fear of ancestors is that the ancestor cult forms part of their structure of existence (2011:86). Donkor premises his argument on the observation that ancestor veneration is driven by a certain view of human nature. This anthropological approach posits that there is an entity in human beings that is immortal (2011:75). This view has also formed the basis of the different dichotomous and trichotomous understanding of human nature. According to Donkor the biblical view of human nature can be schematized as “dust of the ground + breadth of life = living being” (2011:80). Death, as far as this argument is concerned, is the reversal of

creation, which brings the person to a state he was in before creation, and that is non-existence (2011:83)

Donkor shows that the Bible does not lend support to dualism. He gives a list of about ten texts that show that the dead remain in the grave and have no part or role among the living. He, however, concedes that there are some texts in the New Testament that can be interpreted to mean that there is an intermediate state. He does not do any exegetical work on these texts except to conclude that they can be interpreted otherwise (2011:82).

Donkor effectively uses the Scripture to define who the ancestors are and what their role is. A correct biblical understanding challenges the whole notion of the living dead and the intermediate state. He could have been more effective had he also taken time to respond to the New Testament texts that seem to support monism.

Nürnberg, a white South African born in Namibia, has served as ordained pastor in the predominantly black Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the preface of his book, *The living dead and the living God: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa*, he observes that ancestor veneration and beliefs related to this, play a significant role in many parts of the world. He maintains that such beliefs are causing agonies of conscience and theological confusion among lay members and church leaders since these must be hidden or repressed. He sees ancestor veneration as a product of traditionalism (2007:17) it is within that worldview that he engages in this study of ancestor veneration.

Nürnberg begins his exploration by evaluation and 'listening' to African spirituality. He maintains that the ancestors belong to a hierarchical structure which they assumed when they were alive (2007:25). Failure to show respect and submission to their authority endangers the life of the living and threatens the existence of the ancestors. African life is filled with the authority, the presence and the power of the ancestors.

When the Christ of the gospel fails to live up to this expectation a vacuum is created that leads most African Christians back to the embrace of the ancestors. According to Nürnberg this is where traditional Christianity has failed by leaving the vacuum empty, (2007:40). It turned out that the Christian God is not that big after all. Turning to the

biblical witness, Nürnberger argues that family ancestors played no role in the Bible. “Forebears could do nothing for their offspring and their offspring could do nothing for them. Death was the end of all relationships” (2007:59).

These forebears cannot act as mediators, for death has brought an end to their vitality and their existence. Ancestors are therefore unable to play a role in the lives of the living because they are no more, they have ceased to live and can neither bless nor curse the living. Nürnberger argues that the difference between Christ and ancestors does not lie in their ontological existence or non-existence but in what they can do to us (2007:95).

It is their non-existence, the fact that they are dead, that renders them powerless and with no authority among the living. It is Nürnberger’s singular argument that the dead, whether they were Christians or not, are not alive in any manner. They are dead, resting and waiting for the promised resurrection. By resurrection he refers to the bodily resurrection and argues that as far as the Bible is concerned, the spirit is not the opposite of the body (2007:94). The Bible does not seem to know any existence or life that is without the body, all existence is bodily existence (2007:94). The following paragraph sums up Nürnberger’s (2007:62) interpretation and understanding of the biblical anthropology and the state of the dead.

As far as the vitality of the deceased is concerned, the New Testament takes death as seriously as the Old Testament. According to the Old Testament, people become human when earthly material is granted life (Gen. 2:7) and people return to dust when life is taken from the organic material that makes up these human beings – body, soul and spirit”

The implication of the above paragraph is far reaching and revolutionary in its intent. This sets the Christian doctrine of resurrection apart and distinct, as Nürnberger argues, from the “Greek notion of immortality of the soul” and the African notion of ancestral ascendancy” (2007:62). Nürnberger sums up the three views which are often conflated both in traditional and African Christian, as follows:

Resurrection implies death of the entire person; immortality of the soul the presence of divine element in the person that cannot die; becoming an ancestor implies that the vitality of the person is lost but his/her belonging are confirmed and enhanced.”

The theological clarity that Nürnberger brings into the ancestral discourse and their role among the living is that the Bible has no place for ancestral veneration and does not implicitly and explicitly condone such practices (2007:96). Nürnberger is quick to acknowledge that “African insights, worldviews and can illuminate and enrich the biblical message” (2007:96). He admits that there is an inevitable confrontation that does not have to be “confrontational” between the biblical assumptions and the African claims. Christianity, according to Nürnberger, offers an “alternative response to the spiritual needs” that underlie the whole cosmology of ancestors (2007:70).

Nürnberger is one of the few authors who has done a serious anthropological study focusing on the nature and the state of the dead. As a protestant, one would have expected that he would not subscribe to the ‘communion of saints’ doctrine. His arguments against the belief in the immediate life after death put him in the minority, even in Lutheran circles. Both the belief in the immortality of the soul, embraced by most Christians, and the notion of the ancestral ascendancy embraced by most Africans, are challenged and rejected by Nürnberger.

Nürnberger creates an unnecessary dichotomy between the ontological existence of the ancestors and their functional significance. According to him, “...the difference between Christ and ancestors does not lie in their ontological existence or non-existence but in what they can do to us” (2007:95). According to Nürnberger, the deceased should not be consulted because doing so “perpetuates and empowers the past (2007:82). This overemphasis of the functional role of ancestors leads to a myopic and limited appreciation of the complexity of the story found in 1 Samuel 28, that Nürnberger refers to. The biblical and theological dilemma in the story is not the consequence of Saul’s appearance or rather what he said, but that he appeared and spoke although he was dead. Here we have a competition between God who speaks and the deceased who also speak. This is the basis of syncretism – something Nürnberger is wary of.

There does not seem to be a biblical support for Nürnberger’s assertion that consulting the deceased perpetuates the past. The prohibition of not consulting the deceased cannot be limited to what it does to us but what it affirms. In fact, Christianity is a religion that

perpetuates and celebrates the past, as seen in such rituals as baptism and Holy Communion. Without the past there would be no future. What if consulting the deceased brings fortune and prolongation of life? The worship of other gods does bring relief, however temporal, hence the survival of such beliefs for all these years.

Maybe there is a point in regarding the ancestors as part of the demonic realm (2007:14) – something Nürnberger adamantly argues against. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:20, could be intimating that those who offer sacrifices to ancestors are actually doing so to the demons. So the basis for the prohibition is to avoid fellowship with demons. The reason for the prohibition could be that the ancestors have no ontological existence and anything appearing as an ancestor is a manifestation of demons. Contrary to Nürnberger’s argument, it is not what the ancestors do to us but the fact that there is a belief that they can do something to us, that should be addressed. The relevance of the ancestors is sustained by the spiritual needs that Africans have. Debunking the myth of the ontological existence of ancestors is an appropriate theological response, especially when ‘ancestor’ is applied to Christ.

2.3.4.3 Lack of clarity on the intermediate state

There is unanimity among both monistic and dualistic theologians that there is no clear indication in the Bible about the existence of intermediate state. Both the dualist and the monist confirm this observation. Smith (2010:23) notes that “scripture nowhere gives a detailed description of the intermediate state as its focus is always on the final consummation at the parousia”. He adds also that “the form of existence believers will have in this intermediate state is a matter of conjecture” (2010:14).

Edgar (2002:34) a monist, reacts to Smith’s view by arguing that while his view “may explain the paucity of material at the same time it points out the difficulty of attempting to justify the intermediate state when there is little material to work on”. For Edgar, this cannot be used “as an argument to support the immediate state”. Edgar (2002:34) is quick to add that “the paucity of material on intermediate state does not disprove it but it raises real concern about its validity”. Afeke and Verster (2004:57), who are dualists concede “it is not totally clear what the intermediate state will be”.

Kunyahop (2012:223), also a dualist, maintains that there is life after death but admits that the Bible does not give much information about the nature of the existence of the dead in the intermediate state. Cunningham (2010:215), while admitting that Scripture teaches us little about the state of unbelievers in the intermediate state, maintains that “the prevailing view since the time of Augustine is that they go to a place of conscious punishment”. The paucity of scriptural material and the lack of biblical clarity on the intermediate state have led to “contradictory explanations of what it is that constitutes it” (Edgar 2002:33).

2.3.4.4 Monism and dualism debate

The debate among African theologians regards the efficacy of ancestor cults rather than the African anthropology. The monism/dualism debate has not yet found currency in the African theological landscape. The debate is around the role that ancestors are purported to play. In the Western theological circles this debate, however, has reached noticeable levels and has gained popularity.

Wright, the Bishop of Durham for the Church of England, laments the dualistic anthropology with its emphasis on life after death (2008:36). He argues that bodily resurrection is the good news of the gospel. In his view the doctrine of intermediate state “represents a serious distortion and diminution of the Christian hope” (2008:36). He maintains the early Christians, beginning with Paul, were unanimous on the significance of the resurrection, and that is where their focus was. He sees Jesus as both “the model for Christian’s body and the means by which it comes”(Wright 2008:36). He does not appear to discount the intermediate state but believes that it is not the good news of the gospel.

John Cooper, in his attempt to expose the flaw of monistic anthropology, asserts that monism is a relatively modern position (1988:19). According to Cooper the traditional Christian doctrine espouses dualism. He notes that the diverse streams of argumentation have been seen even “among evangelical as well as Reformed thinkers” (1988:19). He, however, is of the opinion that dualism is not dead and quotes a number of prominent thinkers that still support it.

Cooper's main argument is that the soul carries the 'blue print' of the individual personality. The monist view, with its focus on materialistic view of humans, fails to "preserve the principle of personal identity" (1988:20). His objective is to show that the monistic view has serious philosophical implication in its failure to maintain personal identity. The fatal flaw of Cooper's view is that it tends to downplay the good news of resurrection as Wright has earlier pointed out. If the soul is everything one wonders what the value of the body is. If persons do not die then resurrection becomes peripheral as it seeks to focus on that which is not major.

Joel Green (2010) from the Fuller Theological seminary in the United States of America believes that dualism has become a default hermeneutical position (2010:3). He cites three texts, namely 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, Matthew 10:28, and Revelations 6:9-14 as proof that these texts can be viewed from a monistic position. His basic argument is that in these texts the interpretation of soul and body is influenced by platonic dualism and not the context. Soul and body are not seen as different entities that can survive independently of each other in the Bible.

Edgar (2013) argues that the "theoanthropological dualism is neither as widespread nor as theologically central as it is often claimed" (2013:121). He notes that dualism has serious negative implication in relation to the radical nature of death; totality of resurrection and value and place of body in human life (2013:121).

The conclusion and observation by Turl (2010:67) is apropos when he comments "proof-texts can be used by both views in support of their position". It is the reader's position that determines the interpretation of the text at hand. Turl's view is that the implication of the different views must be considered. It is clear that the battle between monism and dualism will be won to a great extent in the 'field of implication'.

2.4 Conclusion

African Christology needs to be relevant without betraying the authority of the Bible. Real freedom is possible only if Christ is allowed to pass judgment on our culture and redeem what is redeemable in it. Biblical exegesis will not seek to advance continuity or

discontinuity but will bring a dialectic. The only way to salvage African Christology is for Africans to take the Bible seriously and allow it to throw light on their culture and religion. The universality of Christianity is seen in its ability to address particular issues in each culture and religion bringing all to the lordship of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

This chapter explores what is African and what is Christian in African Christology. This chapter indicates that African theologians are not in agreement as to what really constitutes the African element in African Christology. At issue is whether ancestors should be incorporated into Christianity as part of the good values from the African worldview or not. Thus, the debate is whether the positive role ancestors played within the African traditional religion can be migrated into Christianity. Those arguing for continuity claim that African Christology has a place for ancestors, while those arguing for discontinuity see no role of ancestors in biblical Christology.

There is however general agreement among African theologians as to what is Christian in African Christology. The belief in the doctrine of the intermediate state appears to be the point where African theologians converge. This doctrine is premised on a dualistic biblical anthropology that argues for the continuation of life after death. The contestation is therefore on the role of ancestors in African Christology and not on their ontological existence.

African Christianity faces a *kairos* which Magesa (2004:143) captures succinctly well when he says: “the time has come for an African Christian to live his/her faith as truly African and truly Christian, without a split personality”. The solution given for this schizophrenic reality is that an African Christian must remain a true African by connecting with his/her African background. While on the other side, there are those who argue that the solution is for African Christians to be truly Christian by focusing on Christ only.

In seeking to understand this brand of Christianity, the following questions are apropos:

1. What is African Christianity?
2. What is African in African Christology?
3. What is Christian in African Christology?

It also needs to be appreciated that while African Christology may create resonance within African worldview, it may at the same time engender dissonance within the Biblical worldview. African Christology is not only judged by how well it answers African questions but also by how well those answers reflect the biblical worldview.

3.1 What is African Christianity?

The words of the Catholic theologian from Nigeria, Orobator (2008:14), capture the essence of Christianity in Africa when he writes: “As Africans we are not just Christians, we are African Christians. We have embraced Christianity as our path to God and our way to live.” African Christianity is not just Christianity in Africa but Christianity within the African worldview. The statement affirms the reality of African Christianity and the intentional and deliberate exercise by Africans in embracing Christianity.

3.1.1 African Christianity vs African theology

Most of the African countries attained their independence from Western powers in the 1960s. While this independence was largely political, Christianity as a Western religion did not escape the criticism and condemnation that was levelled against the colonial powers. Houle (2011:760) is correct in his assessment that Christianity as a product brought by Western missionaries and sustained by colonial powers was expected to disappear from the African soil.

It was duly anticipated that Christianity would follow the White Colonial powers that brought it, as they returned to their homelands. Contrary to this legitimate and logical expectation, Houle (2011:760) observes that Christianity has to the contrary “exploded in numbers and dynamism.” It is an uncontested fact that there are more Christians in sub-Saharan Africa today than in the Western world.

It can rightly be argued that Christianity in terms of its membership and popularity is no longer a Western religion but qualifies to be an African religion. Writing almost twenty years ago Parrat (1995:1) observed that the focus of the Christian faith is “moving steadily away from Europe and America to new centers in the Third World.” This, according to

Parratt, may be unpalatable to European Christian theologians as they are now expected to take the contribution to Christian theology from the Third World seriously. The question asked by Hillman (1993:13) around the same time is worth noting when he quizzes:

On what grounds, then, do ecclesiastical office holders continue to act as though God wills the expressions and celebrations of African Christians to remain essentially, as they are now, Eurocentric reproductions of the historically and culturally conditioned religious experience of Western peoples? (Hillman 1993:13)

African Christianity is not a post-colonial product. The departure of missionaries did not lead to a formation of African Christianity. While African theology can be seen as a post-colonial phenomenon, this does not apply to African Christianity. The confusion in Christian literature is brought about by the failure to make a distinction between African Christianity and African theology. Is African theology the child or parent to African Christianity? Mbiti is quoted to have said during an interview around 1985 (Tienou 1995:4): “The Christians in Africa have a faith but not a theology.” The implication is that Christianity existed as a faith before it did as a theology.

Tienou (1995:4) also sees a distinction between proclamation, which is the preaching of the message and reflection on what is being preached and lived. African Christianity existed first as proclamation and practise before any systematised and formal reflection could be articulated. African Christianity precedes therefore its academic reflection, which is African theology.

3.1.2 Origin of African Christianity

It has already been observed that the disappearance of colonial powers after the 1960s did not adversely affect the growth and dynamism of African Christianity. If this is true, then it can be deduced that African Christianity transcends colonial Christianity. African Initiated Churches (AICs) are believed to be the original custodians of African Christianity. The first academic reflection on AICs is reported to have been done by Bengt Sundkler in 1961 (Ranger 2007:65; Anderson 2001:267). This goes to show that AICs as a form of

Christianity are not a product of post-colonialism. They owe their origins in colonial times and their continued relevance in post-colonial period.

The origin of the AICs goes as far back as the late 19th century. These churches represent a response to missionary Christianity through the African idioms. These idioms, according to Ranger (2007:65), were the “experience of prophecy, the desire for spiritual healing, the desire to eradicate witchcraft, the experience of spirit possession, and the passion for creating holy places”. It was the apparent failure of the mission Christianity in taking these idioms seriously that somehow created a vacuum which was filled by AICs (Ranger 2007:65).

Allan Anderson (2003:179), a former researcher in southern Africa, observed that these churches saw in God a God who not only saves the soul but heals the body as well. This was not the result of catechesis but intentional reflection on the Bible by Africans. Anderson (2003:276,79-81, 84) further lists the following as some of the distinct causes that led to the formation of these churches: “Reaction to Western mission; Protestant denominationalism; Bible Translation and Theological Causes and other precipitating factors”.

He further notes that “these churches have made possible a dialogue between the African thought world and Christianity at an existential level” (2003:179). According to Magesa (2004:103) the AICs are not only a reaction to missionary Christianity but also a critique of African Traditional Religion. The AICs offered a critical reflection on both African Traditional Religion and missionary Christianity in terms of experience and practise. These same issues would later be the subject of discourse pursued by theologians through the influence of the Negritude movement.

The emergence of AICs could be seen as the radical development that introduced an alternative to blind acceptance or total rejection of Christianity by the indigenous Africans. According to Kiernan (1990:18, 19), the fundamental and principled response by the Zulus of South Africa towards Christianity was one of rejection. Those who became Christian converts among the Zulus were marginalised and ostracised. They were regarded as dead,

culturally speaking. This was a serious form of punishment to a culture that valued community attachment. A blind acceptance and a total rejection were the only two options for the Africans.

The AICs in a way created a third alternative and a different way of response by avoiding the two extremes. They saw in the Bible answers to African existential issues as well as critique of the African Traditional Religion. They also saw in it a critique of the missionary Christianity and an affirmation of certain aspects of their traditional religions expectation. It is the ability to see in the Bible answers to issues raised within the African worldview that continued to make these churches attractive. These churches rightly deserved to be called African Christian churches – where the African worldview is taken seriously and where the Bible is seen to be normative.

As far back as 1994 almost 42% of black South Africans claimed to be members of African Initiated Churches (Siaki 2002:41). Twenty years later, Anderson (2001:279) observed that these churches were the fastest growing of all Christian churches in Africa. Since the 1970s, Pentecostal and Charismatic African churches have mushroomed on the African continent (Anderson 2001:276). As part of the AICs the Pentecostal churches have become the current face of African Christianity.

3.1.3 Development of African voice in Christian theology

Justin Ukpong (1984:501) observes three major theological currents that developed in Africa from the 1960s. The first one is what is now known as the theology of inculturation which then assumed the name of African theology. The emergence of this theology as it will be argued later coincided with the demise of colonialism. This was followed by the theology of liberation from the early 1970s. The third and the voice to be heard was that of the black theology.

These different distinct voices in theology all dealt with specific contextual issues that were affecting the African people. African theology was the cultural voice, while the liberation theology became the voice of the poor as Africans sought to deal with structural and racial poverty. The latest of these, black theology, became the voice of the

marginalised and oppressed black people in South Africa (Ukpong 1984:501). All these issues were in one way or another influential in the rise of the AICs. Even though these churches earned the label of Christianity without theology but with faith, as Mbiti argued, there is more to this 'faith' than what Mbiti seems to realize.

AICs have sought to ground their faith on the Bible while taking their context seriously. Anderson (2003:179) argues that the faith expressed in AICs may not qualify as theology from above but it is theology from the "underside". It is the "theology of the people", it is done where the rubber meets the road. It is critical appraisal of the context it finds itself in. It seeks to address the needs of the African people using the Bible as its authoritative text. It is indeed the African voice in Christian theology.

In Anderson's (2003:179) opinion, the failure of the so-called academic theology has been its preoccupation with how to theologise in Africa. This is in contrast with the focus in AICs which was the needs of the African people. It is true that the way forward for Africa is deep listening by the theologians in dialogue with the people (Dickson & Kalilombe 1985:96). This will avert what the Congolese theologian, Bujo (1992:72), refers to as the "lifeless, theoretical theology produced by experienced and smooth-tongued theologians while the voice of the poor is simply ignored." He further argues that "truth", and in this case African Christianity, "can only be discovered and conceptualised within the context of life" (1992:65). As already observed, the AICs grew out of a desire to confront and to respond to life as they experienced it.

The three basic theological trends to emanate from Africa have as a common factor among them the context the Africans found themselves in. Racism, poverty and African culture all have to do with the African context. These three 'theologies' seek to express Christianity within the framework of these contextual challenges. African Christianity is then the product of contextual theology even before it was formulated in academic language.

3.1.4 African theology

The liberation theology, African theology and black theology have come to characterise what is known as African Christianity. As already noted, all are the products of contextual

theology. While black and liberation theology embraced the socio-political aspirations of Africans, African theology focused on the religio-cultural issues. The focus of this research is on the religio-cultural aspect and therefore excludes liberation and black theology when relating to African Christianity.

The Catholic priest by the name of Placide Tempels is recognised as the Father of African theology (Bujo 1992:58). Bujo recognises Tempels as the one who inspired the Africans and laid the foundation for them to build upon. The expression 'African theology' came into popular use around 1955 (Ukpong 1984:501). Bujo also recognises that the reality that it represented predated the expression. This reality is seen in the existence of AIC churches. It was in the same year (1955) that Vincent Mulago wrote that within the context of African theology. It is this exercise that, according to Bujo (1992:58), qualifies Mulago as the "first African who can be called an African theologian." African theology is seen as the oldest among the three contextual theologies (Ukpong 1984:509).

3.1.4.1 Negritude movement

The immediate background to African theology lies with the movement known as Negritude (Bujo 1992:50). The pioneers of this movement wanted to "think and write as Africans, believing that only in this way could they recover their identity and their freedom" (Bujo 1992:50).

In a similar vein, Clarke (2013:73) intimates that it was the Negritude movement that led some "African priests to revive a cultural consciousness and adapt Christian faith to the African situation." He further argues that there were originally only two initial responses to the message brought by Western missionaries: "accept or reject". Later, due in part to the influence from the Negritude movement, a third response was developed. "This aimed to reconcile Christian faith with African culture" (Clarke 2013:73).

Clarke (2013:86) also shows how Negritude as a movement led African theologians to ask new and different questions about what it means to be a Christian. He aptly describes Negritude "as a mode of cultural self-determination, critiqued the colonial mentality and articulated new epistemological orientation in African Culture" (2013:86). Clarke further observes

that it was this movement and its dynamism that awakened the “African voice in theology and tried to reconcile what it means to be African and Christian.”

3.1.4.2 Failure of African theologians

In the early part of 1960s already there were passionate discussions around the subject of African theology as observed by Bujo (1992:59). The problem of inertia and the inability to construct a viable African theology came to the fore in 1976. This, according to Ukpong (1984:71), became visible at a conference called to critique the absence of African theology from Western theological discourse. It was at this conference that the Ecumenical Organization of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was established. The discussions were conducted as if African theologians did not exist.

This experience surprisingly led African to the realisation that their marginalisation was not only from the Western theological discourse but also from the Third World theological discourse. African theologians discovered that they were suffering from “double marginalisation” (Ukpong 1984:72). This double marginalisation was both from the Western theologians as well as the Third World theologians. It appears that for sixteen years the Africans were still busy clearing their throat in order to make their voices known. This fits in with the observation made by Mbiti that Africa had faith but no theology.

It would be therapeutic and redeeming to admit that this embarrassment provided the necessary motivation to construct an authentic African theology. But this was not to be. An observation by Bujo (1992:73), thirty-two years after 1960, reflects that the problem still existed. He laments the dismal failure of constructing an African theology when he states: “As for the incarnation of Christianity into African culture, the failure has been almost complete. There is a great deal of talk about African theology, but so far it has hardly gone beyond a preliminary clearing ground.” (Bujo 1992:73). African theologians had failed to make use of the “raw material for a contextual theology in Africa resident in AICs (Anderson 2003:179). The issues that were raised in AICs had not been taken seriously by African theology, even decades later.

3.1.5 Struggle for authentic African Christianity

Can there genuinely be a balance between Christianity and Africanity? Are there not observable biases in the interaction and coming together of African traditional religion and biblical Christianity? While on paper inculturation seeks to be an objective and genuine process of allowing a mutual critique of the two religions and or culture, what occurs on the ground can be very different. A competitive environment seems to be the product of inculturation whether intentionally or unintentionally. This often leads to, amongst others, the hybridization problem in African Christianity.

3.1.5.1 Theology of inculturation

The flowering of the theology of inculturation as an extension of African theology became the visible progress made by African theologians. While African theology can be traced just before 1960s, inculturation as an expression of African theology is a recent phenomenon. Attempts at integration of the gospel and culture took either the form of accommodation for Catholics or indigenization for Protestants (Osei-Bonsu 2004:15; Bosch 1991:450). Both these models were limited to accidental matters such as liturgical vestments, art and music (Bosch 1991:450). Both models were discarded around 1975.

Osei-Bonsu (2004:15) argues that the main reason these models were no longer used, was that they represented a one-way movement with the appearance of paternalism. He further observes that “Christian faith was made to fit into a particular culture without the former being open for change” (2004:15). Furthermore, he opined, indigenization “restricted itself to the work of the insider, the native, and did not leave much room for outsiders” (2004:15) It would appear therefore, that the missionary theology ended up dictating the terms of this cultural and religious exchange.

The different models of engaging the gospel and culture can also be grouped into two, namely adaptation and inculturation (Ukpong 1984:517). Ukpong argues that of the two, inculturation is the more radical one. He further notes that the distinction between the two lies in the finished product and the method. As far as the finished product is concerned, adaptation tends to retain the pattern of Western theology, while inculturation is influenced

by African Traditional Religion. According to Ukpong the methodology of the former may be referred to as “translating Christianity” into the African context while the latter can be seen as “giving birth to or sowing the seeds of Christianity” in the African soil (1984:517). Inculturation is similarly defined as the “flowering of a seed implanted into the soil of a particular culture” (Bosch 1991:454).

African Christianity can thus be seen as the flowering of a gospel seed planted in the African soil. According to Gittins (2000:27), “The harvest of inculturation is ripe when the Gospel has become relevant to, yet not compromised by a culture.” The definition of inculturation by Magesa (2004:5), the Tanzanian theologian, brings out the radicalness argued by Ukpong when he asserts:

Inculturation is understood to be the process whereby faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture. In this encounter the faith becomes part and parcel of this new culture. In practical terms this process involves the interaction of mutual critique and affirmation. It entails the acceptance and rejection of thought forms, symbolic and linguistic expression and attitudes between the faith-cultures in question. (Magesa 2004:5).

One can see that for Ukpong this interaction is one of equals yielding to a give and take situation. Accordingly, as far as this view is concerned, there is no authoritative text that determines what must be accepted or rejected in each culture or religion: “Mutual critique and affirmation” (Ukpong 1984:517) is the ultimate methodology.

It is in this vein that Shorter (1988:9) sees inculturation as a dialogue between Christianized culture of the missionaries and the “unchristianized culture of the potential convert”. Shorter agrees in principle with Ukpong in levelling the playground by asserting that inculturation is merely cultural interaction. King (2001:25) insists that local cultures were rejected in favour of alien cultures which appeared under the guise of the gospel. Here again one sees culture intermingled with the gospel such that one cannot make a distinction. Christianity, as argued by Bosch (1991:454) can only exist as “it is translated into a culture.” In the same vein, Magesa (2004:7) opines that that gospel is essentially “a cultural reality and not a disembodied reality and a pure emanation from God.”

While the above views touch on reality and seek to eschew any form of cultural absolutism, they appear to err on the side of relativism. The gospel appears to be defined exclusively in human terms. The divine aspects and the salvific elements are relativised and viewed as part of culture. It is true though, that missionaries could not escape transmitting their understanding of the gospel, which is culturally conditioned. Shorter (1988:14) sees the whole process of inculturation as a double movement, where there is once the “inculturation of Christianity and the Christianization of culture.” This leads to the transformation of culture and the enrichment of Christianity by the values of the culture that is being evangelized (Shorter 1988:14).

Inculturation can therefore be seen as a way of being Christian, or in this context, of being African Christian (Tinyiko 2010:370). It can be observed, based on the above arguments, that inculturation as practiced in Africa can be viewed as a template for anyone who takes his or her context seriously. It is not confined to Africa nor is it for Africans. It can therefore be a constant for theology and ministry (Schineller 1990:97).

African Christianity is to Africans what Western Christianity is and was to the missionaries. The summation of the above arguments by Ukpong (1984:521) is worth noting when he says “The main goal of African theology is to make Christianity attain African expression, thus creating an atmosphere where Christianity may come to be regarded as part and parcel of the people’s way of life.” He, however, cautions, especially the Catholic Theologians, of the “need to ground their works on the solid biblical foundation” (1984:521). If this caution is heeded it may, according to Boshart (2010:18), result in a situation where Christianity is both native and stranger in Africa.

It can be argued therefore, that a balanced view of inculturation seeks to maintain a happy medium between what is Christian in African Christianity and what is African. It is supposed to be a process that assists a convert from African traditional background in becoming a truly African Christian.

3.1.5.2 Syncretism

The tendency, and indeed the practise of dual religious allegiance in African Christianity, can be seen from an experience narrated by the Nigerian theologian Dadem Danfulani (2012:39). He observes that in Nigeria the practise of consulting diviners, fetish priests and African religious functionaries can be seen even among professed Christians. He tells the story of a professor who was a Christian dean of a faculty, who, after campaigning for days for a certain post has to consult a diviner to help him regain this position. Nevertheless, he still lost the position after undergoing and following embarrassing and humiliating instructions from the diviner.

Colonialists and missionaries did everything to destroy the ancestor cult but to no convincing success. Even those that became converts would revert to their traditional practices in times of crisis for comfort and guidance. Ancestors may have been removed from the public view but could not be removed from the heart. Africans would become Christians but continue practicing their African religion in private (Bujo 1992:31). This has resulted in a well-orchestrated system of dual religious allegiance.

Magesa (2004:79) conducted research across the three Easter African countries to determine how the cult of ancestors affect the African Christians. It has been observed earlier that Eastern Africa is one of the areas in Africa where veneration is popular. The data from this research revealed the following:

People usually take instinctive personal or communal initiatives in addressing an issue at hand and may tackle a problem in ways that may not be sanctioned by the church or even by the people concerned when they are themselves rationally confronted.

There is also a case of Christians who call upon their ancestors, mentally or ritually, to intervene in certain difficult circumstances. Where it is proscribed, Christians were reluctant to admit that they occasionally did so, but the research revealed it to be a practice widespread across the Christian spectrum. Magesa (2004:79)

This research is quite revealing and shows how embedded ancestors are in the psyche of most Africans. African theologians may articulate and argue and give reasons why certain

African response is justified or preferred. But for most average believers their response, as shown in the research, is “instinctive” and they may even act against their Christian beliefs.

This visible obsession with rituals may be propelled by the fear of what might happen or perceived to be happening, if these are not followed. The reason for and the basis of this fear is what Donkor (2011:86), a Ghanaian Adventist theologian, refers to as the “sociology of ancestors”. This concept stems from the appreciation of the effect and influence ancestor cult has had on the Africans. African Christians may belong to churches that proscribe the belief in ancestors but as part of the African community, Donkor argues, “their individual and corporate lives and existence are shaped, ordered, defined, and given cohesion by the ancestor cult (2011:85). There is therefore a socio-psychological dimension which challenges even the biblical data which must be understood when studying the ancestor cult (Donkor 2011:86).

This explains this instinctiveness in the African Christians’ response observed by Magesa in his research. The findings by Magesa resonate with Nürnberger (2007:17) who also argues that ancestor veneration is substantial but largely hidden, within the African church. He argues that this state of affairs could be generated by the inability of the Christian gospel in providing a “valid and adequate response to African traditional spirituality”.

This hybrid form of African Christianity which results in a schizophrenic African Christian personality has been the source of theological reflection by most African theologians. Jean-Marc Ela (2000:14), the Cameroonian theologian, asks: “How can we live our faith so it will not marginalize and discredit our ancestors? Can the church become a place in black Africa where communion with the ancestors is possible? The last question that Ela asks which would pave the way for the response to his series of questions is “How does the gospel regard the cult of ancestors?” (2000:14).

A similar question is differently put by Nürnberger (2007:17) when he asks “whether ancestor veneration can be accommodated within the set of beliefs and the devotional practices of the church without undermining its identity and rationale.” It is not clear whether by “its identity and rationale” Nürnberger refers to ancestor veneration or church

practise. The question applies to both: what happens to identity and rationale of ancestor veneration when it is incorporated into the church and what happens to the identity and rationale of Christian practise when ancestor veneration is made to be part of it?

3.2 What is African in African Christology?

There is no general agreement amongst African theologians as to what is African in African Christology. This refers specifically to the issue of the involvement of ancestors in Christian liturgy as part of Africanisation of Christianity. There are two basic groups: those who favour continuity and those who advocate for discontinuity.

3.2.1 Continuity theology

Taylor (2001:7) poses some very pertinent questions on how Christianity addresses African issues and problems, when he asks:

Christ has been presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European world-view, the object of the adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. But if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand him would he be recognizable to the rest of the Church universal? And if Africa offered him the praises and the petitions of her total, uninhabited humanity, would they be acceptable?

The question is what happens to Christianity if it takes the African worldview seriously? What happens to Christ when He begins to address the issues that Africans are confronted with? Kato (1985:33) as far as back as 1975 argued that Christianity is no longer a Western religion. He opined that it is more African than it is Western. At the time he made this statement there were more than 150 million Christians in Africa. In Kenya the church attendance was 40% compared to England's 4%. Besides, Kato continues, "Christianity thrived in Africa long before it did in Europe" (1985:33). He thus regards Christianity not just as a European product carried to Africa by missionaries and it is for these reasons that he calls Christianity an African religion.

The question asked by Obeng (1997:16) remains unresolved in African Christology, when he says “ In re-reading the Bible within African Christianity, which culture should take precedence over the other – the biblical culture or African culture?” The answer to this question will determine the quality of African Christology, within the umbrella of African Christianity, that will be displayed to the world. Two more issues accentuating the seriousness of the question are the persistent challenge of syncretism as already shown above and the role of ancestors in African Christianity.

3.2.1.1 The role of ancestors in African Christology

Christology, argues Hearne (1980:334) lies at the centre of any theology of inculturation. What then happens to ancestors if Christ occupies the centre of African Christology? Ela (2000:14) makes a striking observation when he emphasises that ancestors represent that part of “African culture where Africans are the most attached to”. How then can Christ, as Pope John Paul once remarked, “be truly African in His members who are African” (Hearne 1980:346).

The question becomes more pointed, especially in the matrix of ancestors. While differing views can be observed concerning the place of ancestors in African Christology, the pendulum still swings in favour of an ancestor Christology. The relevance and role of ancestors, it would appear, does not become obsolete when Christ is embraced by Africans. Many African theologians argue for continuity between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. More African theologians have come out in the open defending the ancestor cult. While African Christians may still be prone to play the dual allegiance game, the theologians are leading in front calling an end to this “split” personality.

Kalengyo (2009:49) exhorts the Ganda Christians that there is no need to be ashamed of themselves for “holding strong beliefs to the ancestors”. He points out that it is “impossible for them to disassociate themselves from their roots – the ancestors”. Ela (2000:25) forcefully argues that “A Christian who abruptly abandons sacrifices to the ancestors is in danger of jeopardizing the unity of the entire clan and will provoke widespread social crises”.

The basis for Ela's argument is that ancestors guarantee the order of the world and judge moral life from beyond (2000:23). Ela continues to note also that the "teachings of family, the tribe and the culture are all crystallized in the life of the ancestor" (2000:22). He maintains that the cult of ancestors helps Africans to "rediscover within Christianity an African vision of humanity". He sees the cult as not only "maintaining communion with the dead but as that which reinforces ties among the living" (2000:14). He suggests that the church would profit by encouraging African Christians to stay in contact with loved ones who have left this life (2000:26).

In his study of the Tswana religion, Barreto (2000:66) warns of opposing and even encouraging abandoning of the ancestor cult among the Tswana Christian as this would produce a deep crisis. He argues that "Tswana Christian would lose an integral part of his identity if he/she were to cease from observing the ancestral cult". This seems to be boosting an argument that a Tswana Christian without his or her ancestors has ceased to be a *MoTswana*. At the core of one's identity as an African are the ancestors who not only define the individual African but the whole African community.

The same argument is made by Kalengyo (2009:60) that the "Ganda are so inextricably linked with the ancestors that any attempt to deny them a relationship with the ancestors is tantamount to denying them life itself". He further notes that the "Ganda cannot exist without the good will and continual support from the ancestors". According to Kirby (1992:36) "community ritual and actions" would assist the Africans in hearing "the truly weighty message of the gospel". It would appear that opposing ancestor cults among African Christians will have an adverse effect on how the gospel is perceived and appropriated.

Kabasélé (1991:126) also points out that ancestors permit African Christians to comprehend the fullness of the mediation of Jesus. However, Ela (2000:26) concedes that not everything is perfect with ancestors that the cult needs to "receive the gospel so it can be purified, configured and preserved".

A detailed comparison and contrast is given by Machoko (2010:184-90) between Jesus and Ancestors:

1. *Ancestors are at times uncaring but Jesus is the good Shepherd.*
2. *Ancestors are despotic and are feared by their people but Jesus is a suffering servant who dies for His sheep.*
3. *Ancestors are teachers of the way but Jesus is the way*
4. *Ancestors curse their family members when they do not offer sacrifices but Jesus curses no one and loves even sinners.*
5. *Ancestors punishment are punitive and ill-willed, but Jesus punishment are meant to bring back to God's fold those who have gone astray.*

In spite of the qualitative difference between ancestors and Jesus, Machoko (2010:190) argues that not everything is evil in Shona ancestorhood and as such ancestor values should be adopted into the church. The continued relevance of ancestors is premised on the observation that they are closer to Africans than God. This makes it easier for Africans to turn to them in times of crises. Kalengyo (2009:60), quoting the works of Xavier Mulambuzi (1997:75-6) adumbrates this point:

Many Baganda continue to believe in their ancestors even when they convert to a new religion like Christianity. ... It is their ancestors (benevolent) who keep them from death, diseases, accidents and show interest what they do and even make them succeed in their endeavours. God may be there, but He is not as close to them as the ancestors, whom they can turn to whenever there is a crisis.

African Christology acknowledges the existence of God and accepts the supremacy of Christ. Ancestors are somewhat experienced as being closer to the African than Christ. Ancestors may still be inferior to Christ and other beings ontologically, but as far as their role is concerned they are indispensable.

3.2.1.2 Divination in African Christology

These ancestor rituals are traditionally mediated by diviners who help the Africans develop a “deeper relationship with God and enlist His aid in dealing with their real problems”

(Kirby 1992:326). Divination also helps maintain links with the past, with ancestors, and with an ideal order. It is believed in African Traditional Religion that chaotic elements are at the root of the misfortune and it is the duty of the diviner to reharmonise these elements (1992:326). Kirby strongly argues that divination should be incorporated into African Christology. He encourages the church in Africa to avoid “denying the importance and the existence of lesser spirits in African Christology, but rather to acknowledge God’s supremacy and power over all other agents” (1992:365).

Kirby’s argument is that inculturation must go beyond the mere superficialities such as drumming and dancing, and must enter into an effective African dialogue ritually and sacramentally (1992:366). Obeng (1997:17) supports Kirby’s view by insisting that African Christians must approach hermeneutics from an African cultural point of view.

Obeng (1997:17) points out that the culture of the people dictates the what, how, and when, when interpreting biblical material. According to him “culture should determine our priorities in any attempt to re-read the Bible with the African context” (1987:17). It is within this context that divination would play an important role in African Christology. Their positive role in African Traditional Religion should continue into African Christianity.

Kirby is in agreement with Obeng that culture should determine how the Bible should be re-read and interpreted. They both see a strong continuity between African culture and the Bible while accepting its supremacy. It is interesting to note that Kirby, who was a Western missionary anthropologist, was later alleged to have received powers of divination. He became an African diviner and many Africans consulted him for intervention in times of crises.

The concept of divination in African Christianity is further developed and enhanced by Machoko (2010:57), when he argues that both *Mwari* (God) and ancestors must be contacted on a regular basis to know their will. The role of the diviner, according to Machoko, is to mediate the will of God through Shona ancestors to the living. It is also the role of diviners to reveal the spiritual causes of catastrophic events and problems to live

and give solutions to such (Machoko 2010:58). According to Machoko, it appears that diviners would strengthen the life of the African Christian and help the African to know God better. Ela (2000:20) also sees divination as being crucial in “explaining the cause of disharmony and ill will and what ancestors want in order to bring back normality”.

While Machoko (2010:58) maintains that ancestor veneration should be encouraged among African Christianity, he notes that a report from the Idol and Evangelism Commission which was set up in Zimbabwe discouraged divination. The report also encouraged the practise of ancestor veneration.

Ela (2000:16) makes an insightful observation when he points out that the central thought in African culture is that the “dead are not dead”. Missionary Christianity also maintains that the dead do not really die but continue to live as disembodied souls. This, for theologians like Ela, is an undeniable link between the two religions and it should be maintained. For Ela, one’s life in Jesus does not preclude maintaining a relationship with ancestors and he laments the fact that the ancestors have not yet found a secure place in the life of African Christians (2000:18).

Ela views the rituals and sacrifices offered not as a “religious act but as a form of symbolic experience” (2000:19). He encourages Africans to include the ritual “sacrifices as part of their Christian faith”. Kalengyo, speaking from the Ganda tribe perspective, argues that “the principle of ancestorship does not contradict Jesus Christ the Messiah”. He further opines that these beliefs should not be “condemned and judged as pagan” (2009:51).

If the arguments from these theologians are anything to go by, then African Christianity indeed cannot exist without ancestor cult. It is this cult that gives shape and colour to African Christianity.

3.2.1.3 Christ as an Ancestor

Stinton (1995:115) who researched the question of Jesus as an ancestor among African Christians in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana, asks the question “Can Jesus be viewed as an ancestor?” Stinton advances three key questions that are critical in responding to this question. The first is whether “ancestors are worshipped or venerated in African

Traditional Religion”; the second is “What is the place of African ancestors in the Christian faith”?; and lastly, “if Jesus is the universal Savior, then what is the role of ancestors in the history of salvation”? It is imperative for any attempt to incorporate ancestors in African Christology that these questions be responded to. The first question will be examined closely in the next chapter. Jesus, argues Machoko (2010:17) in response to the first question, “should be accommodated and integrated into the apex of the pyramidal hierarchy of African ancestorhood as the Great Ancestor”.

African theologians who argue for continuity see a link between ancestrology and Christology. The Christ event becomes more meaningful and relevant to Africans when viewed within the context of ancestors. Bujo (1992:121) asserts that the images that are currently used in Christology are derived from a particular culture which Africans cannot fully understand (1992:121). Viewing Christ as an ancestor offers more clarity for Africans than seeing Him as *logos* and *Kyrios* (1992:84). In this structure, Christ becomes a “Proto-ancestor” (1992:121). The qualitative difference is that in Christ the “African will find a true and faithful – but immeasurably more perfect – image of His (traditional) ancestor” (Nyamiti 1984:69). Nyamiti contends that African ancestorship is transcended but not effaced (1984:70). However, others still see the continuity of ancestors while making room for abandonment of certain traditions (Bujo 1992:121; Healey & Sybertz 1996:214).

Christ is seen as an “exemplar ancestor” by Kabasélé (1991:124) who fulfils in himself the words and deeds of the mediation of Bantu ancestors”. There is also a strong argument that the comparison between Jesus and ancestors should not be seen as a simplistic one (Magesa 2004:112). Magesa’s argument is based on the fact that Jesus is divine while ancestors are human. This therefore makes the ancestral activity to be inferior to that of Jesus. Bediako (2004:26) seems to be relegating the function of ancestor to a “myth” when he argues:

Jesus has demonstrated through his resurrection from the dead, the possession of the indestructible life (Heb. 7:16). This can never be said of ancestors. We can maintain that ancestral spirits, as human spirits that have not demonstrated any power over death, the final enemy, cannot be presumed to act in the way tradition ascribes them. Ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact, the way is

open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind. Bediako (2004:26)

However, Bediako continues to see the relevance of the ancestor cult. According to Nyamiti (1984:86) there is a connection between the myths around ancestor cults and Jesus. He sees these as “a precursor to the true ancestor which is Christ Jesus. He maintains that the socio-psychological values found in and sought after in African ancestorship are eminently found and accomplished in Christ (1984:86). These arguments do not discard ancestors but rather point to a better ancestor which is Christ Jesus. It would appear that the strong belief in life after death or the survival of the dead in one form or the other makes it difficult for African theologians to completely do away with ancestors.

3.2.1.4 Conclusion

African Christianity seems to be stuck in African Traditional Religion where God is acknowledged but with no clarity on how He is worshipped. Ancestors, due to their proximity, seem to be occupying the central focus in African Christology. It is their “existential relevance” due to their proximity that continues to endear them to the African soul. Biological life is believed to be transmitted by God through elders and the ancestors such that life can only be fully enjoyed only when ancestors are remembered and honoured (Bujo 1992: 21).

Ezigbo’s (2010:34) observation is apropos when he states that the growing belief in the uniqueness and self-sufficiency of indigenous religions makes the Christ-event irrelevant. If Africans cannot exist without their ancestor in one form or another, the door to syncretism is opened and a competition and rivalry between Christ and ancestors cannot be avoided.

3.2.2 Discontinuity theology

The major bone of contention between continuity and discontinuity theology seems to be on the role assigned to African ancestors and their significance in African Christology. The following are areas where such concerns are lodged.

3.2.2.1 The negative elements in ancestor cult

The new Pentecostals and some of the charismatic churches believe that ancestors are demons that must be shunned, confronted and exorcised (Anderson 2001:202). The argument is that they bring further misery and bondage to African peoples (2001:202). The blame for the lack of progress in Africa, according to Ngong(2012:359), is the promotion of spiritualized cosmology regulated by belief in ancestors. The piety which this theology promotes does not “equip African Christians to effectively deal with modern world which is characterized by the promotion of economic power” (2012:359). Christianity is seen as offering better solutions for the African problems than the traditional solutions.

The main argument is that there are certain elements in African worldview that are dangerous and harmful and as such should not be promoted. This cosmology leads to wrong diagnoses of sicknesses which are often attributed to witchcraft (Ngong 2012:360). These challenges are brought about by economic forces and acceleration of science and technology and not mere spiritual forces. He also debunks the myth of the sacredness of African cosmology by noting that this is not unlike the cosmology of the medieval Europe (2012:359). He argues these must be discarded if African Christianity is to thrive and gain the respect worldwide (2012:359). He concludes by making the following remarks; (2012:361):

That is why in spite of the fact that there are currently far more Christians in Africa than in America or Europe, African Christianity is still less influential than the Christianity of these places. After all, many influential scholars of African Christianity are trained in the United States of America and Europe, not in Africa.

Afeke and Verster (2004:59) admit that belief in ancestors have helped Africans to withstand many problems. They also concede that ancestor veneration has also played a role in many of Africa’s problems. It is clear that those advocating for observance of ancestral cults tend to have a biased view by ignoring the not so positive aspects of the cult. If liberation theology seeks to free Africans from political oppression brought about by colonialism then another theology is needed to redeem Africans from themselves.

3.2.2.2 Inherent bias in inculturation theology

In his critique of inculturation theology, Ngong (2012:356) observes that African inculturationist theologians are critical of Western categories in African Christianity but “less so with the appropriation of central elements of African culture”.

There seems to be no serious debate on the concept of contextualization, but the main challenge is the process and the method employed. Turaki (1999) argues succinctly that African theology is biased toward African Traditional Religion in its attempt at contextualization. He further attests that it is this “cultural agenda and political ideology” formed by nationalist interest that is stifling African scholarship. This glaring compromise leads to a situation where the Bible loses its primacy and more exaggerated and inflated interpretations and conclusion are drawn from African traditional religions.

One of the issues faced by the inculturationist theologians, especially the adoptionists as observed by Parrat (1995), is that the “Christological titles as used in the New Testament have not provided promising basis for an African Christology”. This vacuum has led African theologians to advocate a “functional or existential approach” which focuses on the deeds of Christ and not His person (1995:81). African Christology is thus more interested in the work and not the nature of Christ.

Kunhiyop (2012:137) views the debate around ancestor cult and the role of ancestors as a war that must be waged by the church. According to him, this war can only be won when the following factors below are acknowledged. Kunyihop believes that there is unanimity among African theologians on these factors (2012:137):

There is a Sovereign God who is separate from all other spirits including ancestral spirits

There is indeed life after death. Death is not the cessation of personal existence.

We all have real needs and all need a religion that is relevant to our daily life, God must be able to provide protection, security and guidance during times of crisis.

We all need some form of mediator between us and the spiritual world.

Taking the above factors into consideration, according to Kunhiyop, could lead the church to a point where few African Christians would revert to ancestral worship. Kunhiyop (2012:79) sees a problem in any study of theology that has the human context as its starting point. He gives several reasons why this approach is problematic. The first is that it focuses on how man relates to God rather than how God relates to man. The second reason is that this theology tends to overemphasize the works of Christ at the expense of His being. Thirdly, it assumes an anthropological rather than exegetical approach to the study of the Bible (2012:80). Fourthly, it only sees Christ through the lens of human images, as a healer, diviner, proto-ancestor. Kunhiyop continues that Christ's deity and divine attributes are neglected while His humanity is greatly honoured and overemphasized. He concludes by arguing that the "Scriptures must be allowed to have a final say regardless of where the questions emanate from" (2012:80). Christianity can be truly African when the "biblical worldview is translated" (2012:79).

Kato (1985:11) argues that there is a battle for survival of sound biblical Christianity raging in the African continent among African Christians. Contextualization is being used as guise to bring in to the African foreign concepts. He further notes that the antidote for the current situation is a clear biblical gospel (1985:23). By gospel he means that which "eschews any form of Christo-paganism". While he maintains that Christianity is an African religion, he contends that it should be based on clear and sound biblical principles (1985:24).

Danfulani (2012:53) argues in favour of inculturation and contextualization but is opposed to the "futility and emptiness of promoting African cultural practice in the name of doing contextual theology". He is opposed to the idea of "legitimizing unchristian practices in the church". He notes that the "revival of certain aspects of African Traditional Religion such as death and burial rites" which is linked to ancestral cult, challenges the "lordship of Christ over culture" (1985:59). These do not constitute attacks on the theology of inculturation but seem to question its presupposition and methodology.

3.2.2.3 The challenge of universalism

Universalism is one of the three biggest challenges facing African Christianity, according to Kato (1985:11). He cautions that the revealed faith is at the risk of being sacrificed at the altar of “syncretistic universalism” (1985:15). For Kato all this takes place under the guise of contextualization. African theologians, in seeking to carve an identity for African Christology, have tended to “exalt African culture, religion and philosophy beyond proportion”, argues Kato (1975:51). He takes up the issue with the promotion of universalism by Mbiti who maintains that “There is not a single soul however debased or even unrepentant which can successfully flee from the Spirit of God...” (Mbiti 1969:87). According to Kato, Mbiti is “just one step short of Origen who taught that even Satan will be saved in the final analysis”.

In arguing for a radical discontinuity and rejection of universalism, Kato (1985:11) further opines that it is not “neo-colonialism to plead the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ”. He notes that to “herald the fact that all who are not in Christ” are lost is not arrogance but what the Scriptures teaches. Kato’s basic argument is that African religions fall under natural revelation and by its very nature, natural revelation is not soteriological but serves to point to the creator God (1985:123). The possibility of ancestors being lost or not saved makes the plea for their incorporation into African Christianity suspect.

If Africans cannot exist without their ancestors, then there is a serious existential problem, if the same in principle can be lost. Ancestors must therefore of necessity be saved if they are to play any positive role in the lives of their descendants. Parrat (1995:209) asks the question: “if there is salvific value in traditional religion, in what sense is the Christian faith necessary and unique and on what ground can it claim to be more meaningful”? The missiological question that this raises, is “why should Africans follow the Christian way rather than the way of their fathers”?

3.2.2.4 Rejection of ancestor cult

Some African theologians totally reject ancestor cult and everything attached to it. This deconstructionist view maintains that Jesus destroys the core of indigenous religion and that which makes African Christianity tick (Ezigbo 2010:36). The predominant view amongst

the AICs, especially the Pentecostals, rejects divination (Anderson 2001:202). It is seen as being contrary to Christian faith and practise. Anderson (2001:204) notes that there are some AICs which are not opposed to ancestral veneration, especially in South Africa. But he observes that even in such churches the worship and prayer centres around God and not ancestors (2001:204). These churches continue to be distinguished by their immersion into the African worldview, observes Anderson. In a later publication, Anderson (2003:180) argues that the African prophet has provided a biblical solution to the problems encountered by the AICs (2003:180). He notes some similarities between the African prophet and the healer/diviner, since both provide answers to the same questions that Africans are dealing with (2003:181). However, there are radical differences between the two, as seen in the solution they both offer to the same problems.

The African diviner promotes ancestral rituals as part of his prescription while the African prophet confronts beliefs in witchcraft and rejects any “illegitimate divination” (2003:181). While some African churches see continuity between the old practises and Christianity, these AICs point to a confrontation with the traditional ways (2003:185). For most of the AICs the ancestors are no “longer an acceptable solution but this does not mean that the needs no longer exist”, hence the ministry of African prophet (2003:185).

Afeke and Verster (2004:54) maintain that divination is “disallowed by God in the Bible”. Divination is a process of consulting the dead to obtain help and this is prohibited in the Bible (2003:54).

3.2.2.5 Can Christ be viewed as an ancestor?

The question asked by Akper (2007:238) is apropos and insightful when he asked if those who are not scholars who are the adherents of African traditional religion are able to see Jesus as an ancestor in the New Testament”. The question can also be extended to those who are scholars in African Traditional Religion – do they see Jesus as an ancestor in the New Testament? Do African Christians clearly see Jesus as an ancestor in the New Testament? Akper (2007:238) quotes Maluleke (1997) when he says that the current Christological debate that employs African traditional religious concepts is “confusing than enlightening”.

The research conducted by Stinton (2004:126) in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana reveals that the image of Christ as an ancestor is controversial and undecided. Stinton admits that “Jesus as an ancestor is clearly rooted in African heritage” but how this should be “appropriated into Christian faith remains inconclusive and controversial”. He observed that “Catholics show greater proclivity to adopt the ancestral image than Protestants”. He also observed that “theologically educated respondents show greater awareness of theologians’ proposals for Jesus as ancestor than those without theological education”. This increased awareness Stinton observed did not “translate to increased affirmation”.

Nürnbergger points out that using the metaphor of Christ as an ancestor is actually closer to the African mind than Christ as ‘logos’ (2007:103). The problem arises, according to the author when the metaphor used is not found in the Bible and when it is regarded as a taboo as far as traditional Christian understanding is concerned (2007:103). The salient caution is that metaphors used should bring more clarity and not confusion. He further argues that when the metaphor, ‘ancestor’ is applied to Christ then it should be clear that this is not referring to ancestors as an ontological and functional reality. It ceases to be a metaphor when the forebears are real and consequently sinks into syncretism and not absorption (2007:104).

It would appear that only the African theologians are able to see Jesus as an ancestor in the New Testament, which is a cause for concern for African Christology. Caution then should be a rule in re-imagining Christ as an ancestor. While the term may seek to portray Christ in African terms it has also the potential of betraying the true personhood of Christ

3.2.2.6 Problem of syncretism

Nürnbergger (2007:98), a South African theologian, describes syncretism as having “faith in more than one divine partner”. He argues that in the Bible what was believed to be the function of other gods such as Baal was absorbed and integrated into the Israelite faith while Baal himself as alternate god was rejected. God was never called Baal in order to accommodate Baal worshippers but God met the perceived function and role of Baal.

Keith Ferdinando (2007:127), an American theologian who at the time of the writing of this article was a consultant with African inland mission, makes a telling contribution in his critique of Bediako's work. He notes that Bediako, like many other African theologians, sees the "monotheistic nature of African religions as an essential point of continuity between Christianity and African traditional religion". His basic critique is that the centre in African religions is not the worship of God but the veneration of ancestors. He bases this on the anthropocentricity of African religion which make ample room for the veneration of ancestors as entities much closer to human than God (2007:130). Ferdinando (2007:133) contends that Bediako sees conversion as a fulfilment and not a radical break with one's past. He argues that the New Testament sees conversion as a radical transformation with a demand for people to repent, which includes abandonment of past religious allegiances, in this case ancestral cult (2007:134). The gospel may not eliminate everything in African culture but that which remains and is purified does not include ancestor veneration.

According to Ferdinando what would remain would be African ideals such as generosity, hospitality and community while others are rejected and condemned (2007:144). Oborji (2002:28) acknowledges and recognizes the legitimacy of African religions before the coming of the gospel. But he now contends that with the appearance of the gospel the African has a far more powerful and enriching reality than the ancestors in the person of Jesus Christ (2002:28). If ancestors are more than venerated in African Traditional Religion as Ferdinando argues, then arguing for their incorporation into African Christology will create two centres of power. This will inevitably lead to a challenge of syncretism resulting in dual religious allegiance.

Almost forty years ago, Kato (1985:11) already saw syncretism as a serious threat to biblical Christianity in Africa. Kato (1985:26) gives two reasons as to why syncretism appears attractive to Africans. The first is the interest in the study of "comparative religions without affirming the uniqueness of Christianity". The second reason is the palpable desire to make Christianity truly African is not balanced with the determination not to "tamper with the inspired inerrant content of the revealed Word of God."

Kato argues that “man’s fundamental problem is sin against God and salvation is only through Jesus Christ” (1985:22). He continues that “All human tragedies are only a symptom of the root cause, which is sin” (1985:16). The problems that African theology seeks to address, that liberation theology seeks to challenge and that black theology seeks to engage with are all related to sin. The point being made is that by being our Saviour, Christ addresses in principle and practice all that troubles humanity.

African Christianity seeks to find a place for ancestors in Christianity. Ancestors are viewed as mediators and not competitors; but the reality is that they are competitors. The argument is that if they are seen to be at the core of what it means to be an African Christian, then they are in direct competition with Christ. That the identity of an African Christian is first and foremost attached to ancestors than to Christ is itself a Christological problem. As such this emphasis has the potency to lead to idolatry. If African Christians cannot do without ancestors the question “Who do African Christians say Christ is?” and “Who do they say ancestors are?” become very relevant.

3.3 What is Christian in African Christology?

“What have Africans done with the Christianity that was given to them by Jesus Christ through Western Christian missionaries?” (Danfulani 2012:42). What is biblical and Christian in African Christianity? How different is African Christology from African ancestrology? This question has to do with the extent of inculturation, what is left out of the biblical world-view and what is taken? In presenting Christ as an ancestor or in creating a role for ancestors in African Christology how Christian is African Christianity?

The Christian element in African Christology will be determined by its position on the primacy of scriptures in its articulation of beliefs together with the centrality of Christ. Just as there is no unanimity on what is African in African Christology, there is also no unanimity on what is Christian in African Christology.

3.3.1 Centrality of Christ

“The central core of Christianity as manifested in any given locality should be such that it is readily identifiable by others from outside it as truly Christian”, opined Omulokole (1998:34). The problem that Omulokole perceives in African Christianity is that it is largely not “African in flavor” and not Christian in its center.” He cautions Africans to be wary and careful that they do not fall into the trap of criticizing European Christianity for being non-Christian only to “replace it with an African Christianity which is overlaid with cultural matter that it fails to meet the test of the true Christianity” (1998:34).

The litmus test for true African Christianity, argues Maluleke (1997:188), is the “re-imagining and appropriation of Jesus Christ in Christian contextualization.” Maluleke’s critical question is whether the re-imagining of Jesus by Africans represents a “betrayal or portrayal” of Jesus (1997:188). He is concerned with the methodology of Christologising when he asks “How are Africans theologizing? Are there boundaries in the re-imagining of Jesus, if so what determines those boundaries (Akper 2007:239).

If African Christology is to be accepted as Christian, retorts Akper (2007:240), Africans should not be offered a new Christ for their salvation. He argues that the Bible knows of one Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom God has given to the world. This represents an appropriate boundary to any hyphenated Christianity – Jesus must not be turned into “another figure that is not God-man” (2007:240). If this is not adhered to then the Christ portrayed in African Christology will be nothing else but the betrayal of biblical Christology.

It is not only the seriousness that African Christology seeks to address African contextual issues that should determine its quality but where it is grounded. For Goba (1979:5), the only true ground for Christologising is “the faith in God fully revealed in Jesus Christ”. The centrality of Christ and the role He plays in African Christianity, as observed by Maluleke (1997:191), can be deduced from African songs like, “Akekho ofana noYesu” (There is no one like Jesus); “Akahlulwa nto uYesu (Jesus never fails) (1997:191).

The theology in these popular African choruses does not create room for ancestors. While African theologians seem preoccupied with the assertion that Jesus is like the ancestors, the average member sings “there is no one like Jesus”. This appears to create an unhealthy tension between academic theologians and the average African Christian.

In his study and research on Akan AIC, Clinton tried to determine how many members of the AIC are using the predominant Christological titles given to Jesus. He discovered that only 2.4% regarded Jesus as ancestor compared to 74% of those who view Jesus as the Saviour. Clinton concludes that the “centrality of the Bible within the Akan AICs would make it unlikely that such a traditional and non-biblical title to be applied to Jesus”.

In their relentless effort in creating some form of continuity between Christ and ancestors, African theologians run a risk of undermining the centrality of Christ in African Christology. The issues of syncretism and universalism addressed above remain a sore point in African Christology with divergent views.

The question asked by Danfulani (2012:42) “What have Africans done with the Christianity that was given to them by Jesus Christ through Western Christian missionaries?” remains a challenge in African Christology. Contextualization is a must if Christ must be appropriated by Africans, but again Danfulani asks “To what extent should we engage in contextualization?” What should be omitted and what should be incorporated into Christianity? (2012:52). Danfulani’s view is that many Christians “have often opened the door too wide”, accepting everything and anything into Christianity while others “have kept it too tight” (2012: 53).

Those who keep the door too tight, as Danfulani alleges, fail to develop an adequate Christological response to the issue of Christ and culture (Ezigbo 2010:40). Any Christology, opines Ezigbo, that fails to “engage dialectically with the indigenous religions will hardly influence any Christians at a deeper level” (2010:42). While continuity theologians may be guilty of over-selling African religion, those for discontinuity run the risk of underestimating the place of culture of the hearers and their perception of the meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ezigbo 2010:42).

There are those who avoid the pitfalls of the gap and fulfilment view and also the deconstruction view but rather opts for the “reconstruction” view (Ezigbo 2010:42). According to Ezigbo this view seeks “to bridge the gulf” between these other two expressed views (2010:42). A dialectical view presents Jesus as the one who accommodates, and reconstruct the cultures and traditions of Africa (2010:42). Ezigbo asks the following pertinent questions (2010:43):

- 1. What is the extent to which Jesus reconstructs the indigenous religions?*
- 2. Would the core elements of the indigenous understandings of the world remain untouchable after the reconstruction?*
- 3. Would these understandings still be recognizable after the reconstruction?*

Ezigbo’s insightful warning is that African theologians must avoid constructing a Christology on syncretistic foundations that neither adequately represents the teachings of Christianity nor the indigenous religions (2010:46).

This rather long passage by Ihuoma (2003:278) sums up succinctly the work that lies ahead if an authentic African Christianity is to be realized.

The challenge for each and every true Christian theology consist in being able to maintain the dialectical tension between faithfulness to one’s context and openness to dialogue, in order to enrich and be enriched by theological insights at an intercontextual level. This entails starting steadily with an exploration and appreciation of what is positive in both one’s theological contribution as well as in that of others. This approach does not rule out a critical stance. Rather, the challenge is one of maintaining a healthy balance between being open to and being positively critical with regard to both one’s own context and that of others – thereby allowing Christ to be the criterion of theology.

The determining factor is that Christ should be the “criterion of theology”. Culture context is important but one should allow Christ to have a say in that culture. This will lead to a situation where both culture and our understanding of Christ is transformed.

3.3.2 Centrality of scriptures

Mugambi (1992:48) shows the heavily indebtedness of African theologians and indeed African Christians to missionary Christianity when he says:

Although the establishment of Christianity was largely the work of African catechists and evangelists, these agents tried very hard to be faithful messengers of the missionary based in the various mission stations. Their acceptance of Christianity was based mainly on what missionaries taught, rather than what the Scriptures state.

The statement by Mugambi should not be taken as categorical but should be viewed in context. It has been shown that AICs, even before the end of colonialism, had managed to craft a faith that took its context seriously. Instead of baptising, the missionary Christianity that sought to separate the sacred from the secular, the spiritual from the physical, they saw in the Bible a view of integrated life.

Liberation and black theology were the products of this holistic view of life. It can be argued that it was the holistic African view of life that empowered the African theologians to see in the Bible a critique the missionary theology. It is also true that it is basic African ontology that made missionary Christian dualistic anthropology attractive. They saw in missionary Christianity areas that reflection their traditional religion and culture and accepted such. They also saw areas that contradicted their worldview and these were rejected. The criterion was the African worldview, not the Bible. In any case it can be argued that there was some form of reference to the Bible.

It is the cultural agenda, according to Turaki (1999:19) that is stifling African scholarship by creating a bias toward African traditional religions in the methods employed for inculturation. African Christians seem to be attracted only to those elements in the Bible that resonates with the African worldview. Olowola (1993:8), in seeking to provide a constructive critical view to African religion, observes that African theologians have been uncritically zealous in defending African Traditional Religion. According to him, the reason for this is in the past many of those who wrote on African Traditional Religion where non-Africans and in their criticism presented erroneous views about African Traditional Religion and were hugely biased (1993:8). What is needed, according to

Olowola, is an accurate presentation of African Traditional Religion together with a “critical evaluation in the light of the revealed word of God” (1993:8).

Christ becomes an ancestor to the extent of His likeness to ancestors without considering his unlikeness. Thus, contrary to Mugambi’s view above, African Christianity is not based on what missionaries taught but rather on the African worldview. It is also true that what is reflected in the African worldview is not always contrary to the scriptures. The point that Mugambi makes, though, should not be lost and that is that African Christianity should be based on the “thus saith the Lord”. Stinton (2004:137) concludes his research by stating that the Bible is still regarded as a “central source for African Christologies”. (2004:137).

3.3.3 Intermediate state

Afeke and Verster (2004:54) admit that “both the Christian and African traditional religions acknowledge the existence of humans after death.” They of course argue that the meaning attached to this existence after death is not the same in both religions. The difference is that in African Christianity ancestors exist for their community and families, while in missionary Christianity they exist for God. Ancestors are the so-called living dead for death has not ended their lives. It is this dualistic anthropological climate manifesting itself in the doctrine of the intermediate state that legitimises ancestral ascendancy in African Christology. This common element creates a logical and legitimate connection that characterises African Christology as Christian.

3.3.3.1 Understanding dualistic anthropology

“Christian dualism is the belief that human beings possess both body and soul/spirit and that when the body dies, the soul/spirit continues to exist in a conscious state until the resurrection and the reception of a resurrection body” (Waters 2012:287). Green (2010:4) opines that the dualistic anthropology is a “default hermeneutical position” for many theologians. This argument is insightful and it applies to African theologians as well.

Dualistic anthropology is distinguished from cultural anthropology and its focus is rather on what the Bible teaches about human nature. This view is succinctly explained by Cooper (1989:485) when he says:

Historically, the virtual consensus of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and confessional Protestant traditions is that Scripture teaches a two-stage view death is followed by an intermediate period of conscious discarnate existence with Christ or apart from him until bodily resurrection, final judgment, and eternal or perdition ... this requires some sort of soul-body dualism.

Cooper (1988:21) further indicates that “dualism encompasses an ontological possibility that human person can exist temporarily without being embodied”. Touching on human nature and how it is constituted, he continues to note that:

Human existence is so constituted that after biological death, self-conscious individuals can by God’s providence continue to experience fellowship with Christ and with other saints until final resurrection. This is dualism in the sense that a human being, a functionally and organizationally unified whole during earthly and resurrection life can “come apart” at death, the self or person surviving.

Smith (2010:19) concurs with Cooper when he says, “roughly the view that, for humans, we are made up of a material body and immaterial soul and /or spirit”. Dualistic anthropology has as its constituent elements the body-soul concept and a belief in the intermediate state, which is either heaven or hell in most cases. Edgar (2002:121) refers to this as theanthropological dualism and notes that it involves a “disembodied, intermediate state”.

3.3.3.2 Dualism in African Christianity

There has not been any serious discourse and reflection on body-soul dualism amongst African theologians. The dualistic anthropology, which is the legacy of missionary Christianity, is assumed uncritically in most cases.

Jack Partain (1986:106), an American who taught in Tanzania for thirteen years, sees this common belief in soul – body dualism as a dilemma for African theology. He observes that

African theologians are raising pertinent questions that are influenced by dualistic anthropology. He quotes at least four African theologians as evidence of this dilemma.

The first of these is Fasholè-Luke who argues that “Christians pray in faith for the departed, both Christian and non-Christian.” According to him, this will provide Africans with “that link with their dead which they so much desire” (1974:219). The second is Nxumalo who insists that intercession between the living and the departed is a Christian responsibility since duties to one’s elders are not changed by death (1974: 220). The last of these is Sawyerr who argues that “some ancestors might be saved because of this intercession” (1974:219).

Ancestors that are living but have no relationship with the descendants is a dilemma and enigma for most Africans. It is clear that dualistic anthropology activates and sustains the belief in ancestors and their involvement in affairs of the living. This section seeks to outline this foundation of African Christianity and assesses its implication. The biblical evaluation is done in a later chapter.

3.3.3.3 Utilisation of Christian dualistic anthropology in African Christology

African theologians have understandably seen some connection and continuity between African traditional religion and missionary Christianity. They have seen in the missionary Christianity not only a reflection of their culture but also a justification for its continuance. This has resulted amongst others in the Christianisation of ancestors and the popularization of Christianity among Africans.

3.3.3.3.1 *Christianization of ancestors*

African theologians appear to have found the basis for ancestral ascendancy in the Bible. There are several scriptures with a dualistic anthropological interpretation that have been used to bolster the arguments for ancestral ascendancy.

One of the most common scriptural evidence used by those who argue for continuity is Matthew 5:17. Machoko (2010:55), basing his argument on this text, argues that Christ

who is *Mwari* is there to fulfil the traditional Shona culture and not to destroy it together with its ancestors. He is seen as fulfilling the Shona vessels and not discarding them.

Ezigbo (2010:26) refers to this argument as the “Gap and fulfilment presupposition”. He also sees Matthew 5:17 as the central text for this view. He observes that those supporting this position believe that the indigenous religions clearly contain some incomplete fragments of divine truth: they are in need of a supreme and definitive fulfiller. He argues that the majority view argues that Jesus fulfils these gaps by perfecting the previous work of ancestors and not by discarding or replacing them (2010:34).

Kalengyo (2009:49), writing within the context of the Ganda culture, one of the oldest and largest tribes in Uganda, uses Hebrews 12:1 as the basis of his argument for inclusion of ancestors in African Christianity. He sees it as the parallel in acknowledging the role of ancestors in the lives of the living (2009:50). He maintains that the text demonstrates the presence of ancestors in Christian theology. He further argues that the Church of the Province of Kenya in its Holy Communion liturgy celebrates the faithful ancestors “who have passed through death” (2009:63). There is no attempt by Kalengyo to do an exegesis on the text, which leaves one with serious questions.

3.3.3.3.2 African ancestors and sainthood

There are some African Christians, and particularly the Catholics, who argue and maintain that there is a link between sainthood and ancestorhood, as noted by Stinton (2004:139). African ancestors have been incorporated into the liturgy and have become part of the celebration of Eucharist (2004:139). Ancestors are those who have excelled in virtue and those who have lived an exemplary life. Ela (2000:29) argues that in light of the virtues ancestors have displayed during the time when they were alive, “they cannot be excluded from the multitude found in Revelation 7:9”.

The implication is that they were Christians and on that basis are seen in heaven and have experienced salvation. Ela (2000:26) further asserts that while these ancestors died without knowing Christ they cannot be excluded from those found in 1 Peter 3:19-20. The point being that Christ went to preach to them as well when He died. Ela seems to imply that this

act by Christ met with a positive response by African ancestors and marked the point of their conversion. Despite this observation, Ela does not believe that ancestors can be viewed as saints or fall in the category of saints. They have become Christians by the act of Christ in 1 Peter 3:19-20 but are not to be venerated as saints (Ela 2000:30).

Kabasélé (1991:125) observes that saints are those who have suffered martyrdom and “are exemplary for perseverance of faith in Christ”. He, however, argues that since ancestors have not known or experienced faith in Jesus Christ nor have they suffered martyrdom, they cannot qualify as saints (1991:125). African ancestors can “perform the role of exemplary to African values”. These values while African in origin, are incorporated into Christianity because they do not contradict Christian values. African theologians argue for the incorporation of ancestor veneration on the same grounds (1991:126).

The above observation renders African Christology Christian in its content. The Bible remains a point of reference and Christ plays a significant role in African Christology. The Christian teaching on the nature of humanity is seen affirmed in African Christianity, which is the basis for African Christology.

3.3.4 Why dualistic anthropology is attractive

It has been shown that the dualistic anthropology has given African theologians a legitimate platform for African Christology. This part seeks to show that dualistic anthropology has a basic theological and pastoral appeal to many Africans. There are also some negative issues inherent in this anthropology that in recent times have been called into question in some theological circles.

3.3.4.1 Missiological significance

Dualistic anthropology has made Christianity in Africa more attractive and appealing. It has been shown that today African Christianity can be termed African religion due to its pervasiveness and popularity. The growth of Christianity in Africa, both in dynamism and numbers, is unequalled.

The African worldview with its belief in the continued existence of the dead has made it more possible and easier for Christianity to be inculturated in Africa. Kane (1978:215) notes that, “Christianity has made more converts in black Africa than in all the rest of the Third World combined.” Mbiti (quoted in Bediako 1995:214) says, “the man of Africa,” in meeting with the Gospel, “will not have very far to go before he begins to walk on familiar ground.” Relating the God the Africans worshipped and the God of the Bible, Bediako (1995:213) emphatically argues that “The God of the Africans has turned out to be, after all, the God of Israel whom the Christian worship.”

The linkage between Africans’ view of death and their belief in the afterlife and Christians’ understanding meant that the African worldview is not as evil as once purported to be. Ngong (2012:356) states:

In the context of colonial and missionary denigration of African traditional religious cultures, the theology of inculturation has attempted to revalue African cultures by insisting that no viable African theology can be done without appropriating the African worldview.

The overlap of African worldview with that of Biblical worldview as propagated by missionaries creates room for the living dead. Intimating that African ancestors can be lost would create a serious crisis to a community, which believes it is sustained by ancestors. It is clearly this belief that possibly makes Christianity attractive to those in African Traditional Religion.

3.3.4.2 Pastoral significance

Smith (1996:14) raises a pastoral concern when he asks “What do you say to the widow of a Christian who asks, ‘Is my husband with the Lord now or is he asleep awaiting the resurrection?’” He answers the questions by indicating that “the possibility of being with Christ brings a positive exception because it is relationally superior to earthly existence”. The implication of this answer is that the husband of this widow is enjoying an elevated form of existence which is bodiless. He is in the presence of the Lord as he awaits the bodily resurrection. The widow would have to stop crying for him as he now experiences a life of bliss in the presence of the Lord.

Farewell messages and requests are often made in African funerals asking the deceased to prepare the place for his descendants and friends in heaven. The intermediate life is seen as a better life and something not to be feared. For African Christians the continued existence of ancestors opens the possibility of communion with them.

3.3.5 Monistic anthropology: a critique of dualistic anthropology

It is due to the observations made above that dualistic anthropology has come under sustained attack and dispute in theology today. “There is no agreement in the church today about what happens when people die”, argues Wright (2008:36). Referring to the tradition of dualistic anthropology that has been viewed as a historical position, Edgar (2008:121) observes that it is “neither as widespread nor as theologically central as it is often claimed”. Cooper (1988:19) reflects a demise of dualistic anthropology when he notes:

After centuries of body-soul dualism, recent decades of philosophy, science, and even biblical scholarship have combined to foster the widely held opinion that Scripture views humans’ psychophysical unities. Whereas the traditional Christian doctrine of humanity insisted that persons can exist temporarily without bodies – that soul and body can separate at death – many modern He Christians oppose the idea.

He further notes that the arguments against this dualism stream from different persuasions not excepting evangelical reformed thinkers. He indicates that this “has generated strong currents of monism in Christian anthropology today” (Cooper 1988:19). Wright (2008) opines along the same lines when he adumbrates the fact that “Monism claims that it is unnecessary to postulate a second metaphysical entity, such as a soul or spirit, to account for human capacities and distinctives”. Edgar continues to observe that “In the modern era dualism has been challenged by monistic theoanthropologies” (2002:19).

Smith (2010:19) observes a similar phenomenon, when he says, “While it is not new for authors writing as biblical scholars to criticize body-soul substance dualism... it is a fairly recent phenomenon for evangelicals to do so”. Despite these developments Smith still maintains that dualistic anthropology is still respectable, as does Turl (2010). Turl notes that “recent articles in the journal of Science and Christian Beliefs have proposed that dualism is no longer tenable”. It is a fact that the intermediate state is clearly evident

throughout the history of the church, opines Edgar (2002:129). He notes that “its significance has been overstated”. He concludes by arguing that “Intermediate state is not the only viable historic position of the church” (2002:129).

Smith (2010:19) gives a list of theologians of note who have argued against dualism in favour of monistic anthropology:

Philosopher Nancey Murphy, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, defends a form of monism holding that humans are completely material. Joel Green, also at Fuller, stands out as the foremost NT scholar to embrace monism. Indeed, Green's recent book, “Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible” serves as a major statement of his own position, as well as a significant reply to dualists such as John Cooper, J.P. Morela and Scott Rae.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church espouses a monistic view of the human nature. The dead are regarded as sleeping and awaiting the promised resurrection. This sleep is unconscious. Summing up the Adventist belief in monism, Cairus (2000:212) writes:

All occurrences of the words “soul” and “spirit” in the Bible can be understood, in context, as referring to functions of the individual psyche or the activity of the whole person. This is true both in the OT of the terms of nepes or ruah, and in the NT of the corresponding terms psyche and pneuma, which are translated “soul” or “spirit”. In no single instance do we read of an immortal entity within man, a soul or human spirit that is able to function independently from the material body.

The conclusion of this section is that monism is an option but unfortunately African theologians have not yet given it the seriousness it deserves. One is aware of the undesirable consequence of monism in so far as ancestors are concerned. It would result in the radical abandonment of ancestral rites and promotion of ancestral ascendancy in the inculturation exercise. An erosion of dualistic anthropology would therefore spell an end to veneration and worship of ancestors in African Christianity. This presents a test to all professing Christians and Africans in particular, whether they will follow the Bible or allow culture to dictate to them how to view human nature.

3.3.6 Conclusion

What is African in African Christology is its connectedness to African traditional religions especially in the area of ancestors. The centrality of ancestors in African Traditional Religion continues into African Christology, albeit under the Lordship of Christ. African theologians of note have argued strongly against the abandonment of ancestors and to a greater degree of the attended rites. The paper so far has shown that there is a growing number of African theologians who are opposed to ancestral ascendancy. This shows that there is no consensus in Africa on the role of ancestors in African Christology.

The second pillar of African Christology is that of the cosmic ontology which is underpinned by theological dualistic anthropology. This, as already observed, has given legitimacy to ancestral ascendancy and provided a theological connection between ancestors and saints or Christians in heaven. This anthropology has been the traditional and historical position that the missionaries propagated in Africa. Africans have uncritically assimilated this theology due to its acceptability and affinity to their worldview. It has been noted that this position is no longer as viable as it used to be. Its theological correctness and its biblical justification is under serious scrutiny among many theologians from all persuasions. Monism has become a credible option. The dilemma for African Christology therefore is that its 'Africaness' is being challenged, not only by outsiders, but by African theologians themselves. Again its 'Christianess' is being challenged by the very Western theologians who were responsible for its propagation. What is African in African Christology is in dispute and what is Christian in African Christology is under attack. This is the dilemma facing African Christology.

It is clear that the Christological controversy within African Christianity is long from over as one group argues for the usage of the ancestor image in some form or another while the other rejects any use of this image in African Christology (Stinton 2004:142). The researcher agrees with the penetrating assertion by Stinton that despite the inconclusiveness of this debate, Africans are posing questions from its own context of faith in Christ which it received no preparation from the West. This is the critical inquiry that African Christianity must undertake if Christ must be seen as relevant to Africans.

The next chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the African worldview in order to discover if indeed ancestral ascendancy argued in African Christology is connected to the ontology of ancestors as seen in African Traditional Religion. It is true that some African theologians have seen the justification of ancestral ascendancy in African Christianity in the Bible – but who are these ancestors in the African worldview and what is their role? The next chapter addresses these and related questions.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE AND ONTOLOGY OF ANCESTORS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The previous chapter indicated that what is Christian in African Christology, is the perceived role of ancestors. The view held by African theologians on ancestral ascendancy in African Christology is influenced by the role ancestors play in African Traditional Religion. The previous chapter also showed that what is Christian in African Christology is the centrality of Christ, primacy of Scripture and the belief in the intermediate state. The belief in the intermediate, though seemingly supported by the Bible, forms part of the African worldview.

Ancestors are seen as being part of the “four ingredients of African Traditional Religion that have provided African theologians with a skeleton for an African theology” (Muzorewa, 1978:7). A proper and effective appraisal of the role ancestors play within the African worldview is crucial. In order for one to argue for continuity or discontinuity one must understand the African categories that form the backdrop to African Christology.

Mndende (2009:18) has lamented the fact that people of other faiths have pontificated on African Traditional Religion without ever hearing the side of the adherents. She appears to have some serious misgivings in the way African Christology seems to incorporate ancestors into its fold.

While good and productive work has been done in the study of African Traditional Religion, there is a dearth of African literature that critiques African Traditional Religion from within. Turaki, (2006:4) is correct in his observation that due to the deep emotional attachment which some of the African scholars have with African Traditional Religion, an objective discourse on African Traditional Religion is difficult to attain.

This chapter explores the role the ancestors play in African Traditional Religion to understand why they are significant in African Christianity. It also investigates the question of the nature of human beings and the state of the dead in African Traditional

Religion. Subsequently, African Traditional Religion is also evaluated to discover the basis for its resiliency. Lastly the chapter also examines why many from an African Traditional Religion background seem to be attracted to Christianity.

4.1 African religion or African religions?

What usually confronts scholars on African Traditional Religion is whether to view African Traditional Religion as a singular or plural. Whether African worldview is plural or singular depends on one's view of African Traditional Religion. Metuh's view (1987:21) is very insightful and informative, when he succinctly observes: "Whichever way one settles this problem, any study of African Religion must pay great attention to the similarities as well as dissimilarities in African Religion."

In discussing the African worldview, it should be borne in mind that there are similarities as well as dissimilarities in African spirituality. These are influenced by geo-cultural, ethnical or tribal realities. That is why there are titles such as *West African Religion* (Parrinder 1949); and *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (Callaway 1870). The first one is geo-cultural while the latter is ethnical as it relates to one of the people groups in Southern Africa. Even within the geo-cultural there are dissimilarities that are ethnical or tribal.

Metuh comments on the classification made by EW Smith in Parrinder (1949:12) which sees the classification in a pyramid, where God is at the apex and on either side of the triangle are nature gods and ancestors with magical powers at the base. He notes a contrast between the worldview of many West African peoples to that of the Bantu-speaking people of East and Central Africa (1949:63). His view is that Bantu areas recognize generally four categories, namely Supreme Being, spirit-forces, ancestors and magical forces. The notable difference is that of deities or gods, which are absent among the Bantu-speaking areas of Africa.

While Parrinder's classification shows some similarities with Turaki's, he seems to be locating this categorization within the West African geo-cultural religion. He observes that these classifications are found in many West African languages, but not in all. The mistake

most African writers make is to conflate the regions and end up with one view of African spirituality.

Mndende (2006:112) presents a threefold hierarchical structure that consists of Supreme God, ancestors and communal life. He sees this as African Traditional Religion. This may be true, but it represents a Bantu-speaking group and specifically the Xhosa-speaking people of South Africa. The absence of divinities/or nature gods, which are integral in the West African worldview disqualifies it as a non-Western African view of African Traditional Religion. Machoko (2010:32), unlike Mndende, limits his view of African religion to the Shona worldview and not to the African Traditional Religious view in general.

There are two main views within the African worldview, which Nürnberger (2007:22) distinguishes as animistic and dynamistic. The first view is more prevalent in West Africa, and the latter among the Bantu-speaking groups in southern and East Africa. Here again one sees the two views within the African Traditional Religion mainly emanating from the different geo-cultural divisions.

While dissimilarities can be noticed, there are remarkable unity and similarity on other levels. The belief in the Supreme Being, belief in ancestors and magical powers seems to be common in all African beliefs. How these entities are regarded, the relationship among the different levels, the ritual and worship practices associated with them, do however, display some unique features. It can be argued that African religions are one in their diversity. The observation by Lugira (2004:19) is apt: “Whether African religion is based in Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Western Africa or Southern Africa, the belief in the Supreme Being and the superhuman beings are its cornerstones”.

Christian religion was introduced to the Africans as seriously denominated but never as Christian religions. It is the view of this study that in spite of the many forms in which African traditional religion appears, it should be viewed in the singular. This view allows for different tribal, regional and cultural expressions of African traditional religion.

4.2 Current status of African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion appears to have survived its relegation as being non-existent. It has not only asserted itself as one of the religions to occupy the African space but as being popular and attractive.

4.2.1 Resilience of African Traditional Religion

There were times when African Traditional Religion was thought to be non-existent. This was evident as far back as the early 1920s (Smith & Haworth 1929:132). Africans were not seen as religious but rather as superstitious. This view is also attested by Olowola (1993:10, quoting Frobenus). He reflects a statement from a 19th century Berlin newspaper that saw Africans as people with “no ethical inspiration whose lives and conduct are determined by primate instincts”. This is short of saying that Africans were not human beings but animals with no religion.

Africa has survived an onslaught aimed at destroying not only its people militarily but its way of life, and its worldview. Despite colonialism and missionary activities, traditional religion has endured and persisted and still has a meaningful place in the lives of the Africans (Turaki 1999:75). Islam and Christianity, which today can be regarded as the living religions of Africa, have spread throughout Africa, but have not displaced African Traditional Religion (Parrinder 1949:8). African Traditional Religion, as observed by Olowola (1993:7), is increasingly being taught in schools alongside Islam and Christianity (Olowola 1993:7). He confesses that today “Christianity in Africa faces traditional religion as never before.”

Contrary to what is generally believed, African Traditional Religion still enjoys popularity even in terms of number in some countries. Lugira (2004:9), quoting the *Current World Leaders Almanac: 2002* observes that there are countries on the West African coast that boast of 70% of its population claiming to be adherents of African Traditional Religion. Over 108 300 000 of the total number of 730 000 000 recorded in the year 2000 are adherents of African religion, comments Lugira.

The all-pervasiveness and popularity of African Traditional Religion seems to be incontrovertible. This fact is conceded by Froise (2005:19) as he notes that all the important aspects of life are in one way or another affected by “spiritism” in South Africa. He rather derogatorily calls these “animistic beliefs” and argues that they are not just part of culture but are basically religious in nature. These beliefs are seen in mainline Christian churches, as well as in government events and academic circles, observes Froise (2005:19).

4.2.2 Popularity of African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion, as seen above, has provided African theologians with a skeleton for African theology (Muzorewa 1989:9). It is seen as the major source of African theology (Martey 1993:72). African theologians have endeavoured to reverse the evils of the past by not only celebrating African Traditional Religion but also putting it on the academic platform. As early as 1949 Parrinder (1949:8) made an observation that a growing number of African writers are making valuable contributions in the area of African Traditional Religion. This was a field that was inundated by Western anthropologists and missionaries.

It is to these African theologians that we owe the volumes of literature on African Traditional Religion, since African Traditional Religion is a pre-literate religion, marked by little literature from its adherents. Mndende (2006:18), writing both as an African traditional diviner as well as a theologian of note, does not spare the African theologians in a scathing attack. She argues that both the Western missionaries and anthropologists, together with “African dualists”, have monopolised the discourse on African Traditional Religion.

African dualists, according to Mndende (2006:8), are born-again Christians who double up as part-time adherents of African Traditional Religion. It is this observed dualism that proves the tenacity and resilience of African Traditional Religion. Some of these writers have argued in academic circles for the incorporation of African ancestorhood in Christianity. These scholars are not only polemical but seek to express Christianity through African categories such as ancestorhood. One of these is Machoko (2010:55), writing from

a Zimbabwean perspective, who argues that Christ did not come to destroy the Shona culture together with its ancestors but rather to fulfil the Shona vessels.

There is an element in the African worldview that refuses to succumb to any pressure that seeks to reduce it and views it as irrelevant. Writing and appreciating this uniqueness in African worldview, Martey (1993:72) makes the following observation:

The vitality and dynamism of African Traditional Religion in contemporary African societies, despite an accelerated movement toward Islam and Christianity, is demonstrated by the fact that its underlying worldview and philosophy have never been part of the decline.

This is proof that despite the phenomenal growth of both Christianity and Islam through conversion, the African worldview has remained unconverted.

Gehman (1989:19) argues for the importance of studying African Traditional Religion and lists several points, two of which deserve attention. He notes that Africans who have converted to Christianity continue to view Christianity in an African perspective. Secondly, the majority of these Christians resort to African Traditional Religion in times of crises. This shows that while the adherents of African Traditional Religion may be seen to be few in number in most countries, their worldview has not declined in the mind and soul of the African. African Traditional Religion is no longer the domain of the Africans; nor is it confined to the African continent.

Magesa (1997:26) points out that African religion should not be viewed as a tribal or ethnic religion; it is a world religion. This view invaded the theological platform as early as the 1940s from authors such as Geoffrey Parrinder. He was one of the leading proponents in teaching the value of “systematic study and of the proper place of ancestral religion in the context of the world’s religions” (Parrinder 1949:vii). He spent about twenty years in different parts of Africa. The book *West African Religion* was first published in 1949 while the comparative studies were completed in 1946. This was during the time when the West saw nothing of value on African Traditional Religion and used all kinds of derogatory terms to explain and define it.

Lugira (2004:129) notes that “priests of African religion appear to be in demand for their spiritual services”. Professor Abimbola, who is a priest of the African religion, is quoted to have made the following statement on July 11, 2003: “Our religion today is a world religion embraced by over 100 million people in 28 nations.” There is a strong belief that seeks to indicate that indeed African Traditional Religion will indeed heal the broken world, as evidenced in Abimbola and Miller’s book *Ifa will mend our broken world*.

This tenacity and resiliency is proof that African Traditional Religion in general and ancestor cult in particular, continue to meet the religious needs of the African people.

It is the view of this research that the contribution of the so-called African dualists are invaluable, as they afford us the rare opportunity of seeing how African Traditional Religion and Christianity interface. The evaluation of this interface is therefore apropos. It seeks to discover the value that each brings to African Christianity. It is therefore not so much the views of the adherents of African Traditional Religion or those writing from a purely Western worldview that will be focused on, but those who have been exposed to both worlds. All views on African Traditional Religion are valuable while not all can be viewed as authentic and truthful.

4.3 African ontology

It has been shown that despite the apparent growth of Islam and Christianity, the African worldview which is expressed in African religion, has remained intact and is not declining (Martey 1993:72). What is it in the African worldview that seems to be the bedrock of Africans even when they have migrated to other religions?

4.3.1 Core African beliefs

Awolalu (1991:123), lists what he considers to be the six fundamental beliefs of Africans as follows:

1. *This world was brought into being by the Source of all beings as the Supreme Being.*

2. *The Supreme Being brought into being a number of divinities and spirits to act as His functionaries in the orderly maintenance of the world.*
3. *Death does not write 'the end' to human life but opens the gate to the hereafter – hence prominence is given to the belief in the continuation of life after death.*
4. *Divinities and spirits together with the ancestral spirits are in the supersensible world but are interested in what goes on in the world of man.*
5. *There are mysterious powers or forces in the world and that their presence makes man live in fear.*
6. *If men and women are to enjoy peace, they would live according to the laid-down directives of the Supreme Being and His agents.*

All religions have basic beliefs that are fundamental and integral to their system. These beliefs distinguish one religion from the other. These beliefs are also pillars to the worldview espoused by each religion. Metuh (1987:17) defines African religion as “institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from time immemorial in response to the ‘Supernatural’ as manifested in their environment”. What are the core beliefs of an African worldview?

Turaki (2006:78) observes that there are four foundational religious beliefs in the traditional religions. He lists these as:

1. *Belief in impersonal (mystical powers)*
2. *Belief in spirit beings*
3. *Belief in divinities/gods*
4. *Belief in Supreme Being*

The implication and the content of each belief are analysed later. The above categorisation may be informative, but are these beliefs to be found in all traditional religions?

Parrinder (1949:12) observes a similar fourfold classification of beliefs in many West African languages. He lists these as follows:

1. *A Supreme God or creator*
2. *The chief divinities*
3. *Cult of human but divinized ancestors of the clan*
4. *The charms and amulets*

4.3.2 Hierarchical structure of African Traditional Religion

The apparent hierarchical structure in African religions is clearly visible but in reality this may not always be the case. Mbiti (1969:77), in “pursuing the hierarchical consideration”, sees divinities as occupying a higher status than that of spirits. The spirits in turn are above the status of man. The living-dead are seen as the closest to man (1969:82). God as the originator and sustainer of all things occupies the highest level (1969:14). The elements of the African worldview, according to Mbiti can then be summarised as follows: God, Spiritual beings (divinities, spirits, living-dead), man, plants and natural phenomena. While man occupies a lower status compared to the spiritual beings, he is viewed as the centre of the African worldview (Mbiti 1969:21).

Metuh (1987:61-63) observes that all beings known in African religions belong either to the visible world or invisible world. The former is the world of people and all that can be seen and the latter is the world of spirits who either dwell in the sky or inside the ground. However, Metuh highlights the fact that there is no dichotomy between the world of spirits and that of human beings. These two worlds overlap and affect each other. He notes that men can influence the deities and the deities can intervene in human affairs for good or for bad.

Machoko (2010:35) writing from the perspective of the Shona people in Zimbabwe, which is part of the Bantu-speaking people, observes a three-fold structure in the Shona worldview. He reflects the Shona worldview as being “pneumatocentric, ancestorcentric, and theocentric”. He maintains that ancestors are the centre of this worldview (2010:35).

The three-fold classification is also supported and observed by Mndende (2006:112). She notes the following ontology:

1. *Creator*
2. *Ancestors*
3. *Communal life and ritual performances*

This appears to be a very highly simplified version of a rather complex African worldview. The structure is not only simple but seems to be devoid of any tension between the different levels. However, Mtuze (2003:7) sees a tension between these levels when he writes, “Every African person’s life is affected, in one way or the other, by the tension between God, the benevolent presences (Ancestors) and malevolent spirits.” The level between man and God is not pictured as peaceful as it appears in Mndende’s observation. There are both malevolent as well as benevolent spirits who may not share the same agenda. The tripartite structure can be presented as follows:

1. God
2. Benevolent presences and malevolent spirits
3. Human beings

It is this reality that shapes African spirituality. The communal and ritual life of the African is spent trying to access the benevolent spirits and also to avoid the malevolent spirits.

The African beliefs can also be structured spatially. There are three distinct spheres of existence, each with its attendant beings. There is heaven, between earth and heaven and earth. According to Lugira (2004:46), the Supreme Being who is God, reigns in heaven. The space between heaven and earth and between God and humanity is known as the spirit world or spiritual universe, which is the abode of spirits, the superhuman beings. These beings are ranked hierarchically and their potency is determined by their nearness and closeness to the Supreme Being (2010:46). The hierarchy among the spiritual beings can be presented as follows: God; associates of God (lesser gods); intermediaries; guardians and ancestors. “The intermediaries act between divinities and humans, while the guardians and ancestors are seen as protectors and advocates for humans” (2010:48).

The three-tiered view of space is, however, pictured differently by Fuller (1994:7) who instead of the space between heaven and earth, speaks of the space under the earth. According to Fuller this is the spiritual world where the Middle Powers reside. They are called “Middle” because they are in the middle between God and people (1994:11) and not necessarily between earth and heaven. He also sees, besides beings, some impersonal spiritual power in this middle realm which can be manipulated by African specialists.

In Fuller's structure there is room for animals – some of which are sacred and treated as gods (1994:12). There is also room for inanimate things such as rocks, rivers and plants. There are spirits that are “associated with rocks, plants, trees and caves”. Some plants are considered to be spiritually powerful (1994:12).

It is clear, therefore, that a more comprehensive and inclusive African worldview consists of the Supreme Being, divinities, spirit forces, ancestors, and magical forces. Bearing in mind that the spirits are not all friendly towards human beings, African religion seeks to maintain a proper balance among the spiritual forces through its religious functionaries and experts. There is significance attached to the hierarchy; each level has inherent authority and power.

4.3.3 Ancestors or the living-dead

It has become apparent that the dead in African worldview are not regarded as dead, but alive, albeit in a different form. These are alive but dead, and this is the rationale employed by Mbiti (1969:84) in choosing the term living-dead over ancestors or ancestral spirits. He argues that the term ancestral spirits or ancestors are misleading since they imply only spirits who were once the ancestors of the living. He further argues that there are spirits of the living-dead who are not in any way ‘ancestors’ (Mbiti 1969:83). He therefore concludes that the terms ‘ancestral spirits’ and ‘ancestors’ must be abolished and replaced with spirits or living-dead (1969:84).

The above argument is picked up by Froise in his unpublished dissertation when he observes that the term ‘living-dead’ has been adopted almost generally by scholars and representatives of African Traditional Religion (2005:27). This observation is true, the term living-dead has been generally adopted as the more precise one in defining the ancestors.

However, a closer look at Mbiti's argument reveals some basic contradiction and obfuscation that leads to some confusion as to who the ancestors are. While it is true that to refer to spirits or ancestral spirits as ‘ancestors’ is misleading, however, Mbiti's confusion of these terms does not help solve the problem. Metuh (1987:147) is correct in his

observation that the term living-dead is a useful one in African Traditional Religion but it should not substitute ‘ancestors’. He further argues that the ‘living dead’ is the genuine term for all the departed but not all the departed are ancestors (1987:147). Ephirim-Donkor (1997:129) concurs with Metuh when he also observes that ancestors are a distinct group of eternal saints apart from other spiritual personalities. These spiritual personalities are also endowed with immortality but they are not ancestors.

The term ‘living dead’ may be applied to all the human spirits but not all these are benevolent spirits, some qualify as malevolent. The latter are regarded as evil spirits who never received proper funeral rites. These may be regarded as ‘living-dead’ but not ancestors. Ancestors are the living-dead but not all the living dead are ancestors. Ancestors are what Mtuze (2003) calls the ‘benevolent presences’. This separates them from the malevolent spirits or presences.

The term living-dead is also an imposition to many African groups that have a high regard for ancestors. Among the Nguni, generally, ancestors are known as *amadlozi* in Zulu, *izinyanya*, *badimo*, in Sesotho, etc., and these terms exclude any other living-dead or spirits who do not qualify as benevolent presences. As it can be seen, the ancestors are hardly referred to as ‘spirits’, even though their place of abode is known as the world of the spirits, *kwelemimoya*, in Xhosa.

The living dead and spirits can be regarded as the ontological description of the ancestors focusing on who and what they are. They are the spirits who are living though dead. The term ‘benevolent presences’ indicates their role among the people. The term ‘ancestor’ is therefore a fitting term for the spirits of the departed which are living, though dead, and are seen as benevolent presences by the adherents of African religion.

4.3.4 Centrality of ancestors in African Traditional Religion

It has been observed and pointed out that African cosmology is not uniform throughout the continent. Most cultures in West Africa include divinities or nature gods in their ontology. This is not very prominent in East, Central and southern Africa, where ancestors take the

centre stage. Metuh (1987:73) alludes to the fact that belief in ancestors remains a main feature in Bantu religions.

The point to note here is that while ancestors may not be the main feature in some groups, it does not mean that there is no space allotted to such beliefs in their religion. Fuller (1997) confidently reports that there are one or two tribes in Africa that do not communicate with the living dead or the departed ancestors and that these tribes deal only with divinities. He adds though that this is not common and is extremely rare. While one would not like to commit to the number of tribes where such an observation is true, the point that is made here is that there are few tribes where ancestor belief does not feature. The argument is also not on the degree or its intensity but just its presence in the basic ontology.

Fuller (1997) observes, and correctly so, that most groups in Africa have divinities and ancestors as part of their worldview. There is no religious or spiritual competition for loyalty between these two entities, where the belief in divinities is stronger, most functions are attributed to them and where ancestors are stronger the same happens.

4.3.5 Anthropocentricity of African Traditional Religion

To understand the role of ancestors one needs to appreciate the importance and centrality of man in African religion. It can be said that African religion centres and revolves around man and benefits man (Gehman 1989:50).

This hierarchical depiction of the African worldview can be diagrammed as follows:

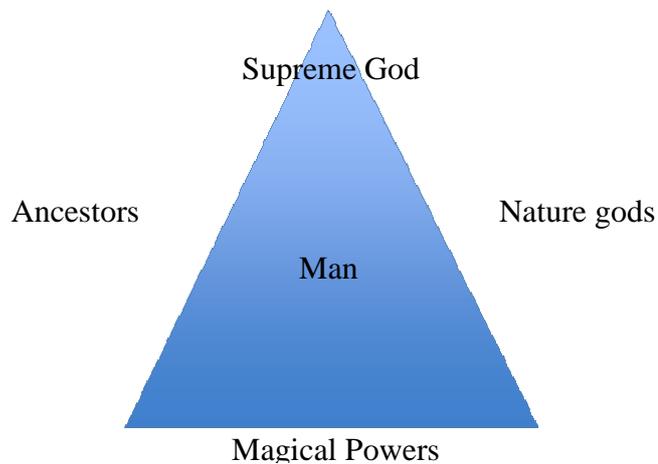


Figure 1 Hierarchical depiction of the African worldview

1. God as the greatest power exist at the apex of the pyramid;
2. on the two sides of the pyramid are ancestors and nature gods;
3. at the base are magical powers;
4. the centre of the pyramid is occupied by man who is subject to influences from every side of the pyramid.

According to Parrinder, this does not only show the centrality of man but also how he relates to the other beings around him. He notes that man is subject to influences from every side. It is not clear by observing the diagram how man relates to other beings in the pyramid, whether the influences are direct or indirect. The hierarchical delineation is also not very clear; the ancestor and the nature gods seem to occupy the same level but on either side of man. Does this depict equality and equidistance between man? In other words, it is not clear which one is closer to man and which one is closer to God. Other questions have to deal with the relationship between, God and man. Does God relate directly to man and at the same intensity as ancestor and nature gods do?

This all goes to show that the hierarchical element is not as clear as one would have it. While man is clearly in the centre and God at the apex, lines of authority are not very clear. Another limitation of the diagram or depiction is that it presents Western African ontology

of African religion. In areas and cultures where nature gods are not part of their ontology, the pyramid becomes shapeless and loses its cohesiveness.

It should be noted that this does not mean that the hierarchical depiction in African ontology is wanting. The challenge is in showing the centrality of man and yet maintaining the basic traditional ontological hierarchy. Both Mbiti (1969:82) and Parrinder (1949:12) have aptly argued for a clear hierarchical structure. The divinities occupy a higher status than the ancestors and are closer to God. Ancestors are closer to man and the influence stronger.

It is well noted and argued by most African theologians that the African worldview is indeed anthropocentric (Metuh 1987:80; Mbiti 1969:90). Mbiti captures the relationship between God and man and the spirits aptly when he says:

African ontology is basically anthropocentric: man is at the very center of existence, and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man. God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; It is as if God exists for the sake of man. The spirits are ontologically in the mode between God and man.

The observation that God and all the other spiritual beings exist for the benefit of man is true in most cultures that are part of African religion. In the Bantu perspective of African Traditional Religion, divinities or nature gods do not play a major role and are indeed absent in many cultures. Man is always in the presence of ancestors. The Bantu worldview as observed by Mndende (2006:112) comprises of the following:

1. God the Supreme
2. Ancestors
3. Communal life and ritual practices.

It should be noted that man participates in the communal life and ritual practices. These are designed for his benefit and for his own welfare. It should also be noted that it is as human beings who have died that ancestors in turn serve man. Thus, ancestors are intrinsically and essentially human. One can almost venture to note that all that God did was to create man and allowed him to live in a communal life. The ancestors who are the creation of man

would continue the process of sustenance and well-being of man. This fact is emphasised by Amanze (2002:64), without of course diminishing the role of ancestors, when he adumbrates; “ ...it is the people who select the living-dead into the rank of ancestors.”

In view of the foregoing observation, the best way of depicting man’s centrality in the African worldview could be to use a concentric diagram, as follows:

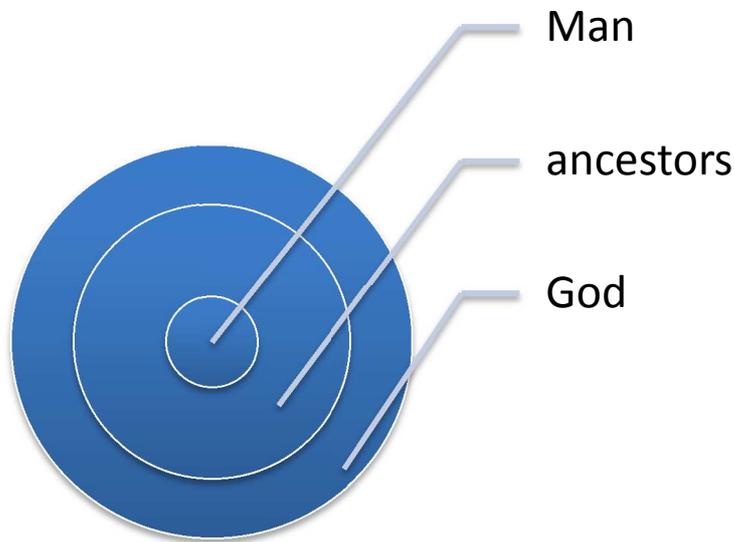


Figure 2 Man’s centrality in the African worldview

One more circle can be added to fit in with the Western African basic ontology. Each circle is influenced and affected by the antecedent circle. God embraces all the known spiritual entities and existential levels. The diagram does not only depict the influences that surround man but also the proximity of such influences.

The relevancy accorded to each spiritual being is determined by the service expected from it and more than anything its proximity to man. The pyramidal hierarchical structure that depicts man as occupying the centre of the pyramid may not be telling a full story of the degree of relevance afforded to each spiritual entity. In Bantu religion, ancestors are the

closest to man and man lives such that he too may become an ancestor. Man is the main focus of African worldview.

4.3.6 The individual and the community

The above description of man as the centre in the African religion and worldview may be misconstrued as a form of African individualism. The reference to man is not to him as an individual but as part of the community. This is well attested by Oosthuizen (2000:278) when he says:

The ontology of classical Africa is basically anthropocentric. The person is the center of existence not as an individual, but as family, as community. To be blessed implies having children and food, and to be healthy, but this is the case only if the whole community shares in it. (2000:41)

The African religion and culture differs remarkably, for instance when compared to the Western culture. It is generally observed and accepted by any keen observer that Africa stresses communality while Western cultures emphasises the individual (Van der Walt, 1997:28). In African religion the community is at the centre and not the individuals. Mbiti (1969:106) captures this concept succinctly when he asserts:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and other people. When he suffers he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with the kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married he is not alone, neither does the wife belong to him alone.

The above observation by Mbiti is captured in many African anthropological studies by the phrase – “I am because we are.” An African believes that he shares in the community therefore he exists (Van der Walt 1997:29). Observation from other cultures suggests something different – “We are because I am”. Here the community exists because it is constituted by the individuals (Van der Walt 1997:29).

The basic unit of the community is not the individual but the family that constitutes it (Mndende 2006:116). It should be noted here that family in the African context is not limited or defined by the parents and their children. Family includes the departed ones

(Mbiti 1969:104). Those who have died still have a say in the affairs of the family and are afforded the space to do that. The family also includes the unborn ones and marriage being the legitimate way of bringing the unborn into being. Everyone in African religion “belongs to a family, immediate, extended, clan and tribe, ancestors and unborn” (Gehman 1989:52).

The size of the family can be seen during the performance of religious rites. Such rites are never performed by the parents and the children alone as it would be in the West. The household is the basic unit of the family and no major religious rituals are performed at this level.

Families are hierarchically structured. The role and status of the individual within the family is determined by age, gender and seniority (Nürnberg 2007:23). The greatest punishment and indeed curse in the African context is not death but exclusion from the family and by implication from the community. One participates in the community as a member belonging to a particular family. Among the Xhosa-speaking people a person can be excluded from the family. This is a rare event that is occasioned by one’s behaviour in flaunting and disregarding cultural duties and expectation.

This excommunication exercise is usually accompanied by a ritual where an animal is slaughtered and an announcement made both to the present members of the family and the departed. This is worse than death and confines one into a life of oblivion and a vagabond with no social or religious ties.

4.3.7 African anthropology

It is generally believed in African anthropology that man is more than the physical appearance. There is a spiritual part that continues to live even after the physical part has died (Gehman 1989:5). Human beings are not only made up of flesh but also spirit and soul; the body is susceptible to death and dying but the spirit or soul does not perish (Mndende 2006:114). According to Lugira (2004:49), “when a person dies, his or her soul separates from the body and changes from being a soul to being a spirit.

Being a spirit is higher status to that of the living; the human attains a state of superhuman and enters a state of immortality when he dies (Lugira (2004:49). When people die physically, spirits are what remain. This is the ultimate state and destiny of man (Mbiti 1969:77,78). The belief then is that as much as man is a mortal being, he has within himself a part which is immortal. Without this understanding there would be no space for the belief in the ontological existence of ancestors.

4.3.8 The state of the dead

The concept of ancestorhood in Africa is more extensive and assumes a profound religious meaning than the dictionary definition (Amanze 2002:62). In African religion, ancestors are more than just lineal descent or progenitors of a family or one's forebears.

Mbiti (1969:25) refers to the African ancestors as the living dead. He reflects the current understanding of what it means to be an ancestor when he writes:

The living dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in this life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits... So long as the living-dead is thus remembered, he is in the state of personal immortality. While the departed is remembered by name, he is not really dead.

Ancestors as observed from above belong to the world of spirits and are alive. What sets them apart from other spirits is not in themselves but in the memory of their descendants. There are other spirits who exist who may have been the progenitors of their descendants but who have passed out of memory of the living (Magesa 2003:53). Ancestors do not want to be forgotten and the living would do well not to forget them, for the reasons stated below:

If the living-dead are suddenly forgotten, this means that they are cast out of the Sasa period, and are in effect excommunicated, their personal immortality is destroyed and they are turned into a state of non-existence. This is the worst possible punishment for anyone. The departed resent it, and the living do all they can to avoid it, because it is feared that it would bring illness and misfortunes to those who forget their departed relatives. (Mbiti 1969:26).

It is in the best interest of the living to remember the dead for their lives and well-being depends on the continued existence and favour from the ancestors. It is equally important for ancestors to be remembered by the living for their own existence depends on it.

The question around the abode of the ancestors remains open and there is no unanimity on it. Lugira (2004:46), as observed earlier, sees them occupying the space between earth and heaven, while Fuller (1994:7) has them residing underground. Among the Xhosa-speaking, ancestors are also referred as *abaphantsi*, meaning ‘those who reside under the earth’. The observation by Kiernan (1995:20) is apt that no consensus exists on where ancestors reside, but what is commonly accepted is that they are in “constant attachment to the living space of their progeny.”

4.3.9 How does one become an ancestor?

Ancestorhood is not just life after death but one’s benevolent relationship with the living after his death. Life after death is accorded to everyone due to the nature of man but ancestral status is a privilege granted to only those who qualify. The point to be noted is that this status of ancestorhood is “conferred by the living and it depends on their continued willingness to honor it” (Kiernan 1995:20). By continued willingness is meant the intentional maintaining of the departed in the memory of the living. The living dead cannot act on behalf of their descendants without an explicit mandate to do so (Mtuze 2003:49). The transition from life in this world to life in the world of the spirits has therefore to be negotiated and legitimised through performance of a ritual organised and enacted by the living (Kiernan 1995:21).

This conferment is not done arbitrary by the living but is determined by several factors that the dead, when they were alive, applied to the dead during their time. Metuh (1987:147) gives a very comprehensive shopping list that the living look at as they determine whether one should be an ancestor, and this includes old age, offspring, good moral life, funeral rites, a good death excluding epilepsy, leprosy, or death by accident.

Commenting on the very list Magesa (2004:53) amplifies it making it clear who would qualify and who would not. He lists the following categories as those who would not

qualify: Spirits of children, those without proper initiation, those without children of their own or did not receive a proper burial. From this list one sees that the death of a child is a catastrophic loss that leads to a dead end. One may be old and lead a good life but if one has no children, the envisaged status of ancestorhood is denied him. Kiernan (1995:20) adds to the list of childlessness and minors, women and noting that the last category does not frequently become ancestors as do men. This is particularly true in patriarchal societies.

It is not just death but how one dies that determines where proper funeral rites will be performed for the deceased. Those who die “unhappy death by hanging, drowning, being struck by lightning, or in pregnancy” (Kiernan 1995:137) do not qualify for funeral rites. Among the Xhosa-speaking a body of a person who dies in the manner mentioned above is taken straight to the grave and is not brought home for funeral rites. In some culture a person struck by lightning is buried on the same spot with no funeral rites.

Among the *amaXhosa* in South Africa, a place where there was a terrible accident that claimed the lives of people often becomes a haunted place. The person who died there is reported to be seen at night exactly at the place where the accident took place and his appearance is blamed as the cause of the accidents that follow in the same place. The spirit of a person who dies in an accident or accidentally, or is murdered becomes a malevolent spirit that haunts the living. Any ritual that is performed in such cases is to ensure that the “spirit of the deceased does not ‘hover around’ to harm the community in any way” (Magesa 2003:83).

Magesa (2003:82) narrates a ritual that is done among the Luo of Kenya when an unmarried person dies, compared to the one who dies married. He observes that a “married man is accorded an honor at burial such as being smeared with oil, but an unmarried man was covered with ash, symbolizing shame.” One of the reasons for this attitude is that it is the male heir that confers ancestorhood on the parent (Kiernan 1995:21). To die without an heir is to die without a legitimate person who qualifies to confer ancestorhood. Infertility does not only adversely affect the dying, the dead are affected as well. Fertility is of

greatest interest to the living-dead, they need descendants who will remember them to perpetuate their immortality (Kiernan 1995:21).

There is also an expectation that those who become ancestors had amassed wealth during their life time (Magesa 1997:56). Wealth is seen as a sign of favour from ancestors. It is such a person who, when becoming an ancestor, can insure the same for his descendants.

Kiernan (1995:20) argues that one's influence as an ancestor is merely an extension of the role he played while alive. He notes also that the "religious remembrance of ancestors is a way of extending authoritative roles beyond the grave". A person who never had authority while living cannot hope to have in the world of spirits. The living, who came for advice and guidance during the time when the dead were alive, would normally continue to do so even when he is dead. In patriarchal societies where women occupy lesser positions of authority becoming ancestors is highly unlikely as compared to matriarchal societies.

The living-dead or spirits who lived bad lives continue to do so in the world of spirits and as such these cannot be ancestors (Magesa 1997:56). These would include people who practiced witchcraft and sorcery. Those who were evil during their life time and those who die a bad death, like accident, suicide, etc. share the same fate in the hereafter. Metuh (1987:147) refers to these as "ghosts of malignant forces".

The striking question here is why would those who practice witchcraft and sorcery suffer the same fate as those who died childless or died a bad death? This fate is that of facing death without a future. This is dealt with in the section about at the role and function of ancestors. (4.4)

The conclusion that can be drawn from the foregoing observation is that not all the dead become ancestors. The living do not confer on those who die the status of ancestorhood, except as they meet the aforementioned qualification and qualities. These can be summed up as follows: old age, which represents seniority and authority; offspring, having children and especially male in patriarchal societies; a good moral life, and proper funeral rites.

The mortuary rites are performed by the living for the dead and it is in such that one can determine whether the one buried will become an ancestor or not. Those who die as children, or childless and those who do not lead good moral lives do not merit the proper funeral rites. Parrinder (1949:126) notes that “many human sacrifices of olden times took place in connection with funeral and memorial rites especially for rulers and kings.”

The funeral rites, according to Mtuze (2003:50), “are to ensure his mandate to act on behalf of his family as a properly appointed ambassador-plenipotentiary.” This reemphasises the point stressed earlier that it is the living that approve who will be the ancestor. This approval is signified by the proper performance of funeral rites. A person who dies far from home without the knowledge of those who have the power to confer ancestorhood, remains in limbo (Kiernan 1995:135). According to Kiernan, such a person becomes a rogue spirit, capricious and indiscriminately harmful. This will continue until the proper funeral rites are performed. In short and simply, an ancestor is one who has had proper funeral rites, of course there are qualities that leads to one meriting those rites.

4.3.10 The mystical powers in African worldview

African religion is not a flight into the mythical world of abstraction and theories. It is an experiential religion, where mystical powers are not only felt, but are seen as part of the daily life of the African (Nürnberg 2007:30). The African people who have grown up in a traditional and rural environment have ample stories about the mystical power. This power is often “experienced and at times manifests itself in the form of magic, divination, witchcraft and mysterious phenomena that seem to defy even the immediate scientific explanation” (Mbiti 1969:189).

The African world hides more than it reveals to the human eye. That which is causally related to, is visible in more ways than one. Witchcraft for most African people is part of the mystical powers that defy rational explanation. It is part of the religious forces that surround him (Lugira, 2004:97). The mystical power can be experienced as positive, neutral or negative and therefore evil (Mbiti 1969:190). On the positive side, the power is harnessed and used for “protective, productive and preventative purpose” (Mbiti

1969:190). On the negative side it is believed to cause misfortune and is often ascribed as the cause of death (Mbiti 1969:190).

The explanation usually given for the misfortune and death involves ancestors as well as witches and sorcerers. Ancestors are seen as “admonitory while the rest are seen as vindictive and evil” (Kiernan 1995:23). The mystical power does not originate from human beings whether evil or good; it ultimately is from God (Mbiti 1969:19). It may reside or be channelled through human beings via spiritual beings. This power is ultimately from God, but in practice it is inherent in, or comes from or through physical objects and spiritual beings.

African religion is to some degree preoccupied with averting the evil effects of this mystical power through faithful performance of ritual and other forms of protection. It also seeks to have access to these powers through agents that are in tune with the spiritual world, especially the ancestors.

A true reflection on what it means to be an African cannot be attained without a full understanding of the belief in ancestors. Referring to the existence of spirits in anyone who seeks or attempts to deny the existence of ancestors, argues Olowola (1993:30), is to deny the existence of African religion. One can extend this argument by suggesting that to deny the existence of ancestors is to deny the existence of African spirituality and indeed African identity and personality.

4.3.11 God the Supreme Being

There is general consensus among all African scholars and anthropologists that all African cultures and religions believe in a Supreme Being or deity. Do Africans believe in one God the Supreme or in many gods? This question cannot be avoided despite the general belief in a Supreme Being. Lugira (2004:36) argues that in African religion monotheism and polytheism exist side by side. The Africans embrace a hierarchical monotheism. This is the type where God as the Supreme Being as its head. According to Lugira, God “rules over a vast number of divinities who are considered to be associates of God.” Africans pray and

sacrifice to many lesser gods, but God is regarded as the Supreme Being who created life (Lugira 2004:41).

The Supreme Being is vaguer among Bantu people (Metuh 1987:73) and the reason for this is explored in the section dealing with worship (4.4.3). Mbiti (1969:33) notes that God “in spatial terms is conceived to be transcendent and dwelling in the sky beyond the reach of men.” There are observable myths around the existence and being of God in African religion. He also appears to be associated with natural objects and phenomena (Mbiti 1969:34). Mtuzze (2003:8) refers to this association as being panentheistic as opposed to pantheistic. It is God’s manifestation in such objects that is the source of wonder and not the ontological essence of the object.

4.3.12 Divinities or nature gods

It has already been shown that African ontologies of the Western African region mostly include divinities or nature gods. While the focus of the research is more on the regions where ancestors feature the most, a cursory treatment on the divinities will be sufficient.

It appears that divinities never existed as human beings; they are viewed as part of the created universe and are below God but above ancestors (Kiernan 1995:124). They are created by God to perform specific roles (Uka 1991:191). Some of the cultures in the West are known for their pantheon of gods which share a striking resemblance to areas like Egypt (Kiernan 1995:129). They all believe in one eternal Creator along with a host of other gods.

While it is may be true that in some tribes in West Africa the term ‘gods’ is a collective name for the cult of ancestors (Fuller 1997:29), there are tribes that have distinctive divinities that are separate from ancestors (Fuller 1997:29). The Yoruba and Akan in the southern part of Nigeria each have different views toward divinities (Fuller 1997:30). In the Yoruba tradition divinities are more important than ancestors while for the Akan the ancestors are revered more than the gods.

4.3.13 Conclusion

Ancestors are an integral part of the African Traditional Religion. Among all the spiritual entities that are known to exist in African ontology, ancestors are the most popular and the closest to Africans. Ancestors do not exist for themselves – they exist for man. It is in this sense that African Traditional Religion is regarded as intrinsically anthropocentric. Any attempt to render the ancestors non-existent would lead to the annihilation of the entire religious system. It is their perceived and acknowledged existence that Africans come to expect benevolent involvement in their lives.

4.4 Role of African ancestors in African Traditional Religion

It has already been indicated that African religion is an experiential religion. Africans ‘do not walk by faith, but by sight’. It is what they have seen and experienced that form part of their stories. It owes its existence, not in the literature, but in the hearts of its adherents. Magesa (2004:47), writing from the Eastern African perspective, argues that without understanding the role played by ancestors in the African mind, it is impossible to grasp the true meaning of the religious foundations of an African. It has played a significant role and continues to have an impact in the lives of the Africans.

4.4.1 Role of ancestors in stages of human development

The statement: “Africans are notoriously religious” as attributed to Mbiti, sums up the essence of African spirituality. This notion marks the different developmental stages culminating in death and life after death. Amanze (2002:15), makes a relevant observation, which speaks to the omnipresence of religion in the African life, when he says:

There is a general agreement today among many scholars, who have examined the African societies closely, that African religion exists in a diffused form with its beliefs, rituals, theology, and organisation intimately merged with secular institutions. In other words, religion in Africa permeates every aspect of the life of the individual and the community.

It is worth nothing to observe the rich religious fervour that underpins the key developmental stages of man. The ritual life which is part of the religious world of the

African begins before conception and continues through birth and growth until the individual becomes an ancestor (Amanze 2002 133).

4.4.1.1 Birth and growth

Birth is marked with great celebration and is seen as a profound religious event. The joy and the social acceptance of the parents largely depend on whether they have children or not. The importance of the child is not limited to the continuation of the physical and biological line of life but in some cultures it is thought to be the re-incarnation of the departed (Mbiti 1969:117). There is therefore a “sacred link between the life of the new born and the past generation which cannot be broken” (Gehman 1989:52). It is through the birth and extension of life that parents are assured of their state of personal immortality (Mbiti 1969:117).

Conception is viewed as a result of blessings and benevolence of God and the ancestors. God, man and ancestors all have their assigned duty in the process of delivering a child to this life. The parents’ responsibility is to copulate and give birth; God intercedes to create the life that is to be; ancestors assist in protective the child from malevolent powers of destruction (Magesa 2003:83). It may also be argued that God intercedes to create life because of the favourable conditions created by the parents in their relationship with the ancestors. There are rituals that mark the birth and the naming of the child which vary according to societies or cultural groups.

4.4.1.2 Puberty and initiation

The stage before one can be seen and recognised as an adult is very important in most African cultures. Elaborate rituals and initiation ceremonies mark this stage. Those who are not initiated and have not gone through puberty rites are often regarded as non-members of the tribe. These rituals mark one’s entrance and acceptance into the fellowship and community of the tribe. In the Xhosa-speaking community, a man who has not undergone initiation in the form of circumcision is not regarded as proper human being.

Circumcision is prominently and distinctly expected to “transform the irresponsible and intractable boy into a matured with dignity and self-respect” (Mayer P quoted in Gitywa

1976:203). The late president Nelson Mandela, himself a Xhosa, wrote the following, in his autobiography: “I count my days as a man from the date of my circumcision.” (Quoted in Robert Block *Sunday Times* (London), p. 18, 29 December 1996). The saying that *inkwenkwe yinja*, meaning that a boy who has not been circumcised is a dog, is well known among the Xhosa-speaking community.

The newly initiated are informed and instructed on their responsibility as part of the whole community. The instruction is not limited to the social responsibility but also pertains to the ancestors. The vertical relationship between man and the ancestors is regarded as the most important (Gitywa 1976:203). The newly initiated is taught to honour and respect the ancestors by adhering to the customs and carrying out the rituals that he witnessed, to his progeny (Gitywa 1976:207).

4.4.1.3 Marriage

One of the most important stages in the life of an African is marriage. Marriage is not a choice but an expectation that must be fulfilled at all cost. African religion allows no bachelors or unmarried women, because children are needed for survival (Gehman 1989:54). It is through marriage that children are born and develop to be fully matured human beings, playing a vital role in the family and community.

As already alluded, marriage is not just a social institution which exists for the succession of descendants for the continuation of a family and community. A point observed by Gehman (1989:53), which sets African religion apart, is the fact that “Both the living and the departed together with the not yet born meet at the point of marriage.” There is profound interest in marriage from those who are departed and those who are alive. Children, as noted above, are the result of marriage, and as such they assure the living and the dead of personal state of immortality.

Mbiti (1969:131) echoes the above sentiment when he points out that those “who die without getting married and without having children are completely cut off from human society, they become disconnected and become outcasts and lose all links with mankind.” Childlessness is not viewed as a “personal tragedy but a communal catastrophe” (Magesa,

2003:84). Marriage in most African cultures is not an event but is viewed as a process that is only complete when a first child is born (Mbiti 1969:131). Sterility and barrenness on the part of the wife is the single greatest cause for divorce (Mbiti 1969:141). It is the woman who is often blamed for not bearing children and all is done to determine the cause and at times witchcraft may not be excluded on the part of the wife.

If marriage is only complete at the birth of a child, then failure to have a child is tacit acknowledgement that the marriage is incomplete, and has not taken place. It is clear that marriage does not bring joy to the married couple only; it affects the whole family – indeed the whole clan. The dead have vested interest in procreation since their continued immortality depends on them being remembered by their descendants. This point is developed further and clearly when the significance of ancestors is treated in 4.5 below.

4.4.1.4 Death

Preoccupation with death and the dead is a phenomenon that is clearly articulated in many African rituals. Magesa (2013:81) shows the centrality of death in African spirituality when he writes:

If there is anything in human existence that evokes the necessity of for relationship between beings and the invisible world (God, the ancestors, and the spirits), emphasizes its central role within the human community itself (the living and the yet-to-be-born), and highlights human dependence on the land and the rest of creation (the material community), it is the awareness and experience of death.

Magesa concludes the above remark by noting that without the discussion of the concept and reality of death, discourse on African spirituality cannot be complete (Magesa 2013:81).

No one looks forward to dying; living is still better than dying, even though the dead are more powerful than the living, death brings discord (Gehman 1989:50). Death, in most cases, is viewed as having been caused by external forces, which may include ancestors, witches and sorcerers (Gehman 1989:50). It has already been alluded to that the misfortune from the ancestors serve as an admonition while those from evil sources are seen as vindictive and evil. Among the Xhosa-speaking people, death is conceived as not the end

or annihilation. The following words are used as an expression of death: *usishiyile* (he has left us behind), *usandulele* (he has gone ahead of us), *ugodukile* (he has gone home) *okwelokhokho* (he has joined the world of the ancestors). Mbiti (1969:157) is correct in his observation that there is no expectation of any form of judgment, reward or punishment in the hereafter in African eschatology.

4.4.2 General role of ancestors

It has already been indicated that the term, ‘benevolent presences’ by Mtuze (2003), is an apt description of the role played by ancestors in African religion. The operating principle according to Magesa (1997:48) is that though dead they continue to influence the life of the tribe, more positive than negative. Among all the spirits human and non-human, it is the ancestors that are viewed as benevolent presences in Bantu religion. The following is a brief look at the different roles that ancestors play in African religion.

4.4.2.1 Protectors

The point made by Kiernan (1995:140) that the relevance of the ancestors is determined by their usefulness, is worth noting. It also stresses the point made earlier that African religion is deeply anthropocentric. It seeks to serve the interest of man and to the degree that it fulfils that, then it remains relevant to the same extent. Ancestors are generally regarded as the protectors of the society (Magesa 1997:48). They shield their descendants from witches and other malevolent forces (Mbiti 1969:198). Mtuze (2003:49) lists several causes that could lead to one seeking God’s protection through ancestors, such as famine, death, bad luck, ill-health. They are also requested for help in bearing children and preserving them since these are of interest both to the ancestors and the living (Kiernan 1995:141).

Elders of the clan do serve as guardians and counsellors of the family and the clan. It is in this regard that ancestors are to assume the level of seniority or eldership and must have been acting in that position when they were alive. The ancestors are in full sense the eldest of the senior elders and the clan come to them for guidance (Kiernan 1995:140).

The living, therefore, would not hesitate to perform funeral rites so as to have access to the guidance they enjoyed from the now deceased. This also explains why children and youth cannot be transferred to ancestorhood. They cannot do in death what they did not do when they were alive.

The African world is full of potential enemies existing both in the spirit world and world of man that have as their objective the destruction of man in all aspects of his existence. While ancestors play a protective role they may also, under certain circumstances, relinquish their role temporarily as a form of punishment to those who disregard their authority (Mbiti 1969:199). It is in this regard that those who die a 'bad death' are denied funeral rites, they are seen as the recipients of the wrath of ancestors.

4.4.2.2 Custodians of African tradition and ethics

Ancestors are viewed as the guardians of the family affairs, traditions and ethics (Mbiti 1969). They are also known to rebuke to those who flaunt these traditions and warn of impending disaster (Mbiti 1969). They are also seen as watchdogs of the moral behaviour of the family, clan and society

It is as a community that Africans relate to ancestors and without ancestors there would be no community (Oosthuizen 1989:40). The force that holds the community together and that creates a deep sense of community is found in ancestral belief.

Every crisis that develops, either for the tribe or individuals, is usually attributed to the displeasure of the ancestors (Kiernan 1995:140). There is reluctance in accepting innovation; it is tradition that people are turned back to (Kiernan 1995:140). Ancestors cannot be custodians of innovation they have not been part of. Ela (2000:22) sees the ancestors as the embodiment of the teachings and cultural tradition of the family and tribe.

It is adherence to public and communal norms of social and descent relationships rather than personal moral virtues that ancestors are concerned with (Metuh 1987:153). African ethics are described as anthropocentric and existing to serve life, they are not "juridical and legalistic but rather vitalistic" (Mulago 1955:129). It is the respect for parents and hierarchical order that takes centre stage in African ethics and what would then concern the

ancestors. This becomes a serious concern for ancestors, since those who do not take authority seriously may also not regard the ancestral authority and thereby threatening the ancestors' personal immortality.

A point is made that wicked people may thrive under the watch of ancestors as long as the supposed wickedness does not disturb the social balance (Mulago 1955:129). In African religion it appears that incest is regarded as one of the most evil acts that usually merit immediate punishment (Mtuzze 2003:34). There are no reported incidents of how ancestors regard adultery or corruption in general.

It is unclear whether this would merit their wrath or not. Ancestors are therefore not approached for the sake of providing strength and power to live virtuous life (Mtuzze 2003:34). As custodians of African traditions and ethics, ancestors continue what they were doing as elders of the family when they were alive. As ancestors they are older than the living elders and have been mandated through proper funeral rites to continue to function as elders.

4.4.2.3 Intermediaries

In Bantu ontology, ancestors are positioned between man and the Supreme Being. This hierarchy is not only that of authority and power but reflects the basic function and role of ancestors. This strategic position allows them to act as intermediaries between the living and the Deity (Mtuzze 2003:25). They act as a vital link between the living and Deity (Mtuzze 2003:25). It is their perceived proximity to the Deity that qualifies and empowers them for this role. They are also perceived to have enhanced power and influence which makes them effective intermediaries (Metuh 1987:152).

The closeness to Deity has gained them the ability to speak the language of Deity. Mbiti (1969:82) notes that the ancestors have the ability to speak the language of men and the language of Deity. They are in this sense bilingual. They have full access to communication with the Supreme Being (1969:82). The living make their supplication and wishes known to the ancestors who in turn convey the same to *Qamata*, being the name of the Deity among Xhosa-speaking people (Mtuzze 2003:48).

It would appear that the perceived existential distance between man and the Supreme Being necessitates intermediation. According to Mbiti (1969:82) ancestors are often approached for minor needs of life which are daily exigencies which God should not be worried about. Ancestors are also not just mediators who only have power to refer to the Supreme Being, they are also viewed as plenipotentiaries (Mtuze 2003:25). This gives them power to transact business and not just to refer to the Supreme Being. The power and status of ancestors is best appreciated when viewed in relation to worship or veneration.

4.4.3 Worship or veneration of ancestors

One of the issues raised by those who study African religion is whether ancestors are worshipped or venerated. But there is general unanimity on the centrality of worship and its relation to ancestors, whether as recipients or mediators of such. The custodial, supportive and protective role played by ancestors is just one part, the other part concerns what ancestors require from their descendants.

It has been established that not only are the living responsible for conferring ancestorship on their dead loved ones, but for one to continue as an ancestor he still needs the continued remembrance by his descendants. Magesa (2003:77) observes that the living are not the only ones that seek ancestral communion for their wellbeing, this communion is for the wellbeing of the ancestors as well. They want to be remembered and kept informed of the happenings in the family (Metuh 1987:53). This remembrance comes in the form of rituals and sacrifices whose main beneficiaries are the ancestors.

4.4.3.1 Importance of ancestral rituals

Ancestors are judged to be actively involved in ensuring that they are remembered and honoured by their descendants. They are known to visit their descendants by particular snakes, possessions, through dreams and also by exposing them to calamities (Metuh 1987:53). The appearance of a snake, known as *uMajola* among the Xhosa speaking tribes, calls upon the Majola family to perform a ritual in honour of the ancestors.

Ancestors continue as ancestors enjoying their personal immortality as long as they needed and deemed useful by their descendants. Rituals in African religion carry a very significant role. Commenting on the importance of rituals, Lugira (2004:62) says, “To Africans, belief without ritual actions would take away much of the religion’s power. Rites and rituals punctuate all aspects of African religious life.”

Rituals are seen to be the heartbeat of worship and the most common way of approaching and communicating with the ancestors (Mbiti 1969:59). Kiernan (1990:23) makes a similar observation when he notes that the “living communicate with the dead by regular sacrifice and invocation.” On a similar vein, Mtuze (2003:48) also notes that the “ancestors are approached through sacrifices and appropriate propitiatory addresses or prayer”.

Rituals are also used not only to ask blessings and protection but also to make ancestors aware of the geographical locality of the descendants. M’Timkulu (1977:21) argues that the ancestors are neither omnipresent nor omniscient and as such may even get lost in trying to locate the descendant. Relevant rituals are then performed to alert and inform the ancestors of the whereabouts of the members of the family.

4.4.3.2 Ancestors as recipients of sacrifices

If ancestors are accepted as acting as a go-between, between Deity and man, how are sacrifices or rituals received by them. Do they receive these on behalf of the Deity or do they pass these to thereby acting as channels? Answers to these questions are crucial since it will further enlighten how ancestors are viewed in African religion.

Mbiti (1969:58) observes that “sacrifices are commonest acts of worship.” The question is – who are the recipients of these acts? According to Mbiti, the recipients are believed to be God, spirits and living-dead. He further argues that the ultimate recipient is God; the other two are regarded as intermediaries. God, according to him, is the ultimate recipient, whether or not the “worshippers are aware of that or not” (1969:58). The same point is raised by Idowu (1973:168) within the context of the Yoruba religion where he argues for a modified monotheism instead of polytheism. Following Mbiti’s argument, he asserts that

these divinities, since they are a creation of God, serve as intermediaries and whatever worship they receive they do so in the name of God.

It is difficult to sustain this line of reasoning when it comes to ancestors. As observed earlier, ancestors are not a creation of God; they depend upon their descendants for continued existence as ancestors. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two, such that the ancestors take man's worship and sacrifices as acts of remembrance. The blessings are an acknowledgement from the ancestor of the acceptance of the worship.

To those who argue for veneration rather than worship, the argument is that what is done in these sacrifices is more than veneration (Froise 2005:59). Froise further argues that the "dictionary defines venerate as to pay respect – however sacrificing to the ancestors suggests something stronger than merely paying respect".

Mbiti (1969:59) does concede that households and family groups direct their sacrifices and rituals to the living-dead. He adds that larger communities do so directly to God alone or through national and regional spirits. This shows that the living-dead can receive sacrifices directly and personally.

Adding to the point above, Kiernan (1990:23) asserts that the dead are not only honoured by sacrifice but are also thanked for benefits received and invocations are made to them for future favour. In this case the implication could be that they have the power to dispense certain blessings and respond to prayers. They, according to Magesa (2003:77) are sometimes referred to as 'gods' not the Supreme God, because of their strength and vitality. It is this strength and vitality that enables them to dispense of gifts and blessings and as such qualifies them as direct recipients of sacrifices and offerings.

Ancestors are known to be unreliable at times and rituals can be channelled towards addressing this problem. This is noted by Magesa (1997:49), when he says that ancestors can exhibit evidence of injustice, jealousy or unjustified behaviour. On a similar vein, Kiernan (1990:22) observes that ancestors are "capable of reneging on their responsibilities and of turning against descendants appearing to be capricious and unreliable".

In the cases mentioned above, the responsibility to expostulate, rebuke and reprimand is assumed by man (Magesa 1997:49; Kiernan 1990:23). The very people who conferred the ancestorship on them, hold them responsible for their actions. The same is observed in the case where the living are not fulfilling their responsibility, the ancestors takes it upon them to punish the erring descendants. The communication to reprimand the ancestors is done through a ritual and the attempt to set things right with the ancestors requires a ritual or sacrifice. In all these, the recipients are the ancestors and not the Supreme God.

Ela (2000:23) makes a stronger argument when he asserts that the ancestors represent the symbolic face of the father and receives the sacrifice of atonement. This of course, he receives not to pass it on. The rationale and religious reason for the sacrifice is “recognition of the authority of the ancestors as the one who guarantees the order of the world and judges the moral life from beyond” (Ela 2000:23). It is what the ancestors can do in their personal capacity and not as mediators that qualifies them to receive sacrifices.

4.4.3.3 Ancestors as centre of worship in African religion

It has been shown that ancestors can receive sacrifices in their personal capacity and that they can also act as mediators and pass these to the Supreme Deity, who is the ultimate recipient. A similar issue can be raised: Is worship directed at ancestors or do they act as mediators where worship is directed through them to God?

Mtuze (2003:8), as already noted above, views African spirituality as basically panentheistic and not pantheistic. His argument is that Africans do not “worship certain objects, not even ancestors, but rather recognize the presence of god in certain natural phenomena” (2003:8). However, it has also been shown that it is the perceived function and their ability to help the African to cope with the problems of the environment that ancestors are worshipped (Olowola 1993:45). Metuh (1987:156) makes the following rather pointed argument when he says: “if it is accepted that worship is an expression of one’s submission and dependence on a spiritual being – it is difficult to see why this term should not be applied to the cult given to ancestors”.

It is not the recognition of the presence of God in them but the recognition of their powers to protect their descendants that qualifies ancestors for worship. It is however not clear how God manifests himself in ancestors. It would be very difficult to worship the presence of God in ancestors without worshipping the ancestors.

Kato (1975:34) notes that the Jaba tribe from Western Africa, while accepting the concept of God, His worship is absent. Kato further points out that the Yoruba of Nigeria do not have a clear concept of God nor do they worship him. The same observation is made by Salala (1998:136), that among the Basukuma in Tanzania, there are no shrines devoted to God, neither are there priests set apart for Him.” His conclusion is that the Basukuma do not worship God (1998:137).

Uka (1991:44) concurs with the above observation as he contends that the worship of God seems to be inconclusive and is apparently absent when he says:

One would expect God to be the centre of worship and life of the people. But usually, more attention is paid to the lesser divinities and spirits. The Supreme God usually has no temples, no priests, no organized regular worship or sacrifices.

The point made above is that for one to argue that God is worshipped in African Traditional Religion, one must show how this is done, which rituals are conducted in this worship. If ancestors are venerated, then one must also see the distinction between the ritual for veneration and those for worship.

Sawyerr (1929:6), writing almost 100 years ago wonders if the tribes he observed, except in the case of Akan, do believe in God. The responsibilities of day-to-day matters are the responsibility of ancestors and as such they tend to receive the adoration and worship (1929:6). If one accepts that worship is concerned above all things about day-to-day issues confronting the African, and if it is asserted that this is the domain of ancestors, then it is logical to accept that they would be approached through sacrifices and worship for such services.

It would appear that in areas where divinities play a major role, it is God who receives worship direct through them. Divinities are regarded as direct creation of God. The

situation differs when it comes to the ancestors, since these are the creation man or depend on their descendants for ancestorship. Prayers and sacrifices directed to them are for them as independent entities and they also demand these for their own continued existence. Parrinder (1949:126) observes that the prayers made to the ancestors are not made for the dead and directed to God but that these are prayers to the dead.

While God is recognized and accepted, African religion seems to focus primarily on ancestors. Nürnberger (2007:30,31) argues for a distinction between two spheres, that of “mythological canopy and of existential relevance”. According to Nürnberger ancestors clearly belong to the sphere of “existential relevance”. The main argument for this assertion is that they are known by name, they have lived among their descendants, they are present and are seen even though they are dead. Their interaction with their descendants is not speculative but experiential.

It has been observed that African religion is anthropocentric, all spiritual entities exist for man. It can be said that African spirituality is ancestorcentric. It is not clear when and how God as the Supreme Being is worshipped by Africans. In the absence of formal prayers, priests, shrines and dedicated rituals, it is difficult to sustain the argument that God is the centre of worship in African religion. While there is a belief in God, it is the ancestors that receive much attention. African Christianity must therefore grapple with this dominant belief in ancestors for it to be relevant to Africans.

4.4.3.4 Relationship between ancestors and other divine beings

The relationship between the Supreme God, ancestors and divinities can be depicted by using the following illustrative diagrams, according to Shorter (1975:10,11).

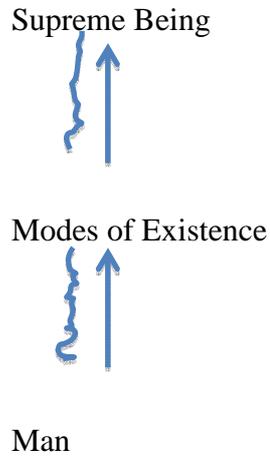


Figure 3 Relative theism

In the above figure, the Supreme Being is worshipped through a variety of spirits and divinities and these are considered as modes of his existence. The straight line represents a direct and formal prayer from man to God but mediated through his modes of existence. The crooked line represents an informal way of approaching the Supreme Being. The diagram shows a co-existence of both formal and informal prayers to the Supreme Being through the Modes of Existence. Divinities or nature gods who were created by God as intermediaries, best represent these modes of existence. This would apply more in some cultures in Western Africa.

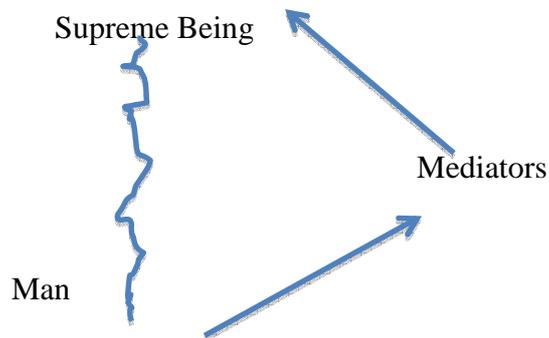


Figure 4 Asymmetrical mediation

In Figure 4, ancestors exist as distinct mediators and the recipients of formal prayer. There is little or no direct formal worship of Supreme Being except general acknowledgement of the existence of God, as represented by the crooked line. This explains further the observation made earlier where the Supreme Being is pictured as one with no priests, no organized worship or even sacrifices (Uka 1991:44).

It would appear that those who approach the ancestors do not see them as counsellors as some have alleged, but as having authority in themselves to grant or to withhold their requests. These as already pointed out by Mtuze (2003) are plenipotentiaries and as such have the authority to act directly and decisively with a degree of finality. There is no court to appeal a 'no' from the ancestors, one does not have access to the Supreme Being for a recourse.

In most African countries, and other Western countries as well, forms of bribery are given to the government representatives and not to the president. Sacrifices and ritual in African religion are directed at those who have the power to act decisively, and these are the ancestors. This would fit more some of the Bantu religions and some cultures in the West African where ancestors are more revered than divinities.

The Bible regards worship of other beings besides God as idolatry. It is wrong to make the assumption that this applies to African Traditional Religion as well. It is not clear whether the worship of ancestors is forbidden in African Traditional Religion. To argue that it is, is tantamount to imposing Christian values on African Traditional Religion.

4.5 Significance of ancestors in the African worldview

It has already been observed in this study that despite the decrease in the number of those who are adherents of African religion, the African worldview has remained intact. The resiliency of the African worldview, as it relates to ancestors, has been the perceived and indispensable role of ancestors. The beneficial role of ancestors represents more than just knowledge but what has been experienced. African religion is an experiential religion and not just academic.

Sawyer (1929) wrote: “The value of religion depends upon the degree to which it satisfies all our needs, emotional, rational, and practical.” If any constructive criticism has to be made to any religion and African religion in particular, then the question of how the religion satisfies the needs of the African becomes poignant. The observation made by Sundermeier (1998:134) is true for all religions when he says: “People yearn for peace and happiness in their belief in ancestors”. The experience of peace and happiness becomes as it were, the litmus test for the belief in ancestors.

The study so far has assumed a phenomenological approach; the question now is whether the African religion meets the existential needs of its adherents. The tenacity and the enduring influence of African worldview may be taken as proof of its lasting benefits even to most of the Africans who have embraced Christianity. Data from the research done by Magesa (2004:79) across three Eastern African countries, namely Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda reveals the following:-

1. People usually take instinctive personal or communal initiatives in addressing an issue at hand and may tackle a problem in ways that may not be sanctioned by the church or even by the people concerned when they are themselves rationally confronted.
2. There is also a case of Christians who call upon their ancestors, mentally or ritually, to intervene in certain difficult circumstances, Where it is proscribed, Christians were reluctant to admit that they occasionally did so, but the research revealed it to be a practice widespread across the Christian spectrum.

The inadequacy and insufficiency of the African worldview may also be exposed by the fact that there are still more Africans who are attracted to Christianity despite its supposedly deficient qualities.

If African religion has indeed fulfilled the deeper yearnings of Africans and delivered the promised peace and happiness, there would be very few if any African Christians. The fact that among African Christians there is an observable lasting influence of the African

worldview may be proof that Christianity has not delivered all that the Africans yearn and hope for.

Chidester (1992:11) lists three specific benefits that belief in ancestors provides for its adherents:

1. It provided an explanatory system that accounts for affliction, illness and misfortune.
2. It provided a symbolic system that supports the authority of elders in the homestead.
3. It identified a spiritual dimension that effectively dissolved death – death was not a barrier between the living and the living dead.

The aforementioned observation sums up the epistemological basis that African religion provides to its adherents. The three dimensions reflected are existential, sociological and eschatological.

4.5.1 Existential significance

It had been noted that African religions, and in particular the belief in ancestors, help to explain life's exigencies. Without the belief in ancestors, Africans would be lost as to how to deal with and also how to avert misfortune, illness and suffering. It has been noted that when a crisis strikes, most Africans resort to their African traditional practices, regardless of their Christian convictions. They may not do this in public or during the day, but when the sun sets their true nature is revealed (Bujo 1992:31).

Ela (1989:31) asks a rather penetrating question when he says "Can we be at peace with our conscience if conversion requires that we live separated from the dead of our families without any possibility of contacting them in the periods of crisis?" One can say that at the time of crisis an African is drawn to that which resides inside his own African personality.

The main thrust in African Traditional Religion is to "ensure harmony between the living and the ancestors (Phillipe (2006). Salvation from all that threatens life becomes the

preoccupation for an African – adhering to ancestral ritual systems is a way of protecting life from evil spirits, harm from witch doctors, and removal of all kinds of evil and calamities (Bujo 1992:27; Van der Walt 2003:73). Life for an African in traditional religions without ancestors is inconceivable.

4.5.2 Sociological significance

The belief in ancestors has serious social implications. Africans are communal beings and existence without the community, especially the family is unthinkable (Van der Walt 2003:136). This is one of the areas that missionaries did not fully appreciate when they sought to convert the Africans. Conversion and discipleship were hard to come by in many missionary fields in South Africa. This was due to the policy that Kiernan (1990:18) refers to as that of “resistance and containment”. This was designed to neutralise the influence of Christianity.

The Nguni tribe in South Africa for the majority, viewed conversion to Christianity as cultural treason and political deflection (Kiernan 1990:18). Two groups came to exist among the Nguni: one was known as *amagqoboka* or school people, referring to Christians, since they also attended the missionary schools. The other group would be known as the *amaqaba* referring to the red traditional ochre which was smeared on their bodies. The two became absolute as if referring to two distinct tribes.

In Zululand, South Africa, it is reported that one ceased to be regarded as a Zulu the moment he or she became a Christian. They were wrenched out of the structure of customary attachments and were counted a loss to their relatives (Kiernan 1990:18). Clearly one was viewed to have died a bad death, which meant that his death would never be mourned nor any funeral rites be accorded him. To be defined outside of one’s family and community was the ultimate punishment that very few could endure. As a result Christianity tended to attract people who were already regarded as the rejects or as Kiernan puts it; the “flotsam and the jetsam” of the community (Kiernan 1990:18). No highly respected person would associate himself with Christianity.

Ela (2000:18) supports the above historical observation and maintains that it still holds true in our times. He argues that “abandonment of belief in ancestors would provoke a widespread social crisis”. He gives a strong warning to those who might contemplate abandoning sacrifices to ancestors to desist since this would “jeopardize the unity of the whole clan.” He concludes by noting that the church would profit by encouraging African Christians to stay in contact with ancestors (2000:26). It is true though that Ela (2000:26) admits that not all is perfect within the ancestral cult, but unfortunately he does not explain or outline its imperfections.

4.5.3 Eschatological significance

Eschatology is not used here in its strict technical definition. It is an umbrella term that denotes how Africans view the end of life and issues dealing with the hereafter. Without the belief in ancestors, death for Africans would be the ultimate end, thereby destroying all that supports the African community.

4.6 Some challenges in ancestor cult

It is clear that ancestor cult continues to be seen as a solution to some of the basic needs of the African. While the attractiveness of ancestors cannot be denied, Christianity has also been seen as offering some solutions that probably could not be found in African Traditional Religion. The question is what compels Africans in African Traditional Religion to see in Christianity a viable alternative?

4.6.1 Capricious nature of ancestors

It has been observed that ancestors are treated with reverence and respect in most African religions. They have the power to bless and the power to curse. Magesa (203:77) made the point that ancestors are often referred to as gods and not to be confused with the supreme God. This designation is due to their strength and vitality. This may also be seen as the rationale for receiving gifts and sacrifices from their descendants. The ancestors are thanked for the benefits received and at times invocations are made for future favour (Kiernan 1990:23).

The disconcerting factor in all this is that the same ancestors can be rebuked, insulted or even threatened (Metuh 1987:156). This is largely due to the fact that ancestors are capable of displaying qualities and “acts of injustice, jealousy or unjustified behaviour.” Actually Kiernan (1990:22) went so far as to observe that they can also turn against their descendants, capriciously and unprovoked. This means that these powerful ancestors can be unreliable and unpredictable.

If these ancestors act as mediators as argued by most African theologians, one wonders what role the supreme God plays in such a situation. Sacrifices and gifts are therefore not used only for protection against evil but also against the capricious and unjust acts of the very ancestors. Christ then can be seen by some African Christians as one who protects even against the capriciousness and cruelty of ancestors.

4.6.2 Ancestors and morality

Metuh (1987:157) observes that “ancestors do not concern themselves with personal moral virtues or with performance of good deeds.” According to Metuh, what is important to ancestors is the “adherence to public norms of social and descent relationship” (1987:157). The issue here is not that wickedness is promoted in ancestor religion but that the focus is on social duties and their performance. Incestuous relationships are condemned but one does not hear much of adultery in general. While women and girls may be expected to live a pure life the same is not encouraged for the males. The Bible is no respecter of persons and condemns evil from the highest to the lowest. This may also make Christianity attractive to African Christians.

4.6.3 Mortuary rites

The living confers ancestorship on the dead, and there are certain rites that must be performed to ascertain one’s ancestorship. Failure to do this may earn the descendants displeasure with the ancestors. Parrinder (1949:126) asserts that “many of the human sacrifices of olden times took place in connection with the funeral rites.” Today these may

be explained but there is no hiding the fact that they did cause suffering and cruelty all to the name of trying to achieve ancestorship (Parrinder 1949:127).

A pastor in Madagascar shared one of the mortuary rites practised in one tribe in the southern part of Madagascar with the researcher. Upon the death of the head of the family all the cattle that he had accumulated during his life are slaughtered and the whole village invited to feast. Nothing is supposed to be left behind and the funeral will only take place after all the beasts have been slaughtered and consumed.

The aim of the living is to have as many cattle as possible before death to ensure a successful ancestorship. This implies that during his life the family does not benefit from the wealth created and also at the passing of the father, all that was is destroyed. Poverty and suffering become the order of life in this culture. What if one does leave any cattle when he dies? It is this uncertainty that may draw many to the Bible, since it prescribes no mortuary rites.

4.6.4 Qualifying for ancestorship

Mortuary rites are performed for those who fulfilled and met certain requirements. It was observed earlier that those who die a bad death, die without having children, and die as a child before marriage, may not qualify for mortuary rites. It can be observed that all these are to a great extent beyond one's domain of choice. Bad death includes death by accident or disease. Accidents are reported daily: what then is the fate of those who are the victims of such, including crime and incurable diseases? How are those who are left behind comforted in the event of such death? How do they continue to live when their relative is deemed unfit to assist them due to the manner of his death?

Those who die young or unmarried cause untold misery and pain to those who remain behind. How do the parents and siblings deal with this death? The mourning in such cases has no proper closure. Those remaining behind may even blame themselves for the passing of their loved one, or it can be viewed as punishment by ancestors meted on them for some wrong behaviour. In some cases this is attributed to evil and sinister forces. That the dead may be a victim is not the main issue, the fact is because of this death he is disqualified for

ancestralship. One also notices the premium placed on having children and the pressure it may put on those who are married. Usually the one who is to blame for these ‘accidents’ is the woman.

In some cultures, especially the Sotho culture in South Africa, initiates who die during initiation are not given a proper burial or even mourned. An uncircumcised boy in the Xhosa tradition is sometimes referred to as a dog (*Inkwenkwe yinja*). His death, while in the process of initiation, can therefore not be mourned since he had not fully attained the status of “human being” (Papu 2003:12). Van der Vliet (1974:230) argues from this point when he says that the death of an initiate is a non-event since the boy can be regarded as dead in any way until “birth” through initiation. One can almost say that the death of an initiate is more like a stillborn.

This happens even today. A friend lost her son and according to the culture, she was not supposed to mourn nor was anyone expected to comfort her. Stories abound that such deaths are viewed as necessary evil since they serve to protect those who remain behind. To protect the lives of the rest of the initiates, which can be up to a 100 in number, a death of one initiate may serve as protection for the rest of the initiates. There is hope for all those who die in Christ, regardless of age or cause of death (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Those who remain behind are comforted in their grief. This can also be an attraction to Christianity.

Christianity appears to give more hope for the living, as they are facing death. It gives comfort to the bereaved, as they have to deal with the loss of the loved one. Death is not the end and life has meaning.

4.7 Ancestors in African Christology

African Christianity worth its salt cannot ignore the role played by ancestors in African Traditional Religion. The question is whether these continue to play some significant role in Christianity. The term ‘ancestor’ has been used by African theologians without a clear definition as to what it means. African traditional religionists spell out clearly who they consider as an ancestor.

Do African theologians work within the traditional religious framework in their understanding of ancestors? It would appear that the ancestors in African Christology are not the same as those found in African Traditional Religion. African Christology affirms the role of ancestors. This perceived role is premised on what the ancestors are and have become in the presence of God.

4.7.1 Importance of ancestors for African Christians

Kalengyo (2009:49) has argued and encouraged the Ganda people to continue their strong belief in ancestors. His argument is that it is impossible for them to disassociate themselves from their traditional roots. Ela (2000:25) has warned those who abandon sacrifices to ancestors as jeopardizing the unity of the clan, risk plunging the whole community in widespread crises. He maintains that the church would profit by encouraging its members to stay in contact with their departed loved ones. Barreto (2000:66) has also argued that a Tswana Christian without ancestors has ceased to be a *MoTswana*.

The main question is how do these ancestors qualify for this role? Is it a role played by any dead person or are there conditions one must meet in order to be an ancestor?

4.7.2 Who are the ancestors in African Christology?

It has been shown that in African Traditional Religion ancestorship is conferred by the living on the dead. This is not the prerogative of the Supreme God. There are specified mortuary rites that must be done for this to take place. Those who fail to observe these mortuary rites risk being on the receiving end of the displeasure of the dead. The living must perform the rites and the dead expect these to be performed. God is not in the picture.

The ancestors argued for in African Christology appear to be different from those found in African Traditional Religion. The following are some of the conditions that one must meet to be an ancestor in African Christology:

4.7.2.1 Live an exemplary life

According to Magesa, as observed and reflected in the previous chapter, ancestors are those who have excelled and have lived an exemplary life. They are thus included in the multitude found in Revelation 7:9. Accordingly, it is Christ who qualifies them as ancestors and not their relatives. While a well-lived life is one of the conditions in becoming an ancestor, it alone does not qualify one to be an ancestor. Mortuary rites must be performed, depending on the nature of death and the age at death. The implication is that one who is viewed as an ancestor in African Christianity may not be one in African Traditional Religion.

It has also been shown that ancestors in African Traditional Religion live and act benevolently toward their descendants. They benefit the community and their families. Those reflected in Revelation 7:9 are not in any way linked to their descendants. They are praising God as the context shows and are in the presence of God. They are also said to have come out of great tribulation, which implies also how they died. These would not necessarily be viewed as ancestors in African Traditional Religion. Besides, those alive did not have any role in them being made ancestors.

4.7.2.2 The act of Christ

Ancestors must undergo a post-mortem conversion for them to function as ancestors in African Christology. This is the basis for universalism in African Christology. They must become Christians or must have been Christians at the time of death. Kalengyo (2009:49) sees Hebrews 12:1 as depicting the role of ancestors in the lives of the living. The text found in 1 Peter 3:19 is used by Ela (2000:30) as proof that ancestors become Christians through Christ's action.

Regardless of the exegesis of these texts, the witnesses in Hebrews 12:1, all went through suffering and premature death according to Hebrews 11. It is not clear whether this is what all African ancestors have experienced before their death. In any case, being maimed, decapitated, or burnt as reflected in Hebrews 11, may serve as a disqualification for ancestorship. The witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 are for the benefit of all Christians as the

write of Hebrews indicate. Ancestors in African Traditional Religion act on behalf of their families, and clan.

The act of Christ reflected in 1 Peter 3:19 was recorded at least 2 000 years ago. The main argument in favour of universalism is that these ancestors lived at a time when the gospel had not yet been preached in Africa. It should be noted that in African Traditional Religion, as already observed, ancestors are those who are still remembered and known by their descendants or at least some of the descendants. It seems to have escaped most of the African theologians that ancestors include the elderly who may have passed away few weeks or years ago.

If it is God who qualifies African ancestors, then it has not been shown why God would need ancestors. The argument is that African Christians need their ancestors. African Christianity has somehow qualified some who are not regarded as ancestors as true African ancestors and have even incorporated these into Christianity. The push towards universalism qualifies all the dead in African Traditional Religion as ancestors, a view which is not supported in African Christianity. This results in an African Christology that is not African.

This understanding has two-fold implications – one is that the person who has died may have had enough opportunity to respond to the gospel but exercised his or her choice and refused to accept the gospel. To seek to convert these dead people posthumously, appears to be unethical as this is done against their wish and desire. The second is that those who have died may have been opposed to the cult of ancestors. These may include the very African theologians who are opposed to ancestral ascendancy, such as Kato and others. Assigning ancestral roles to such individuals goes against their belief and may also be deemed as unethical.

4.8 Conclusion

The benevolent role of ancestors in African Traditional Religion as seen by some African theologians provides a framework for their incorporation into African Christology. This represents the benefits Africans have experienced in their communion with the dead. This

is done with little or no relevant scriptural support. Christology is expected to make room for ancestors without denying the power and the relevancy of Christ.

On the other hand, African anthropology gives structure to the ontological existence of ancestors and the belief in life after death. The dead in African Traditional Religion are not imagined, they are alleged to be seen in dreams and around the household. It is also clear that African anthropology is essentially not different from Christian anthropology. The dualistic understanding of human nature is common between the two religions. This dualist anthropology creates a context for the belief in the existence of ancestors. However, the Christocentric understanding of the role of the dead in Christianity conflicts with the anthropocentric understanding of ancestors in African Traditional Religion.

In missionary Christianity the dead are seen as enjoying the presence of God with no regard to their descendants. This individualistic view is opposed to a communalistic view espoused by Africans. African Christology, influenced by the African worldview, perceives ancestors as existing and living for their community and family members.

It has also been shown that those who are regarded as ancestors in African Christology are not necessarily regarded as such in African Traditional Religion. While their role is connected to the African worldview, their existence is foreign to African Traditional Religion. These have turned out not to be African ancestors. If African Traditional Religion has not sanctioned these persons as ancestors, can it be said that scriptures have qualified these as ancestors? The next chapter examines and evaluates the biblical support for the ontology of ancestors.

CHAPTER 5

AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The research has shown so far that there are two fundamental issues that make ancestors attractive to African Christology. The first is the traditional function that ancestors are perceived to have fulfilled in the African religion. The second is the ontological existence and existential presence of ancestors. Those opposed to ancestor Christology argue on the basis of their existential irrelevance and not on their continued presence, albeit as disembodied souls. The belief in ancestral ascendancy in African Christology is influenced by the centrality of ancestors in African religion and the doctrine of the intermediate state in missionary Christianity.

African Traditional Religion has been shown to be an experiential religion, a religion that takes the needs of its adherents seriously. The same needs have been downplayed in missionary Christianity, resulting in dual religious allegiance among African Christians. Secondly, African Traditional Religion moves by 'sight and not by faith'. The dead in African Traditional Religion are not imaginary; they are known, they appear to the living and enter into communion with them. The two issues facing African Christology is what to do with Christ and secondly what to do with ancestors.

The growing belief in the uniqueness and self-sufficiency of ancestors in African Christology, as observed by Ezigbo (2010:34), makes Christ irrelevant. The argument is that while it can be argued on paper that both ancestors and Christ are relevant to African Christology, the truth of the matter is that "one cannot worship two masters." An authentic African Christology must therefore show the relevance of Christ in meeting the needs of the African within the context of the non-existence of ancestors.

The main objective is to evaluate both the ontology of ancestors and communion with the dead in African Christology. A proper view of the deceased will go a long way to reinforce in rooting African Christology on the Scriptures.

5.1 Communion with the dead

It is tempting to use the observable and the perceived as the basis of one's beliefs. Truth about beliefs must be amenable to criticism, scrutiny and radical reflection. Ngong (2010:21) is correct in his observation that:

In order to better engage the Christian faith and effectively address some of the difficult issues the continent is experiencing, Christians need to be encouraged to think beyond the familiar framework... The work of theology is not simply to embrace what people believe but also, and more especially, to critically reflect on what people believe.

In keeping with the above observation, this section seeks to scrutinize what lies close to the heart of Africans: the communion with the dead. It should be noted, as already argued in the Chapter 4 that African Traditional Religion does not only argue for the belief in the intermediate state after death but also for the involvement of the dead in the affairs of the living. Those who once lived do not only populate the intermediate state but are passionately involved in the lives of their descendants. The first section will consequently answer the following questions:

1. What is the biblical view with regards to communion with the dead
2. What are the implications for the continued interaction of the dead with the living?
3. What is the biblical pastoral guidance for the living?
4. What is African Christology without ancestral ascendancy?

There are at least three foundational biblical texts upon which the arguments against communion with the dead are based. These are found in the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Isaiah. The intolerant attitude displayed against those who are regarded as mediums between the living and the dead is premised on these three texts.

5.1.1 Deuteronomy 18:9-22

This pericope, as with the rest of the book, is given to Israel on the borders of Canaan as the last instruction before they take possession of the new land. Moses warns Israel not to

follow the “abominations” of the nations that were dispossessed before them (vs. 9). This is followed by a list of these abominations. Included in the list are those who are mediums, spiritists, and those who call up the dead. The observation by Brueggemann (2001:194) is that:

These “abominations” are based on assumptions that cut the covenantal nerve of Yahwism and produce a society of apathy and manipulation in which human choice, human freedom, and human responsibility are rendered null and void.

The interest is of course in knowing the future, but as Brueggemann again argues “whoever can control the future will have greater power in the present” (2001:192). These abominations would be a snare to Israel to lead her to forget God and the gods who appear to have knowledge about the future.

It would appear that this is not the list of professionals but one of abominations. The implication is that these abominations could be attached to one or more of the ‘professions’ listed. The medium that Saul consulted in 1 Samuel 28 had the ability to call up the dead – “Whom shall I bring up for you? was the question she raised. These abominations are in one way or another linked to the dead.

Again the point is made that these nations were driven for practicing these abominations (vs. 12-14). Israel is exhorted to be blameless and not to listen to soothsayers and diviners because the “Lord your God has not appointed such for you”. The mediums and spiritists were not God’s instruments and as such were not to be listened to by Israel. Kalland (1992:120) is correct in his observation that:

Not only adherence to the false gods of Canaan was proscribed, but also the means by which the Canaanites attempted to communicate with them. Both the objects and the methods of Canaanite religious life were to be abhorred totally and rejected completely.

The common punishment for both the mediums and those who listen to them was to be cut off or stoned to death, as mentioned earlier.

While the mediums and spiritists were clearly not appointed by God – God promised Israel to raise a prophet like Moses. The implication is that they had Moses to listen to, and not mediums. God would hold those who do not hear what God communicates through the prophets responsible (vs. 19). It should be noted that a ‘prophet like Moses’, while it included all prophets after Moses, pointed to Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22-25). This is confirmed explicitly in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 1:1) “God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these days spoken to us by His Son” Jesus is therefore not the only one whom God used to speak to His people but He is the prophet par excellence.

The prophets were exclusively employed by God and were not chosen by Israel; they represented God to man and were in a way his ‘mouthpiece’. Commenting about the role of the prophets Easton (1893) says:

The “prophet” proclaimed the message given to him, as the “seer” beheld the vision of God. (See Num. 12:6, 8.) Thus a prophet was a spokesman for God; he spake in God’s name and by his authority (Ex. 7:1). He is the mouth by which God speaks to men (Jer. 1:9; Isa. 51:16), and hence what the prophet says is not of man but of God (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; comp. Heb. 3:7; Acts 4:25; 28:25).

There is also a warning given against false prophets who do not speak what God has not commanded – such prophets will suffer the same fate as the mediums and spiritists (vs. 20). Easton (1893) observes that “in Josh. 13:22 Balaam is called (Heb.) a *kosem* “diviner,” a word used only of a false prophet”. Diviners were not appointed by God and therefore fell under the category of false prophets.

It was the responsibility of Israel to test those who claim to be prophets (vs. 22). Those whose prophecy does not come to pass were to be regarded as false prophets and are not instruments of God. While the injunction was that no one should be a medium or diviner, Israel has the responsibility of not listening to any who might be called a medium. The same applies to prophets, false prophets would be killed but if for any reason they are not killed, Israel was not to fear them or listen to them, for God did not send them.

God also appointed priests for His people. In Deuteronomy 20:1-4 the statement is made that during times of war the priests would serve to bring courage and confidence among God's people. It should be noted that priests (*hiereus* in Greek) served in the temple to aid people in worship. Carpenter and Comfort (2000) comment that "the pagan temples had their priests, and God's temple in Jerusalem had its priests".

The Hebrew word *kohen* means one who offers sacrifices. As such "priests represented the people before God, and offered the various sacrifices prescribed by the law" (Easton 1893). One also notices an evolution of priesthood in the Bible, from every man being his own priest to heads of the family, to descendants of Aaron.

Easton (1893) comments that "The priestly function was typical". He continues that "The priests all prefigured the great Priest who offered "one sacrifice for sins" "once for all" (Heb. 10:10, 12)". Jesus is the Priest par excellence and in a more preeminent way. Paul says He is the only mediator between man and God (1 Tim. 2:5). In contrast to prophets, priests represented people to God; they served as mediators, the 'go between'.

A profound distinction between the diviners, mediums and spiritists was access to God. Whereas the other agents called up the dead, who would in turn communicate the message from God, the prophets and the priests who were living had direct access to God. There was no need of calling up the dead prophets or priests on behalf of the living. The living Israel consulted a living prophet or priest who in turn communicated the direct message from God or to God.

Charles Salala (1998:149) makes the following deductions from Deuteronomy 18:9-22: "Conferring with agents other than those ordained by God Himself is to disobey Him." Secondly "To consult ancestral spirits for the purpose of seeking to know the future and other unclear issues is to act against God's Word". He concludes by noting that ancestral spirits have no place in Christian faith they are unordained agents and their message should not be heeded or sought by those who trust in the Lord" (1998:149).

5.1.2 Leviticus 19:26, 31

In the book of Leviticus God, through Moses, gives a list of regulations and laws to the people of Israel. This list indicates a clear prohibition against communion with the dead. In chapter 19:26 a clear directive against the practice of divination and soothsaying is given. In verse 31 the nation is warned not to “regard [to] mediums and familiar spirits and not seek after them”. The prohibition is not just against those who are mediums but also against those who consult them with such powers.

In chapter 20:27 a more severe deterrent is given against those who are mediums and who have familiar spirits. The injunction is that they be put to death by stoning. The punishment was not only for those who practiced such but also those who consulted those with familiar spirits, “they were to be cut off from among God’s people” (18:29; 20:5).

It is not difficult to see why God prohibited Israel from these practices. God’s people were about to inherit and occupy Canaan, the promised land, and as such God wanted Israel to be separate from the people they were to dispossess (Lev. 20:24). God expected and required Israel to be holy, which is what God was (Lev. 19:1).

Another reason given for this prohibition is that these practices defile the land and those who were in Canaan before Israel were guilty of defiling the land (Lev. 18:27). The land, due to it being defiled and contaminated “vomited those who were before Israel”, the previous occupants. It was not only the land that was defiled but the people practicing these abominations are said to have been defiled as well. It would seem that the land was defiled by the defilement emanating from its occupants. The Bible gives this as the reason God disposed the Canaanites in favour of Israel. The same fate would be theirs if they were to be found guilty of the same abominations.

It should also be noted that these laws were not only given to Israel as God’s people. It has already been shown that these nations were under the same obligation hence the punishment of dispossession. God makes it abundantly clear that even the sojourners, the strangers within the confines of Israel, are expected to abide by these rules (20:2). These

prohibitions were not culture or religion specific but were universal. God as the creator of all expected all to abide by these rules.

The argument that these practices must find space and be accommodated in African Christian has no scriptural basis. Africans may be deemed as strangers to Christian faith but they are not permitted to continue with the practices that are prohibited by God for His people.

Afeke and Verster (2004:55), basing their argument on Leviticus 19:26 and 20:6, 27, argue that “If ancestors have become spirits then dealing with them falls in the category of familiar spirits.

5.1.3 Isaiah 8:19,20

The book of Isaiah, written hundreds of years after the settlement in Canaan, carries the same warning found in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy. It would appear that the lure and the attraction to Canaanite religion were still a lingering threat for Israel. The mediums and related practices were still a force to be reckoned with, as is clear from the following text: “And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter.’ Should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?”

The injunction is not against ‘seeking’ but who is being sought or consulted. Isaiah seems to recognise the fact that people at some stage will need guidance, but the issue was who qualifies to give this needed guidance. Gehman (1989:171) correctly argues that the “concept of ‘darash’ as seen in this text, which in Hebrew means to consult, is abused when it is not directed at God but to spirits and mediums”. This can be seen as lack of trust in God and as such a form of idolatry. Necromancy which is the practice of communicating with the dead is forbidden in the Bible as so the practice of seeking, loving and serving the ancestors opens one to syncretism (Gehman 1989:171).

The principal objection from this illegitimate consultation is that the dead cannot be consulted on behalf of the living (vs. 19). Here is a contrast between the living and the

dead. It would appear that the mediums and wizards seek guidance from the dead. This is in line with what is reflected in Deuteronomy 18 of these instruments calling up the dead. The living is to consult their God and not their dead through mediums. It is somehow clear why these agents were outlawed – they seem to compete with God creating a context of idolatry.

5.2 Intolerant attitude against mediums

Already in Leviticus and Deuteronomy capital punishment was decreed on the agents that God did not appoint and on those who consulted such. In 1 Samuel 28:3 we find the first record of the implementation of Leviticus 18:29; 20:5. Samuel had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land. One of the mediums who had remained in hiding also confirms that Saul had “cut off” all the mediums from the land.

This cutting off or putting out, implies annihilation, according to the medium that was consulted by Saul, It seems that the main cause of this intolerance was that these mediums claimed to be able to bring up the dead, or call upon the dead as seen already in Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 8. It is not clear at this moment why consulting the dead was prohibited. What was essentially wrong in consulting the dead on behalf of the living?

5.2.1 Why the dead cannot communicate

Looking closely at the Bible it appears that the dead are not forbidden from communicating with the living, but it is the living that are forbidden from consulting those who bring up the dead. The evidence gleaned from the Bible is that the dead are not able to communicate because they are not living; they are dead and as such cannot communicate with the living. The temptation to consult the dead is with the living, hence the instruction to the living. One of the key texts that underlies the inability of the dead to have any communion with the living is found in Ecclesiastes 9:5,6:

For the living know that they will die but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and

their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in everything done under the sun.

The knowledge of the living is contrasted with the dead – while the living know they will die, the dead do not know that they are dead. Whatever feeling they had before they died perishes with them at the point of death. They have no share in everything done under the sun. The point is reflected further in Job 14:21 “His sons come to honour, and he does not know it. They are brought low, and he does not perceive it. Tepker (1964:20) is correct in adumbrating the point that in the “state of death man can no longer take part in the activities of this present world”.

The Psalmist (Ps 146:3, 4) warns against putting trust on the “son of man in whom there is no help”. This is premised on the fact that when he dies his plans perish. It therefore appears convincing that anyone who claims to have the power to call up the dead to give guidance to the living is misguided. This is so because the dead do not know; their love and hatred is perished; they do not know what happens to their own family; they do not perceive; their plans have perished.

The Bible encourages children to honour their parents (Ex. 20:12) but this is not extended to honouring the dead parents. Patriarchs in the Old Testament were known for their faith but none of their descendants ever approached them as dead ancestors for help or counsel. Communion with the dead appears to be foreign in the Old Testament, especially among the Israelites. Communion with the dead was part of the religion that Israel was forbidden from following.

5.2.2 Scriptural cases of communion with the dead

If the Bible forbids communion with the dead, are there occasions where this was allowed on some exceptional theological ground? There are at least three texts in the Bible that can somehow be seen to imply communion with the dead. These texts are 1 Samuel 28, Matthew 17:3 and Luke 16. Since 1 Samuel exhibits both communion with the dead and ontological issues, it will be examined later in the chapter.

5.2.2.1 Matthew 17:3

This is the first record in the Bible where the dead are seen communicating with the living. Does this open the way for ancestors in African Christology? Moses and Elijah, who lived during the Old Testament times, appear in the New Testament and are seen to be speaking to Jesus. This has been used also as evidence that the dead can speak to the living and actively participate in the affairs of this world. Waters (2012:292) argues that the appearance of Moses and Elijah and their conversation with Jesus, as seen in Luke 9:31, “demonstrates that conscious existence follows death”.

Kunhiyop (2012:295) sees in the text also a basis for his argument that the dead are alive somehow and are able to communicate with the living. It is not just their appearance but the fact that they had communion with the living that creates interest in the story. If this is true, then Christ “sought the dead on behalf of the living”; that the living are interested in the activities of this life. In the story there is no medium to bring up the appearance of the dead but a clear indication of the dead communicating with the living is presented. The question is whether Moses and Elijah were dead.

In 2 Kings 2:11 the story of how Elijah was taken up to heaven by a whirlwind is narrated. There is no record of the death of Elijah in the Bible. His appearance on Mount Transfiguration is not a proof that he was dead. In the case of Elijah there is no evidence of the dead speaking since there is no record of Elijah dying. What can be said of Moses?

The death of Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:7 and he was 120 years old when he died. Moses appears again in the New Testament having a conversation with Jesus – is this a dead man talking? Jude 9 seems to indicate a wrestling for the body of Moses. Commentators are not in agreement as to what this was all about. It is possible that the event had to do with the somatic resurrection of Moses. It would not make sense for Satan to fight over a dead body. It is likely that this was a dispute on the personal resurrection of Moses. The basis for this dispute is possibly the fact that Moses sinned by beating the rock and ended up disqualified for entrance into Canaan. The special and personal bodily resurrection would qualify Moses for entrance into heaven, hence the dispute.

There are therefore recorded events around Moses in the Bible; the death and burial of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:5,6; the appearance of Moses with Elijah in Matthew 17:3 and in between these two events there is a record of the dispute about the body of Moses in Jude 9. The appearance of Elijah has an historical connection; he was taken to heaven – but what about Moses? The devil, who is said to have been rebuked, could not lay a claim to the body of Moses and his appearance with Elijah was proof of that.

The appearance of Moses with Elijah who did not die could be seen as evidence that Moses was alive as he had been brought back to life. Since Elijah did not appear as a disembodied soul, it can be deduced that Moses was also not a disembodied soul, but appeared as corporeal. Both were not disembodied spirits or souls. The body dispute resulted in the bodily resurrection of Moses who appeared in bodily form, just as Elijah did. The communication between Moses and Elijah and Christ was one that took place among the living, who were obviously no longer living in the world.

5.2.2.2 Luke 16:23

The text has been used to prove that the dead who were unrighteous go to hell and are tormented and those who were righteous go to heaven. This line of argument is dealt with later, but the focus at the moment is whether dead people can speak and interact with the living. The conversation in the story is between Abraham and Lazarus who are both not in this world according to the parable. Whether this parable is a reflection of reality as many parables do, or it seeks to show an objective lesson, is argued later.

What is clear in the parable is that the dead Lazarus was not allowed to go back to warn his five living brothers. If there was any speaking at all it was between the dead Abraham and the dead Lazarus. The talk was not between the dead and the living. The Bible seems to be clear that people should not seek the dead on behalf of the living.

Froise (2005:62) uses rather strong language as he denounces those who claim that the New Testament supports the idea of contact with the ancestors. He categorically condemns Mbiti, for instance, as not only “misinterpreting scriptures but defying it”. He argues that this is in direct violation of Scriptures that specifically denounce this practice as seen in

Deuteronomy 18:10-12. Ancestors can only have room in African Christology if such texts as Deuteronomy 18 are reinterpreted.

5.3 Christological pitfalls in communing with the dead

The Bible appears to forbid communion with the dead. What are the theological pitfalls in communing with the dead? The focus is on at least two aspects, namely idolatry and trust in God.

5.3.1 Idolatry

Morreal (1980:31) is correct in his observation that if persons do not continue to exist after death, then praying to them is unnecessary. This can also be viewed as disobedience since it is contrary to what the Bible affirms. The rituals that are based on this perceived reality lose their meaning and relevance and any view that seeks to promote the ascendancy of ancestors can be shown to be unbiblical.

Afeke and Verster (2004:55) further argue that “if ancestors are to function as intermediaries in that they receive prayers, libation, then dealing with them becomes idolatry as they take the place of Christ who is the only mediator between God and man.” Afeke and Verster observe that even Paul spoke of the unknown God. He never promoted the worship of these gods, but pointed to the only and true God (2004:55). Ancestors therefore become idols and the creation of man.

It has been shown that the Bible is not only opposed to the idols or false gods, but judges the means employed to communicate with them as abominations. Incorporating the dead in African Christology is tantamount to using the means that God’s word declares as abomination to worship the very God. This is to fail to make a distinction between the true God and the false god. It assumes that the false god has more authority to dictate how God should be approached than God himself. Worshippers do not have a ‘democratic right’ to vote for members of their choice in God’s Christological government. To impose such, especially when they have been discredited, is to undermine God’s authority and is a sign of disobedience.

In Deuteronomy 12:2-5, the Israelites are instructed to destroy the places where idolatry took place, the altars upon which offerings were made and the false gods that were worshipped. The reason given for this destruction is found in vs. 4 “You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things”. Deere (1985:283,84) argues that “By destroying these cultic objects and centers the Israelites could express their allegiance to Him and that they did not believe in the existence of the Canaanite deities”. Israelites were not only forbidden from worshipping the idols but also “to worship in the impure superstitious manner of the heathen” (Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown 1997:129), and they were forbidden from “following the pagan means of worship” (Barry, Heiser, Curtis, Mangum & Whitehead, 2012). The role played by ancestors in African Traditional Religion is clear, but to argue for the same in Christianity is to make the Bible a servant to African Traditional Religion.

5.3.2 Trust in God

It has already been shown that the mediums and the spiritists fell under the category of all that had to be destroyed. So not only the place where they worshipped or the altar where the offerings were made were destroyed. Even the “means by which the Canaanites attempted to communicate with their gods” had to be destroyed (Kalland 1992:120). It should also be noted that these were integral elements of the Canaanite religion.

Psalms 115:1-18 addresses the foolishness of worshipping idols. The point the Psalmist makes is that these idols are not only incompetent but are impotent, they are useless. They have eyes, but cannot see, mouths but can speak, feet but cannot walk, they cannot help those who come to them. He then encourages Israel to “Trust in the Lord who is their help and shield” (vs. 11).

It has already been shown that the dead cannot speak; they cannot be involved in the affairs of the living. The dead cannot even worship and praise God (Ps. 115:17). Isaiah 8:19 has warned against consulting the dead on behalf of the living; this is futility. The true worshippers of God are encouraged to seek the Lord and not the dead. In a similar fashion, Africans who argue for incorporation of ancestors in Christology are compelled to give

them life, eyes, mouth, and ears. In reality this represents our product and hence an idol that cannot help us.

Seeking help from the dead is a manifestation of lack of trust in God, as the Psalmist indicates. Contacting the dead through mediums and spiritists shows a lack of trust in God. Seeking communion with the dead and worshipping idols are parts of the same system that is opposed to the only true God.

African theologians have argued that it is impossible for Africans to be separated from their dead loved ones (Kalengyo 2009:49). African Christians are encouraged to stay in contact with their ancestors. One's identity is said to be destroyed if one abandons the ancestral cult (Barreto 2000:66). Widespread social crises are predicted to those who abandon the cult (Ela p, 25). They are asserting that Africans need ancestors just as much as they need Jesus. It should be noted that these theologians are not opposed to Jesus; these are Christian theologians. This is a promotion of syncretism with the admission that one cannot survive without ancestors nor can one survive without Christ, yet the two are opposed.

It has been shown that God expected not only Israel but also the strangers and foreigners within Israel not to have relations with those practicing abominations. Judging from the history of Israel, the gods of the Canaanites and their system of worship was a snare to them. They found it difficult if not impossible at times not to be part of this false worship. It is within this context that Psalm 115 and Isaiah 8 denounce those who trust in idols and the dead. Refusing to heed God's instruction in such matters is a sign of deeply embedded syncretism and idolatry manifesting itself in a lack of trust. If Christ is sufficient then there is no need for other entities to supplement or augment His functions.

5.4 Dilemma for African Christology

It has been shown that ancestors in the African worldview are regarded as the living-dead. This is so because of the belief that death is not the cessation of life. While the living-dead have departed and exist in another form, they still remain part of the families but do not stay with them. Ancestors, as shown in the previous chapter, are not just alive they are in

constant communion with their descendants. Communion with ancestors includes communication (Gehman 1999:44). The biblical prohibition against any form of communion with ancestors poses some serious dilemma for African Christology.

5.4.1 Ancestral rituals have no basis

The communication with ancestors is mediated through specified and acceptable rituals. These rituals are accompanied by “appropriate propitiatory addresses or prayers”, as previously noted by Mtuze (2003:48). African theologians who see continuity between African Traditional Religions and African Christology also argue for the maintenance of some rituals. This is done to enhance effective communication between those alive and the living dead. It was brought to view earlier in this study that theologians, such as Ela (2000:18, 19) and many others believe that one’s life in Jesus does not preclude maintaining a relationship with ancestors. Ela (2000:19) encourages the continuation of rituals and sacrifices and argues that these are not a “religious act but a form of symbolic experience”.

An observation by Gilbert (2014:54) that some people deal with their existential crises by performing specific rituals is true for Africans. However, the simple question, which, according to Gilbert (2014:54) requires a “yes” or “no”, is whether “there is any magical reality underlying magical occult practices.” It is now clear that these “symbolic experiences”, as argued by Ela, have no scriptural support and are regarded as abominations in the Bible.

5.4.2 Divination prohibited

Divination is practiced in African Traditional Religion as a process by which the will of the ancestors can be known and communicated to the descendants. Accordingly, some like Machoko (2010), have pointed out that God communicates His will through ancestors and ancestors would in turn communicate the same to the diviners who would pass it to their descendants. African theologians supported also by Western anthropologists and missionaries seem to encourage divination within African Christology.

Kirby (1992:326) was earlier quoted as arguing that the lesser spirits in African cultures should not be denied, but God's supremacy over all spiritual agents must be acknowledged. The authoritative text used to bolster these arguments is not the Bible but African culture. Obeng (1997:17) amongst others, has been noted as arguing for a re-engineering of biblical hermeneutics allowing the African culture to determine the meaning of the text. Africans are therefore encouraged to use culture as a prism to re-read the Bible. The voice of the Bible about the relationship between the dead and the living is muted.

Habtu (2006:826), an Eritrean scholar, seems to grasp the profound implication of the non-involvement of the dead in the lives of the living especially in the African context. Those holding a traditional African worldview, he comments, would agree that death is the worst thing that can happen to a person, as reflected in Ecclesiastes 9:4-6. His insightful observation is that the same Africans would be shocked by the statement in Ecclesiastes 9:5,6. He notes:

Rather than joining the ancestors ('the living dead') at death and continuing to be part of the community, the dead no longer have any participation in the life they have left... It is important to note that the Teacher is not denying that there is life after death; rather he is asserting that death ends all relationship with the present world.

It should, however, be emphasised that while those holding an African traditional worldview would be shocked. African Christology faces a serious dilemma. The teachings of the Bible are opposed by arguing for the incorporation of diviners and rituals that honour the dead. The dead, as has already been shown, can neither have communion with the living nor with God. Any mediatory function that they are supposed to play becomes impossible.

God has appointed legitimate agents as His channels and instruments in the communication of His will. The prophets, culminating with Jesus, are the channels God used to communicate His will to His people (Heb. 1:1). The priests, who in their role represented God to the people and played a mediatory function, did so not as dead but as living agents.

Christ, the preeminent priest, continues the mission as the resurrected Lord who once was dead but is now alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18).

5.4.3 Christ, mediator not ancestor

Afeke and Verster (2004:56,57) argue that as far as Paul's theology is concerned and with his strong emphasis on Christ's mediation and Lordship, "it is not possible to allow for any ancestor veneration". In their view ancestors are not "mediators and cannot influence lives of people on earth other than by the example of their faith".

Gilbert (2014:54) argues further that "if there is an authoritative text that eliminates the cosmic space necessary to support this magical reality" then the people would be compelled to "acquire a new horizon to negotiate" their existential crisis. If it is true that there can be no communion between ancestors and the living, then the whole argument for incorporating the ancestral rituals into the church is not sustainable. This leaves the Africans with a new and biblical way of solving any crises that threaten their existence, instead of resorting to African rituals.

The Bible presents Christ as the only mediator and not as one of the ancestors. Christ died and rose again, He is not the living-dead, not existing as disembodied soul in an intermediate state. He is presented as "sitting at the right hand of God and interceding" for those who believe in Him (Rom. 8). He may fulfil the role the ancestors are alleged to have played, but He is not one of them and cannot be incorporated into their hierarchy.

5.5 Doctrine of the intermediate state

What is Christian in African Christology is the belief in the afterlife and that death is not the cessation of life. The arguments for the accommodation and integration of Christ into the apex of the hierarchy of African ancestorhood (Machoko 2010:17), can only be sustained if it can be shown that ancestors do indeed exist in whatever form. The title given to Christ as "proto-ancestor" (Bujo 1992:121), and "exemplar ancestor" (Kabasélé 1991:124) can only be relevant if an ontological existence of ancestors can be shown.

The belief in the doctrine of the intermediate state appears to give African theologians legitimate reasons for incorporating ancestors into African Christology.

The biblical evidence for the doctrine of the intermediate state falls into two basic categories as observed by Edgar (2002:29). The first is the “general evidence for a dualist anthropology”. The second category is the “alleged biblical evidence for an intermediate state”.

This section seeks to evaluate the belief in the existence of the intermediate state and the body-soul dualism. There are two fundamental pillars that support the doctrine of the intermediate state. The first is the general evidence for dualist anthropology (Edgar 2002:29). There are biblical texts that are interpreted as supporting a dualist understanding of human nature. The second pillar is the “alleged biblical evidence of an intermediate state” (Edgar 2002:29). Biblical passages are given as evidence for the belief in the existence of the intermediate state.

5.5.1 Biblical evidence for monist anthropology

The doctrinal status afforded to the intermediate state is premised on the assumption that man has a soul that remains conscious after death (Murphy 2013:34). Rodney Clapp, a former editor for *Christianity Today*, refers to this as a standard view of life (Clapp 2012:45). The view is that the disembodied soul upon death goes either to heaven or to hell. He maintains that this body-soul dualism did not always fit easily with the Old Testament (Clapp 2012:45). He further notes that a reappraisal of the New Testament with “a keener eye to its Hebraic roots” have challenged this standard view of life. The “new view” does not focus on disembodied souls who are supposed to exist in the intermediate state but focuses on the resurrection of the dead.

It is this dualistic understanding of the nature of man that is used to support the doctrine of the intermediate state. Green (2010:3), quoting Wright, says:

We have been buying our mental furniture for so long in Plato's factory that we have come to take for granted a basic ontological contrast between

‘spirit’ in the sense of something immaterial and ‘matter’ in the sense of something material, solid and physical.

Despite its longevity in theological circles the body-soul dualism does not enjoy the biblical support it purports to have. If this is true, the question might be raised as to why Christians have maintained the belief in this dualism for centuries (Murphy 2013:33). One factor could be the influence Platonism had on the early Christianity. This is what Schroer and Staubli (2014:12) refer to as “a speculatively metaphysical, dualistic concept”.

The other factor raised by Murphy (2013:33) is failure to make a distinction between “partitive” and “aspective” accounts of human nature. In partitive accounts, the part is seen as an ontological entity while in the aspective accounts, each part stands “for the whole person” (2013:33). It is this dualistic interpretation that is projected into the Biblical text. This tendency is examined fully from the biblical texts often given as evidence for body-soul dualism.

5.5.2 Dualism in Old Testament

While much has been written on the body-soul dualism from the New Testament perspective, there are some scholars who have ventured into the Old Testament in search of evidence for dualism. The following three texts seem to appear in most literature.

5.5.2.1 Ecclesiastes 12:7

The word used for ‘spirit’ in this text is ‘ruach’ and Tepker (1964:18) argues that this usage may mean that it is not the entire man that descends into the dust, decomposes and sees corruption. Tepker thinks that the text could probably be linked to the story of the creation (1964:17). The separation that occurs takes place at death. Kunhiyop (2012:215) sees the text as referring to the physical death which does not affect the soul.

5.5.2.2 Genesis 35:18

The text mentions the “departing of the soul” of Rachel which led to her death. The New King James Version of the Bible (NKJV) has in parenthesis (for she died) referring to the departing of her soul. A dualistic anthropological twist is applied to the interpretation of

this text as the soul is seen as an ontological entity capable of living apart from the body. Linking this text with 1 Kings 17:21, Tepker (1964:17) observes “Thus death results when the nephesh departs from the body, and a body revives when the nephesh reenters”.

5.5.2.3 1 Kings 17:21

The text is taken from the narrative of Elijah bringing the widow’s son back to life. Elijah’s prayer is for her soul to come back to the boy and the report says “the soul of the boy came back”.

5.5.2.3.1 Biblical meaning of ‘nephesh/ruach’

Since the three texts above argue from the Hebrew usage of *nephesh* and *ruach* to show the dualistic understanding of the text, a background study to these words gives insight.

5.5.2.3.2 Man not possessing a soul but a living soul

The argument has been raised from Ecclesiastes 12:7 that the spirit that departs and returns to God is an ontological entity capable of feelings. The text, as already noted, can easily be linked to the story of the creation. According to Genesis 2:7, Adam becomes a living being after God had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It is the departure of this life that renders man dead in Ecclesiastes 12:7. It would appear that Ecclesiastes 12:7 is a reversal of the creation event.

Man becomes a “living *nepes*”, “living being”, “living creature”, from the different translations. Pannenberg (1994:184), in arguing for the unity of man, makes the following statement: “The soul is not just a partial principle but that which makes us human in our bodily reality. Conversely, the body is the concrete form in which our humanity, the soul, finds appropriate expression”. According to Green (2008:64) “humans are distinctly human not on account of their purported possession of a soul”. Man is not presented as having a living soul but as a living soul. The infusion of *nephesh* into the body resulted in a living soul and the departure according to Ecclesiastes 12:7 will result in a dead soul or creature.

5.5.2.3.3 *Nepes in man the same as nephesh in animals*

According to Genesis 2:19; 1:20; 6:17; and 7:22, man and animals share the spirit of life in them – in other words there is no difference between the spirit of man and that of the animals (Pannenberg 1994:189). Wesner (2014:14) asserts that humans, as far as Genesis 1-2 is concerned, are not distinct because of their physical creation. “Humans and other creatures have the breadth of life which is ‘nephesh’. They were all formed from the ground. What sets humanity apart is described in Genesis as “being made in the image or resemblance of God” (Wesner 2014:14). The Bible’s definition of man is not “essentialist but relational” (Green 2008:65).

5.5.2.3.4 *Nepes as life*

An illustration of the usage of *nephesh* as referring to life can be seen in the talion law in Exodus 21:23-25. “Here the *nefes* always maintains a corporeal aspect” (Schroer & Staubli 2014:12). The text reads as “nefes for nefes, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”. *Nefes* is translated as life that can be killed and not something that is immortal.

5.5.2.3.5 *Nepes as aspective*

The Shema of Israel presents *nephesh* as an aspect of a human being. “You shall love God with all you nefes and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). It would not make sense to infuse in the text a dualistic understanding thereby creating two centres of worship in man which exist as two entities. Schroer and Staubli (2014:12) observe that “lebab and nefes represent two aspects of the person”. The meaning is that the whole person must be involved in worship.

Another term that the Old Testament uses is *ruach*. The root meaning of the word is “air in motion” (Ladd 1994:500). The usage of *ruach* can be seen in the following texts: Genesis 45:27, 1 Samuel 30:12, and 1 Kings 10:5. “Here the individual is seen as possessing *ruach*, inbreathed from God, as an element in his or her personality (Ladd 1994:500). Ladd (1994:501) concludes by stating that “neither *nefes* nor *ruach* is conceived of as a part of a person capable of surviving the death of the body. They both designate the human being as a whole viewed from different perspectives”.

5.5.3 Dualism in the New Testament

The New Testament has been seen as a rich depository for the material for dualism. The evidence is seen to emanate from the gospels, Pauline epistles, Petrine and even the apocalyptic. This seemingly covers the whole Bible. The biblical evidence given from the texts below is alleged to show that distinction between the soul and body, and that the soul is the essence of humanity and has the capability of continuing to live outside the body which takes place at death. The rebuttal from the monists' perspective continues the argument for the aspective understanding of these texts and that the texts do not support the argument for the dualistic interpretation.

5.5.3.1 Matthew 10:28

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”. The text is used to argue for the separation of material from immaterial. According to Waters (2012:292), Jesus separated the material from the immaterial and made a distinction between the body and the soul. He further argues that the duplication of *kai*, which is translated as “both body and soul or not only body but also soul”. Scripture views the body of man as subject to death while soul is not (Tepker 1964:18, 19). Jamieson et al. (1997:37) say that the “torment that awaits these lost will have elements of suffering adapted to the material as well as the spiritual part of the our nature”. Jamieson et al. (1997:37) note that both the soul and the body will “exist for ever”. This implies eternal suffering. Robertson (1933) sees soul as referring to “eternal sprit and not just life in the body”.

The parallel passage in Luke reads as follows: “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but I will show you who you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell...” The body-soul dualism has also been read into Luke 12:4, 5 even though there is no mention of ‘soul’. “Here is a hell, it seems, for the body as well as the soul (Jamieson, et al. 1997:111).

According to Henry (1994:1865) those who kill the body should not be dreaded “for they only send that to its rest, and the soul to its joy, the sooner”. There is no mention of body-soul in Luke, those who kill the body seemingly cannot cast it into hell. In John 5:28, 29, Jesus points to resurrection as a time when those others will inherit eternal life and others eternal damnation. Those who kill the body have no say in the resurrection would be the best interpretation of this text.

The argument seems to rest on the biblical meaning of the Greek word for soul which is *psyche*. Body-soul does not point to dualism but to “the totality of human personality” as Green (2010:12) argues. Quoting Mark 8:35-37, Edgar also notes that “psyche corresponds to the totality of life”. After analysing the usage of *psyche* in the following texts (Matt. 2:20; 6:25; 10:39; 11:29; 16:25-26; 20-28), Green (2008:14) argues that there is no traction for dualism evident in these texts. He argues further that, “psyche refers to someone’s life and not to an ontologically separate part of a person distinct from the body” (2008:15).

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) translates *psyche* as ‘life’ in the whole book of Matthew except in four places where it is translated ‘soul’ (Green 2008:15). This translation is seen twice in the text under consideration and the other two being Matthew 12:18 and 22:37. In the first instance it is used in relation to God – “God’s soul is pleased...” Green (2008:15) observes here that soul is used “metaphorically for God’s affective capacities”. This cannot be translated as God, who is spirit, as having a soul that is an entity that exists separate from His ‘body’.

The recitation of the shema in Matthew 22:37 cannot be interpreted partitively. ‘Heart’, ‘mind’ and ‘soul’ will have to be seen as separate entities that are capable of existing independently of each other. Soul here refers to “one’s vitality” (Green 2008:15). It is used aspectively and not partitively. Waters’ argument of *kai* would by implication be translated as “life and body”, which does not make sense. “Soul” is used conceptually and not ontologically in this phrase” (Edgar 2010:30). Green (2008:15) argues for a “rhetorical” and not ontological dualistic interpretation. Green further argues that “This par like many other could have a synecdochic function, just like ‘flesh and blood’ – these are not two

ontological entities”. *Kai* therefore cannot necessarily be indicative of dualism but is rather rhetorical.

The question by Edgar (p, 30) is incisive when he writes:

If the death is a separation which means that the physical body separates from the soul and is left behind in corruption in this present temporal and physical world while the soul continues to exist independently in either heaven or hell, then what is the body doing in hell?

It can also be noted that not only the body but also the soul can be killed, which argues against the immortality of the soul. “This is a reference to the earthly life which can end but not the eternal life” (Edgar 2002:30). This interpretation is in line with the parallel passage in Luke. God’s enemies can only kill this temporal life but cannot prevent the body from resurrection and enjoying eternal life.

5.5.3.2 Matthew 22:22-33

The last part of this pericope, which is the point of contestation, reads as follows: “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”. The construction of the text in Waters’ (2012:293) view forms the basis of his argument. He argues that “The reputation of “God of” is interesting because of the present tense of the verbs: “I am” and “He is” coupled with the negative “not... of the dead”, and the positive “but of the living”. Waters continues to assert that “The text does not say, ‘He was the God of’. According to Waters, Matthew uses the present tense because there is an afterlife – “if there was no after life, the past tense would have certainly been used”.

Smith (2010:29) concurs with Waters and states that Jesus responds to the Sadducees by “rebutting their challenge to resurrection but then he ups the stakes”. By this he means that Jesus begins to focus on something that was not the original enquiry from the Sadducees. According to Smith this text is not ambiguous: “Either these patriarchs were dead or they had been resurrected” (2012:30).

While the patriarchs are presented as ‘living’, there is no indication of body-soul dualism. God is presented as the “God of the living” not the God of the “living soul” or God of the “dead physical bodies and surviving souls”. Smith’s argument, though intended to support dualism, has monistic overtones. He views the patriarchs as having resurrected which is not the same as continuing to live. The parallel passage in Luke 20:39 ends by saying “for all live to Him.” Turl (2010:66) is right when he says, “these persons are alive to God since held in his memory awaiting resurrection.”

The same argument can be used for David as reflected in Acts 2:29, where Peter says, “... that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.” It would be difficult for anyone to project David as living; but in God’s memory he was alive, awaiting resurrection. The same can also be seen in Acts 13:36 “ For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption.” The same can be said of the patriarchs, that they were dead and buried and saw corruption. The Sadducees had a problem with the doctrine of the resurrection and Jesus makes a case for it. For Jesus to argue that they are alive would be to concede that there is no resurrection, as Smith seems to indicate. Those who are dead are regarded as asleep (1 Thess. 4:15) and hence alive to God because of the certainty of resurrection. If there were no resurrection, then God would not be the God of the living.

5.5.3.3 Acts 7:55-59

The statement by Stephen when he says, “Lord receive my spirit” is taken to reflect dualism by Waters (2012:297). He argues that Stephen did not say “Receive my body, You can’t have a decaying body in a heavenly home. Stephen knew who waited for him, because his eyes saw Jesus”. If the spirit is taken to represent the essence of Stephen, why did he not say “Lord receive me” or maybe said “Lord I am coming home.” Why point to the spirit? ‘Spirit’ here cannot be interpreted as an entity that survives the body; there is no evidence for such an interpretation. Stephen prayed to God to receive his life, the very life that God breathed into this nostrils, the very life he will receive at the resurrection.

5.5.3.4 1 Thessalonians 4:14

Paul says “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus”. According to Waters (2012:301), this is an indication that “those who died in Christ would return with Him and that they would be raised to share in the glorious reign of Christ.” He continues to assert that the “rapture of living beings who would meet in the air those who were with Christ” (1 Thess. 4:13-18) was a major emphasis in Paul’s preaching.

The background to these passages appears to have been a concern raised by the “Thessalonian Christians about the fate of some of their fellow-believers who had died” (Okorochoa 2010:1489). “Those who remained feared that the deceased would lose their glorious experience that Christians expected to enjoy at Christ’s return” (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 1980:246). Paul assures these concerned Christians that those who are dead will be resurrected. The basic argument simply is as follows: Jesus died and rose again – and such God will resurrect those who are dead in Christ.

Paul explains the process and how it will be coordinated between those who are alive and those who are dead. Those who are alive will not “precede those who are asleep” (vs. 15). “The dead in Christ will rise first. Those who are alive will be caught up together with them,” those who are dead in Christ, “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”. The resurrected dead and the living will meet the Lord in the air and they “shall always be with the Lord” (vs. 17). This is the fulfilment of the promise made by Christ in John 14:1-3 “And If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” There is no indication of Christ bringing with Him disembodied to soul in this text.

5.5.3.5 Hebrews 12:1

The text in view says: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...” This issue is how to interpret and understand “witnesses”. Should these be viewed as those who have gone through the similar experiences and are now dead or those who are presently watching the Christian race? Orabator (2008:113) as noted earlier understand the term ‘witness’ to refer also to the ancestors. He maintains that their life of

dedication is hereby celebrated. Kalengyo (2009:49) has also argued for the inclusion of ancestors in Hebrews 12:1. To him the text amply demonstrates the justification of the role ancestors in Christian theology and their continuing influence on the living.

It was noticed earlier also that Gehman (2005:144-5), argues for strict interpretation of witnesses as those who have gone through similar experiences and not as spectators. It is doubtful that African ancestors can collectively be viewed as those who suffered martyrdom and that their experience can encourage Christians throughout the ages. It is Kabesele (1991:125) who pointed earlier that ancestors have never suffered martyrdom nor have they experienced faith in Jesus.

The author of the book of Hebrews seems to view the cloud as strictly witnesses and not spectators. We are encouraged to “look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”. The same witnesses in (Hebrews 11:13-16;39) are presented as those who have not yet received the promise but are now dead waiting for the fulfilment of the promise. They may have run the race but they have to wait for the reward which will be given at the expected time. Since they have not yet received the promise of heaven they cannot be viewed as enjoying the celestial bliss.

5.5.3.6 Revelation 6:9

This text is one of those that is not easy to interpret and ascertain its meaning properly. John records what he sees when the fifth seal was opened and he writes:

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice saying, How long O Lord holy and true until you judge and avenge our blood upon those who dwell on the earth? Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer...”

Kettner (1986:98) observes that “John describes the souls as being alive and conscious and as having received their white robes, while at the same time awaiting final vindication before the world.” Kettner’s point is that these souls are in heaven and enjoy a conscious disembodied life in the presence of God. This interpretation is to be expected especially to

those who hold a dualistic understanding of human nature. There are however several points that militate against this interpretation.

5.5.3.6.1 The location of the fifth seal

This text represents what John saw when the fifth seal was opened. The question is whether what he saw was in heaven or on earth. There is no indication from the text that the souls John saw were in heaven. The opening of all the seven seals reveals an activity that takes place on earth. It would be inconsistent for the fifth seal to refer to a heavenly activity.

5.5.3.6.2 Language of symbolism

It is clear that the seals are immersed in strict biblical symbolism. The four horses and the riders cannot assume a literal interpretation. John sees a lamb as though it had been slain in heaven (Revelation 5:6). This cannot be interpreted as literal lamb that was bleeding in heaven. It would also be difficult to view the souls in heaven inhabiting the place beneath the altar, this must have a symbolic meaning. The saints were killed on earth and their death may be viewed “as sacrifices presented to God”.

Edgar argues that these souls that await judgment “do not appear to be presented as incorporeal for they are clothed and speak” (2002:36). He further notes that these souls represent only martyrs. These souls are not only corporeal; they are said to be under the altar and are crying for justice. A similar scenario is presented in Genesis 4:10 – “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground”. It would be impossible to argue that the blood has an independent existence from the body and that it can speak. Abel was a martyr just like the souls under the altar. The death of the martyrs must be vindicated and avenged and God promises to do that in both instances.

5.5.3.6.3 Cry versus praise

It must be conceded that the text does seem to indicate that the souls that had been slain were alive and raising their cries to God in heaven. It is difficult to envisage heaven as a place where those who have died are crying under the altar for vindication. A different

picture is present in Revelation 7:9-12 where the saints burst into a cry of praise and are seen before the throne and not under the altar.

The white robes are given to those who overcome (Rev 3:5). Those who have overcome are seen in heaven, after resurrection, wearing white robes as a sign of victory. The souls are symbolically given white robes as an indication of their victory and these robes will be worn in heaven after resurrection.

5.5.4 Evidence for the doctrine of intermediate state

Despite the paucity of Biblical material on the doctrine of the intermediate state, dualist scholars allege a number of cases exist in both the Old and New Testament in support of this doctrine. The main evidence adduced for the existence of the intermediate state in the Old Testament revolves around the term *Sheol*. There are also several New Testament texts that are perceived to serve as cases for the existence of the intermediate state. There are two from the gospels, namely Luke 16 and Luke 23:43; three from Pauline letters: 2 Corinthians. 5:1-8 and 2 Corinthians 12:34; Philippians. 1:23 and one from the Apostle Peter: 1 Peter 1:18-21.

These texts are seen as giving the description of the intermediate state. Afeke and Verster (2004:57) see these texts as offering a strong indication that “the believer enters into the presence of Christ when he/she dies”. According to Kunyihop (2012:24), the unbelieving dead go to a place of torment, based on the interpretation of these texts. He sees hell as a place of “punishment for unbelievers who are conscious and capable of such torment”. Kettner (1986:98) argues that 1 Peter 3:18, in speaking about the souls in prison, is referring to the “disembodied spirits of men who refused to believe in this life and who are even now in torment awaiting the last judgment”.

The intermediate state therefore represents a place where dead righteous exist in the presence of Christ. It is also seen as a place of torment for the dead unrighteous. These dead people exist as disembodied souls who are conscious and capable not only of torment but of enjoying bliss and rest. Edgar (2002:33) refers to these scriptural texts as “alleged to constitute specific biblical evidence for a disembodied eschatological form of existence

which occurs after the physical death”. The following is an exegetical evaluation of the mentioned texts.

5.5.4.1 Intermediate state in the Old Testament

The lack of convincing evidence from the Bible about the existence of the intermediate state has not deterred some in arguing for its existence. It has already been noted correctly that the paucity of material on intermediate state does not necessarily “disprove it, but it rather raises serious concerns about its validity” (Edgar 2002:34). The observation by Feinberg (1986:303) that “the question of the intermediate state of Old Testament individuals is a matter which has occasioned much heat, even if not much light” is worth noting. This is so because not much light has been shed on the evidence for the existence of the intermediate state in the Old Testament.

Much has been argued from the New Testament as is shown later. The arguments for the existence of the intermediate state in the Old Testament seem to pivot around the place in the Old Testament called *Sheol*. Cooper (1988:19) argues that the “Old Testament does not present death as the end of existence”. He maintains that the Old Testament suggests that the deceased enter *Sheol*, that they survive physical death in some way (2013:19). However, he is also of the view that the Israelites in the Old Testament generally do not think of the intermediate state as a “far better than this life” (2013:20).

Cooper sees in the prophecy of Isaiah 26 and Daniel 12 evidence for the existence of the intermediate state a place for the non-fleshly existence in *Sheol* before the final bodily resurrection (1988:20). Cooper’s conclusion based on his observation is that dualism is in fact not the bastard child of Christian and Greek philosophy but is rather inherently Hebrew and biblical (1988:20).

It is interesting to note that the two texts given by Cooper do not shed much light and seem to be insufficient as a basis for his conclusion. In the first prophecy of Isaiah 26, there are two verses that refer to the dead unrighteous who are dead and the also the dead righteous. The first verse is verse 14: “They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will

not rise. Therefore you have punished and destroyed them, and made their memory to perish”.

It is difficult to see the evidence for the existence of the intermediate state where non-fleshly beings exist. Here the dead are those who will not live, and who will not rise; referring to the unrighteous. “They are deceased” which is a clear indication that they are not alive or existing somewhere.

Referring to the righteous dead Isaiah says “Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise... and the earth shall cast out the dead”. This seems to be referring to the resurrection of those who are dead and not the continuation of life in *Sheol* or the intermediate state. It is difficult to see how Cooper can use this prophecy as a basis for his argument for the existence of the intermediate state.

The other prophecy is that of Daniel 12. It is needless to say that this prophecy says very little, if anything, about the existence of the intermediate state. The allusion to resurrection is clear in this prophecy – “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (vs. 2). It would appear that Jesus later in the New Testament refers to this prophecy in John 5:27,29. Clearly this is referring to those who are in the grave and not those who are alive in the intermediate state.

The allusion here is that of resurrection not intermediate state. At the end of the prophecy, Daniel is promised “he will rest and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (vs. 13). Here also there is no evidence for the existence of intermediate state. That Daniel will rise after resting could be an indication of resurrection.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 is seen by Kunyhop (2012) as a further evidence for the existence of the intermediate state. The text indicates that the “spirit returns to God who gave it”. It is not clear how one can deduce from the text an existence of the intermediate state. The spirit is not said to be returning to a place to exist as an entity but to God who gave it. The corollary of the argument could also be that there was a state of existence for the spirit before God gave it to man and it is to state that the spirit returns after death. This is nothing else but pre-existentialism which argues for the eternal existence of soul/spirit.

5.5.4.1.1 *'Sheol' in the Old Testament*

Is the mention of *Sheol* in the Bible a clear evidence for the existence of the intermediate state where the disembodied soul lives, either as a rest for the righteous or place of torment for the wicked? Cunnington (2010:227) did a methodical analysis of the word *Sheol*. His conclusion after studying over half of the texts that mention *Sheol* is that “it could mean either the underworld, the grave or place of punishment”. It is clear that *Sheol* “denotes the place of human destiny”. Cunnington (2010:228) agrees with the majority of scholars that *Sheol* means the underworld. The New Testament word for *Sheol* is *Hades* (Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13) and it also means “underworld” (Cunnington 2010:228).

Sheol, according to Ladd (1994:194), is not a place, but a state of the dead. Ladd of course asserts that *Sheol* “is not non-existence but it is not life for life can only be lived in the presence of God”. According to Ladd (1994:194), both the righteous and the unrighteous go to *Sheol* and it is not a place of punishment. Having made these observations, Ladd maintains that those who are dead continue to have communion with God. It is not clear how this view can be sustained, when he also asserts that *Sheol* is not life; that is a state of the dead; that both righteous and unrighteous go there. He succinctly argues that life can only be enjoyed in the presence of God. If this is true, how can one have communion, which implies life, and continue to have it in the absence of God?

Cunnington observes that the righteous are said to descend to *Sheol* when they die (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31; Job 14:13). His argument is that there is no “Scriptural support for the view that *Sheol* represents a place of conscious punishment for the unrighteous” (2010:228). He analyses the five texts used by Berkhof in his arguments for the existence of the intermediate state and finds these devoid of light on the subject (2010:228-9).

Ps. 9:7 – It is sufficient to note that nothing in the text indicates that punishment is in view.

Ps. 49:14, 15 – this in no way indicates that *Sheol* is itself a place of conscious punishment for the unrighteous.

Ps. 55:13 – there is no indication of punishment here and, as Anthony Hoekema notes, the principle of parallelism suggests that the second line merely repeats the

thought of the first.

Ps. 15:11 – Elsewhere Abaddon is paired with death (Job 28:22) and the grave (Ps. 88:11), indicating that it is the destruction of death rather than post-mortem punishment that is in view. '

Prov. 15:24 – Again, the contrast here is between life and death, rather than paradise and punishment.

The conclusion that Cunnington makes about *Sheol* is worth noting and is very insightful in the debate about the intermediate state.

Those in Sheol lack a body and are inactive and silent (Ps. 94:17); they are cut off from Yahwe and cannot praise him anymore (Ps. 6:5; 88:5,12; 115:17; Isa. 38:18). Sheol is a place of no return (Job 16:22; a prison that holds its inhabitants captive (Ps. 18:5; Isa. 38:10; Johan 2:6)...The Israelites feared Sheol because it signified the cessation of ordinary existence and their separation from Yahweh. Sheol is not a place of conscious punishment but it is just as much a part of the curse as death itself.

Accordingly, the intermediate state arguing from Cunnington's observation is a state of inactivity and silence. Those who inhabit it cannot praise God anymore. The clear implication is that in the intermediate state – *Sheol* – there is no activity within the dead, their love and hatred is gone. There is no activity towards their descendants, they cannot return to bless or curse them. There is no activity towards God, they cannot praise Him. If the above is a true reflection of the intermediate state, then those who are in *Sheol* are dead, body and soul and they await the resurrection at the end of time.

The story of Saul (1 Sam. 28:3-28) that was examined earlier also shows that *Sheol* is the common destiny for the dead. In the narrative, Samuel is reported to have said to Saul "And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me..." (vs. 19). The indication is that the destination of Saul will not be different from that of Samuel. The narrative does make a distinction between the life of Samuel and the life of Saul, in short, Saul was unrighteous and Samuel was righteous.

It is shown in 1 Chronicles 10, that Saul died because he disobeyed God by consulting the medium. How could Saul share a common destiny with Samuel? The only logical response

is that the text is referring to the death of Saul. The prediction was that Saul would die the following day, and had nothing to do with where he would go. It can be correctly concluded that in the debate about the intermediate state in the Old Testament not much light has been shed, rather much heat appears to have been generated.

5.5.4.2 Intermediate state in the New Testament

There are several texts that have been used to argue for the intermediate state in the New Testament:

5.5.4.2.1 Luke 16:22-23

This is one of the few texts that are difficult to interpret and fully understand. One of the reasons seemingly is that the narrative comes in the form of a parable. It is not surprising that dualists have found in the text sufficient evidence for the body-soul concept. Waters (2012:294) is convinced that the most natural and logical interpretation of this text points to the existence of the intermediate state. Is the text describing the intermediate state and should it be taken literally?

Ladd believes that Jesus had nothing to say about the intermediate state of the wicked but that the righteous dead are with God (1994:195). He argues that the parable is not a didactic passage that teaches about the state of the dead (1994:194). This to him is a parable about the five brothers and not about the rich man and Lazarus. He asserts that Jesus used a “contemporary folk-material” to set forth the single truth about the importance of hearing the gospel while one is still alive (p, 195). Edgar (2002:34) concurs with this view when he says:

The descriptive detail of the parable should be not be taken literally – this was intended to teach the real and eternal consequences resulting from our beliefs” The dead are visualized in bodily form since there is no other way in which they can be visualized.

Cunnington (2010:234) concurs when he notes that “most treatments of the text note that the parable is not intended to provide actual descriptions of the afterlife. The parable, he continues, “contains details that are problematic even for the defenders of the conscious

punishment position”. He notes that the “rich man is able to see Lazarus and talk with him suggesting that Lazarus is in Hades as well (although seemingly in another compartment)”.

The point here is that there is nothing in the parable to suggest that the figures presented in the text were disembodied souls. The rich man is presented as having eyes and a tongue. If the intermediate state is for disembodied souls then the text cannot be referring to the doctrine of the intermediate state, since these souls are embodied.

5.5.4.2.2 *Luke 23:43*

Here Jesus makes the promise to one of the dying thieves that He will be with him in paradise. There are currently two interpretations attached to this promise. The argument is whether the comma should be placed after “today” or before. Waters refers (2012:295) to this as a “major interpretative problem”. “With the comma placed before “today”, the adverb would refer to the following verb (“to be”). But if placed after “today”, then the adverb would modify the preceding verb (“to tell”)” (Paroschi 2010:1). Which is the correct rendering of the text – I say to you, today you will be... or I say to you today, you will be.... This is exacerbated by the fact that in Greek “little or no punctuation was used to indicate how the text should be read”.

Waters (2012:295) states that “today” means this very day and sees this as a natural reading of the verse. Ladd (1994:195) concurs with Waters and asserts that this is a “clear confirmation that the soul or spirit of the dying man would be with Jesus in the presence of God”. The implication from both Waters and Ladd is that when Jesus promised the thief that he will be with him, He was referring to his soul or spirit. In other words, Jesus would be with his spirit/soul in heaven that very day. Since Jesus was also on the verge of dying, it would be His soul/spirit that will be with the soul/spirit of the thief. Thus the understanding of the text is that the spirit of Jesus will be with the spirit of the thief in paradise on the very same the promised was made.

There are two assumptions that are made in this view. One is that the spirit is a conscious entity capable of enjoying the bliss of heaven. Secondly, that Jesus believed that He would be in heaven that very night in the disembodied form. The implication is that Jesus taught

and believed that the righteous go to heaven upon death, hence the promise. The first question that needs to be addressed is whether Christ went to heaven. The second one is whether there is any evidence of any teaching by Christ that the dead go to heaven upon death? The last question is whether Christ saw the person as a constituent of two independent parts.

5.5.4.2.3 Did Christ go to heaven upon death?

Since Christ made the promise, the logical assumption is that He would be in heaven also, for the thief to enjoy His presence. The arguments for the thief being in the presence of God with Jesus can only be sustained if it can be shown that Jesus did indeed go to heaven on the day He died. There is a conversation recorded in John 20:17 where Christ says to Mary “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father, but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father...’”

The same person who made the promise to the thief appears to admit here that He has not yet ascended to His father and this was the Sunday morning. If Jesus was referring to His spirit when He made the promise – who was He referring to when He said He had not yet ascended? He could not have been referring to the body, for according to dualism the identity is in the soul not the body.

5.5.4.2.4 Did Christ teach that the dead people go to paradise after death?

In Revelation 2:7 Jesus refers to paradise which has the tree of life in its midst. Those who overcome will have the privilege of eating from this tree of life. Since this is the reward of the righteous, it is possible that it is referring to life after resurrection. It would also be difficult to sustain the argument that souls will need to eat the tree of life. A similar promise is made in Revelation 2:10, 11 to those overcome. They will be given a “crown of life” and will not be “hurt by the second death”. Since these overcomers will have been hurt by the first death, then this must be referring to a life after resurrection, after the first death. The righteous will enter paradise not at the point of death but after resurrection as corporeal beings.

In John 14:1-3, Christ indicates that it will only be after He has prepared the place in heaven that He would come to fetch His people. The promise is that He will be with them only after finishing the preparation and after fetching them. It would then be impossible for Christ to make a promise to the thief, when He had already indicated the time when this would take place.

5.5.4.2.5 Did the Spirit of Christ go to heaven upon death?

It is true that indeed that Christ made the statement – “Father into Your hands I commit My spirit”. But it is also clear that by this statement Christ committed His spirit into God’s hands but not Himself, for the record says He died on that day. It has already been shown that ‘spirit’ which is *pneuma* never depicts a conscious independent entity both in the Old and New Testament. It would be easier to understand the text as Christ offering His life into His father’s hands rather than Himself. If it was Christ that was in the hands of God, then John 20:17 will not make sense. His life could not exist as a conscious entity without the body, hence His remarks in John 20:17 that He had not yet been to the Father.

Christ’s supposed post mortem journey to heaven does not seem to have any theological significance in the Bible. It is His death that is pivotal to the salvation of mankind. In the book of Hebrews, it is the death of Christ that deals a fatal blow to the one “who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). It is the death and resurrection of Christ with no indication of the intermediate state that carries hope for mankind (Romans 8:34; I Thessalonians 4:14). Christ died that those who believe in Him should not perish (John 3:16), but if His death was not actual death, then it is not clear how those who believe in Him will be saved.

In Hebrews 9:27 the author says “As it is appointed for men to die once and after this judgment.” Commenting on this text, Cunnington (2010:237) notes that this text in Luke 23 adds weight on the biblical teaching that is expressed in Hebrews 9:27. The biblical teaching is that one’s destiny is fixed at the point of death. To a person who is dead there is no tomorrow, it is death and judgment as if all happening today. There is no consciousness of the lapse of time to the dead – judgment for the dead takes place on the day he died.

5.5.4.2.5.1 Place of the comma

The placement of the comma either before “today” or after “today” would give a different meaning to Christ’s promise. Paroschi (2010:3) concludes that “If the comma is placed before the adverb “today”, it becomes virtually impossible to reconcile the passage with what Jesus Himself teaches concerning the time when the faithful dead get their final reward in heaven”. This would also contradict the meaning of ‘spirit’ in the New Testament. It would also be difficult to reconcile it with the fact that on the resurrection day, Jesus admitted that He had not yet ascended to heaven.

This kind of usage of the adverb seems not to have been something strange in the Bible. According to Paroschi (2010:3) this was a “Semitic idiom” as can be seen in the following scriptures “I teach you today (Deut. 4:1), “I set before you today” (Deut. 11:26).” The evidence at hand suggests that the comma should be placed after “today”. The interpretation being that Christ would be with the thief, who now is among the overcomers, in paradise where he will have access to the tree of life.

The thief did not ask “When will you be with me in paradise”? He wanted to be reminded when Christ comes to take His people to the paradise and Christ gave him assurance on the very day. The assurance made on that day was that He will be with him in paradise.

5.5.4.2.5.2 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

This passage is indeed one of the difficult passages and it opens itself to different interpretations. Once again one has to take into account what Paul has mentioned elsewhere in his writings in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this passage. The traditional interpretation given to this passage can be summed up in the words of Smith (1996:14):

Paul anticipates an intermediate state for deceased Christians between death and the Parousia. This state of existence is apart from the body, causing Paul an apprehension. He is not a Platonist who see incorporeal existence as the ultimate reality.... The possibility of being with Christ is superior to earthly existence – they enjoy fellowship with Christ and yet still await their resurrection bodies.

The passage, according to what Smith argues, has to do with the intermediate state which for Paul is undesirable and yet better than the present life. The ultimate existence that Paul longs for is to receive resurrected bodies. The question that needs to be addressed is whether Paul indeed anticipates an intermediate state which is apart from the body.

Smith (1996:17-22) simplifies the passage by categorizing it into three distinct parts “each using a metaphor to talk of existence beyond the grave”. He observes the “housing metaphor” (1996:17, 18) “the clothing metaphor” (1996:20) and the “homeland metaphor” (1996:22). In this exegetical analysis of the passage, the same categories are employed.

5.5.4.2.5.3 *Housing metaphor*

Two houses are brought to view in verse 1: the earthly and the heavenly. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18, the immediate text before 1 Thessalonians 5:1, Paul speaks of the seen as the temporal and the unseen as eternal. According to Smith (1996:18) “the first house is the physical body which will be destroyed in death and the second is the eternal resurrection body which will be received at the Parousia”. “Most Biblical expositors agree that Paul here refers to the “spiritual body” given to the believer at the time of the resurrection” (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 1980:861).

The common denominator between these two forms of existence, one temporal and the other eternal, is the “body”. Both denote a bodily existence, whether temporal or eternal. It is crucial to note that Paul is not making a distinction between the body and the soul; such an interpretation is foreign to Paul’s argument. The distinction that Paul makes here is between the earthly and the heavenly, transient and the eternal (Reynolds 2013:147). This is further elaborated by Paul in Colossians 3:1 when he says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”. The whole of a person body, soul and mind, as Paul further asserts “Set your mind on things above...” should focus on eternal things.

5.5.4.2.5.4 Clothing metaphor

Paul uses the clothing metaphor from verses 2-4. According to Smith (1996:14) this section represents the heart of Paul's argument in this passage. Two contrasting emotions are depicted here, which represents Paul's longing as well as his apprehension. He longs to be clothed and yet is apprehensive of experiencing nakedness (Smith 1996:20). This nakedness according to Smith (1996:14) is "bodiless existence". This being the state Paul would be in while he waits for the ultimate resurrection.

This "pre-Parousia" state, according to Osei-Bunsu (1986:95), must be in the form of soul and spirit". He quickly notes though that Paul "does not use either word in the passage". The observation made by Smith (1996:14) is that this "form of existence believers will have in the intermediate state is a matter of conjecture". He further notes that "Paul is largely ignorant of what such an intermediate state will be like" (p, 20).

While Paul appears not to be clear about this state the interpretation is that Paul regarded it as being superior to earthly existence (1996:14). Smith is correct in asserting that a "major problem in exegeting this text is determining how it relates to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15". The chapter cannot be read in isolation, it is related to the preceding chapter as well as I Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians and Philippians (Reynolds 2013:143). It is when this chapter is read within the specified context that a proper understanding of Pauline theology can be reached.

Paul's expressed longing in verses 2 to 5 is to be clothed. He does not want to "be found naked" (vs. 3). He does not want to be unclothed but to be further clothed. He desires for "mortality to be swallowed up by life". The contrast between what is seen and what is not seen is brought up again linking this to the previous chapter. The logical meaning that can be attached to Paul's longing is that he "longed for a heavenly body" (Richards 1998:108). It is the heavenly body he mentions in vs. 1. Paul uses the word "unclothed" or "naked", to refer to mortal body which we have in this life, but which we put aside in death (Tepker 1964:19). But it is not death that Paul longs, or the intermediate state but heavenly body and not disembodied soul.

When will Paul be clothed? In other words, when will he have this heavenly body? According to verse 4, this will happen when mortality is swallowed up by life. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 he states that only at the resurrection will mortality put on (be clothed with) on immortality. It is only at this time that “Death will be swallowed up in victory (immortal life)”. Reynolds (2013:143) sums this succinctly when he adumbrates:

The description of the perishable putting on the imperishable and the mortal putting on the immortality is just what Paul is describing also in 2 Cor. 5:4 it is at the resurrection at the last day, when the last trumpet sounds, that the mortal body is clothed with immortality and death is swallowed up in victory by life.

There does not seem to be an observable shift in Paul’s emphasis from what he says in 2 Corinthians and what he said in 1 Corinthians.

5.5.4.2.5.5 *Homeland metaphor*

Paul continues with this contrast between the seen and the unseen which he started in the previous chapter. Here he indicates his desire to be away from the body and to be with Christ. Smith (1996:22) argues that in “being at home with Christ, rather than this present life” Paul uses an incentive aorist to signify that death ushers the believer into the presence of Christ”. This presence with Christ is in the disembodied state. What does Paul mean by the expression “at home with the Lord”? Following Paul’s argument, this expression apparently refers to the time when we receive the heavenly body, the time when we are further clothed (Richards 1998:112).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul says that the resurrected believers together with the dead in Christ will be with the Lord after “meeting Him in the air”. Edgar (2002:35) states that:

There will be a simultaneous entry into the kingdom at the coming of the Lord rather than a period of time for the deceased and disembodied believer in the presence of the Lord. Those who have died and those who are alive meet the Lord together not separately.

This is referring to post-resurrection not immediately after death. “At home with Christ” is “the promised eternal life” where we enjoy our heavenly bodies, where mortal is swallowed up in life” (Reynolds 2013:147).

In Philippians 1:22-24, Paul expresses a desire to “depart and be with the Lord”, but rather chooses to be with the believers. Kunhiyop (2012:208) sees “death as the transition into the presence of Christ” based on the reading of Philippians 1:21-23. In the very book of Philippians Paul does indicate when he will be with Christ. He does not seem to expect any meeting with Christ prior the resurrection (Reynolds 2013:148). In Philippians 2:16, he refers to the Day of Christ as the time when he will rejoice, which is his desire in the first chapter. In Philippians 3:11, Paul desires to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

If Paul was confident that when he departs he will be with the Lord, why would he be concerned about resurrection from the dead? Could it not be the fact that it will be the only time he will be in the presence of the Lord? According to Philippians 3:20, 21, believers “eagerly wait for the transformation of their lowly bodies”, and this will only take place when Jesus appears from heaven.

Paul uses a house metaphor to indicate that believers have an eternal building from God which they will receive at resurrection. In the clothing metaphor, he desire to be clothed and further clothed, that the mortal may be swallowed up in life, and this will take place at resurrection. In the homeland metaphor, Paul’s desire is to be away from the body and be with the Lord and this will take place when believers receive their heavenly bodies at resurrection. Inferences to soul-body dualism and intermediate state cannot be justified using this passage.

5.5.4.2.5.6 *Pauline psychology*

Osei-Bonsu (2004:65) as has been observed, continues to argue for the existence of the soul and spirit in the intermediate even though he concedes that Paul does not either soul or spirit. The usage of soul or spirit as an independent and conscious entity is foreign in the New Testament. This is further attested by the use of the words *psyche* and *pneuma* in Pauline psychology. “One looks in vain for any Pauline usage of *psyche* as an independent substantial entity – let alone as one which exists in disembodied form after death” (Edgar 2002:37).

Edgar (2002:37) attests that the word *psyche* is “always used with reference to life as a whole”. He makes the following points about the usage of *psyche*: The word appears as a “meaning of the natural life of the person (1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 11:3; 16:4; Phil. 3:30; 1 Thess. 2:8; 2 Cor. 12:15)”. It also means more than “simply physical life but is a reference to the whole of the energy and endeavors of life (1 Thess. 2:8; Phil. 1:27)”. It is the source of emotion (Phil. 1:27; Col. 3:23, Eph. 6:6). It is also the synonym for person (Rom. 2:9; 13:1; 2 Cor. 1:23). It refers to the whole person (1 Thess. 5:23).

It is interesting to note that Ladd (1994:502), who is a dualist, confirms that “Paul never uses *psyche* as a separate entity in humanity nor does he intimate that *psyche* can survive the death of the body”. He further attests that “Paul never uses the obvious Hellenistic summary of the human being: body and soul” (1994:502). The word *pneuma* is seen by Ladd as a “person’s true inner self, the word is naturally used to represent that person as such in terms of her or his self-consciousness as a willing and knowing self” (1994:504).

It is clear that monist interpretation do offer a more consistent understanding of the scripture used as evidence by dualists. Bergendorff (1954:188), is correct in his summation that “Christianity has never fully shaken off the influence of Greek mysticism which early fastened itself on the New Testament idea of redemption”. His view is that what God has joined together philosophers and theologians have put asunder by divorcing the bodies and souls of men which God made one at creation.

5.5.4.2.5.7 1 Peter 3:18

There are several lines of interpretation that have been traditionally attached to this text (Feinberg 1986:306-09). Only two of these interpretations will serve the purpose of this research. The first view is that this passage refers to the “disembodied spirits of men who refuse to believe in this life and are now in torment awaiting judgment” (Kettner 1986:98). Afeke and Verster (2004 57), supporting this view, conclude by noting that “There is no doubt that the Bible accepts that the deceased are alive before God”. This is also referred to as “conscious punishment” position (Cunnington 2010:229). This view, as can be seen, supports the existence of the intermediate state where disembodied souls are tormented.

The second position posits that “Christ through the Holy Spirit went and preached through Noah to the people who were non-believers in Noah’s day” (Cunnington 2010:334). This position is opposed to the existence of intermediate state and the view that the dead can be afforded yet another opportunity to repent.

The first view is difficult to sustain as it raises several questions that do not have a clear Biblical basis. Why are ante-deluvians singled out? Since these people refused to repent during Noah’s preaching, why are they pursued again in death, where does the Bible teach this kind of probation? Does the Bible teach that spirits/souls can be preached to or is it human beings? Besides these questions, Feinberg (1986:333) argues that this position has “serious problems in fitting with the context”. He notes that most commentators agree that 1 Peter was written to “suffering saints to encourage them in the midst of their suffering”.

The second view is the only one that seems to fit within the context. The view connects with Noah who suffered and was persecuted during the period of his preaching (1986:335). Cunnington (2010:230) further argues that the conclusion reached concerning the meaning of 1 Peter 2:18-19 influences the interpretation of 1 Peter 4:6. Here Peter refers to the dead to whom the gospel was preached also. “A post-mortem gospel proclamation” would contract Peter’s message that everyone will be judged based on their actions in life whether alive or dead (1986:231). Chapter 4:6 is therefore directed at those who are alive while implying that even those who are dead will be judged based on their actions when they were alive.

Feinberg’s (1986:336) concluding statement is apropos when he says “Whatever one wants to say about biblical teaching concerning the intermediate state, he must say it on the basis of some other texts than this one”. The discussion and debate on these texts will never end as Green (2008:18) testifies that “others will be presented as counter-arguments”. The reason for this is that the platonic dualism has become a natural hermeneutic tool for interpreting these texts. Due to this dualist reading of the biblical material Green later attests that a “dualist reading of the biblical material we fail to see immediately or even to entertain how these texts might make sense within monist anthropology”.

All the Biblical cases used as evidence for belief in the communion with the dead as well as the doctrine of the intermediate state, at best can only argue for one and not both of these positions. Those arguing for intermediate state do not argue for the role of the ancestors, so the texts adduced as evidence have only to do with the intermediate state. The same applies to those who argue for the belief in the communion of the dead.

There is only one biblical case that seems to apply to both communion with the dead as well as the doctrine of the intermediate state. The story found in 1 Samuel 28 seems to address both the issues raised in African Christology – communion with the dead and their ontological existence.

5.5.4.3 1 Samuel 28:3-24

This text, while appearing very controversial to many Christian theologians, finds resonance in those with an African traditional background. The dead who come back to speak and warn those alive of impending danger or crisis is the recognized rhythm in African Traditional Religions. It is interesting to note that even those who do not believe in ancestral intervention/communion with the dead are quick to argue for a theological exception in this narrative.

Jamieson et al. (1997:194) in their commentary argue that “eminent writers are the opinion that Samuel really appeared”. A similar view is maintained by Matthews (1998:118) when he comments that “God intervened in an unprecedented way and actually sent Samuel to prophesy Saul’s judgment”. Here the argument is not only for the existence of Samuel in the intermediate state but also for his involvement in the affairs of the living. The Bible and its position on the teaching of communion with the dead is suspended and the story of Samuel is regarded as an exception.

The conclusion above is made based on the fact that the prediction made by Samuel came true and that indeed Samuel came from the dead and spoke to Saul. What is not appreciated by most theologians is the plausibility of the assertions made in African Traditional Religion. The incidents recorded in the story of Samuel are daily occurrences in African Traditional Religion. The dead do appear and speak to their descendants and

what they say does come true. It is on these bases that the African Christians may be willing to suspend what the Bible teaches about communion with the dead.

The question that should concern all theologians and Bible students is whether the Bible's position on communion with the dead should be suspended based on the experience reflected in the story. The appearance and the communication between Saul and Samuel need critical reflection to test their veracity. The following elements provide a hermeneutical tool that provides a solution while maintaining the position of the Bible.

5.5.4.4 Samuel not Saul's ancestor

What is explicit in the story is that Samuel was not Saul's ancestor; they were also not related. There is also no ritual that accompanies the interaction between Samuel and Saul in the narrative. Except for the fact that Samuel was now dead, Saul approached him as he used to when he was alive. It would appear from the story that Saul's main objective was to inquire from the Lord; he wanted God to reveal the future. The effort of contacting the dead Samuel was to know God's will and not what Samuel's will was. There is no way that Samuel would be an authority, he did not have the power to curse or to bless, and he was God's messenger.

Samuel acted as a priest for Israel (I Samuel 13) besides being a prophet and judge (I Samuel 3:20; I Sam. 7). He was the only one that could present sacrifices on behalf of Israel having taken after Eli. Saul approached him not as his ancestor but rather as His priest whose function was to mediate on behalf of Israel.

5.5.4.5 Mediums prohibited in Israel

While the above point may appear obvious, it needs to be restated. A death sentence was pronounced on anyone found practicing the abominations which included those who were mediums and spiritists. It was in line with this law that the fact that Saul had killed or "put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land" was recorded. The mediums were never God's appointed agency and it was God's directive that they be put away or cut off. It was also shown that the nations that were before Israel were disposed of their land because they had defiled it through such abominations.

The medium that Saul approached had no right to be alive or to be in Israel. She had no role to play in the affairs of the living. Her presence was an abomination that had caused King Saul to drive them out of the land. Whatever else may be said about this woman, it is important to recognize that she was not needed, she had no right to be in Israel, her presence was an abomination and could never be used by God to communicate His will.

5.5.4.6 Saul was forbidden from consulting mediums

The introduction to this narrative pointing out that Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists is important so that the “reader can recognize that Saul is breaking his own laws” (Cartledge 2001:320). On the surface it might appear that Saul had a legitimate excuse to approach the medium for help. The record is that “when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by the dream or by Urim or by Prophets” (1 Sam. 28:6). God did not respond to Saul’s inquiry and all His appointed agents could not help him. The same can be adduced from Samuel who at one time was the link between God and Saul. When God rejected Samuel as the King, the record states that Samuel “went no more to see Saul until the day of his (Samuel) death” (1 Sam. 15:35). If the means and the agents appointed by God to communicate His will could not help Saul, one can only conjecture as to who would be able to help him. For Saul to turn to the medium who was an illegitimate agent only shows the depth of his desperation.

The clear prohibition as seen in Isaiah does not leave room for exceptions. God’s people are to seek God and not the dead on behalf of the living. By approaching those who call up the dead, Saul had declared himself as one who did not belong to God. It can also be argued that God’s silence in spite of Saul’s seeking was a sign that he was no longer recognised as one of God’s people. God’s silence does not leave one with a legitimate recourse, but a clear indication that God has departed from him.

Saul had approached an agent that had no right to be alive or to be in Israel: this act qualified for capital punishment. Those who sought after the mediums were to be cut off from the land (Lev. 18:29; 20:5) and since there was no one to do that, it was up to God to execute Saul. This could explain the fact that Saul died, and was cut off the following day.

The book of the Chronicles, which for some reasons does not include the episode of Saul visiting the witch at Endor, does refer to the incident in passing. In 1 Chronicles 10:14, two reasons are given for the tragic death of Saul and his family. The first is that “he died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD” (vs. 13). The second reason is that “he consulted a medium for guidance, but he did not inquire of the LORD” (vs. 14).

The Congolese theologian, Weanzana (2003:483), points to the fact that this last part in the story of Saul is a “theological evaluation” in his commentary on the story. This is poignant in that it does not form part of the historical narrative but comes as theological assessment of this historical event.

5.5.4.7 Medium called up the dead Samuel

The story shares insight on how mediums and spiritists operated. They were a link between the living and the dead. The question by the medium, “Whom shall I bring up for you”, was followed by a response from Saul that the medium should bring up Samuel. Samuel had been dead for years and Saul through the medium desired that he be brought up. It was for this reason that God commanded Moses to tell Israel that there shall not be found any who calls up the dead in Israel (Deut. 18:11). People, according to Isaiah 8:19, “should not seek the dead on behalf of the living”.

It was noted earlier that God’s appointed agents had direct access to God and did not need to have another medium between them and God. Saul in his dealing with Samuel when he was alive, was never exposed to the dead. Samuel never called up Eli to respond to issues raised by Saul. It would have been easier for God to speak directly to the medium than to use a dead Samuel – that is how He communicated with prophets and priests. The whole experience of calling up the dead definitely excluded God from this interaction.

God had promised Israel a prophet – “Him you shall hear” (Deut. 18:15). This was opposed to the mediums and spiritists who were not appointed by God. The implication was that these, they should not hear. If the mediums have the power to call up the dead and Israel was warned not to listen to them, then the logical conclusion is that these mediums

had the power to deceive. The point is not so much on what the mediums said but why they said what they said. The intention of mediums is not to communicate truth but to deceive the hearers and separate them from God. The business of mediums is a rival and is opposed to the true religion of Israel. These agents are not appointed by God and would therefore not report to God.

If the dead were dead and could no longer have an active role in this life, how could an agent not of God's appointing bring up Samuel? Did these agents really exhibit power to bring up the dead? Did they really call up the dead? As noted earlier, the story provides a window to the operation of these agents. It is clear from the story that Saul did not see Samuel. It was the medium that saw him and related to Saul what she saw (vs. 13).

Saul "perceived that it was Samuel" and this by the fact that "he was an old man and covered with a mantle", but did not see him. This robe, as pointed out by Tsumara (2007:625), "was the characteristic garment of Samuel (15:27)". If this were so, does that mean that the spirit of the dead require the mantle as a covering even in death? Is it not possible that this form of covering was to be the point of contact between a dead Samuel and the apparition and also the medium for deception?

If this form of communication was based on deception, then the appearance cannot be mistaken for reality. Are forces opposed to God and His truth able to reproduce appearance in their attempts at deceiving people? Merrill (1985:454), in his commentary is in agreement with those who maintain that Samuel indeed appeared before the medium. The basis of his argument is crafted as follows:

So startled was she by Samuel's appearance that she immediately realized that the work was of God and not herself and that her disguised nocturnal visitor was King Saul. This implies that she did not really expect to raise up Samuel but only a satanic imitation.

Tsumara (2007:627) indicates that "God permitted the witch to call Samuel up in this case even though he might not normally have allowed it". It is not clear why God would want to do this unusual and legitimize the abomination that He Himself had outlawed. If such

practices were a constant threat to Israel, why would God confirm their efficacy by using the same? Would that not make it even more difficult for Israel not to consult such agents?

This may well have been a “satanic imitation” which the woman believed to be genuine. This is the same medium that initially could not identify Saul because of his disguise. The statement says “Saul disguised himself and put other clothes”. And in the eyes of the medium the person that had come for consultation was not Saul and this was based on the appearance which were designed to deceive. It is also possible that the same medium would also be convinced that Samuel spoke to her – but did he really speak to her?

To argue that the medium did not expect to raise Samuel but a satanic imitation is to allege that the woman did not believe in the efficacy of her magical powers. The comment by Tsumura (2007:619) is apropos as he indicates that Saul was probably aware of the perceived efficacy of the magical practices hence his prohibition. She was startled when she realized that this was Samuel and by implication the one who had come to inquire would be Saul. She was startled as she realized that she was deceived – “Why have you deceived me for you are Saul” (vs. 12).

The theological analysis given in the book of I Chronicles 10:14 with regards to the causes of Saul’s death exonerates God’s involvement. The indictment that Saul died because he consulted the medium would not make sense if God raised Samuel from the dead to communicate with Saul. It has already been stated that one of the reasons why the dead could not be called up was that they could no longer intervene in the affairs of the living and as such could not be consulted on behalf of the living.

5.5.4.8 Samuel speaking to Saul

Was the person the medium saw really Samuel and if not, who was it? The spirit seen by the woman was an old man covered with a mantle and Saul perceived that it was Samuel. The issue of spirit and the views around its existence is covered later. It was the appearance as related by the medium that led Saul to believe that this was Samuel; but was this really Samuel who spoke to the medium?

In Genesis 3, there is a record of a snake that is described as being more cunning; it speaks to Eve and asks if God had commanded her not to eat from the tree. The same question can be asked – can a snake speak? Was this a genuine snake, since genuine snakes do not speak, why did this one speak? It is difficult to argue that the snake was used by God to speak to Eve.

The snake's intention was to deceive and it succeeded. Barry et al (2012), in their commentary, judging by the human characteristics attributed to the snake, note that *nacash* suggests more than “an ordinary member of the animal kingdom”. Richards (1988:33) maintain that this was the “great adversary of God and His people who came in the guise of a serpent to tempt Eve”.

There are two options that the devil may have employed here; first to use a genuine snake as a medium – the snake did not speak but the devil spoke through it. The second option is to create a snake that genuinely speaks. The latter is not possible since the devil does not have creative powers and as such cannot create life. This leaves the first option which is supported by Barry et al. (2012). Applying this to Saul, one would have a genuine Saul who could not speak since he was dead and the devil spoke through him to accomplish his deception. To argue that this was the spirit, hence it was able to speak, would beg to be questioned since there is no evidence that disembodied spirits could talk.

The common element between the story of the snake and that of Samuel is deception. To create an appearance and use it to as a rivalry to God's appointed agents. Exodus 7:10,11 records a story involving snakes. Moses under God's power threw his stick on the ground and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers did the same but not under God's power. Did Pharaoh's agents produce genuine snakes? The argument cannot be sustained since the devil cannot create life.

Whatever these were, they had the form of snakes. This could imply that the devil can create that which looks like a snake and in reality is not. Using the option for Genesis 3 and that of Saul it can be argued that whatever appeared in the story of Saul and Samuel was not Samuel but something in the form of Saul. It would not have been the first time.

Since there was no Saul around for the devil to use as an instrument, he created an apparition and spoke through it. Gehman (1999:171) concludes by stating that "... by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we conclude that Satan is the one who appeared, not Samuel, since the dead cannot communicate with the living".

Gbile Akanni (2010:373,74), a Nigerian author, offers an insightful comment on this narrative that reveals the prevalence of such experiences within the African worldview when he says:

The type of divination in which this medium engaged was common in Palestine and the Middle East and is still common in Africa. Here the spirits of the ancestors are often provoked in times of trouble and difficulty, or by those who want to know what the future holds. The spirits consulted are demonic, but they usually take the shape of someone familiar, impersonating that person in order to oppress others or demand a sacrifice.

This could be one of the strongest reasons why God forbade necromancy in Israel. It was its ability to deceive and detract from God's will and act as a rivalry that was the motive for the annihilation of all such agents.

5.5.5 Conclusion

While no general consensus has been reached in the interpretation of these texts, there is general agreement that the biblical cases offer no trajectory towards the role of ancestors in African Christology. The main question is, does the Bible support the doctrine of the intermediate state or not? Even if it can be accepted that there is such a state it would be a quantum leap to argue for the incorporation of ancestors based on this doctrine. What is impossible with others is not so with Africans. In the African communal view of life, ancestors cannot forget their descendants; they will keep in touch with them. Those alive will also seek to maintain contact in one form or the other and hence African ancestor Christology.

Unfortunately, the hermeneutical controversy in the story of Samuel does not do much for African Christology. While others maintain that this was a demonic manifestation, there

are those who see an exception in the story. God condescends to use the means He has clearly forbidden, in order to bring a message to Saul. The appearance of ancestors and their continued role within African Christianity is premised on this theological exception.

However, the Bible seems to be consistent in its denunciation of pagan practices such as communion with the dead. There are no exceptions. The doctrine of intermediate state presents only one view but has its inherent challenges.

5.6 Christological implication of the dualistic and monistic anthropology

Turl (2010:67) is correct in his observation that when it comes to the doctrine of the intermediate state “proof-texts” can often be used by both views in support of their position. He further argues that “the view which carries more weight is likely to be determined by the reader’s position”. His view is that the implication of the different interpretations must be considered. What are the Christological implications of embracing monist anthropology which argues for a non-existence of the intermediate state? What are the Christological implications of the belief in dualist anthropology?

It is in line with this argument that Clapp (2012:45) quizzes if the monistic view will “bring changes in attitudes and hopes of the daily lives of the congregation”. The same can be asked of the dualistic views. Would African Christians be better off with dualistic or monistic views? Another question to consider is whether the implications of these views are in line with the general tone and teaching of the whole scripture. These questions address the issue of Christological significance. Cunningham (2010:237) notes that the doctrine of the intermediate state has both pastoral and doctrinal significance. This has to do with Christ that is embraced and the one that is preached or believed.

5.6.1 Pastoral significance

How does the dualistic and monistic views help bring hope, comfort, encouragement and assurance to Christian believers in general and African Christians in particular? This section argues that monistic anthropology provides a more comprehensive biblical basis for comforting the bereaved and also injecting purpose and meaning to the living.

5.6.1.1 Comfort to the bereaved

It is interesting to note how monistic and dualist views bear on the issue of comforting those who have lost loved ones. Waters (2012:303), a dualist, makes an insightful point when he asserts that believing in the intermediate state is “pastorally significant”. He retorts that the belief in the intermediate state “enables the minister to comfort those who are grieving and those who wonder about the state of those who have died”. Waters applies this in a practical situation when he says:

Many pastors and parents have been asked at a graveside, “Where is Grandma now? What is she doing? Is she with Jesus already? Are she and Grandpa back together? Does she know what we are doing?”

According to Waters, dualistic anthropology is more than adequate to offer comfort and answers to these questions. The obvious assumption in the questions posed above is that ‘Grandma’ is a Christian.

This is the point that Smith (1996:14) seeks to clarify when he presents a similar scenario – “What do you say to the widow of a Christian who asks, ‘Is my husband with the Lord now or is he asleep awaiting resurrection?’” For Smith, it is the “possibility of being with Christ immediately after death that brings a positive exception”. The reason for this, Smith comments, is that this existence is “relationally superior to earthly existence”. It appears that the integrity of Christ and His character is maintained.

For African Christians this dualist view has personal and existential benefits. ‘Grandpa’ is not only enjoying heaven but exists to benefit the descendants and to protect them from evil forces. He carries their petitions to Christ and represents them. It is not unusual to hear in some of the African funerals a plea and a request to the deceased to remember those left behind when they reach heaven. In turn the descendants will be encouraged to continue with the necessary rituals to maintain a positive and vibrant communion grandpa and the descendants.

It appears as if dualistic anthropology holds hope and comfort only to those whose departed relatives were Christians. There is no mention of unending torment for those who

were not believers on earth. Cunnington (2010:237) seeks to address this neglected possibility when he says:

When a Christian is asked about the current state of an unbeliever who has died, they should not reply that he unbeliever is in a place of conscious punishment but rather that the individual is being kept until the Day of Judgment. While this should never be used to provide false hope ... it can provide comfort for Christians who are struggling to understand the necessity of eternal punishment.

While the above brings some balance and is true to reality, it ignores the fact that people articulate what they believe. If they believe and have been taught that the unbeliever goes to a place of torment after death that is the answer they will give. Cunnington's response will bring comfort if all the dead are said to be waiting for the Day of Judgment. But if the Christian are already in heaven, then the Day of Judgment is meant for unbelievers, which implies that by waiting they have been judged already. What is even more discomfoting is the potential belief that God torments unbelievers before He raises them to torment them further. A picture of a cruel and vindictive Christ is portrayed who punishes the unbelievers for much longer than the life they spent committing sin.

5.6.1.1.1 *Death as sleep*

By viewing death as 'sleep' monism stands a better chance in bringing hope and comfort to all the bereaved regardless of the religious status of the deceased. Christ is also not presented negatively to the minds of the mourners. The words recorded in John 5:28,29 seem to be more appropriate, especially as coming from Jesus:

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

This comforting promise applies to both the believer and the unbeliever. Those who will be resurrected are those in the graves, not some in heaven and others in hell. Here Christ does not engage in any form of dualism and mentions nothing about the intermediate state. It is only at the resurrection that people will know what their destiny is. This prevents

Christians from engaging in the judgment prematurely and leaves the act of judging and judgment to God.

The Christian, just as the non-Christian, sleeps and only Christ at the resurrection will reveal their destiny. There is always the possibility that the one who appeared as a Christian may actually not be one in the eyes of the one who reads the hearts. A possible disappointment exists since not all those who call themselves Christians are Christians (Matt. 7:21-23).

5.6.1.1.2 Promise of second coming - not presence of Christ

The promise given in John 14:1-3 is for all those who believe in Jesus. In it Jesus promises to come back after preparing the dwelling places and to receive His followers so that where He is, they may also be. Here again only a monist interpretation can make sense out of this promise. Jesus is not promising to take them to heaven or to bring their souls after death with Him when He resurrects their bodies. He comes alone to fetch all those who died believing in Him, and only then will they be with Him.

5.6.1.1.3 Raising of Lazarus

The raising of Lazarus is more evidence that shows that a monist interpretation is relevant for effective comfort. Here Jesus refers to Lazarus' death as "sleep". This would have been the best time to inform the disciples about the intermediate state, instead He says; "Lazarus is dead" (vs. 15). Jesus' reassurance to Mary was that her brother will rise again (vs. 23). Mary seemingly believed in the resurrection as she affirms that this will take place at the last day (vs. 24). There was no philosophical speculation about where Lazarus' soul was: the focus was on the dead Lazarus.

Jesus commanded Lazarus to "come forth" and not come down from heaven and enter the body. Lazarus was in the grave and the command was for him to come out of the grave. What brought comfort to Mary and her sister, was the resurrection of Lazarus as a symbol of what will happen in the last day.

5.6.1.1.4 *Comfort in Pauline epistles*

Paul explicitly instructs the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to use the words in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-16 to comfort each other. Edgar (2012:35) is correct in saying that those who have died and those who are alive meet the Lord together, not separately. As Christ died and rose again, so will those who die in Him on the last day. The living will not “precede those who are asleep”. The dead are therefore asleep awaiting the last trumpet in order to meet Jesus.

5.6.1.2 Purposeful living

There is a certain expression that is used at funerals especially among Xhosa-speaking Christians, namely *isitya esihle asidleli*. A loose translation of this expression is that those who are good do not last long, for God needs them. This is in view of the fact that death is seen as a transition to a better life based on the good deeds the deceased performed while alive. The implication of the statement is that those who live long may not be good.

This view contradicts the Bible teaching that the good works of those who are alive bring glory to God (Matt. 5:14). God is not interested in removing the good people from the earth so that they could be of use to Him in heaven. The promise given in the Ten Commandments to children is that if they honour their parents they will live long. Longevity and not death is accorded to those who live righteous lives. The best life that one can live can only be here on earth. It is only in this context that death can be viewed as an enemy. Those who take life cannot be doing God a service or benefiting those killed in order to afford them an opportunity to be with the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul elaborates on the significance of resurrection. In the whole the passage there is no hint of any form of intermediate state. The certainty of resurrection that Paul elaborates on in the chapter is used as the basis for courage (vs 58). The Corinthians were urged to stand firm in the apostles’ teaching (v. 2), unmoved by the denials of false teachers (cf. Eph. 4:14). “This certainty”, observes Lowery (1985:546), “especially concerning the Resurrection, provided an impetus to faithful service”.

The monist interpretation leaves room for comfort to all who have lost loved ones. The focus is on resurrection and not where the dead have gone to and, as Clapp has observed, this will change the complexion of funeral sermons. This then is the basis of Christian comfort. The implication for African Christians is that they now need to focus not on the deceased but on the one who is the “Resurrection and the Life.”

5.6.2 Doctrinal significance

The state of the dead has serious implications for the understanding of two important doctrines in the Bible. The two doctrines are death and resurrection.

5.6.2.1 Teaching on death

In monism death is seen as the cessation of life while in dualism it is seen as a vehicle to a better life. These two contrasting positions have serious implication on how death should be viewed. According to Kunhiyop (2012:208), “death is the transition into the presence of Christ”. Edgar (2002:34) notes that this has been described as a “period of rest and happiness prior to the fullness of eternal life; a period of growth in holiness; a place of punishment for the wicked; a time of conscious sleep waiting for the general resurrection”.

Waters (2012:303 quoting Lutzer), states “Death, though it would appear to be man’s greatest enemy, would in the end, prove to be his greatest friend. Only through death can we go to God”. Edgar (2002:118) mentions two important ramifications of dualism. He states that “death is not seen as the radical event which it is presented in Scripture”. Secondly, he observes that “at death no person ever actually dies”.

The Bible pictures death as an enemy that must be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Edgar (2002:33) is correct in arguing that death is an “unfortunate disintegration and destruction of the person”. If death is to be seen as a “friend” then those who kill serve as instruments God uses to bring believers into His presence. The resurrection of Lazarus was meaningless and a form of punishment. He did not “come out” from the grave but came down from the exalted sphere of existence back to this life of sin and hardship. The recorded healing and the feeding of the hungry mentioned in the Bible cannot be seen as

good news. These reported healings and miracles deprived the victims of the bliss of heaven. If the Bible does view death as an enemy then death is serious and is a threat to life.

5.6.2.2 Hope of resurrection

The hope of resurrection becomes meaningless and superfluous if death is not a real enemy. Wright (2008:36), succinctly points out that:

Postmortem journey represents a serious distortion and diminution of the Christian hope. Bodily resurrection is just not one odd bit of that hope. It (bodily resurrection) provides an excellent foundation for lively and creative Christian work in the present world...

It is not clear why somatic resurrection should be the basis of hope in dualistic anthropology. There seems to be little difference, if any, between the soul and the body that resurrects or the person that resurrects. This point is captured well by Edgar (2002:120) when he argues that if the “soul is able to think, communicate, experience and be the person then the body is not essential as contributing to the nature of the person”. He further points out that in this case the body is “purely a functional addition which extends the range of capabilities of a fundamentally complete person”.

It is in this sense that Morreall (1980:29) finds the intermediate state incompatible with the doctrine of general resurrection. His line of argument is that the “beatific vision and the resurrection cannot both describe significant events”. This explains why there is lack of biblical clarity on the intermediate state. The Bible sees resurrection as the only blessed hope.

Paul Althaus, quoted by Kettner (1986:90), sees the teaching concerning the intermediate state as being “spiritualistic and acosmic”. It is spiritualistic because it focuses on “a private blessedness without the fellowship with the people of God, apart from a view of the victory of Christ, or His in-breaking kingdom”. It is also acosmic since it “rejects the connection with the world that also groans under a sentence of death”. It was against the spiritualistic tendency that Paul reminded the Thessalonians that those who are dead will

not precede those who are asleep. The dead and the living will together, and not separately, meet Christ in the air and thereafter be with Him throughout eternity.

Morreall (1980:31) argues that monism is unattractive because “it contradicts important teachings in Christian theology”. He lists these teachings as: “praying for the dead”, belief in “purgatory”, belief that “saints are now in heaven” and that there are “no sinners in hell”. It has been shown that saints who are now in heaven contradict the Christian teaching on resurrection. Sinners who are now being tormented in hell contradict the character of God which is depicted as love in the scriptures. It is the absence of such doctrines that makes not only monism attractive but Christianity to a greater degree.

The overshadowing of general resurrection in dualist anthropology is evident in African Christology with its emphasis on the activity of the ancestors. The argument to connect with the ancestors is a clear indication that African Christology does not see a reunion with the dead loved ones as the climax of history.

5.7 Conclusion

African Christology seeks to take seriously the African categories and the Bible. In this study it has been shown that what is African in African Christology is the role of ancestors in its liturgy and theology. What is Christian in African Christology has been demonstrated to be the embrace of the belief in the intermediate state which is founded on the dualist anthropology.

This chapter has revealed that veneration of ancestors and communion with the dead in whatever form has no scriptural basis. The Bible views the dead as being inactive with no ability to enter into a relationship with the living. Christ alone occupies the intermediate state and He alone is the Mediator. Christ is not at the apex of the African ancestor hierarchy. There is only one centre and that centre is Christ and there are no competing or assisting powers.

Biblical Christology forbids any connection with the ancestor but maintains that a time will come when there will be a reunion with those who are dead. The focus is on Jesus Christ

who is the resurrection and the life (Rev. 1:1:18). The shift is more on what will happen on the Day of Judgment and not on where the dead people are. African Christology in its relationship with ancestors and in its embrace of the intermediate state has proven to be neither African nor Christian. There is still a need for authentic African Christology, one that meets the needs of Africans while remaining true to the Bible.

The following chapter outlines how this can be achieved and this will be in the form of recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

What has spearheaded this research as has been indicated is the reality that has been observed by most African theologians of “split personality in African Christians. Writing almost ten years ago, Magesa (2004:143) believed that the time had come for African Christian to live his/her faith as truly African and truly Christian, without a split personality”. In 2015, that dream of an authentic African Christology seems to be still elusive.

Gehman (1989:109) has observed that the question of “split personality” has dogged African Christianity since the early 1960s. The solutions that have been offered and recommended have tended to exacerbate the African situation. The arguments for continuity tend to undermine the possibility of syncretism and indeed idolatry that threatens to destroy African Christianity.

Those who advocate for discontinuity have indirectly made ancestral ascendancy more attractive. African religion as the central core of African worldview is a religion of experience and sight. Any recommendations on how to live and achieve a truly African Christianity must address these two realities. There are therefore two basic recommendations that this research would like to make. The first has to do with the balancing of God’s transcendence with His immanence. The aim is to present a Christian God that is not only powerful but also relevant to African needs.

The second basic recommendation focuses on the non-existence of ancestor reality. The elimination of this cosmic space will enable Africans to negotiate the challenges of their existence differently (Gilbert 2014:54). Thus this chapter addresses the following concerns:

1. A brief overview and critique of recommendations already made
2. Christ’s power and His relevance

3. Understanding the power behind spiritual manifestation
4. Role of the Bible in African Christology.

6.1 Overview and critique of previous recommendations

Machoko (2010:215, 16) reports the recommendation made by a special commission that was set up around 1992 by the Synod of the Diocese of Harare in Zimbabwe to the church in Zimbabwe on how they should deal with ancestral practices:

Conflict between Christianity and culture and other world religions is not something new – every person who turns to Christ from paganism is faced with the same problem.

Zimbabwean Christians should be aware of the fact that only Jesus Christ and not the ancestors is the Way the Truth and the Life.

The Church in Zimbabwe should teach that kurova guva and divination are the works of the devil.

The church should use the Bible as its metre-stick. It should not confuse people with the so-called “academic theology or universality theology”.

It will take the church in Zimbabwe a very long time to destroy ancestor worship and divination. But the church should not give up this battle... The church should teach that standards of God are different from the standards.

These recommendations by the special committee seem to acknowledge the fact that becoming a Christian is not a smooth transition. Viewing the African Traditional Religion as paganism appears to be strong and probably uncalled for. But if African Traditional Religion is viewed as trying to undermine and compete with Christ and what the Bible stands for, paganism is the only term that can be used for it. The view also accepts the difficulty of destroying the belief in ancestor cult and divination. These are viewed as being contrary to the Bible.

They see African theology as being opposed to the Bible and as such as being ‘academic’. African theology ceases to reflect the belief of the people but is seen as opposing that which is contrary to the Bible and hence misleading. While the view seems to be opposed

to ancestor worship it is not clear if ancestors are seen as ontological reality or not. The needs of those who worship the ancestors is not addressed, which may lead one to believe that these needs are undermined. It is not clear how these Africans can practically abandon ancestors.

Afeke and Verster (2004:59) have also made some very crucial suggestions on how to deal with the issue of ancestors. The following is a list of these suggestions:

A theology should be put in place to inform Africans that the practice of venerating ancestors as if they have influence on people on earth and are acting as mediators is against God's commandment.

A theology should be designed to present Jesus not just as another religious leader, but a theology that teaches that the universal application of Christ's lordship, authority and supremacy can meet all Africans' spiritual needs as enumerated above.

Finally the deceased cannot be viewed as evil spirits who want to mislead living Christians. Biblical teaching on evil and evil spirits is explained in Ephesians 6. The influence of Christian ancestors cannot be justified from the Bible either. A positive interpretation of respect for those who have died should, however, be developed in keeping with the fifth commandment.

Afeke and Verster seem to take the role ancestors play seriously. The African needs are affirmed and Christ is proposed as the one who can meet those needs. Ancestors according to the authors have no role to play in the lives of the Christians. Afeke and Verster point out that the ancestors have no influence on their descendants but argue that they cannot be viewed as evil spirits.

It should, however, be noted that ancestors are believed to have influence because they often appear to their relatives. They also give instructions and predictions that are often seen to be fulfilled. The question then is who are these entities that appear, if ancestors have no influence? If ancestors have no influence as Afeke and Verster claim, then who are these entities that appear and enter into communion with the dead? To say that ancestors have no influence is to undermine their power and the genuineness of the witness of those who interact with them. If these are not evil spirits who can they be? And if they are not misleading what is the main reason for their appearance?

Kato (1975:182) sees syncretism and universalism as one of the threats facing African Christianity. He proposed in 1975 already what he called a “Ten Point Proposal” that would serve to “guard biblical Christianity in Africa”.

1. *Adhere to basic presuppositions of historic Christianity.*
2. *Express Christianity in a truly African context, allowing it to judge the African culture and never allow the culture to take precedence over Christianity.*
3. *Concentrate efforts in training men in the Scriptures, employing the original languages to facilitate their ability in exegeting the Word of God.*
4. *Carefully study African Traditional Religion as well as other religions but only secondarily to the inductive study of God’s word.*
5. *Launch an aggressive program of evangelism and mission to prevent a fall into the error of the doctrinal strife of third-century Christianity in North Africa.*
6. *Consolidate doctrinal structure based on doctrinal agreements.*
7. *Carefully and accurately delineate and concisely express terms of theology as a necessary safeguard against syncretism and universalism.*
8. *Carefully present apologetics towards unbiblical systems that are creeping into the church.*
9. *Show concern in social action but bear in mind at all times that the primary goal of the church is the presentation of personal salvation.*
10. *Africa needs her Polycarp, Athanasiuses, and Martin Luthers, ready to contend for the faith at any cost.*

Kato does well in reminding the readers about the centrality of God’s Word and the hermeneutical approach required in order to fully understand it. He calls for determination and aggressiveness in presenting the Bible truths against threats of syncretism and universalism. His unique contribution is about the importance of social action within the context of the mission of the church.

One of the concerns that Kato seems to imply indirectly is the apparent dichotomy between social action and personal salvation. Missionaries had stressed personal salvation at the expense of the community. It was observed that one of the strategies that were used in South Africa was to isolate one from his/her community upon conversion. This was due to the fear of pagan influence. This can be perceived as a form of Western individualism, which is also evidenced in the understanding of the intermediate state.

One of the ways of expressing Christianity in an African context is to allow the gospel to address the African existential issues. It is these issues that keep Africans attached to ancestors, as they perceive that these are not taken care of in Christianity.

Kunhiyop (2012:138) argues for a clean break with African religions, on the basis that Christ has fulfilled all the laws including those related to ancestors, they have become obsolete. The implication is that the rituals associated with the veneration of our ancestors are now null and void. Christ has assumed all the functions our ancestors fulfilled in traditional beliefs. He is the only mediator between God and humanity. (2012:138).

The recommendation by Kunhiyop seeks to maintain an authentic and biblical Christianity. He is also mindful of the role ancestors played in the African religions. Without undermining the needs of the African, he appeals to a higher source of power that will more than fulfil these needs. This appears to curb the appetite for syncretism. It has been observed that Kunhiyop argues for an ontological existence of ancestors while of course limiting their role. It is the view of this researcher that as long as there is a perceived form of ancestral existence, there will always be the temptation to appeal to them for help in times of need.

It is within this understanding that a monistic view of human nature appears to have more influence in moving Africans away from the ancestral rituals. Thus this study argues that an effective recommendation will have to address both the perceived role of ancestors and their existence within the African context.

6.2 Existential relevance of ancestors

The role of ancestors within the African context is accentuated by the existential needs that Africans have. It is the existential relevance of ancestors that endears them to their descendants. While African Christians do believe in God, it is the function of ancestors that renders them central in their beliefs. This has been the central theme of those who argue for continuity between African Traditional Religion and Christianity.

The scriptures seem to affirm directly and indirectly the following three realities: the genuine needs of those who seek ancestral intervention; that God is powerful and loving and can be trusted. This first part will endeavour to consider these two issues and therefore make the relevant recommendation

6.3 Affirmation of the needs of Africans

Here the recommendation that this study seeks to make is that the needs of Africans must be recognised and affirmed. The list of prohibition found in the Mosaic code against contact with those who claim to have powers to bring up the dead is tacit affirmation of the needs of Israel. These were not just recreational but were deep religious and social needs that Israel felt.

Samuel approached the Witch of Endor as a last resort after perceiving that God and His instruments are not in his favour. It was the weight of the unknown and the anxiety that accompanied it that compelled him to seek help from an illegitimate source. It has been recognised by Kiernan (1990:21) that failure to address these temporal needs led many Africans to “revert to more established praxis which involved retention of a reliance on diviners and ancestors”. It was also noted that this failure led to the schism that resulted in the formation of AICs that took the needs of Africans seriously.

It is an accepted fact that most missionaries were unsuccessful in making Africans genuine converts. But one of those who appeared to have succeeded enormously is Van der Kemp. It is noted that even after three generations, there were Christians who were named after him – known as “people of Van der Kemp” (Hastings 1985:200). He took the needs of the Africans seriously. He came to be known as a “rain maker”. When the indigenous people were crying for rain and engaging in ancestral ritual to gain favour with ancestors, he would pray to God for rain. It was the answer to his prayers that made the indigenous people respect him.

Any aggressive prohibition against ancestral ritual must be preceded by a thorough understanding of the needs the ritual is perceived to meet. It is the experience of fulfilment and satisfaction in those areas that will motivate those steeped in the ritual to abandon it.

6.4 Affirm the relevance of Christ

It has been shown that God's existence is accepted and acknowledged in African Traditional Religion. However, it is His relevance that is contested and seemingly not experienced. African theologians who argue for the role of ancestors in African Christology do so on the basis of their relevancy. What they do not realize is that by doing so, God is rendered once more irrelevant.

In the process leading to the emancipation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, God revealed Himself as the almighty God. The snake from Moses' rod (Exodus 7:10,11) swallowed all the other snakes to show that God's greatness is such within the context of rivalry and contestation. There are different levels of encounters that any religion must confront to be seen to be relevant. Christianity tends to major on truth encounter, which many deem academic reflection and abstract thinking.

African Christianity must encounter Satan's counterfeit and deceptive power with God's effective power (Kraft 1981:C78). The way in which Christology relates to ancestrology is crucial (Bediako 2004:24). Africans need to know how Jesus, as is preached by the church deals with socio-psychological issues emanating from the traditional worldview (Donkor 2001:170).

The social structure of ancestors must be appreciated, understood, and taken seriously if there is to be any hope of realizing a true African Christian. Christ did not only teach, He healed, which was a way of confronting powers that are opposed to Him. A powerless form of Christianity will not quench the thirst for the power ancestors exhibit. However the following related issues must be recognized for a balanced view of God's power and interest to meet our needs:

6.4.1 Christ's will versus human will

The perceived power of God to meet all the African needs runs the risk of creating God in the image of our needs. In this sense Christianity, as African Traditional Religion, becomes anthropocentric. The God of the Bible is not activated by the needs of His worshippers.

Ezigbo (2010:138) is correct in asserting that “African Christians need to rediscover that Jesus does not come to us merely as one who provides for our needs; he also shapes our understanding of our needs”. Man as a fallen creature will undoubtedly have needs that are contrary to God’s will. It is in such cases that God’s revealed will can also come as a form of judgment on such degenerate needs.

African Christians must learn to trust God and not just have faith in Him. Trusting God accepts that He knows what is best for human beings. The prayer to a Biblical God does not come as an instruction or command but as request in submission to God’s will. It is in this sense that Ezigbo speaks of the “dialectics of God’s providence” (2010:139). Sometimes, as shown in Christ’s prayer, “not my will but thine” becomes a cross that African Christians must bear. Praying in the name of Christ is not a magical formula to have our wish list attended to. Thus prayer opens one’s heart to receive God’s blessings and not to dictate how God should bless.

6.4.2 Theology of suffering

African Christians must develop a proper and biblical view of suffering. African theologians and pastors must develop a sound theology of suffering. This theology will counteract the tendency to view all suffering as originating from witchcraft. The Bible does not present a one-sided view of life constituting of success and prosperity. There are records of suffering and death even among God’s faithful servants. The eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews comprises of a list of God’s faithful followers who sealed their testimony with their blood. They suffered and died for their faith.

Presenting Christian faith as a fall-out-shelter against all suffering is against the spirit of the Bible. The oft quoted text in Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ...” is not a guarantee of suffering-free Christian life. It is an assurance that Christians are empowered to endure not only the good but also pain and suffering. Kunhiyop reminds African Christians that “God may choose to answer their prayers by enabling them to bear their suffering or pain” (2012:138).

Often the fear of ancestors is premised on what they are able to do to those who do not heed their instruction. It is a fatal mistake for Christians to preach that the devil through whatever power cannot harm them physically. This is not only to undermine the devil's power but a misunderstanding of God's power. According to Matthew 10:28, ancestors fall in the category of those who can "harm the body but not the soul". The devil and his demons can harass Christians but he cannot possess them and control their lives.

The story of Job displays the enormous powers that Satan has at his disposal. He can create havoc and mayhem but only as far as God can allow him. God cannot allow Satan to tempt His children beyond what they can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). God does not only promise to protect His followers, but He also promises to give them endurance and patience (James 1). Suffering is not a sign of disfavour from God, even those closest to Him are not immune to suffering. Christ suffered and those who follow Him are encouraged to carry their cross which is the symbol of suffering and death (Matt. 10:38).

The Bible shows that the suffering of this world is limited and temporal. Suffering and trials may also assume a pedagogical significance (James 1:2). The hope of a Christian is resurrection, new life, new creation, where there is neither pain nor suffering (Rev. 21:1-4).

6.4.3 Social involvement

God's power is not only shown in the ability to endure pain but in the deliberate actions by His followers to relieve those who are suffering in society. This should not only be witnessed in miraculous healing episodes, where God is directly involved in the healing of humanity. It should also be seen in the willingness among God's followers to 'dirty their hands' by being on the side of the poor and the suffering. Matthew 25 gives a list of the different situations where God's followers are to reveal the love of God. The poor must be clothed, the hungry fed, those in hospital visited.

Historically it was the ability and the care that missionary Christianity exhibited that made Christianity attractive in the eyes of the indigenous people. Seeing humanity as a whole is biblical anthropology with which the African worldview resonates. Aggressive and intentional social involvement curbs the appetite of attributing spiritual causes to every

situation. The African spiritual cosmic ontology has little room for cause and effect framework. Praying for healing while cooperating with nature and using natural means, is not a denial of faith. It affirms the role of the Holy Spirit as not leading only to power but to truth and understanding.

6.4.4 Existence of spiritual powers

It has been shown that the role of ancestors is intractably linked to their ontological existence. Ancestors do not exist for themselves and God in African Traditional Religion. They exist for the interest and benefit of the community. The belief in the intermediate state amongst Western Christians, on the contrary, precludes any role of the deceased toward their descendants. The dead are known to manifest themselves and appear to their descendants; it is on this basis that African theologians argue for their incorporation.

6.5 Affirmation of the supernatural and magic powers of spiritual entities

Africans must acknowledge and affirm that entities opposed to God do have and exhibit supernatural powers. One of the mistakes that Western Christianity consistently makes is to confuse African religious functionaries as con artists. Scriptures seem to acknowledge not only the existence of powers opposed to God but the supernatural.

The snake in the garden that is used as an instrument to tempt Eve did not appear to be speaking, it spoke. This represents the first recorded miracle or exhibition of supernatural powers from an entity that is opposed to God. Satan and his angels are supernatural beings who are invisible to the eye but may embody themselves in various physical and believable ways.

Satan must have appeared as less of the evil angel but the angel of light in Matthew 4, as he sought to tempt Christ. The magicians in Pharaoh's court were able to produce live snakes which Moses recognized as snakes (Exodus 7:10,11). In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul warns the Corinthians against deception. His argument is that those who are evil can parade themselves as apostles of righteousness. This observation is based on the fact that the devil himself has the ability to transform himself into an angel of light. This

transformation and appearance is done with the intention to deceive. This can be an irresistible evidence of divine power to those who walk by sight.

Many Africans have genuine stories of how these supernatural beings/ancestors have intervened in their lives. Children have been healed, and curses have been reversed through the performance of specified and prescribed ancestral ritual. To argue that these were not genuine may prove to have very limited theological currency. It is not due to their lack of delivery that the Bible forbids consulting mediums. Saul received an answer for his troubled soul and it turned out to be true. These mediums continued to exist in the history of Israel and were consulted because of the experience and testimony of those who believed in them.

These spiritual powers promise the whole world in exchange for the African soul. In spite of the number of miracle healing reported in Africa there are still more deaths emanating from diseases in African than most continents. The over-spiritualized cosmology that manifest in Africa has led to under-development and lack of progress (Ngong 2012:359). African leaders are known to cross the borders of Africa in search of medical treatment that their governments have failed to procure.

Gilbert, P. (2014:51) is correct in his summation of the problems facing African Christians when he attests:

New converts (Africans) must avoid two pitfalls. The first is secularization, which would manifest itself in a growing disregard for the spiritual dimension of the Christian life. The second would involve an inadvertent return to a Christianized form of animism “in which spirits and magic are used to explain everything.” (heavily spiritualized cosmology).

To acknowledge the existence of these powers is not the same as yielding to their control.

6.6 Rooting the scriptures in African Christianity

There is a tendency among African Christians where the pastor is seen as a traditional African diviner, whose views cannot be contradicted. The *Christian Post* reported a story of a pastor who made his congregation eat grass. It is such divine powers that make people

do whatever they are told by the pastor. The Bible should be reintroduced to the members as the only infallible guide.

Culture must be respected but must not be allowed to take precedence over the Bible. Christian teachers and pastors must “facilitate spiritual birth of new followers of Christ and disciple them” (Pierre, 49). Believers must be equipped through Bible studies to resist the temptation to re-embrace their former worldview or live in a syncretistic system (Pierre 1992: 49)

6.7 Recognition and Respect for African Traditional Religion

The study has discovered that ATR practitioners in general are not at all excited about the way Christianity perceives it. It was shown that the incorporation of ancestors into African Christianity does not meet with ready acceptance by African traditional Religionists. While the findings of this study do not see any connection between ancestors and Christianity, it should be noted that the intention is not to undermine ATR.

Viewing ATR as simply an African culture is one way of undermining it and using it as a step towards conversion to Christianity. Evaluation done in this study is not intended to view ATR as less of a religion. ATR may not boast of sacred writings or founders, but its essence and power is seen in its followers who are also to found beyond its borders.

6.8 Conclusion

There is indeed room and need for African Christology in biblical Christology. The African background with the richness of its worldview does create a ‘hook’ for the gospel. Ancestors play a very significant role in African Traditional Religion and continue to be the force behind the African rituals even today. To try to incorporate them into Christianity is a serious undermining and undervaluing of Christ and what He is to the believers.

Arguing for continuity between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in the area of ancestors is to assume that these religions are equal and therefore need each other. The pagan gods were never baptised into the Hebrew religion. The Greek gods were

acknowledged but did not become part of biblical Christology. There may be a role that pastors and teachers play in grounding believers in Christ. The dead have no role. This is based on how the Bible views the deceased. The study does not argue that there is no role for ancestors in Christology. It basically argues that there are no ancestors, they do not exist.

The inherent bias in African Christology toward the works of Christ and thus His humanity creates a theological distortion. Christ is not just an answer to our questions; biblical Christology is not anthropocentric. Africans are also expected to carry the cross and follow Jesus. They are expected to trust Him even when they do not see the way. He can heal them but can also allow them to die. He is the Lord and He is God.

The basis for the ritualistic and magical reality as envisioned and argued for in African Traditional Religion is not sanctioned in the Bible. The dead are awaiting the general resurrection. The good deeds performed while alive will continue to inspire the living but ancestors as ontological beings have ceased to live. Africans are not left without hope, Christ is all sufficient. All that they had hoped the ancestors will do can be fulfilled in Christ even much better and to a greater extent.

African rituals, even though based on a reality that does not exist, do carry some truths that can help us appreciate Christ even more. Rituals such as circumcision, while to a great extent is an ancestral ritual, may be used to portray Christian values. The ritual may not be performed but that which it signifies may be incorporated into Christianity. One aspect in traditional rite of circumcision is the involvement of the community. The festivity and celebration that mark the reception of the newly initiated into the community is amazing.

There is nothing stopping the church in doing the same when the adult believer joins the Christian community through baptism. There is joy in heaven over the sinner that repents (Luke 15:7); that joy can be shown in a typical African way. African theologians need to grapple with this and studies should be done to show how these African rites can be used to help Africans to better understand Christ.

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