



**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU–NATAL**

**A Critical Discernment of the Image of God amongst the Black, Urban, isiXhosa-speaking Catholics within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, in Relation to Other Sources of Sacred Power, in a Context of On-going Change.**

By

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## DECLARATION


Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

In the Graduate Programme in School of Religion in

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Republic of South Africa.

I, Pierre Goldie, declare that:


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 Pierre Goldie

  
Student Name

Wednesday, 27 March 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
Professor Paul B. Decock (Supervisor)

## **DEDICATION**

I give thanks to the Triune God, who with human mediators, enabled me to successfully circumnavigate various choices that presented themselves to me, and directed my focus to undertake this specific research topic, hopefully for the advancement of his Kingdom in this world.

I thank my late mother, for blessing me with the Catholic faith and my late father who generously contributed to the Catholic schools I attended and to university studies.

I also dedicate this work to the many missionaries and pastors who have laboured in the field to bring Good News to a world looking for that fulfilment and peace which only Christ Jesus can bring, the Good Shepherd who fulfils our deepest yearnings. I also recognize the scholars who assisted evangelization by their research and study, opening the way to cross-cultural mission.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I acknowledge South African theologians, including Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, (Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg), Bishop Sipuka (Bishop of Mthatha, Eastern Cape), Professor Stuart Bate and others who committed substantial personal effort to research the field of inculturation of the faith in the context of South Africa with their investigations, and whose deliberations were stimulating and instructive.

I am grateful to the late Professor Stuart Bate, my supervisor, for being one of the human agents who helped to unearth the thesis topic within me, and for his expert guidance, as well as Professor Paul Decock and his patient and valuable support and direction as my new supervisor. Alana de Kock, who helped me with transcribing and proof-reading, was a motivating presence with her suggestions and encouragement and research experience. I thank Shaun Underwood for indispensable technical computer support.

I also thank Archbishop Stephen Brislin for funding the research from the Archdiocese of Cape Town's Ecclesiastical Education Fund. I also acknowledge the work of many priests within the Cape Town African townships, including the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Apostles of Jesus and the local diocesan priests, including Fr Curran, who was instrumental in establishing several new parishes in the townships.

Since I take seriously a world of invisible beings constantly present to us, I offer thanks to those in the celestial realms whose silent, prayerful inspirations were of assistance to me, including my late parents and grandparents, and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

## **ABSTRACT**

With view to a deeper appreciation of how the Xhosa Catholics within the Archdiocese of Cape Town have assimilated Catholicism, the thesis delimits this compound objective to the way in which the image of God has been appropriated by the urban amaXhosa, in relation to other sources of sacred power, a manageable scope for this paper. Pauw (1975) presents research on how the Xhosa have adopted Christianity, assisted by a substantial team of research assistants. Some Catholic researchers have contributed to religious-cultural analyses of indigenous Catholics in South Africa, but there is a research deficiency within the Cape Town environs due in part to the relatively smaller proportion of Black Catholics within this Archdiocese. These numbers have grown substantially with on-going migration from country to city. A qualitative questionnaire has been utilised as part of an interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the image of God held by the Xhosa Catholics supplemented with a comprehensive literature review. The research discovers that there are a range of contenders for sacred power with which to cope with existential issues, not only 'God'. Also, God exists no longer as a distant, awesome deity, represented as such in African Tradition. He now dominates the religious consciousness of the people. The ancestors have been displaced from their formerly dominant role but are still perceived as significant dispensers of sacred power. Christ's image as God is overshadowed and he does not appear to command a pre-eminent, authoritative relationship with the congregants. The ancestors generally invite more deliberation than Christ. This depreciation of the Christ image critically undermines the Easter mystery, for the Catholic Church the pivotal episode of revelation. Catholic parishioners also patronise other sources of sacred power. The research results generally concur with literature, concluding that the qualitative impact of Christianity is found wanting. Lack of cultural awareness, and imperfect evangelization account for the partial realization of Christian mission. The Holy Spirit too has only been partially appropriated. Results highlight a significant Christological shortcoming, even crisis. Tlhagale (2018) adjudicates indigenous Christians to be closer to ATR than to Christianity. Strategies are proposed to address the challenges.

## **Abbreviations**

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K references indicate the relevant page of the 11 transcripts/ notes from which a quotation or citation was made. Thus, for example, A5 refers to page 5 of the transcript of one particular respondent.

NJB refers to the New Jerusalem Bible, (1985, Darton, Longman & Todd. London, UK).

ACT Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, South Africa

AIC African Initiated/Indigenous/Independent Church

ATR African Traditional Religion

AR African Religion

SACBC Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

XTR Xhosa Traditional Religion

**Key Words**

Xhosa, Catholic, God Image, Christology, African Traditional Religion, Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, Inculturation, Mission.

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## Background to Research Problem

A striking feature in my work of on-going evangelization, ministering as a White, male Catholic priest in a isiXhosa-speaking and isiSotho-speaking parish within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town (ACT) was the awareness that parishioners were regularly celebrating Xhosa Ancestor rituals, *imicimbi* (celebrations), for blessings, or for petitioning the ancestors, and on questioning, that regular prayers were addressed to ancestors. I detected among the congregants a strong sense of being blessed by an omnipresent God and ever-present ancestors, whenever matters are progressing well, and significant fear, when there is misfortune. The obvious differences in cultural perspectives and the concerns they raise, in particular how successful mission has been in its Christological proclamation, have never been formally researched within this Archdiocese. I felt it was necessary to conduct formal research to engage more closely with the culture, as well as to respond to the cutting criticism of the scholar (Gittins 1989: xi) that goodwill and zeal are shamefully inadequate, and it is a dreadful sin not to take culture seriously. Many Western missionaries have not had basic anthropological training and have braved new cultural settings with goodwill but little foreknowledge. They (we?) fall foul of Gittins' judgment!

My concern was that we could ameliorate our mission, that we were missing the mark. We need to listen, and to listen compassionately. It was time to initiate a formal scrutiny and to be a stimulus to others to help us to be better equipped as evangelisers. I saw the need to understand how Catholicism had been appropriated by our parishioners, but since this was too broad a scope, I have limited the study to how the image of God has been assumed. When we approach another culture, we need to take off our shoes as we approach their holy ground; as we tread on their deep values and dreams (Warren 1963:10). We need a hermeneutic of respect, appreciation and trust, rather than one of suspicion and challenge unsubstantiated by well researched cultural analysis. But correspondingly we need to be alert to the danger of cultural romanticism, and the primacy of grace and revelation over human culture. Traditional belief is an integral part of daily living and to attempt to eradicate tradition is to 'disturb habits of awe, loving gratitude, devotion or humility to which the ancient cult

could give expression' (MacMullen 1997:54).<sup>1</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* (28), the missionary encyclical from Pope John Paul II (1990), encourages respect for what the Spirit has communicated to the receiving culture (Rausch<sup>2</sup> 2121:18). From the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (2010; Roman Catholic Vatican body responsible for global evangelization)<sup>3</sup>, the following instruction was noted:

The *Instruction* of 1659, also known as the *Magna Charta* of the Congregation, was addressed to all of the Vicariates Apostolic in China and Indochina, and contained directives for all missionaries. Two of these are particularly noteworthy: the invitation for the promotion of indigenous clergy and an explicit commitment to inculturation, which included a prohibition against combating local customs and traditions of a given country, except when they stood in opposition to faith or morals.

Douglas (2001:54) also critiques the “adversarial spirit” of missionaries and un-reflected bias to what is in fact the ‘splendor (sic) of the foreign pantheon’ (referring to deities, ancestors, spirits), and a ‘deeply impressive religious synthesis’ (Douglas, :54). If the missionaries had recognised the proximity of the traditional religion, Christianity could have brought completion, not reversal: ‘Christianity might have brought fulfilment not a breach with the past’ (:55). She acclaims aspects of ATR and its religious synthesis (:53). Taylor (1963/2000:xii), strongly propounds the need to listen and learn to the indigenous people. Sarpong (1990:107) considers that missionaries were ill-prepared and knew little about the societies to be evangelized, and viewed Africa, the ‘Dark Continent’, in a disapproving light, many proscribing deep-rooted African customs.<sup>4</sup> I hope that this research will be a precursor to further inquiry and serve as a contribution to academic literature in the Archdiocese of Cape Town, with practical recommendations for ongoing evangelization, as well as contributing to the broader field of missiology in Africa.

Whilst my research proposal underwent the scrutiny of senior academics of St Joseph’s Theological Institute (Cedara, Kwa-Zulu Natal) and of the professors of the review board of

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<sup>1</sup> In Tihagale 2019:24

<sup>2</sup> Rausch, Thomas P. 2021. *Global Catholicism: Profiles and polarities*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York. 18.

<sup>3</sup> [Vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cevang/documents/rc\\_con\\_cevang\\_2100524\\_profile\\_en.html](http://Vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevang/documents/rc_con_cevang_2100524_profile_en.html) accessed 2022/06/16.

<sup>4</sup> in Okure, Van Thiel, et al, eds. 1990:107. Date of article 1975.

the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and so is able to claim a positive epistemological, theological and ethical foundation, the conclusions are my own. I have ministered in black isiXhosa speaking and Sotho speaking parishes for 15 years. I have read widely to contrast my findings with other theologians, correlating research, literature, observation and deliberation on the topic of local culture and Christianity.

The Catholic Church in Cape Town has been ministering to the Xhosa and Sotho for over a century. However, the evangelization has taken place within a context of substantial unfamiliarity of the Xhosa parishioners (and Sotho) and their cultural particularities, entertaining a negative assessment of the customs which manifest themselves, effectively implementing a piece-meal approach in its ministry, which fails to appreciate respectful understanding of their context, and which regularly wonders at what is truly transpiring in the minds of the Xhosa parishioners. There is thus no planned focus in ongoing evangelization and how to engage meaningfully with the congregants nor is there comprehensive preparation in seminary training for undertaking mission to diverse cultures. The focus on this study is on how God has been appropriated by the Xhosa Catholics, and the discovery of the relatively poor rate of their weekend Mass attendance (around 4,6%), is partly explained by this thesis, and should stimulate further research into reasons for this apparent failure.

### Field of Study

The study was located within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, South Africa, specifically in Langa, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha, which are three principal 'townships' populated predominantly by Black isiXhosa-speaking and isiSotho-speaking South Africans who have been socialised by their respective traditions. I selected isiXhosa-speaking, urban, individuals, settled in the townships, not itinerant dwellers, who have houses in Cape Town, but who may visit the Eastern Cape (the traditional home of the Xhosa) regularly. These three townships are well established, from the oldest, Langa, to the more recent, Khayelitsha. Three isiXhosa priests were formally interviewed, as well as an isiXhosa-speaking bishop. Of the three priests one was Catholic, another was Anglican but studied in the Catholic seminary for a while, and the third was Anglican. Field notes were available for a mature male and

female which relate to the planning of the questionnaire, and notes were taken of the conversations.

### Respondent Characteristics

Conversations/discussions. These are notes, observations, noted in conversations with parishioners which were organised and summarised into written form.

Formal interviews were conducted using an open-ended questionnaire. Face to face interviews were conducted with 6 laypersons, 3 priests and one email interview was conducted with a bishop. There were broad comments from 2 laypersons, obtained in general discussion, which were noted, as well as observations from general discussions and interaction with parishioners. The formal participant cohort consisted of six lay people (of which three were females and three were males; and four clergy (three priests and one bishop).

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The participants in this study came from the following areas in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town:

- Langa 2
- Gugulethu 3
- Khayelitsha 4

The bishop interviewed was from the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The age profile of the participants as of May 2020 included:

- Two in the range 60-67; including one bishop
- Two participants in the range 50-59
- Three in the age range: 40-49
- One in the age range: 30-39
- Two in the age range: 20-29

Eight of the participants in this study were Roman Catholics and two were Anglicans.

### Key Research Question



How has the image of God been appropriated by the urban isiXhosa-speaking Catholic parishioners in the urban township setting of Cape Town?

### Research Sub-questions

1. What is the image or understanding of God in Christ for Catholics brought up in the Xhosa tradition?
2. What are the effects of the substantial forces of change on the image of God?
3. What alternative sources of sacred power are parishioners having recourse to?

### Objectives

1. To ascertain the success of Catholic mission to Xhosa Catholics in proclaiming the Good News via a Christ-centred mission.
2. To uncover errors in Mission.
3. To provide a plan for future evangelization.

### Theoretical Framework

Creswell describes the Constructivist Worldview (Creswell & Creswell 2018:7-9) which is an approach to qualitative research which studies the way people seek understanding of their world in which they live as they subjectively make meaning of their complex of experiences. This research determines to record and analyse the participants views of a phenomenon being studied. These views are constructed socially by individuals as they interpret them in the line of their own worldviews unique to their culture, hence the use of the term constructivism. Open-ended questions are asked to ensure that the respondent is not unduly channelled into the 'bias' of the researcher, the goal is to engage with their worldview. This is an inductive study, which starts with the participant's construction, not with a pre-formed theory, which steers deductive studies. Creswell (2018:9) also describes the Transformative Worldview, which seeks to study issues of power, of marginalization of peoples, seeking transformation, a challenge to some form of oppression. The researcher in this worldview has a proverbial 'axe to grind'. My 'axe' is ultimately motivated by the transformative goal of

bringing people into a life-changing, energizing commitment to Jesus, inducing an affective, cognitive and spiritual liberation, a new freedom in Christ (See Gal 5:1; 'Christ has set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery'; NJB 1985:1929). This is a type of agenda for reform.

Human life is profoundly cultural (Bate 2002:12), and mission cannot be implemented outside of a culture. The process of acquiring values, customs, worldviews is defined as enculturation or primary socialization (:1), the acquisition of sets of assumptions about the world from childhood onwards (:33). We cannot appreciate new information that is foreign to our world of experience (:28), unless it is presented using local cultural terminology. Inculturation is the approach (or lack thereof) of adapting evangelization to a new culture.

There are qualifications as to the validity of inculturation, notably the existence of many complex variables in a postmodern, globalized world, and the fluidity of the concept of culture. However, the phenomenon of ancestor veneration is prevalent within the African cultural groupings in South Africa, and while it may be practiced somewhat differently among the many clans, it is one constant of the African kinsfolks. Also, inculturation strategy should ideally be studied in the indigenous language. Mindful of such concerns, I propose inculturation as a feasible and necessary theological key for the interpretation of the phenomenon (Bate 1995:19-26). Inculturation can be seen as the progress of the Catholic Church towards becoming a fully local church based on the dialogue between ATR and the faith (Scripture and Tradition of the Catholic Church; in Bate 1995:229-245 ).<sup>5</sup> Bate (:229) refers to an awareness of people of the presence of God in Christ (the primary goal of mission), from which emerges a community of faith, reground, re-oriented, the formation of a local Church, a journey referred to as inculturation.

Procedurally, inculturation includes the insertion of Christian values into the culture, and in the other direction, Africanizing the faith, taking into account that certain aspects of the faith are seen as universal, which constrains the scope for inculturation in this direction (Goldie 2006). The core reason which explains the relatively qualified acceptance of Catholicism is that there has been little effective engagement with the culture of the Xhosa Catholics, a failure to inculturate, a failure to understand the local context and to react to it efficaciously.

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<sup>5</sup> (chapter on *Inculturation as Key to Theological Judgment*).

Inculturation is in effect the interaction of two elements, religion and the world ('text' and 'context'), with present human experience as a valid *locus theologicus*, since a human person is culturally bound and a source of reality (Bevans 1992/2003:4-6). Praxis, where theology takes place, is the 'point of departure, its milieu and finality' (Boff 1987:xxi)<sup>6</sup>, it is a form of action based on reflection.

Bate (1995:244, 245) sets out seven moments to model the emergence of a local community of faith. The Catholic Church in Cape Town appears to be at the step where some local practices have been adopted, but greater openness to the needs of the people is called for. At the national level, some home-grown practices have caused tensions with the official Catholic Church.

The subject of inculturation that I have selected is God/Christ. Bevans and Schroeder (2004) identify 6 'constants' in mission, namely Christology (arguably the principle one), ecclesiology, eschatology, salvation, anthropology and culture. There is support for the centrality of Christology from Hearne (cited in Okure, van Thiel et al (eds) 1990:90), who asserts that inculturation must be seen in the light of the mystery of Jesus, not merely an exercise to make the faith more meaningful: 'Christology is at the heart of any theology of inculturation'.

Human wisdom expressed in adopting the epistemology and methodology of the human sciences is used to understand a phenomenon (Bate 1995:24). I employ the phenomenological approach, 'which considers a phenomenon as it manifests itself and as it is received and interpreted by an active subject' (:24). Phenomenology is a tool of understanding culture focussing on how a person receives and processes information from the outside in order to make sense of it (Bate 2002:43, 44). The phenomena are viewed by the researcher through the lens of theology and anthropology. A phenomenological description of the way God is seen is the basis of further analysis moving from perception to intelligibility, to reason and to responsibility (Lonergan 1971:7, 9).<sup>7</sup> The final step, responsibility, involves the search for the "good" defined in terms of faith values and traditions, indicating the direction for action (Bate 1995:25). The research method begins

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<sup>6</sup> in Bate 1995:23

<sup>7</sup> in Bate 1995:22, 23.

with the current praxis of this community of faith in order to propose the way forward (Bate 1995:22).

The thesis corresponds with the SEE step of social analysis, covers partially some elements of evaluation (JUDGE) and the way forward is a prelude to concrete proposals (ACT). This is an inductive study from the 'bottom' up, moving from the context or situation to the text (Scripture and Tradition).

### Research Methodology

The thesis largely constitutes the first step of the 'SEE', 'JUDGE', 'ACT' methodology, a 'SEE', with a view to reflection (in other words, JUDGE, in light of Scripture and Tradition), and proposed missionary activity (ACT). There are specific criteria of judgment, such as the centrality of Christ, the Eucharist and Biblical theology. The way forward represents an 'ACT' moment for the methodology, a proposed missionary strategy. As a Catholic missiologist, I investigate in a scholarly way the challenges faced in the process of integrating the Christian Gospel fully into the concrete life of the Xhosa members of the Catholic Church within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town. This exploration is the basis of my Judgment criteria in the See, Judge, Act methodology

The project commenced with comprehensive reading of literature on the subject matter. It is instructive to identify that there is a deficit of literature on the precise project proposal, and this deficit is apparent in regard to research on persons reared in the Xhosa tradition within the context of the 'townships' in Cape Town. 'Township' is the label applied to the geographic areas where the Black people (originally predominantly Xhosa in Cape Town) were forcibly located to under the Apartheid regime.

This deficit is hopefully addressed by the respondent analysis of ten Xhosa individuals. I include comments noted from discussions with a female (67) and a male (52), and observations obtained from discussions. I interviewed one Black isiXhosa-speaking Catholic priest. The second Black priest I interviewed was a former Catholic seminarian who converted to Anglicanism (The Anglican Church of Southern Africa). I also interviewed another Anglican priest. I was able to contact a Catholic bishop and include his email comments in this thesis. My choice of a parishioner who was a member of the Sodality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

was prompted by the need to discern if there was a materially greater devotion to Christ because of their membership to a specific Christ-oriented church grouping. In fact, this participant chose God and the ancestors as their most important source of reference, generally in agreement with the other respondents to the questionnaire.

There is a type of stratified sampling in the definition of three age categories, the expectation being that age and gender may make a significant impact on the extent of adherence to African Traditional Religion. There is considerable coherence in worldview/religion where issues such as religion and deep values are concerned, according to scholars such as Kraft (1996) and Luzbetak (1988). The latter contends that the individual's theory of their culture is typically in 'substantial agreement with that of other members of society' (Luzbetak 1988/2002:167). This was confirmed by the comparable responses of the participants.

From an epistemological viewpoint of critical realism (Hiebert 2008:19, 20), people see the same reality through different eyes, so there is some validity and some limitation, but a grid of many emic perspectives helps one to translate through cultures, and also to see a much bigger picture of reality. The truest description of a single phenomenon does not faithfully reproduce the way the world is, but a number of descriptions tell us a way the world is. A variety of perspectives provides a broader map of reality. Therefore, relying on these premises, I feel it was important to ensure a balance of age-groups and gender rather than attempt a random sample, which in a small sample is impossible to attain. It is pertinent to note that responses by the sample of respondents displayed considerable coherence, and therefore generalizing potential.

A questionnaire was used, using general, non-directive questions (although my agenda inevitably influenced the questions). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcript is read, patterns are noted, possible quotations are identified, similar topics and unique ones are identified, and codes are assigned to the text with the aim of establishing themes. Ten themes were identified, which were present in each of the transcripts, not all mutually exclusive, as some, such as 'Prayer', which could have been absorbed by the theme 'God', was, by its consistent recurrence, allocated a theme of its own. There was an inductive iteration between themes and data base to establish a full set of themes. Then deductively, reading from themes to data to establish more evidence to support each theme or whether more information is needed for a theme.

The themes are presented in the Chapters, using a narrative approach to convey the findings of the analysis (Creswell, 2014:252, 284).<sup>8</sup> There is a detailed discussion of themes and subthemes in the reported findings<sup>9</sup>. Comparison with literature, theories or premises, common sense, orthodox theology and other sources assist to unlock the analysis to a wider compass. The analysis provides an agenda for reform, with practical results and recommendations. Interpretation helps identify what lessons can be learned, what the implications are and the way forward for pastoral work. As the analysis of transcripts progressed, there was less new data added to the themes, a sign that there was considerable coherence of views. Again, it was encouraging to identify considerable consistency amongst the participants in the study. There were no major differences in their replies; it was more a matter of degree than fundamental divergences. The themes which are integrated into the text were as follows: life purpose, ancestors, invisible beings, God, Jesus, the Bible, evil, prayer, healing, rituals.

#### Validity, Reliability and Rigour

Methods of ensuring reliability and validity include reflexivity, whereby the researcher declares or acknowledges his special interest and possible biases. It is these specific interests that determine to a large extent the nature of the questions. My initial suppositions were that:

- Males may be more involved in Xhosa rituals than females. This was not a clear conclusion, although males usually perform the task of slaughtering. In fact, in one parish where I served, there are two females who have undertaken training and are now accredited traditional healers, and they continue to frequent the Sunday Mass.
- There may be a distinct difference between a male's and female's image of God. This was not readily apparent from my interviews.

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<sup>8</sup> Reporting the Findings, 252: a narrative approach has been most frequently used and results are expressed in descriptive, narrative form to enable a sense of the experience of the respondent; Also, Glossary, Narrative Research, 284).

<sup>9</sup> Themes: life purpose, ancestors, invisible beings, God, Jesus, Bible, Evil, healing, prayer, rituals.

- Urban Xhosa will be less traditional than rural Xhosa. This is apparent from literature review.
- Older black Xhosa speakers will be more wedded to Tradition. There were signs of a weakening of the ancestor cult among the younger interviewees, but it was still surprisingly resilient. In interaction with parishioners, it became clear that even young children (nine years old upwards) had been taught to pray to their ancestors and to engage with African tradition. It is possible that as young people mature, they will be drawn more into ancestor rituals, and so their involvement with ATR may deepen.
- Change may have a significant effect on adherence to tradition. There is dilution of ATR reflected in the results, but ATR has proved surprisingly resilient. Bate (2002:ix) refers to the rapid cultural change as a result of urbanization and Westernization, affecting the African population. He maintains that we all participate in a number of cultural paradigms at the same time (2002:5). A worldview is made up of a cluster of culture texts around a central theme, which evolves to assist interpretation of reality (Bate 2002:115). The ancestor belief system is one such worldview which reoccurs within all African tradition, one which appears to be faithfully handed down to progeny.

Ancestors and other sources of power, such as religious specialists and the underlying dynamistic forces, still vie for attention due to God. I use the word 'vie' instead of partner since Jesus asks disciples to 'hate' their brother, sister, etc, in other words to put Christ before anyone or anything. It is clear from responses that Jesus does not command a pre-eminent position in the mind of parishioners, that the ancestors command more consideration than Christ when sacred power is sought.

To date, the Church has been only partially effective in its evangelization, partly through lack of methodical research and flawed evangelisation (a Western model which seldom addresses categories beyond the sick, poor and prisoners).

These *a priori* assumptions have affected my questions. *Epoche*, 'suspending our beliefs as much as possible without making judgments about it,' is one of the greatest strengths fundamental to the phenomenological method (Bate 1998:161).

I am a white male (year of birth 1951), conducting an analysis from the outside looking in, with my own unconscious biases. As such, I may miss subtleties and nuances of meaning which an insider would detect. I need to be alert to categories or themes I may have missed in my questions and research. Ideally, inculturation should be dealt with in the indigenous language. An etic analysis sometimes enables the outsider to detect aspects of culture which are relatively unbiased by the insider's indoctrination.

Qualitative research at the stage of theological judgment is always subjective, as the researcher is the instrument of the analysis who makes judgments about questions, coding and categories. However, the initial reporting is done from the respondent's point of view, using verbatim extracts and quotations.

The interpretation involves the researcher making judgment calls, which implies a certain amount of subjectivity. These 'judgment calls' need to be apparent, declared as such and not hidden in the text.

Questions are as broad as possible, open, and general. The researcher can have prompts ready to use if a particular question is not answered satisfactorily. The researcher needs to be open to new possible questions for the next interview.

#### Anticipated Problems/ Limitations/ Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the urban isiXhosa-speaking experience, but I do expect there to be correspondences with the isiZulu-speaking population as both originate from the Nguni peoples. A thesis by Ngoetjana (2002) on the Sotho concept of *Modimo* (God) reveals in general, customs comparable to the Xhosa traditions. Xhosa priests have noted various cultural similarities with Sotho culture. The Zulu and Sotho Catholics outside of Cape Town have been nurtured by different missionary orders and there may be significant differences. There is a possibility that participants may supply placatory answers rather their own, so as not to appear in contravention of Catholic traditions. They may underemphasize their involvement with Xhosa traditions. They were assured that there is no right answer to any question. The extent to which answers correspond with the literature is also an indication of reliability. I conducted ten interviews and various discussions. There is one occasion where I thought a respondent may not have given a truthful reply, in relation to a conversation I had with them 14 years ago. Apart from that, I did not sense reluctance to answer candidly; the



respondents never seemed to be under pressure. I think it is worth noting that whilst Christ was sometimes ranked with God in terms of mediator of sacred power, this was often in reaction to a prompt, and I sometimes imagined that this was a type of placatory reassurance, and *de facto*, Jesus is overshadowed by the ancestors.

In conversation with two religious' sisters (originating from Western Europe) who have spent over 50 years each working with Black isiXhosa speaking Catholics, they perceive that ancestors are still a major part of the Catholic parishioners' religious life, and they would venture that there is an element of concealment of activities relating to ancestors. Sipuka (2000) refers to ancestor rituals which were disguised as 'dinners', but today there appears little fear or embarrassment at conducting such rituals.

Given my substantial pastoral encounters with young catechism students, and the extent of enthusiasm of some for Christ, this area could be further explored in a methodical manner, as this appears to contrast with a more neglected Christ image by the older respondents. I do speculate, however, that they may be drawn more deeply into ancestor rituals as they grow older, and this may advance their forebears to a more dominant relationship. Elsewhere I note that some African scholars advocate a retrieval of African customs and a restoration of pride in indigenous customs, which include ancestor veneration. The possibility of early childhood intervention with Christian faith by the parents and grandparents is also a possible area of very fertile evangelization of young children and could be profitably researched.

## Literature Review

*Broad reference to literature has been made via citations and quotations, to support my circumspect evaluation as to the success of mission, not only within the Catholic parishes in Cape Town, but in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. In some cases, literature is referred to where it diverges from my research findings.*

There is a void of literature on Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town. There are comments by Schimlek (The Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town; 1951:154-161) which apply to the Church in South Africa which makes a reasonable attempt at some cultural analysis, and thereafter there is a research deficiency, addressed in part by Sipuka (2000), Tlhagale (2018, 2019) and Nürnberger (2007), a Lutheran theologian, all writing on South Africa as a whole. Other contributions are noted, which are not confined to Cape Town, especially Pauw (1975). Of increasing importance are more recent works by Professor Landman (University of Stellenbosch). There is considerable literature which deals with African Christianity at the more continental level.

Chapter 1 on the Christological Crisis refers to Wijssen, Henriot and Mejia (Eds) (2005/6) and their understanding of inductive theology, and the urgent need for pastoral or practical theology to insert Scripture and Tradition into real life contexts that Christ may be incarnated into all aspects of society. This is because Christ has been disconnected from social realities by constant attention to theoretical, deductive theology and a narrow segment of life, usually the sick and poor. The failure to make Christ relevant to ordinary life has resulted in a huge gap between faith and culture both in the West and Africa (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965; documents issued by the Catholic Church, including two documents in 1995 and 2011 based on the two African Synods). This has resulted in a severely de-Christianised West, and the same partially flawed missionary model has been applied to Africa (Rausch 2021:9, 10; Hünemann 2002:57-80). The authors Bujo (1986:2003), Magesa (2004), Nürnberger (2007), Mbiti (1969), and many others, observe a significantly attenuated nature of conversion of Africans to Christianity, and the existence of a dual religious system whilst authors such as Ter Haar (2009) Bujo (2003) and Orobator (2018) demonstrate that African

Traditional Religion facilitated Christian mission and provided a substructure for Christianity, which operates in a field still evincing the beliefs of African Traditional Religion.

Bujo (1986;2003), Nürnberger (2007), Katongole (2014). Mokhoathi (2020), Magesa (1997), Kiaziku (2009) and Harries (2013) call attention to the superficial level of conversion to Christ, as well as some secular motives for converting, such as access to education and new technologies. Stinton (2004), in her discussion of African Christologies, also refers to a Christological crisis, a failure to incarnate Christ within the reality of African people. Scholars such as Ilo (2014), Arabome (2014) and Okure (2014) recommend doing theology at the level of the people; pastoral, or practical theology, where the understanding of real context (life, culture, circumstances, forces of change) enables pertinent missionary strategy to be formulated. There is considerable lack of familiarity with the Eucharist (Sipuka: 2000), the heart of the Catholic faith and the special legacy of Christ. All these factors seem to give rise to a particularly low Sunday Mass attendance rate among Xhosa and Sotho Catholics in Cape Town, much lower than the other population groupings (see Chapter 1). Walls (2017) contends that Christian mission seldom leads to a total abandonment of the original worldview, which was instilled at an early age, but the original map of reality is altered in various ways. This was confirmed by my respondents, one reason being that Christian mission has not supplied alternatives for existential problems facing the Xhosa people.

Chapter 2, dealing with spirits, dynamistic forces, and other sources of sacred power, is supported by the authors Tlhagale (2018), Penoukou (2002), Mtuze (2003), Kiernan (1995) and Nürnberger (2007). The latter identifies dynamistic forces, referred to by Pauw (1975) as magico-religious forces, as well as the notion of vital force in the African worldview, supported by Bujo (2003) and Shutte (2001). They note that these forces can be manipulated by rituals. Domingues (2000) discusses witchcraft, the notion of evil, and causation, which contends that any evil, illness or other misfortune can be blamed on a hidden enemy, and religious specialists are consulted to identify the enemy and to prescribe a remedy. These authors also describe the role of various religious specialists, including traditional healers, herbalists, sorcerers and witches, the latter subjects also dealt with by Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000). Ramphela (2002) discovers the reality of a relatively new illness such as depression, affecting the inhabitants of the African townships in Cape Town, another reason for the search for

healing from the religious specialists. Catholic Bishop Tlhagale (2018) presents a critical examination of the *Sangoma*-priest. This chapter illustrates the reality of the sources of sacred power which are accessed alongside Christianity. Where Christianity is found wanting, there is recourse to ATR. The Chapter closes with a brief summary or evaluation of the world of spirits and concludes that the Christian worldview does envisage a world full of spirits, but not entirely comparable with that of ATR. For this discussion, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992, First edition) is the basic resource, as well as a contribution from Okure (1998). The concern with mysterious forces and evil spirits was evident amongst my respondents but was not the principal felt need to be contended with, as many authors contend.

In Chapter 3, dealing with ancestors, scholars who fathom the depth of involvement of African Christians with the ancestor belief system include Tlhagale (2018), Sipuka (2000), Wanamaker (1997) and Mogoba (1994). The latter contends that Christianity has in fact been accommodated by African Christians to harmonise with ATR. Bujo (2003) perceives a legacy of customs which regulate the social order as protected by the ancestors. Ancestral powers are expounded by these authors, as well as Bujo (2003), Kasembele (2012) and Nürnberger (2007), and in an older study, by Pauw (1975). Stinton (2004) and Kiernan (1995), recognise some weakening of the ancestor cult. Wanamaker (1997) and Sipuka (2000) detect the desire for present well-being as the explanation for fear and submission to the authority of the ancestors. Bujo disputes the extent that fear plays in ATR. My respondents revealed varying degrees of trepidation, from outright fear to cautious respect, and for one young respondent, a guarded acknowledgement of ancestor involvement in their life. Walls (2017), Knox (2008) and Magesa (1997) observe a resurgence of the ancestor cult.

The varied ancestor rituals divulge the deep-rooted traditional values of Xhosa Christians. Sipuka (2000), Pauw (1975), Mtuze (2003) and my Catholic respondents confirm the survival of this vigorous worldview. Sacrifice rituals are covered by Sipuka (2000), Mtuze (2003) and Domingues (2000). Both Magesa (2004) and Tlhagale assert that the ancestor belief system cannot be simply eliminated without leaving a spiritual wilderness.

For this reason, I present a summarised but partial reconciliation of the Catholic Communion of Saints with the ancestor cult as a prelude to a pastoral solution, which would note similarities and differences, as well as any points of contention. This represents an attempt to

reach out to the Xhosa culture, to interact with it, to give it due consideration. The main sources for this theology are statements sourced from Catholic councils (in Neuner and Dupuis 1990). This endeavour to befriend the ancestor cult, and to deal with it in a concrete manner appears to be a realistic strategy to engage definitively with this still robust belief system. The chapter concludes with critiques of the ancestral belief system by Nürnberger (2007), Tlhagale (2018) and Okure (1998), and a statement by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (2006), and a final summary. The ancestors need to be relegated to a level where they are perceived as a genuine but optional supplement, as are the world of saints and angels, gifts to us from a generous God in Christ who nevertheless demands foremost devotion. It was clear from the respondents that the trepidation caused by ancestors and coping with daily problems are the prime concerns of the Xhosa parishioners.

Chapter 4 on the Supreme Being, God, draws from Hodgson (1982) as a prime source of reference, dealing with issues such as the Xhosa view of God, myths of origin, Xhosa names for God, and certain adaptations to myths and religion as a result of the encounter with the Khoi and the San who contributed two key names for God, namely *Qamata* and *uThixo*. Other contributors include Pauw (1975) and Mtuze (2003). Orobator (2012) is certain that Christian mission did not overwhelm African Religion, and that Xhosa converts select from both worldviews for their moral compass. I note some brief comments on African Religion from Setiloane (2012) and Bediako (2004). Harries (2013) argues convincingly that there are strong cultural reasons for the African preference for prosperity churches, as well as the allure of Christianity by association with the apparent wealth and technology of the missionaries. Pauw's research (1975) underscores the centrality of God, but both Christ and the Holy Spirit are significantly underrated in the overall religious life of the African Christian. Sybertz and Healey also show up the deficient image of the Holy Spirit. Chapters 4.9 to 4.21 record the respondents' contributions to the notion of God. From this it is apparent that God has eclipsed the ancestors as the prime source of sacred power, but the latter are resorted to when prayers to God for a particular request fail, in other words, a cultural solution is pursued (a traditional healer), or there is resort to an AIC whose allure lies in their offer of healing.

Chapter 5, on Christ, commences with a variety of Catholic documents of the Roman Catholic Church to establish the Christ figure as the necessary centre of Christianity.<sup>10</sup> This is supported by theologians such as Mugambi and Magesa (1989), Pope Benedict (2007), Okure (1990), Pauw (1975), Hiebert (2008) and Mallon (2016). The centrality of the Christ event, namely the cross and resurrection, is also postulated (Domingues 2000). Pauw's older research (1975) discovers that there has been a failure to incarnate Christ into the real life of Xhosa people, and he argues that Christ's role is in effect assumed by the ancestors. Mtuze (2003) argues that Africans do not know the Son of God, and in agreement are Bahemuka (1989/2003), Shorter (1994), Nürnberger (2007), whilst Magesa (July 2012 unpublished lectures to Archdiocese of Cape Town) consented with the generalization that Africans overemphasise the Holy Spirit at the expense of Christ, but he added that on the other hand the Western faithful neglect the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christ as found in some AICs is theologically incomplete (Nürnberger 2007).

Wanamaker (1997) observes that the role of Christ as judge, mentor, mediator, and intermediary vies with the traditional roles of the ancestors. Bujo (1986;2003) attempts to resolve this issue by presenting a theological construct of Jesus as the Proto Ancestor. Stinton (2004) and Wanamaker (1997) endorse this missiological strategy, mindful of certain qualifications which need to be considered. Tlhagale (2018), cognisant of the great fear of evil beings which African Christians still have, seeks to resolve this issue, and proffers Christ as the true liberator, with absolute power over all of creation. Stinton (2004) records that Christ was perceived as complicit with colonialism which affected the manner in which mission was effected, namely supportive of colonialism. There is a certain African predilection for the Old Testament (Okure 1998), which draws attention from the centrality of Christ and the absence of a necessary Christological hermeneutic. Okure (1998) opines that the ancestor belief system should be in concord with a sound Pneumatology and Christology. Waruta (1991;2002) and Tlhagale (2018) note how functions which should be assumed by Christ are taken up by prophets, diviners, seers, revealers of the spirits, possessors of the Spirit, traditional healers, pastors and *isangoma*-priests, all of whom are in the arena which

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<sup>10</sup> *Christus Vivit, Catechesi Tradendae, Dominum et Vivificantem, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio, Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

dispenses sacred power. Nürnberger (2007) wants Christ to be distinguished as in control of all the dynamistic forces. Tlhagale (2018) perceives that Christ is absent or underestimated within AICs and he judges Africans to be closer to ATR than to Christianity. Stinton (2004) observes that Africa is becoming the numeric centre of Christianity. Sections 5.22 to 5.28 of this chapter record the responses of participants to the questionnaire. These responses provide evidence that there is a Christological crisis pertaining to Xhosa Catholics, and to Christians in the western world as a whole. A small minority of Christians, locally and worldwide, in my opinion, have truly made Christ their foundation, confirmed by statistics which illustrate a highly de-Christianized West. My respondents' responses cohere with much of literature, which also contends that the underestimating of Christ is a feature of much of sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapter 6 commences with a brief theology of the Holy Spirit derived from Catholic documents, as a type of framework with which to assess a particular church's theology. These documents include *Ad Gentes* (1965), *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986), *Dominus Iesus* (2000), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and *Redemptoris Missio* (1990). Authors Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000), Gresham (2010) and Mallon (2016) make contributions to the role of the Holy Spirit, but the prime contributor is Anderson (1991). He maintains that the African model of theology found in the rituals of the spirit churches is closer to the biblical pattern of dynamic Pneumatology than the western sterile and abstract portrayal of the Holy Spirit. The charismatic style of worship in the African Initiated Spirit-Churches complements the African temperament. African theology as it manifests in celebrations is close to that of western Pentecostalism. However, Anderson (1991) admits to an unconscious weakening of Christology. I suggest there is a fundamental undermining of Christ in these churches. Tlhagale (2018) also argues that Christ has been sidelined and that the Holy Spirit and the ancestors are perceived as the sources of healing. The popularity of these churches arises from their contending with the 'brokenness of black existence', including illness and suffering. Ter Haar (2009:22) suggests that the Holy Spirit may become more important than God the Father for many Africans who frequent spirit churches. The advantage of a proper appreciation of the Holy Spirit is that it renders a person more sensitive and open to the gifts of the Spirit, to real signs of wonder. The participants in my

research revealed an underestimation of the role of the Holy Spirit, although it is evident that some do frequent AICs, where the Holy Spirit is the main protagonist.

Chapter 7 identifies lack of inculturation as a convincing reason for the low rate of Mass attendance by Black isiXhosa speaking and isiSotho-speaking Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cape Town, and the superficial assumption of Catholicism where Christ has been significantly underestimated in their religious worldview. Catholicism has not provided for key existential needs of the parishioners in Cape Town.

In a letter by Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990) reasons are stated why episcopal conferences should establish research groups into planned inculturation. Sipuka (2000) seeks to inculturate the Eucharist as sacrifice. Bate (1995) identifies the AICs as an original and genuine response to the Gospel. This response, at the grassroots level, should not be overlooked. Magesa (2004) sees the Pentecostal churches as the biggest challenge to the Catholic Church, as their style of celebration is well suited to the African temperament. Nürnberger (2007:43) observes that only when mission churches started allowing choruses and dancing, did they stop losing the attendance of African converts. Magesa and Orobator (2014:31) describe attempts to inculturate Christianity in Africa as 'agonisingly slow'. He is also concerned about the liturgical exactitude of the Vatican authorities. Meaning and emotion can be conveyed through rituals as no other medium can if they are correctly tailored to the local community (Luzbetak 1988).

Mtuzze (2003) records a public apology by the Anglican Bishop of Grahamstown admitting both ignorance and arrogance in the church's past encounter with the indigenous culture. ATR provides what Catholicism fails to offer, namely ways of dealing with illness, mishap, evil spirits and witchcraft, which persist as everyday realities for the black Catholics both rural and urban (Pauw 1975). Harries (2009) poses the obvious question as to what feelings, emotions and sense of transcendence are being invoked by the Western liturgies with their Western sacramental forms. There is also the 'vexing irony of religious growth or expansion and socio-economic and political distress in Africa' (Orobator 2014:20), which serves as a perplexing contrast of vigorous Church involvement alongside considerable human evil such as corruption and tribalism. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) issued a '*Pastoral Statement on Inculturation*' (1995), aimed at making Africans "fully at home in the



Church". *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995; a Vatican document summarizing the African synod in 1994) requires a synthesis between culture and faith, and the faith needs to become culture, otherwise it will not be fully accepted. My participants reveal themselves as well versed in African Traditional Religion, in particular the ancestor belief system, and it is clear that in Cape Town Archdiocese, most of the priests other than a small number of Xhosa priests, have little appreciation of African tradition.

Chapter 8 highlights the 'dizzying pace of change' (Biko 2019:103) but the on-going beliefs in magic (dynamistic forces) (Pauw 1975 and Nürnberger 2007) and the ancestor cult, and the custom of animal sacrifice remain deeply entrenched (Sipuka 2000). Mayson (2010) observes the separation of religion and politics, and that the economy is also an entity separate from the former unitary worldview of all sectors of society. Kraft (1996/2003) claims the conversion to Christianity requires a deep change in worldview. Luzbetak (1988/2002) contends that converts need to become 'of the mind of Christ'. According to my research, it seems clear that this change is incomplete amongst the Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town. Walls' (2017) study of changes in worldview illustrates that mission seldom leads to the immediate abandonment of the old map, but modification and addition of the existing map occur. It is not unusual for mission to result in a dual religious system; the old map of reality is not eradicated. De Gruchy (1995) and Mtuze (2003) identify the mass cattle killing episode and the Eighth Frontier War between the Xhosa and the English settlers as a major turning point, whereby a demoralised, starving nation became more amenable to conversion to Christianity. Western schooling and technology have become attractive to the indigenous people, as vehicles to participating in the wave of new gadgets in this age of technological discovery and prosperity (Kraft 2003), Globally, in the first half of the twentieth century, 'more people have moved to urban areas than were left in the rural areas...the greatest human migration in the history of the world continues' in both Africa and South America (Rynkiewicz 2008:39). This has produced culture shock and placed much of Africa into a type of liminal position, with loss of identity, also, however, a result of globalization. Rice (2015) shows that gerontocracy and patriarchy survive in rural areas, and these are also forces to contend with in the towns. The number of AICs has burgeoned. Many Black South Africans have switched from traditional healers to charismatic leaders of AICs, which have taken over the social functions of the tribal system (Bate 1995/1997). These churches provide a type of haven from an oft times crime-ridden township

existence. There were signs of weakening of ATR amongst my respondents, but the belief system remains remarkably robust.

Nürnberg (2007) observes that the main-line Christian churches have become predominantly woman's churches, and this is confirmed by my experience of Catholic Mass attendance in the townships of Cape Town. There are some highly critical comments on the destructive effects of Christian mission on African culture, (Villa-Vicenzio 1995) as well as on how Black South Africans were forced into towns and the cash economy (Kiernan 1995), and who became part of a complex free market economic system (Nürnberg 2007). Tlhagale (2018) opines that the African worldview will never be the same again; it has been deeply shaken, but not torn apart. Some 15 books on ATR have been consulted as general background reading. Noted in the bibliography, these proffer substantial phenomenological analyses. Placide Tempels (1959), Mbiti (1969) and Odhiambo (2010), as philosophers, have been consulted. Tempels discerns a notion of vital force as a type of alternative to a personal God. Despite this context of substantial societal change, the Xhosa retain much of their African customs, especially in relation to the ancestors.

Chapter 9 summarises the thesis.

Chapter 10 presents the Way Forward, Recommended Pastoral Initiatives. This Chapter introduces the Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa 2019, a document summarising the recommended strategic areas for pastoral initiatives. The document is issued by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural comprehension is an indispensable key to cross-cultural mission. In 1982 Pope John Paul II established the Pontifical Council for Culture to promote the encounter between world cultures and the Gospel. In 2010 Pope Benedict created the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization to proclaim the Gospel to Europe and other formerly traditional strongholds of Christianity, where faith is now in crisis. This thesis uses a culture-based approach to assess aspects of Christian mission to the Xhosa Catholics within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town. It 'listens' carefully to a sample of laity to understand the current state of faith practice, to assess the quality of success of mission to date, and suggests ways forward, to better accomplish evangelization to this distinct cultural grouping, in a context of ongoing change.

In an Apostolic Constitution (*Veritas Gaudium*, 2017:2) Pope Francis notes that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) sought to overcome the gap between faith and life (or culture), revolutionizing theology by examining the *believer's* way of doing and thinking, which amounts to a SEE (cultural analysis), JUDGE (in light of Scripture and Tradition), and ACT (evolve a missionary strategy) type of inductive theology, the very goal of this thesis. True heresy, Pope Francis opines, is not only preaching the wrong Gospel (Gal 1:9), but so is failing to translate the Gospel message into the language and ways of thinking of today, which is precisely what the Apostles of the Gentiles did<sup>11</sup>. Healey & Sybertz (2000:19) quote Karl Rahner to the effect that failure to inculturate amounts to betrayal of the meaning of Vatican II.

The Vatican Synod, currently in progress, due for completion in 2024, reflects a "SEE" on a global scale, where the Church is seeking to incorporate the embedded wisdom of the Catholic laity as well into the subsequent moments of "JUDGE" and "ACT". Claiming the Holy Spirit to be the champion of synodality (the theme of the Synod), of collaboration with all members of the Church, not just the hierarchy, it seeks a 'conversation' in the Spirit with the wider Church, a movement from "I" to "We", of mutual and respectful listening, to achieve a communion which enables the Church to grow into the fullness of Christ, building up his Body

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<sup>11</sup> Catholic News Agency; Vatican Media address to Curia, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2022; accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2022.

in love (IL 2023<sup>12</sup>). This too is the ethos of this study, a search for efficacious mission by respectful listening to the laity, the Local Church, as a privileged resource, reference point, a theological location for ongoing mission, without subverting the primacy of the Chair of Peter, and remaining united to the Church of Rome (LG 13; IL 2023:8). The Church is a custodian of different cultures and traditions, and synodality enables the Church to utilize the diversity without destroying its richness and unity. Individual Church members have gifts, charisms, and experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to fulfil a common mission (1 Cor 12:13; IL 2023:10,11).

This justifies the use of the inductive method of theology, starting with the context, in this case the Xhosa Catholics, and reflecting their responses against Scripture and Tradition. Discernment of spirits is incorporated in the Synod, and participation should not descend to 'emotional spontaneity', fragmentation, or a rush of individual contributions (IL 2023:17). The focus on the Local Church (as opposed to the Universal Church) necessarily embraces the diverse cultures (IL 2023:8), recognizing the contributions of the baptized who assist in the readings of the 'signs of the times' (IL 2023:20; GS 4). This participation adds anthropological weight to the Synod (IL 2023:20) and should encourage missionaries to listen regularly to the laity. It understands the need to adapt the Gospel to different cultures (:36), appreciates the richness of cultures (:35), and from the viewpoint of the Synod, aims to develop participatory structures. My reference to the current Synod and its methodology illustrates parallels with the method of interpretive phenomenological qualitative analysis used in this thesis, and there is much correspondence with the basic motivations of both studies.

From the SACBC (Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference) comes a *Statement on Inculturation* (2002) which acknowledges work done by a variety of individuals, including workshops and conferences, with the ultimate purpose of propagating a genuine 'encounter with the Lord' (that is, Jesus; Pg 5). Their emphasis is on liturgical adaptation to culture as the goal, while my paper is also concerned with outcomes in the spheres of seminary education, catechesis, evangelizing and preaching, which flow from how the Xhosa parishioners have

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<sup>12</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris (IL)* 2023. Working document for the First Session of the Synod of Bishops October 2023. Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2023.

appropriated the image of God. It proposes practical ways of prompting such encounters via informed pedagogy and preaching and even a national revival programme centred on Christ, which could be integrated into the 2019 Pastoral Plan assembled by the SACBC, noting too the substantially de-Christianised disposition of the West as well as of South Africa. The aim would be to address the apparent deficiencies in Christological mission to the indigenous peoples of South Africa, as well as to the Asian, 'Coloured' and White sub-cultures. The booklet *Leiturgia* (compiled by the SACBC:2001) sets out a theology of inculturation and records energetic efforts in this regard in many regional meetings. This impetus appears to have waned considerably.

The cultural analysis in my thesis aligns itself with the efforts noted above in the SACBC statement. My analysis is perhaps startling in pointing out the Christological deficiency of past mission to the indigenous peoples, and it describes realistically and probably not unexpectedly, the way in which the image of God has been appropriated, and more generally, pointers to the way in which Catholicism has been appropriated by the Xhosa, and probably by the other indigenous peoples such as the Sotho. This deficiency significantly diminishes the primary revelation of the Bible, for Catholics the Easter mystery. The comparatively low weekend Mass attendance ratio of 4.6% of the Catholic Xhosa and Sotho parishioners in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town (ACT) is perturbing and invites a reflected missiological inquiry. According to Landman (2021), during the past five years 26% of South Africans have left mainline churches to join the healing churches, some of them even maintaining dual membership to a mainline and a healing church simultaneously<sup>13</sup>. It seems that members of mainline or former mission churches are going 'where the action is', seeking healing, signs and wonders, more participation, more comprehensible liturgy compared to the mysterious Mass, successful answers to prayers, gifts of the Holy Spirit, prominent pastors reputed to have special powers of healing, and more culturally friendly religious services. The weekend Mass attendance ratio for 'Coloureds' and Whites in the ACT is 20%.

Via the Zenit news service, Pope Francis (2022) enunciated three guidelines to the International Theological Commission, one of them being the deepening and inculturation of

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with prof. Christina Landman, *Acta Theologica*; theol. Vol. n.1 Bloemfontein 2019. [scielo.org.za/scielo.php?scr](https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?scr) Accessed 31 July 2021

the Gospel, and the consideration of some anthropological questions of today which are of crucial importance for humanity's journey, and to a prudent understanding of the contributions of other disciplines<sup>14</sup>. This is the goal of this thesis.

The research and conclusions of this thesis should hopefully be of interest to:

1. Priests/pastors/ministers of Western lineage who attend to the indigenous people of Africa, especially in South Africa, as well as Xhosa pastors/priests, and to a considerable extent, pastors of other cultural groupings such as Sotho. I hope both Catholic and Protestant pastors will be constructively edified as to some aspects of the current state of African Christian worship in relation to the image of God, other sources of sacred power and their ongoing relevance, and the forces of change.
2. Missionaries attending African cultures and those concerned with ongoing evangelization of African Christians may find food for thought, especially on inculturation. My conclusion that Christian mission to Africa has had a qualified success is perhaps startling to some. However, this conclusion is underwritten by various scholars, as evident in the literature review.
3. Catholic priests working in Cape Town African townships as well as Protestant clerics may gain a richer understanding of what transpires in the townships.
4. The Catholic and Protestant church leadership in South Africa may be edified, noting moreover statements of apology for underestimating the culture of the African people, emanating from denominations such as the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church and the acknowledgement of cultural neglect by the SACBC Secretary General (1995:2; leaflet *Pastoral Statement on Inculturation*).
5. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, which has made statements on African culture in South Africa, may be further enlightened as to the success of mission to the indigenous groupings.
6. Those who have written on African theology, will perceive correspondence with some of their deliberations in this paper.

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<sup>14</sup> November 26, 2022 03:25Redacción zenitPope Francis. ZENIT News / Vatican City, 25.11.2022.

The term 'township' in South Africa has come to apply to towns which were specifically designated for 'Blacks', one of the four population categories under the former Apartheid regime, and which today are still predominantly populated by this grouping (the other groupings being Asian, Coloured and White). The townships of Langa, Nyanga, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha and Mfuleni are the five main African townships in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, and can be classified as urban, where workforces are predominantly involved in non-agricultural employment.

My use of the phrase 'sacred power' envisages a dynamism which is a source of blessings, a force or power which resolves problems by request (prayer, sacrifice, rituals), a source which is worthy of praise, thanksgiving, and remembrance, and which provides solutions to existential concerns by virtue of supernatural powers which supersede human capacities. For the Christian world, the Triune God is the supreme source of sacred power, and for the Catholic Church, the angels and saints have been given a share in the unique intercession of Christ, an optional extra from a God, who nevertheless demands foremost consideration. In the African world, there are other sources of sacred power, including deities and ancestors, who are appealed to for assistance in times of misfortune. They are also 'sacred', set aside, deemed worthy of respect, and able to provide blessings such as healing, beyond 'natural' or scientific powers, but also invite substantial apprehension, sometimes anxiety. The thesis is also partly concerned with what transpires when an event intrudes into the life of a person, particularly in relation to misfortune (ill health, accidents, anything that causes suffering), and how the person reacts. The sources of greater power they entreat unveil their image of those fonts of sacred power, and how they seek to redress the state of affairs by harnessing extraordinary powers, in their pursuit of fullness of life.

The term 'image of God' refers to the affective and cognitive ways in which God has been appropriated, such as father, provider, protector, saviour, etc. I was also interested to fathom if respondents entertained a visual/mental picture of God or Jesus, Jesus who informs us that to have seen him is to have seen the Father (Jn 14:9), as this provides a pointer to the dominant focus of the participators. Culture presents both visual and cerebral images to its adherents, and faith is an act of imagination before an intellectual assent to new information,

so the perceived image or icon of God is both affective and cognitive, and sometimes visual as well (Shorter 1996/1999:16, 17).

The participants of the research are culture-centred, namely those reared in the Xhosa traditions, within the urban areas of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, South Africa. The use of the word 'Black' in the thesis title embraces the possibility of colonial influence on the God image, where Blacks were recipients of a 'white' or Eurocentric vision of Christ proclaimed by missionaries, and where there has been some deliberation on the possibility of a black Christ.

Responses to the survey, as well as literature review, suggest that the conclusions can be tolerably generalized to the indigenous majority of South Africa, and in some basic, conceptual ways, to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

Yahweh summons us to love him with all our strength, and to teach our children to do the same; to offer him constant attention at all times of the day (sitting at home, out and about, lying down, standing up). We are exhorted to maintain him foremost in our consciousness whatever we are doing, to sustain a constant awareness (Dt 6:4-9). This echoes the constant presence of Yahweh Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall, Yahweh who walked in the garden (Gn. 3:8), but whose presence was lost by the transgression of our forebears, so that humanity, or the bulk of it, was fundamentally unaware of our source, our Creator, and his purpose for us.

Now we are called to practice this presence deliberately, to remind us of God's omnipresence and his dominion over us. In Luke 14:26, Jesus effectively claims this exclusive attention for himself: to be a disciple you must 'hate' your father, mother, wife, in other words locate Jesus first in our daily consciousness. Mission presents Jesus as the route to the Father (Jn 14:6). He is therefore supreme as dispenser of sacred power, of granting blessings and solutions to all who labour and are burdened (Mt 11:28, 29). Parents who inculcate their children with family traditions seldom embrace this Christocentric priority (judging from the deficient presence of the Christ figure in the consciousness of Christ in daily life of many Christians), and 'If we do not know God in and with Christ, all of reality is transformed into an indecipherable enigma;



there is no way, and without a way, there is neither life nor truth.’ (Aparecida Conference 2007:22).

Emeritus Pope Benedict stresses this priority of the encounter with Christ, averring that being Christian is primarily this very encounter, rather than a grand idea, which provides decisive direction, commitment<sup>15</sup>. The Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transports us from death to life, and transforms absurdity and discouragement to meaning and hope<sup>16</sup>.

‘But you’, he asked them, ‘who do you say that I am?’ (Mk 8:28; NJB 1985:1671). If Christ is not at the centre of our religious consciousness and the centre of our existence, who or what has usurped his dominance and authority? For the Xhosa Catholics, the research data identifies the ancestors as one of the principal contenders for this arrogation of sacred power. John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets and religious ancestor of the Jews, on discovering Christ, averred ‘He must grow greater, I must grow less’ (Jn 3:30; NJB 1985:1750). Christ Jesus needs to be encountered by the Xhosa Catholics and surpass devotion to the ancestral shades and other deemed sources of sacred power. This is Mission. The core of mission is to instil a life-changing, energising commitment to the Risen Lord, who, as in the Gospel of John, in the Spirit, continually points to the Father. The substantial underestimation of Christ undermines the central event in the Bible, which for the Catholic Church is encountered in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the Easter or Paschal mystery, which is actualized in every Mass. The God on the Cross theology is the crucial motivation and inspiration for mission, ‘to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles foolishness’ (1 Cor 2:22, NJB 1988:1892).

Empirically, there is a Christological crisis of global proportions. Christ in the West has been relegated to one possible faith election amongst a variety of options. Failure to inculturate the Gospel into the diverse realities of Western life (such as business, politics, education, science, entertainment, sport) has contributed to the marginalization of Christianity. Christ

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<sup>15</sup> Letter of his holiness Benedict xvi to the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. From the Vatican, 29 June, 2007:12, Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Letter, 2007:17

has been imperfectly proclaimed to the Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town and probably at the national and continental level as well, according to several scholars, because of the omission of key areas of human existence, as well as failing to dialogue with indigenous culture (Nürnberg, 2007; Magesa, 2004; Nyamiti, 2003). More reasons for this failure include an over-emphasis on deductive, theoretical theology at the theological, seminary and laity echelons, as well as a focus on other-worldly theology, often disconnected from the realities of daily life and the culture of the people. The Enlightenment era was a force which relegated religion to the private world of the individual, and science displaced God as the primary source of experiential reference.

This thesis seeks to fathom the praxis of the Catholic community in Cape Town, employing a phenomenological analysis to derive an understanding of the ways in which God has been appropriated by the people, and who else claims attention for sacred power, in a context of ongoing change. The qualitative data is interpreted and appraised in the light of criteria set out in literature and documents of the Catholic Church. It aims to contribute to an inculturated text with which to bring Xhosa parishioners into an inclusive relationship with the Triune God.

Mission has failed to inculturate Christ effectively into the culture of the Xhosa Catholics, but it has established God the Father as the centre of religious consciousness displacing ancestors from their former hegemony. There is disagreement from two religious sisters who spent over fifty years each in a Xhosa parish (admittedly the same one), who argue that the ancestors retain their dominance as sources of faith and prayer. I need to acknowledge that my respondents may have wanted to present an orthodox faith to me as a white priest and understated their preoccupation with the ancestors. Nevertheless, the ease with which they spoke spontaneously and enthusiastically about God leads me to retain the view that the ancestors are now second to God. However, in the search for sacred power to cope with existential issues, the ancestors generally elicit more consideration than Christ. God is now a part of the arsenal of sacred resources, whilst the ancestors generally assume second position in the hierarchy of dispensing sacred power. I contend that many Western Christians also have not appropriated God in Christ in a manner which is life-changing and energizing,

especially evident in the historically low level of adherence to Mass and use of other sacraments before the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020, in Europe and North America.

There is a type of cerebral attachment to Christ, but not an affective relationship which is radically energising and life-altering. The Catholic Church has taught theology rather than inspiring faith, so many Catholics are well catechized but not evangelized. The many 'Spirit' African Initiated Churches (AICs) whilst providing solutions to existential issues, appear to err in their exclusion or marginalisation of Christ as the focal point of Christianity, with the Holy Spirit as the principal protagonist in their church services. This, of course, diminishes the criticality of the Easter mystery. These churches have enticed many Christians from the former mainline Christian denominations with their emphasis on healing. This preoccupation is prominent in attracting members.

The Ancestor Belief system remains well entrenched, and many Xhosa Catholics live out a dual religious system, with God (*uThixo*), the ancestors and often the religious specialists (*amagqirha*, traditional healers, more commonly referred to as *sangomas*, the Zulu designation) being the principal mediators of sacred power with a notable relegation of Christ's centrality. The Holy Spirit, in the AICs, as noted above, is inadequately linked to Christ.

While some scholars conclude that two centuries of mission to Africa have attained quantity but ambiguous quality, and that the impact of Christianity has been 'ridiculously insignificant' (Nürnberg 2007:42), my research suggests a more nuanced pronouncement. God dominates the religious outlook of Xhosa Catholics. However, although Christ is ranked as one with God, according to the assurances of some of my respondents, he commands less attention than the ancestors who enter effortlessly into the religious mentality of many of the respondents, appreciably more so than Christ, who is also surpassed at times by traditional healers, and pastors and prophets with reputations for healing. Kiaziku (2009:134) citing Monsignor Zoa<sup>17</sup>, summarises his position on inculturation, which should, he avers, should lead the African peoples to model the profession of the Samaritans in John 4:42:

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<sup>17</sup> in Scarin, A. 1981:36. citing Monsignor Zoa, (no further source provided on Zoa).

Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him (Jesus) ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world (Jn 4:42, NJB 1985:1752).

If the core of mission is to invite people into a communion with the Triune God and initiate a relationship with Christ in the Spirit that is life-changing and energising, the Christ Event needs to be refreshed, using where possible, African categories and Christologies, which resonate with the local cultural map of reality. There is a distinct cultural worldview, whose members' needs have not been adequately considered or respected. Missionary zeal and goodwill may have sufficed previously, but now is the time again to take culture seriously; to add knowledge and respect to mission, and to consciously avoid an adversarial approach when treating African Traditional Religion. Mission has been only partially successful, and if there is reproach to be made, it is the fault of the pastors and missionaries. Missionaries and pastors should not accuse the indigenous people of infidelity to the Christian tradition or apostasy, they need to take the blame for failing substantially to deal comprehensively with the culture of the recipients of the Christian message. Many assumed a type of mental *tabula rasa*, a clean slate on which Christianity was intended to be recorded, having proscribed African Traditional Religion. Others appear to have neglected any consideration of the deposit of African beliefs, assuming they would be superseded. It is, of course, easy to critique when scrutinising history, we are generally people conditioned by the worldviews we have inherited. However, today, with enhanced knowledge, we should not let our newfound wisdom lapse, otherwise we fail to take mission seriously. Mission is not only about crossing geographic boundaries, but also anthropological and missiological frontiers, heightened comprehension, a benefit of the human sciences coupled with theology. Mission is firstly about inspiring faith, and secondly about faith increase via learning, within a specific culture in a specific era. These two fundamentals, faith, and teaching, partner each other. They need to be correlated to distinct cultures and eras, often with profoundly different contexts, cultures, and worldviews.

As noted above, the conclusions of this thesis should be of particular interest to missionaries and the SACBC<sup>18</sup>, which has presented statements on African Tradition Religion (ATR) and should confirm and qualify many of its own conclusions. Priests who have not been inculcated

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<sup>18</sup> Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

with the Xhosa traditions and who work in Xhosa parishes will hopefully discover in this thesis a realistic summation of the state of Catholicism amongst the Xhosa parishioners and their view of God. Xhosa priests will hopefully find this an acceptable resume of the achievement and shortcomings of mission to the Xhosa in Cape Town. The way forward proffers plausible strategies for improved evangelization by deliberate and authentic engagement with the Xhosa culture. Experience with the Sotho community in Cape Town confirms that the conclusions should be applicable to this cultural grouping as well. A short paper on Shona Culture and Traditions illustrates substantial complementarity with Xhosa traditions, lending credence to the generalizing potential of the thesis to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa<sup>19</sup>. (This sentence is repeated in Chapter 10.3). An extensive literature review also lends credence to the thesis as a reasonable representation of the general state of Catholicism amongst the Xhosa and Sotho social groupings in South Africa as a whole, in particular, of course, of how the image of God has been appropriated in relation to other sources of sacred power.

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<sup>19</sup> Marin theatre Company; [https://www.marintheatre.org/productions/the\\_convert/convert-shona-culture](https://www.marintheatre.org/productions/the_convert/convert-shona-culture)  
Accessed 25/06/2021.

## Chapter 1. The Christological Crisis

### 1.1 Summary

Reasons are examined for the demise of God and Christ in the West and for a qualified appropriation of the Christ figure in Africa despite the rapid growth of Christianity in this continent in terms of numbers. Given a severely de-Christianised West and the struggle to assimilate the Christ image in Africa, according to many scholars, I postulate that there is a Christological crisis of continental and global proportions. Chapter 1.2 profiles the context of the Catholic Church in Africa and the West as a background to how God, particularly in Christ as the high point of God's revelation, has been understood by the Catholic, isiXhosa-speaking parishioners, with a view to improving cross-cultural mission, and to accord the Xhosa culture due respect and consideration rather than suspicion born of unfamiliarity.

A variety of binary opposites are noted, which describe the very significant gap between faith and culture and the challenging impact of the Enlightenment Era and the disintegrating effects of the Postmodern paradigm. These opposites discern the reasons for the inadequacy of mission and include: focus on facts versus faith; on the cognitive versus the affective; on theologizing and catechizing versus evangelizing; academic versus practical; theory versus practice or pastoral; scientific second order language versus metaphorical, descriptive first order language; philosophy versus social sciences; facts versus faith; legalism versus relationship; reductionist versus integral. New eras, new paradigms, new circumstances, hybrid cultures, new centres of Christianity have not been accounted for, disclosing a missionary model which is not theologically incorrect, but dated and only partially effective.

### 1.2 The Demise of Christ and God

The broader context of this thesis discerns that the former mission countries, in the past few centuries which span the Enlightenment era and the current postmodern era, have seen God and Christ radically undermined almost to the point of irrelevance, resulting in a severely de-Christianised West. Confirmation of this observation is found in many analyses, including Hünemann (2002: 57-80; Rausch 2021; Schroeder 2021:251 refers to the 'collapse of Christendom in the West'). The relatively recent widespread spiritual revival is more of a

recognition of the need for the transcendent and the mystical, rather than a significant return to organised religion. This need for 'enchantment' (a term coined by Max Weber, a sociologist)<sup>20</sup>, has surprised those who expected religion to disappear, and has manifested itself powerfully. Today the postmodern individual incorporates organised religion usually as part of an eclectic mix of expressions of conviction where the individual selects a variety of worldviews as part of their practice of faith. The one 'grand narrative' of Christianity in the West has splintered into hundreds of worldviews and fusions of these worldviews. Traditional cultures, (including Africa, West, Asia) are being contested by postmodernity and globalization, leaving little of substance to cling to (Nolan 2015:28, who refers to a 'disintegration' of these primal traditions), however, there is a deep hunger for spirituality in the Western world (:30). The revival of spirituality currently discernible in the postmodern Western world continues to relativize Christ and leans towards a type of secular spirituality of enlightened humanism, often perceived as independent of any power of God, as well as several formerly esoteric worldviews, becoming less esoteric as more people embrace these views. Rank individualism, an obsession with arbitrary freedom and radical relativization aggressively challenge any assertions of objective truth and confront the mainline churches with their dogmatic pronouncements. This is in direct contrast with the ubuntu of a community-oriented people of Africa, where Christian membership has grown very significantly since 1900. There has been no 'disenchantment'. Mbiti in various publications defines the African heritage as deeply religious and possessing a natural affinity with Christianity (for 3 see Mbiti 1972:158), and Christian mission to Africa encountered a profoundly religious people. It is interesting to note that the last analysis of religious membership in South Africa (Statistics SA. 2006) recorded a number of responses of participants classified as Black, who professed themselves as adherents of the New Age worldview. African scholars fear that the worst aspects of postmodernity will invade the African culture, especially rank or even narcissistic individualism (for example, Kelvin Acheampong (2020:17).

Industrialization, Westernization and colonialization have also made their mark on sub-Saharan Africa, and as for postmodernity: 'The monster has been let loose and will never be

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/disenchantment-sociology> accessed 2022/07/07

captured again' (Nürnberg 2007:188). However, the resilience of African culture, particularly the ancestor belief system amongst the Xhosa, is remarkable and various African scholars record an appeal for the restoration of the quintessential qualities of African tradition (for example, Magesa). Whilst faith in God has declined in the West, it remains robust in Africa, although the reception of Christ as the centre of the Christian faith is found wanting amongst the Xhosa in my research and according to many scholars, in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The emergence of a fourth branch of Christianity is now clear, namely the Pentecostal movement, especially in Africa and South America, distinct from the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox confessions (Tennent 2010:1). In South Africa, the African Initiated Churches (AICs) are also referred to as spirit churches and are flourishing. African Christians in my research, admit to visiting these churches occasionally, which retain their popularity for their emphasis on healing, receiving gifts of the Holy Spirit such as glossolalia, prophecy, and answers to their supplications. However, as noted elsewhere, Christology is marginalized in many of these AICs, it does not attain its proper weight.

There is a profound rift between faith (the Bible and Tradition) and culture in the Western world, and I contend, in Africa as well. According to Pope Paul VI, (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975:20 in Arbuckle 2010:xix):

The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time... (Every) effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization...of cultures (see also Luna 2005/2006:52).

He refers to bringing the Gospel into all strata of humanity, transforming humanity from within and making it new, converting the personal and collective consciences of people and the concrete milieus in which we live (*Evangelii* 1975:18, 19, in Luna 2005/2006:53). *Gaudium et Spes* (1965:43 in Luna 2005/2006:52) refers to this split between faith and daily lives as a major obstacle to a real inculturation of our faith. The booklet, *Pastoral Circle: a Strategy for promoting Justice and Peace*, (in Luna 2005/6), is the result of an IMBISA<sup>21</sup> workshop. It contends that if faith is expressed in a compartment apart from our daily life, it contradicts

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<sup>21</sup> Inter-regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa.



the Incarnation of the Son of God who took flesh in our human nature and life. This restricted approach leaves the impression:

...that Christianity has nothing to say to history, to life. Christ is for them of no relevance, meaningless to the current human history. He does not mean anything for the human race today... (Henriot and Mejía 2000, no page provided)

The theological and missiological driving force of Christian mission to Africa has lacked a reflected praxis which incorporates new times, new worldviews, new circumstances, new cultures. Thus Schreiter (2002:40) astutely observes that the Church's theological expressions have not been modified and attended to in the wake of cultural change, as a result, 'Christianity has come close to dying out' (2002:40). This is another way of saying that Christianity has failed to inculturate within its own borders, leading to a radical gap between faith and real life. Faith seeking understanding has encountered dated theologies, not theologically at fault, but unrelated to current circumstances, unable to explain, motivate and guide the modern and now postmodern laity. Nürnberger makes the same observation, claiming that Christianity has 'dogmatized' a response to the Gospel which worked in a particular era or situation and imposed this dated response (or formula) to a different situation of need (context) instead of developing a new response (strategy) (2007:52). Magesa (1973:110-117),<sup>22</sup> already some 50 years ago, warned against the indiscriminate use of imported theologies to Africa, and pointed out the need for the divine message to be free of inappropriate and dated cultural wrappings. Mbiti (1972:154) also criticised the overlong importation of Western hymns whose theologies were dated and not meaningful and could extinguish the freshness of Christian faith in Africa. This has been substantially remedied but the larger component of culture remains un-dialogued with Christianity. He called for the sympathetic study of the relationship between ATR and Christianity. This importation was also evident in the Philippines, whereby the neoclassic method of theologizing dominated and imparted immutable doctrinal formula (Mesa, 2000:10). Eboussi-Buolaga in his book *"Christianity without Fetishes"* (1984) urges the West to comprehend Africa at a deeper level, and because of globalization, Africa needs to understand Western culture.

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<sup>22</sup> in Okure, Van Thiel, et al, eds. 1990:112-120.

Mallon (2016:62), also identifies an outmoded catechetical approach that does not relate to the postmodern world (2016:61), focussing on orthodoxy instead of relationship, and on pastoral methodologies which ignore the massive cultural changes over the past 50 years, repeating the same mistakes year after year, experiencing the same annual membership haemorrhage of newly confirmed youth. Cardinal Turkson (Thönissen 2014:640), referring to evangelization, expresses reservation both for Africa and Europe as to the mode of mission. He maintains that Christianity in Europe began on an evangelical base and lost its evangelical thrust. As structures developed, conversion became catechetical, teaching facts and requiring a certain remembering of these facts. The Archbishop of Dublin averred that the Irish youth were amongst the most catechised in Europe but the least evangelised, with the Church being obsessed with orthodoxy, a fear characteristic of the Western Church as a whole<sup>23</sup>.

As far back as 1974, Bediako, quoting Rahner, in *"The Shape of the Church to Come"*, wrote that the modern western world, as a milieu that has become unchristian, 'was in need of re-evangelization' (Bediako, 2011:246). Rausch (2021:4) identifies Rahner as one of the first to discern that Vatican II transformed the western Church into a world church with a world-wide episcopate functioning independently.<sup>24</sup> The challenge is for the Church structures to adapt to the vastly new contexts that form people's lives. Pope Francis' vision is to move to a synodal church, one that listens, one that is not rigidly scholastic but pastoral (Rausch 2021:17). Vatican II constituted the first convocation of this polycentric world church (Rausch 2021:198).

*Redemptoris Missio* (a missionary encyclical, John Paul II, 1990:33) discerned a new mission area, applying clearly to Europe, and increasingly to North America,

...particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger churches as well, where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live far removed from Christ and his Gospel.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Tablet* 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011:31.

<sup>24</sup> Rahner, K. 1974:40, Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II. *Theological Studies* 40, no. 4, 1979:718

Wijzen (2006:107) cautions about the concern of theologians in Europe with theoretical theology 'disconnected from social realities.' It is this emphasis which has guided catechetics in South Africa, although the Lumko series of adult catechetics are more tailored to the indigenous majority. However, catechism in the townships for the young appears not to be an exception to the error of catechising as opposed to evangelising. Catechetics assumes that youth have an authentic faith in Christ, which is not the case, and so catechism, as faith seeking understanding suffers from this deficiency. The dual religious system in South Africa, also apparent amongst my parishioners, accounts for the restricted parental dedication to catechetics in the townships, including the problem of engaging enthusiastic catechists.

Bediako (2004:xi) notes that Christ has been presented as the answer to questions a person from the developed west would ask; as a solution to the needs the western person. But if Christ were to appear as the answer that Africans are asking, what would he look like? There is much that is valid in this view, however, Christ has been omitted from many walks of life, so I would disagree partly with this statement, in that Christ has been confined to limited categories, as noted below, thus the West has been presented a Christ who does not answer questions many people of European descent ask, because Christ has been excluded from crucial areas of life. This reductionist version of Christ has been preached to Africa. Nürnberger (2007:280) concurs with my assessment that it is not true that Christ has been appropriately proclaimed for the West or for Africa; Western mission 'misses both cultures!' From this it can be concluded that mission has been reductionist, and this unintentional delimitation of mission has been brought to Africa.

Christian mission emphasises the poor and sick, and sometime prisoners, omitting vital areas of human endeavour such as business, politics, peace, science, education, entertainment, research, robotics, social media. While theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas addressed some of these mundane issues, these spheres of concern were underrated by theologians, who were often monks, withdrawn from the world, overlooked highly significant mission fields. This deficiency began to be redressed by an emerging corpus of documents referred to as Catholic Social Teachings (CST), theses issuing from the various Popes. The 1891 *Rerum Novarum* (atypically dealing with the worldly topic of trade unions, a new arena for the Vatican) was noted as a milestone, with the Church diverging from the strictly spiritual,

opening itself to wider world issues formerly seen as beyond its duty as well as proficiency. These thus far, have been poorly propagated, but are gaining acceptance and wider dissemination. Specialist topics such as economics, for the time being, render these new concerns beyond the normal competence of priests and seminarians. The Protestant equivalent of CST is referred to as Public Theology, seeking to incarnate Christ into all walks of life.

I note a new book contribution from the Protestant world, *African Public Theology* (2020, edited by Agang, Forster, Hendriks). This includes 29 articles on a wide range of issues, such as work, economics, education, the ecology, science, health, gender, land issues, the police and armed forces, the arts, and others. These papers are written by master's and doctoral students all resident in various parts of Africa, with the collaboration of the University of Stellenbosch (within the Western Cape). However, both Catholics and Protestants have read the signs of the times and are progressing in the process of making all things new, of incarnating Christ in all the pertinent avenues of human life (Rev 21:5; 'Behold I am making the whole of creation new'). It is evident that the Christian churches came to realise that evangelization has been dominated by other-worldly theology. As noted above, this is in part a legacy of the expectation of an imminent Parousia, and of early theologians who were monks who severed themselves from the 'world' focussing largely on eschatology, life after death.

Early Christian theologians employed top-down, deductive theologizing commencing with the text (Scripture and Tradition), establishing general principles, and then applying them to the context, to real life situations. A measure of disdain has been expressed, at times, for those who focus on practical theology, evident in the divide between European and African theologians (Wijsen 2006:129, 130). For a long time, theology as pure science, sought knowledge for its own sake, and to resort to how to do things, was seen to lower its academic status (Wijsen 2006:133). Today there is a resurgence of practical theology, professionally researched, with sound epistemological foundations and coherent methodology, especially in Africa and Asia, where theologians favour action-based theology as opposed to academic theology. My impression from my seminary experience in the nineteen nineties is that theoretical theology retains its substantially superior status and practical theology, even

missiology, is treated with minimal interest, subjects that need to be endured despite their eminent practicality. Pastoral theology has been seen as far less intellectually glamorous than theoretical theology.

Endean (2004:17, 18) discusses Rahner's reaction to the concept of kerygmatic theology (pastoral or practical theology) as against academic theology, where the former employed different methods and had a 'focus more on the God who can be preached.' Although Rahner rejected this distinction, because all theology is at the service of salvation (Rahner 2004:18), he acknowledged that a 'good part' of current scholastic theology is not at the assistance of living proclamation which meets the faith-needs of the person of today. He admits that theological academics of universities do 'too little to train the young pastoral clergy for their tasks' (Rahner 2004:19).

Theology in seminaries, and at the catechetical level, is in danger of being taught in disembodied form, separated from real life and primary images, as well as from the culture of youth and adults. It happens without fail, that once young adults have been confirmed in our Archdiocese, usually after a three-year programme, the majority stop attending weekly Mass. This applies to Black, Coloured and White youth, there is no discernible difference between these different cultural groupings. This same phenomenon occurs throughout the wider Western world. Mallon (2016), writing on his experience in Canada, confirms this unfortunate outcome, referring to the confirmation of young people, which he adjudicates, is accompanied by ecclesiastical perjury when candidates who have already made up their minds that they will not return to the Sunday Eucharist for the foreseeable future, nevertheless 'perjure' themselves as they receive the sacrament of confirmation. The Church has failed to bring many Catholics to a personal relationship with Christ, who is known by the head but not by the heart. A Cardinal Czerny (Rausch 2021:9, in O'Connell 2019) identifies as the key challenge the gap between the institutional Church and the young generation.

My interaction with the Protestant community imparts an intuition that the word 'Jesus' flows more readily from their lips, adding substance to the postulate that many Catholics have been sacramentalized but not evangelised. Catholics have prioritized formal catechetics, theology, over faith-inspiring Scripture, the latter being the central focus of the Protestants. Given the Catholic preoccupation with the Eucharist and other sacraments, Jesus is unconsciously

underplayed and the Logos who is Jesus is less than central, and somehow obscured by the volume of catechetical facts and rituals, which fail to give adequate attention to the author of the sacraments. This results in a failure to accomplish a meaningful, conscious relationship with their originator, Christ. Conversion and salvation have come to be reduced to the avoidance of actual sin and knowledge of the Commandments, rather than a decisive, life changing and energizing relationship with Jesus, the Universal Lord and Saviour (Gittins 2012:166). Nolan (2015:15) refers to his earlier book, *Jesus Before Christianity* (1976) which seeks to uncover the real Jesus before he became 'enshrined' (I favour 'obsured') in doctrine, dogma and ritual. If faith is to be 'taught and caught', it must be an inculturated faith expressed in terms of people's cultural actuality (Gittins 2012:168) and a saviour that can be identified with in the lived experience of the people. There also appears to be a greater pre-occupation with missiology amongst the Protestant community. Their greater emphasis on the Bible may explain their apparently closer affective relationship with Christ. However, I am aware from a colleague in the Methodist Church in the Cape Town environs that they too lose their confirmation graduates, and it is possible that the substantial pedagogical oversights of the Catholic Church are replicated in the other Christian denominations.

*Gaudium et Spes* (GS) (1965:62 in Mejía 2006:153) recommends not only theological principles in pastoral care, but the use of the social sciences. This particular document (GS 1965) used the inductive approach in its exposition of the Church in the modern world. Philosophy is no longer the only handmaid of theology; we must include a multi-disciplinary underpinning which includes the social sciences (Mejía 2006:153). Inductive theology begins with the context, the real-life situation, which is analysed first, and then the Scriptures and tradition are examined to 'judge' the outcome of the social study. The SEE (social analysis) JUDGE (evaluate in the light of Scripture and Tradition) and ACT (define a pastoral response) methodology is the kernel of all missiological tools used to arrive at a missionary strategy. This is the substance of contextual theology, or inductive theology as opposed to deductive theology which begins with the faith first (Scripture and Tradition) and seeks application to real life. The Aparecida Conference (2007:19), in continuity with the previous general conferences of Latin American Bishops, utilized this method, as did the compilers of the Pastoral Plan for Southern Africa (2019) authored by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Theology has tended to be more theoretical, detached from the dramas of real life. God in Christ has effectively been limited to Sundays, a compartmentalized God not relevant to the other six days of the week, therefore absent from critical issues of missionary concern. Katongole (2014:20) concludes that Christianity has become a religion trapped 'in the private, personal and spiritual realms'. The Enlightenment Era saw science displace God as a critical reference point, and this worldview relegated religion to the private world of the individual. It is interesting to note that the African person sees all life through a religious lens, unlike the people from the technologically developed West who were influenced by the Enlightenment paradigm, which separated the material from the spiritual. Life is holistic for the African, who demands a Christ who deals with all aspects of life, not only the 'religious' (Stinton 2004:51). However, in South Africa many black Africans are learning to separate the economy and polity from the formerly holistic worldview.

Africans have a deeper and more adequate sensitivity and perception of the divine at work in human relationships, society, and nature at large. All of life is essentially religious, therefore any 'African cultural studies' necessarily deal with religion. On the other hand, through the Western mode of evangelization, Christ is only 'unpacked' on Saturday or Sunday and then overlooked for the rest of the week by virtue of his exclusion from everyday life, which includes work, politics, education, entertainment, and all realms of society where Christ should surely be incarnated. This unnatural exclusion contradicts the incarnation of the Son of God who took flesh in our human nature and life. As noted above, it leaves the impression that Christianity is irrelevant to history, to a Christ who is of no relevance to the human race (Luna 2005/6:52).

My experience in the townships confirms that the Catholic faith is more concerned with personal sin and individual salvation, with limited attention to social sin, to the Reign of God in broader society, to the concept of social sin, embedded in the structures of public life. Christianity has been dominated by other-worldly theology, also in part a legacy of the expectation of an imminent Parousia, and other worldly theology.

Shorter (1996/1999:17) refers to John Henry Newman who popularized the distinction between first order and second-order language. First-order language deals with intuition, imagination, symbols, and pictures while second-order language deals with analysis,

explanation and rationality. The latter draws its rational explanation from the former. African cultural language falls within the first-order forms of expression but evangelization has tended to use abstract second-order language. Shorter too, (1996/1999:20) believes that the 'high level of abstraction of theological language is clearly one of the reasons for the divorce between the Gospel and culture in our time...' He records an observation by Desiderius Erasmus in 1509 (in *The Folio Society* 1974:81) that the Apostles themselves would need a special visitation of the Holy Spirit to successfully engage with the complexity of Systematic theology! This again introduces the question of the utility of theology and its ability to instil faith as the Apostles did so successfully, and the tendency to view conversion as an intellectual assent of faith rather than an act of imagination (Shorter 1996/1999:16, 19), and a personal relationship with the Lord as well.

Theology has been defined as faith seeking understanding, but its complexity at times and its divorce from primary symbols has rendered it an obstacle or inconsequential to functional mission. The result has been mission that delivers cerebral hurdles to successful evangelization instead of practical, well-reflected engagement with the targets of mission. Ngalula (2014:131) highlights the significant distance between African theologians and lay people. A theology is needed which is at the service of the people. Theology needs to be pursued grounded in lived experience, to provide answers and hope. The hyper-intellectualised environment of the seminaries needs to be balanced with pastoral orientation or risk the chance of forming priests whose theology is inadequate for the challenging task of ministering in a parish. Missiology in my experience in the National seminary in the Nineteen Nineties (South Africa) was regularly omitted as a seminary course, and this in a Church which defines itself as missionary by its very nature!

To some extent, black Africans have received a type of classroom teaching as part of a Catholic School programme, learning the faith without necessarily 'catching' it. There has been an intellectual reception of doctrine as opposed to a commitment at the level of heart, passion and zeal. While the African child was purportedly evangelised at the mission or school, they were socialized with African Traditional Religion in their homes and communities. Taylor (1963/2001:1) also argues that Christianity has been transmitted as a classroom religion, failing to appeal to the imagination and deeper parts of the pupils, as a result, remaining a



white person's religion. Culture and dogma should not be allowed to 'remain trapped at the surface level, alienated from the deepest languages of our humanity' (Magesa in Orobator 2014:40). Wijzen (2006:136-137) opines that the 'spiritual power is alive as never before in African folk culture and popular religion, traditional medicine and customary law'. God's kingdom and God are already present in Africa, but also yet to come (Walls 2006:141). I believe a well-planned inculturated proclamation of Christ could sensitively harness this spiritual energy.

The holistic worldview of the African person contrasts with the compartmentalized lens of the industrialized West and the former needs a holistic Christ who is Lord of all human endeavour. The African theologian Setiloane (noted in a dialogue with Masoga 2012:1) aimed to bring African spirituality into the public realm, governance and corporate institutions. He contends that:

every African person carries this spirituality and morality into his or her workplace every day of their lives. Africans function as whole human beings, where the spiritual and the real are not separated from one another, but intricately and inextricably intertwined.

Whether the modern separation of the economy and polity evident in South Africa from the holistic African worldview supports Setiloane's assertion is uncertain.

Pope Benedict avers that: 'indeed, the missionary activity of the People of God is not only intended for non-Christian peoples and distant lands, but above all for social and cultural contexts and hearts' (in Aparecida Conference 2007:375).<sup>25</sup> This conference summarised the dilemma of the Church, opining that the Church must start with Christ and an encounter with him, not with ethical choices and elevated theology (Aparecida Conference, 2007:8, 12).

It is within this context that we consider the particular experience of the Xhosa Catholics within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town.

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<sup>25</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address on Fortieth Anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, March 11, 2006.

### 1.3 The Eucharist

‘The liturgy... is a celebration of the priestly office of Jesus Christ...(and) because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy...’ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963, paragraph 7)<sup>26</sup>. Also

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is the fount from which her power flows (*SC* 10).

The Mass, the Eucharist, is the heart of the Church’s life. It is the acme of Catholic celebration, and when it is commemorated, it accomplishes Christ’s work of sanctification and is the richest source of charismatic gifts. If ignorance of the Bible is ignorance of Christ (attributed to St Jerome), I venture that ignorance of the Eucharist is also ignorance of Christ. The low Mass attendance underscores this lack of conversion to Christ, and the impoverished understanding of the Mass. A powerful relationship with Christ must draw a Catholic to the Mass. In *IL* (2023:47; 18, the working document for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023) the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, is regarded as the exceptional way in which the faithful experience the mystery of Christ and the Church, and fosters unity. It regards the multiplicity of rites in the one Catholic Church as a real blessing to be both protected and promoted.

Eucharistic theology or doctrine is generally not well known despite the vital importance attached to this sacrament. One of the respondents to my questionnaire volunteered the opinion that:

The Xhosa and Sotho, um, people don’t really understand the whole Mass...they’ll be happy with the penitential rite, after the Gospel we say we can go home because it is all about the Word (E20, middle-aged priest).

The Word (Bible) for many is more important than the sacrifice because the latter is not understood, acknowledged, or apprehended as something unique and extraordinary. It can be debated as to whether parishioners remain attentive after the celebration of the Word when the priest alone intones the lengthy Eucharistic prayer. This could mean a material undermining of Christ and his role in the Mass. A significant number of parishioners of all

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<sup>26</sup> *SC*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, a Vatican II document,

cultures see the Eucharistic rite of the Mass only as the part where the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, unmindful of the key sacrificial aspect. This emerges from discussions with parishioners. I venture that this undermining error is not limited to Black African culture, and that it subtracts from the image of Christ the Sacrificial Lamb, and it is detached from his sacrifice made present in the Eucharist. An Anglican priest working in a parish in Khayelitsha assured me that the Anglicans 'loved the Mass', but he agreed that their understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice was incomplete. Another priest contended that the Mass should be explained as a type of traditional meal.

There are various cultural reasons for not attending the Sunday Eucharist. For example, if a woman's husband dies, she must generally 'welcome the death', which means sitting on a mattress at home until the funeral. She is housebound for up to a full year and this includes not attending the Mass, although she is permitted to attend work. It is a period of mourning, *ukuzila*, (to mourn; also, to fast). As a priest dedicated to the Eucharist and its potential effects on people in pain or sorrow, and as one who constantly attempts to extol the benefits of the Mass, I observed that the Mass is ancillary to certain Xhosa customs for many Xhosa people, such as an ancestor celebration, or a burial society meeting, or a mourning period. For some, the informal community burial society takes precedence over the Sunday Mass. This is not an attempt to condemn, but to contrast Xhosa custom with Catholic traditions to form an assessment of how Christ's sacrifice institutionalised in the sacrament of the Eucharist fares against local Xhosa custom, and the success of imparting Christ as the centre of faith.

A further custom is that unmarried pregnant women must not attend church services. A devout Catholic was quite content to participate in a family cleansing ritual rather than the Sunday Eucharist on the sixth month after their father's death (conversation January 2020). In the Western world, where Sunday Mass attendance is at an all-time low, there are many cultural habits which preclude Sunday observance mainly in the area of leisure interests, notably sport. The Xhosa cultural alternatives can also be of a religious nature, such as a ritual of ATR. But the attraction of sport and other leisure interests which stop males from attending the Sunday Mass is also significant. In one parish, I witnessed a devout Catholic become initiated as a *Sangoma*, or *igqirha*, as they felt the need to correspond with their ancestors, who were calling them to become a traditional healer. The circumstances that galvanized this

resolution appear to begin with the experience of various adversities. These were scrutinised through a traditional cultural lens, principally the ancestor belief system. Again, this illuminates the prolonged presence of awe-inspiring Xhosa customs, which perceive the ancestors as purveyors of substantial sacred powers in a manner that is generally separate from their religious transactions with God in the Church. (conversation January 2020 and November 2020, and January 2022).

Nominalism refers to little or no connection between religious expression and its relevance to daily life, to existential issues (Shaw 2018:5). The issues that I interrogate are: how relevant is the Mass to the daily life of the parishioners? How does the Mass relate to real life? Where is there praying over members for special intentions as in other churches? What does the Mass do for the individual? What do they 'get out of it? These are questions parishioner may ask themselves, and they probably contribute to irregular attendance or non-attendance.

The following is *not* a pietistic criticism, but a genuine attempt to gauge the sense of commitment to a real Christ, as opposed to a nominal loyalty, a consequence of on-going engagement with ATR, and postmodern values. Two contraventions of the Ten Commandments, namely fornication and not honouring Sunday worship (Mass, for Catholics), both of which require a Catholic to confess in the sacrament of reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion worthily, are widespread in all the cultural groupings, in my experience, and a significant number of parishioners are ignoring this veto, and they are receiving Communion despite the admonition that this simply adds to one's transgression, because we have to be worthy (in a state of grace) to receive the sacrament. This raises the question of the extent of one's conversion to Christ and his precepts, and how much of faith is in fact nominalism, an acting out of one's religion without deep conviction, of going through some of the motions and perhaps hoping for the best. The error lies with the missionary, who has operated with minimal knowledge of African culture, who assumed that they were replacing ATR with Christianity, whereas Christianity has been included as part of a wider resource of spiritual goods to invoke the divine, along with enduring ATR.

Sipuka (2000:1) writes about how when he explained to Xhosa Catholics the Eucharistic Sacrifice in 'Xhosa terms of sacrifice', he received the 'overwhelming attention of the congregation', many who afterwards related that for the first time, they understood the Mass

as a sacrifice. Nevertheless, he pondered as to whether they apprehended the rituals of the Mass through their own cultural lens. Thus, he penned his thesis motivated by 'a need to live, celebrate and express the faith in the cultural mentality of the people to whom it is preached in this particular case, the Xhosa people' (Sipuka 2000:1). He notes how the word *iDini*, which means sacrifice, has been used to describe the Mass amongst Catholic parishioners, and that it is thus described in the very popular Xhosa Catholic prayer book titled *iDini eliNgwele*, (The Holy Sacrifice). Sipuka (2000:2) finds only a small number of studies dialoguing the Eucharist as sacrifice and the practice of sacrifice amongst the Xhosa, despite the centrality of this theme in the Catholic and Xhosa traditions. Setiloane (1986:57) observes that the 'in and out' style (where Western congregants neither arrive early at the Church and leave immediately the service is ended) of the Mass is contrary to the African style of celebration which endures for a longer time, and with continuous interaction. Magesa (2004:52, 84, 94- 95) refers in several places to people who value more involvement as part of the congregation, not content to be passive listeners. Some youth describe services as boring, and there are many who decry the absence of healing and deliverance rites, whilst some on the other hand, resist traditional rituals within the Mass. This research was done in East Africa. In Cape Town, from personal experience, it seems that the lack of opportunity for parishioners to be involved in the Eucharist and the predominance of female parishioners deters adult males from attending Mass. However, there is a strong desire to be part of the proceedings, and to sport clerical attire (males) or uniforms (males and females), while the opportunities for further participation in the Eucharist are limited.

There have been explicit measures by the Second Vatican Council to close the gap between religion and life including the use of the vernacular and the adaptation of rites to diverse cultures, with 'a firm insistence on the centrality of the paschal mystery,' which is actualized in the Eucharist to recover the 'lost synthesis' (Häring 1976:9). The disparity between religion and life is far from being resolved however, because of the impoverished understanding of the Eucharist, which is steeped in theological verbiage perhaps inimical to a genuine, rewarding and vitalising reception. God confers grace but the Church can dispose members to be more receptive to divine gifts through the words, signs, and symbols it employs.

The Congolese Rite (formerly the Zairean Rite) is the only inculturated rite approved (1988) after the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis ('Church Militant' article<sup>27</sup>) extols the cultural vibrancy and spirituality of this rite, which invite the enhancing of gifts of the Holy Spirit, thereby enriching humanity. The Church Militant is a Catholic body which seeks to influence Catholic opinion according to its own agenda, often very critical of the current practices in the Church, liturgical or otherwise. The Congolese rite is animated by African rhythm, drums and other instruments which root the Christian message in the Congolese soul. The Pope perceives it as a 'true place of encounter with Jesus'. He is confident that that inculturation is possible both in Africa and Amazon without upsetting the nature of the Roman Missal, to guarantee continuity with the ancient and universal tradition of the Church'. However, the Church Militant argues that 'This is not the moment to include half-baked theological speculations in the liturgy'. This comment highlights the potential controversy inculturation of the Mass can generate. Catholic News Agency, (2022/07/05) reports the celebration of the Zairian Rite by Pope Francis, in St Peter's Basilica, Rome<sup>28</sup> demonstrating his positive support of inculturated liturgy.

#### 1.4 Christian Mission to Africa: A Qualified Success

The growth of Christianity in Africa over the past one hundred years is described as the miracle of the century, an 'evangelical and statistical miracle' (Orobator 2018:25). Sub-Saharan Africa saw a rise in membership from 7 million Christians in 1910 to 470 million in 2010, and it is forecast to increase to 630 million by 2025 (Ter Haar 2009:22). By 2040, Africa's population should reach 1.9 billion, and because of a comparatively low median age currently, could peak at 4.7 billion in 2100, as estimated by Pew Research.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> (Churchmilitant.com/news/article/pope-praises-african-rite-invoking-ancestors Downloaded 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/251706/pope-francis-celebrates-mass-in-the-congolese-rite>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/worlds-population-is-projected-to-nearly-stop-growing-by-the-end-of-the-century/> Accessed 31 January 2020.

The relatively rapid growth is likely to continue. Catholicism's share of this growth in Africa was even faster, with the proportion of Catholics rising from 12.5% of African population in 1900 to 18.6% in 2012 (Orobator 2018:25). Orobator observes a high rate of church attendance amongst Catholics, submitting a rate of 92% in Nigeria, compared with 38% in South Africa. However, in Cape Town, Catholicism amongst the Xhosa and Sotho is not growing rapidly, and the Mass attendance ratio is particularly low.

Orobator (2018:84) also cites Jenkins (2002:85-89) and Allen (2009:23-26) who conclude from the statistics that Africa, South America, and Asia will, numerically constitute the next Christendom, and that the global shift of gravity to the South will impact the universal Church significantly. These three continents are expected to lead the Catholic Church, 'albeit in the direction of social conservatism and evangelical Pentecostalism' (Allen 2009:23-26). As for the Catholic Church, by 2050 75% of Catholics will be south of the equator (Rausch 2021:1). Numerically and qualitatively Christianity is becoming increasingly a non-Western religion (Walls 2017:ix). Africa could become a 'major theological laboratory' (Bediako 2018:151). Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa is some 46% Christian and 45% Islamic. This is the macro environment of the Church in South Africa.

Taylor (1963/2000:4) attributes much of the increase to the Christian Church's 'virtual monopoly of Western education more than any other factor.' With the secularization of education, similar growth from this source cannot be expected. Hanciles (2011:232) identifies the local peoples, who took the Christian missionary task in their own hands as major contributors to the increase in new adherents. Bediako (2011:250) is also confident that it was the indigenous people who accounted for the huge growth. Bredekamp and Ross (1995:9) similarly observe the mass conversions in twentieth century in South Africa. The African Initiated Churches (AICs), often breakaways from mainline churches, constituting a type of 'African Reformation', contribute to the fact that 80% of South Africans confess themselves to be Christian (STATSSA 2006, 2018). Elphick (1995:17) agrees that:

African converts embraced some form of the Gospel with enthusiasm, and carried it, with or without missionary approval, to their families and villages, and often to new regions altogether.

The availability of the Bible in the vernacular empowered confident Africans to initiate their own expressions of Christianity in their independent churches. Another growth factor was the significant increase in life expectancy made possible by the Western bio-medical model.

Many scholars are confident that the primal religion of Africa is substantially congruent with the principles of Christianity, a further reason for the rapid expansion of the Christian faith in Africa (for example, Mbiti, 1972:150; also Tippet 1972:132, 133). This also applies to Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific regions (Walls 2017:143, 144). Primal religion forms the substructure of Christianity, as it did in the West, from its conversion from primal to Christian (Walls 2017:149). Ter Haar (2009:21), observing the surprising resilience of traditional religion in Africa and other former colonies attributes this to the underlying vibrancy of African religion. Africans received from missionaries what they already had (Balcomb 2013:587), and thus Africans were more effective than the missionaries, asserting that Christianity is an African religion. It seems that without African religiosity, Christianity would have taken much longer to be accommodated by African people.

Walls (2017:149) concurs that primal religions 'have proved the most fertile soil for the Christian message.' Walls (2017:149) adds:

...and the Bible, the Old Testament in particular, shows us a good deal about primal worldviews in action, and instantly recognizable in Africa and many other parts of the world.

Primal religion was God's preparation for Christian mission. So, in Africa, Islam and Christianity are blossoming, but within 'a field sown with the beliefs and practices of African religion' (Orobator:2018:60). Walls is certain that the on-going importance of the primal view does not imply that conversion is necessarily superficial or negligible (Walls 2017:120). Primal religions often confess a distant, aloof Creator God. Deities and ancestors are the prime dispensers of sacred power. Religious specialists and rituals preserve a balance of dynamistic forces. In the Archdiocese of Cape Town, I observed a major increase in the God component relegating ancestors to second place, and the addition of Christ as another source of sacred power, although I argue, as a tertiary source. If the substantial effort dedicated to ancestors is considered, it overshadows the attention given to Christ.



The transformation has been more of an Africanization of the Western worldview than a Christianization of the African worldview. If Africa feared a loss of identity from interaction with the west, Balcomb argues that African identity has flowered within Christianity (2013:587). Mills (1995:166), writing from the South African experience, also concludes that 'Christianity was accepted in addition to, rather than in place of traditional beliefs.' He submits that ATR is upheld in the realm of personal and family concerns, and Christianity is accessed for the wider political and economic aspects of life, although Pauw (1975:256) identified Christianity's effective application by the Xhosa to life after death, to eschatological concerns, not to current life issues. Elphick (1995:17, 21) traces the Africanization of Christianity in South Africa to the turn of the nineteenth century chronicling the earlier influence of Ntsikana a charismatic Christian prophet who died in 1821. The faith would not have taken hold without it being naturalized before being internalized; there was 'makeshift improvisation', which he terms *bricolage*. Missionaries 'had always to compromise or, in some cases, to turn a blind eye' (Mills 1995:167). He concurs with the conclusion that 'Christianity was accepted in addition to, rather than in place of, traditional beliefs' (:166).

Oduyoye (a prominent Ghanaian Methodist theologian) saw Christian mission as arrogant, Eurocentric, accompanied by colonialism and commerce, materially inadequate and superficial hence the superficial uptake of Christianity by Africa (1986:41; in Han 2013:184). Mokhoathi (2020:2) is a South African scholar who attributes early conversions to more worldly motives. He records the pessimistic and even hostile view of ATR by the missionaries, and their attempts to abolish African tradition and injunctions against those who disobeyed their rulings. Despite this, ATR endured but eventually moved beyond the stage of pretence to the stage where converts willingly preferred to juxtapose Christianity and ATR, to appropriate the new faith system with their own accommodations. Accommodations were not necessarily tenable in terms of Biblical theology. Mbiti (Magesa, 1997,2008:17) wrote that changes were superficial and were only beginning to reach deeper levels.

Mokhoathi (2020:6) is but one observer who understands the need for Africans to engage traditional tools to cope with evil, in addition to the newly available Christian resources of rituals, and other sacraments, if the latter are not seen to provide solutions to existential needs. Some pastors, local and elsewhere, demand bizarre measures from their congregants

and misrepresent Christianity, including their guarantee that their Christian denomination is an assured font of prosperity and physical wellbeing.

The two religions, Christianity and Islam, have grown, but not to the exclusion of ATR. It supports, cooperates, competes, or partners with the two world religions (Orobator 2018:67). He lists qualities of African religion which appear to sustain and merge with the other two religions, namely: *ubuntu*, which prioritizes inclusivity over exclusivity, community over competition, hospitality over hostility, dialogue over confrontation and respect over domination (Orobator 2018:72). These qualities fit in well with the Christian norm of loving one's neighbour and the principle of solidarity. He also refers to tolerance and mutuality, which support religious pluralism and diversity. He argues that Christianity has much to learn from African religion (Orobator 2018:104).

Africans continue to consult traditional religious specialists and to wear protective accessories (Orobator 2019:68). Both Ntombana (2015:105-111) and Sipuka (2000:170) claim that ancestor rituals were initially covertly performed in South Africa. Ntombana (2015) researched members of former mainline or mission churches, AICS, and Zionist churches, while Sipuka (2000) investigated Xhosa customs. There is still an element of secrecy amongst Xhosa parishioners in relation to ancestor rituals, but Sipuka notes that the custom of sacrifice to the ancestors is still deeply entrenched among modern Xhosa speaking people; even by residents who live in upmarket urban settings (Sipuka 2000:170). Some mainline (mission) churches do not have an official stand on these issues. Some missionaries attempted to proscribe these rituals, and some African Pentecostals banned these practices viewing them as Satanic. In practice, within the Archdiocese of Cape Town, many parishioners participate in rituals, but they are performed wholly separate from Catholic services. However, prayers to God may preface an ancestor ritual according to my respondents. Mokhoathi's (2017:115) research in South Africa shows that most mainline (mission) churches do not preach against ancestor rituals (this is confirmed in my experience with the Catholic community), and some attempts to do so evoke the response "*yeka into zabantu*" (leave the thing of the people (alone)).

There have been a small number of inculturated Masses in Cape Town, but these have not become a regular feature. The church hierarchy pronounced no official verdict on this issue,

and some were performed without the knowledge of the archbishop. Tlhagale (2018:167) contends that the Catholic Church has lost many members but Nürnberger (2007:68) qualifies this by contending that the apparent tacit acceptance of the ancestor cult by the Catholic Church enabled it to remain popular with the grass roots masses.

The Church of Rome in *Ad Gentes*,<sup>30</sup> was perhaps over-confident about Africa, maintaining that the 'Church of Christ is well and truly planted in this blessed soil' (Paul VI, SECAM Address, 1969). ATR is still prevalent with Christians lacking a vigorous Christ image. Paul VI (SECAM Address 1969) recognises the need to adapt the mode of expression to the culture of the people. He also warns against 'local folk-lore,' 'exclusivist racism,' 'egoistic tribalism' or 'arbitrary separatism.' 'Africa represents an enormous spiritual 'lung' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope' (Emeritus Pope Benedict 2018:52).<sup>31</sup> The Pope believed that Africa faces dangers including 'practical materialism combined with relativist and nihilist thinking', traits of the postmodern world, and religious fundamentalism combined with political and economic interests, as well as intolerance and violence (Orobator 2018:52-53). Orobator (:73) hopes that Africa can be 'a profound repository of resources for the renewal of humanity'. The typically lively African celebration of the Mass and sacraments does not necessarily mean that the various external forms of these celebrations are conveying the meaning to the African mind, which these Eurocentric forms convey to a European congregation. There is the constant risk of imparting a message, which has meanings hidden to the missionary (Stinton 2004:61-62). I venture that the spirited, enthusiastic celebrations of the Mass misrepresent, to some extent, the quality of conversion of many congregants.

Kiaziku (2009:16-17) refers to 'double religiosity', 'double belonging' and concludes that 'the Gospel has not penetrated to the depths of the soul. It is still a 'guest' but not a 'family member.' Kiaziku (2009:85) also quotes the Synod for Africa referring to resolving the problem of 'spiritual schizophrenia and double lives' that impact many indigenous people. The dual religious belonging is also referred to as dual religious allegiance or dual religious

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<sup>30</sup> Vatican II Encyclical on Mission. 1965:6

<sup>31</sup> October 4, 2009, address at the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

instinct, the latter pointing to an instinctive reaction rather than a pre-meditated process of a religious deliberation about an issue.

Katongole (2014:200) refers to Africa as a continent of 'churches and coffins,' 'a massively Christian Africa on the one hand and a socially distressed continent on the other.' The prevalence of conflicts, HIV/AIDS and other diseases justifies the label 'coffins.' Katongole also refers to widespread corruption, mismanagement in industry and public office, lack of accountability and 'massive' abuse of human rights in predominantly Christian countries. Tippet (1972:130), discovered in his research of the state of the church in the mission fields, despair, anomie and various unmet cultural wants. These conditions contrast with strong numerical growth of Christianity, its enthusiastic expression, many vocations and 'the devotional and liturgical dynamism of Christianity in Africa' (Katongole 2014:201). The question can be asked, where is the life-changing, energising commitment to Christ that would temper these social and political evils. Sarpong (1990:105-106), also commented on the packed church celebrations in Ghana, increasing numbers of Christian school pupils and seminarians, in stark contrast to the frequency of social evils such as abortions, corruption, crime and substance abuse.

Authors Nche, Okwuosa and Nwaoga (2016:1) revisit the concept of inculturation in modern Africa and observe that many African Christians practised both the 'primal or pristine religion of their fore-bearers and the values it offered' as well as their Christianity, paying 'double allegiance' and being good Christians when things go well and resorting to traditional religion when times are difficult. The authors also refer to Mbiti (1969:15) who contends that mission has resulted in the tragedy of a very superficial type of Christianity. The imported Christianity resulted in situations of alienation, failing to comprehend the local culture as well as the impact of modernity (Nche et al. 2016:2). They quote Mbefo (2016:34), who reports that many Africans 'find no contradiction in practising both traditional religion and Christianity.'

A Southern African theologian rather cuttingly comments:

the impact of Christianity has been ridiculously insignificant after more than one and a half centuries of mission work by various churches following a variety of responses. This seems to be the situation in a great many contexts all over Africa. (My underlining; Nürnberger 2007:42).

Shorter (1996/1999:11, 12), reflecting on the Rwandan genocide in 1994, similarly wonders at the seeming failure of a century of evangelization, and proffers lack of interiority, superficial conversions and failure to enter the heart of the people as some of the reasons for this malfunction of missionary endeavour. Nürnberger also surmises that the take-up of Christianity may have been more formal than qualitative (see also Tlhagale 2018:174). If a person believes in Christ and the ancestors, expecting from either source of sacred power the same results, 'nothing of significance has changed' (Tlhagale 2018:74, quoting Nürnberger 2007:41). This is in effect the case with the sample of my participants. The situation in Ghana also confirms that the appropriation of Christianity in Africa needs to be qualified, where ATR persists, deities are lobbied, and people struggle for identity within the social revolution (Owusu-Gyamfi 2020:77). Orobator, 2018, speaking for West Africa, and Magesa, 2004, with experience in East Africa, reinforce Nürnberger's assessment (2007) of a qualified appropriation of Christianity by Africa.

Mayson's (2010:128-129) observations of African Christianity is critical of prayers, hymns, music and the focus on creeds which drive Africans to fundamentalist Pentecostal churches where there is more acceptance of music but limited effectiveness of prayers and sermons, which often fail to preach engagement with social issues. Jesus of the Gospels is not adequately preached, given the mission churches' predilection for dogma and the priority given to secure adherence to creedal professions (Mayson 2010:164).

The following section (1.5) delineates more fully the reasons for a cautious approach to evaluating the success of Christian mission to Africa.

### 1.5 The Relevance of Christianity, especially in Christ, to the Xhosa

In African tradition, all life is seen through a religious lens. A constricted brand of Christianity has been brought to the African person. Christ has also been perceived as existentially irrelevant to the African person's daily life and felt needs. Also, current 'Christian theological language abstracts itself from fundamental African experience' (Magesa 2014:36). Second order communication (logic, theory, conceptual language) compares with first order communication (stories, images, dance, songs), the latter being more typically African. Magesa (2014:39) also observes that the axiom *lex credendi, lex orandi, lex vivendi* (as we

believe, so we worship, so we live) is undermined for Africans by the Western form of religious practice which relegates ritual only to planned official settings and times, such as church on a Sunday; 'thus separating them from their place and role as the daily bedrock of the possibility of human existence, unity and harmony.' However, my respondents revealed a strong habit of daily prayer to God, often of a supplicatory nature.

Mission work has failed to deal with African realities such as ancestors, evil spirits, witchcraft, polygamy, divination and traditional healing. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a formal statement on *Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith* (11<sup>th</sup> August 2006), prohibiting priests and religious from acting as traditional healers involving spirits (reproduced in Knox 2008:236-243). This in fact is anticipated in Bate's (1995:245) seven step diachronic model of the emergence of a local church, where step 4 describes some specific local practices, which cause tensions with the official local church. Magesa (2014:39) observes how Africans accept healing where they can get it, and that AICs have integrated the Christian belief in the Holy Spirit and the 'ministry of diviner-healers into the structures of the Church'. The Holy Spirit is another source of healing, but is in reality detached from its Trinitarian relationships, and Christ appears absent from worship. Ter Haar (2009:5) also contends that religious healing 'is central to most religious traditions in Africa,' and that Western rationality has neglected this crucial need in church life.

Thlagale (2000:38-39) writes that after great difficulty in converting black South Africans to Christianity, there was greater success significantly because the notion of another spiritual agent, although foreign to the African world, was not incompatible or hostile to the African belief system and was seen as an additional agent to help them cope with their existential problems. There was initially fierce resistance to missionary efforts. The aftermath of the Cattle Killing in 1856-1857 saw a weakened Xhosa people, subsequently more amenable to the efforts of the missionaries (Kiernan 1995:57). Factors such as the desire for literacy and jobs also influenced conversions. Some Catholics revere various prophetic figures in and outside of South Africa, including the late TV Evangelist TB Joshua. In a few homes of Catholics in Khayelitsha, a picture of a certain woman prophet is in evidence, presumably for protection or blessings. Parishioners are willing to explore all the religious options, all the assumed sources of sacred power, from my personal experience. It is worth noting that many African

Christians, including Catholics, visit healing churches and traditional healers. In my interviews, this came out clearly. Respondents mostly all consulted traditional healers or doctors, and some went to healing churches, as revealed in the interviews. One visited the Christ Embassy Church and the Universal Church of Christ for blessings.

Thlagale (2000:52) argues that 'the belief system or the worldview of the people to whom the gospel is preached must be engaged directly.' We cannot simply gloss over ancestors, witchcraft, spirits, sorcery and traditional healing. In seeking to negotiate with the 'mythical', we must not 'throw out the baby with the bath-water' (2000:52). The act of banning or even ignoring all that is African Traditional Religion amounts to the discarding of key aspects of African Religion, which are crucial to inculturation. If these key issues are not dealt with, they will remain part of the convert's map of reality alongside or in opposition to Christianity. A deliberate dialogue of the issues can yield the fruits of inculturation.

The Catholic Church in Cape Town contributed a book on *The Catholic Church and Southern Africa* which provides some insight into evangelization of black South Africans in the townships of Cape Town.

From the commencement of a Western presence in Cape Town in 1652 Catholic missionaries were banned until 1804 (McCann 1951:110) when they were no longer barred by the ruling British colonial power. When the first resident Catholic Bishop arrived in 1838, other denominations had already established mission to the white people and the Bantu speakers, and because of a shortage of priests, the Church saw its first duty to focus on the existing white Catholic population, and endeavouring to provide schooling for Catholic children (McCann: 1951:111).

Although the focus was on the European Catholics, mission was conducted in the Northern Cape Province, Namaqualand, and the Eastern Cape. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate progressed well in Natal and the former Basutoland, evangelizing the Bantu speaking population. The Eastern Cape, the source of most of the Xhosa people who immigrated to the Western Cape because of poverty, saw the arrival of the Cistercians but their Abbot found their location unsuitable and went on to Natal where they founded the Mariannhill mission (McCann 1951:111). Bishop Ricards had hoped to win the Bantu speaking people by the example of prayer and manual labour, believing that they could be taught the

dignity of labour and instructed in the arts and crafts and thus civilised and evangelised (McCann 1951:111). With regard to race, McCann (1951:109) assured people that the Church knows no boundaries of class, colour, or race, however, there are differences between cultures, and he claimed that the church had built up western civilization, and thus has civilised traditions. The Church has excluded anything that degrades human dignity. Mission was not purely spiritual, but it aimed at 'civilizing' the Bantu speaking people. There is a judgment by which the Bantu culture is seen as inferior to western civilization, which is very much in line with this particular phase of mission history where mission was seen as complicit with western civilization, colonialism and commerce.

McCann (1951:112) claims that:

The use of the vernacular, the systematization of the indigenous language, the exploration of Native custom and traditions and its adaptation to Christian principles have been the features of the missionary labours of priests, brothers and nuns.

The claim that there was exploration of 'Native' customs seems to be somewhat optimistic. The Gospel was brought to all people irrespective of race or colour (McCann 1951:113). The Eastern Cape did not enjoy the presence of a large mission such as Mariannhill, but there were pockets of missions such as convents, smaller missions and schools.

#### 1.6 Mission dominated by North Atlantic Theology

Pobee (2004:41), emphasizes that mission to Africa has been radically shaped by North Atlantic cultures, context and theology, making the African person unable to see a picture of Christ beyond these culturally imposed constraints, amounting to a spiritual oppression, as well as cultural, intellectual, physical and economic oppression. Christianity has been brought to Africa with many cultural and philosophical trappings that obscure an appropriate understanding of the central issues. The message has been inculturated for the West, not for Africa. But as noted elsewhere, the Western version is in itself inadequately inculturated. Christ was also seen by some as one who was meant to enable the African to accept their oppression, and so was imagined as imperialist, racist, a cultural and religious colonialist, as well as patriarchal in his dealings with people (Wasike 2004:45).



Since African theology was not written and analysed, but found implicit in rituals, some scholars dismissed Africans as primitive, ruled by notions of supernatural and occult forces, as well as a-logical, because the primary faith symbols and images had not been transformed into analytical-discursive thought, remaining intuitive by participation (Makumba 2007:132). Makumba (2007:133) understands that all parts of African reality are so imbued with religion that the African's assent to the divine is almost instinctual. In this he agrees with Mbiti (1969) that Africans are notoriously religious. Agatha Radoli (1990:xi; Preface), summarizing Kalibombe (1990:129-143) underlines the need to safeguard values of African Traditional Religions:

They are to be duly recognized, as revelatory channels and contexts for the realization of God's plan of salvation for the people, who sincerely live by them. African Christian theologians should know and learn to better appreciate the cultural heritage of their own people and use the values in it to promote inculturation of Christianity from within, which the expatriate missionaries cannot do. (Preface to Okure et alii. (eds) 1990:129-143).

African scholars have lamented the lack of attempt to deal respectfully and correctly with African traditions as opposed to rejecting them out of hand.

Okure (2014:49) argues for a life-centred theology where the theologian should ask what purpose they are doing theology for, what is its value for God's people. Theology should be at the service of the Gospel. It was Third World and women scholars who approached theology from the underside of history 'to ask the texts life-related questions' (Okure 2014:39). There still seems to be a western preference for theoretical theology, of a second order (faith seeking understanding, rational analysis), often divorced from its primary level of images, metaphors, intuition and from a basic faith. There is often no practical use for such theologising as thought provoking as it may be to scholars.

Okure sees the need to return to 'our life-centred African and Gospel roots after two thousand years of getting off-track' (Okure 2014:52). The first missionaries aimed at salvation of individual souls and establishing churches, paying little regard to culture other than the local language. Arabome (2014:243) quotes Ela (2009:180) to the effect that a theology 'under the tree' is needed, that we 'must rediscover the oral dimensions of theology, which is no less

important than the summae and great treatises.’ Poetry, song, dance, games and art are also the languages of faith.

In the document on the African Synod in 2004 (*Africa Munus*), former Pope Benedict called on African theologians to devise transformative theologies for practical ministry using the perspectives found in Scripture and Tradition to apply to specific times and places (Ilo 2014:115). Method in African theology should consider the lived faith of the people, the experience of the faith community (2014:116). Ilo (2014:122) also sees a move from very cognitive methods to a phenomenological engagement from the perspectives of ordinary African Christians and their lived faith experiences (:122), which is a goal of this thesis. There is a wide gap between abstract theologies of African academics and the culture and worldviews in operation that can be understood ‘through an immersion in African religiocultural (sic) traditions at the grassroots level’ (Orobator 2014:122). There is the shift to seeing African Christianity as a cross-cultural process involving dialogue about how to deal with uniquely African particularities such as witchcraft, sorcery, ancestral curse, ‘bad’ deaths and other cultural phenomena. Ilo (2014:124) also suggests understanding the reasons for the permeable nature of loyalty to different denominations in the face of specific life circumstances. I am aware, for example, of the custom of isiXhosa-speaking African women in Cape Town who switch church membership to the denomination of their husband once they are married. Ilo’s stance (2014:129) is congruent with interpretative phenomenological analysis. African theological reflection should impart God’s word of love to people, bring theory to practice and raise hope for a better future. This will answer the pressing questions facing Africans today.

Aihiokhai (2014:257) argues that as women are endowed with various charisms and gifts, the failure to recognise these ‘amounts to imposing limits for receiving the liberating and refreshing role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.’ African theology should be theology *en route* developing in its own right, to respond to local pastoral challenges (Orobator 2014:296). He agrees with Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium* 2013:49) that the Church needs to be out on the streets (Orobator 2014:297). Theologians need to listen, dialogue, immerse and collaborate (:297).

Since the 1960's African theologians have broken away from western methodology and have initiated a theology that incarnates the Gospel in the African culture (Han 2013:1). Schreiter (2018:104 in Irvin and Phan (eds)) records how a group of young African scholars studying in Paris in 1955 questioned the theology they were being taught and the way in which their own cultures were being ignored and even undermined. *Ad Gentes* (AG 16), argues that the minds of students must be opened and refined to better understand the culture of their own people and should examine relationships between Christianity and the traditions of their homeland (Schreiter 2018:105). Schreiter (:105) also quotes Shorter to the effect that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN, 1975, missionary encyclical from the Vatican) is unrivalled for its advanced theology of a multicultural church. It recognises the complexity of cultural fields, and also recognises the way in which the recipients of the Gospel message give shape to it with their own ways of thinking (Schreiter 2018:105).

Walls (2017:47) argues that we live in a period of theological ferment. Theology from outside the West is needed to rise above serious deficiencies in the Western theological tradition. Western theology is not wrong, 'it is simply too small for the operating systems of Africa (and indeed for most of the world).'

Since most Africans live in a larger more populated universe, with entities that are outside the Enlightenment worldview, such models (*Western models of theology*) of theology cannot cope with some of the most urgent pastoral needs (Walls 2017:69).

To a significant extent my validation of the world of spirits, ancestors, communion of saints and angels ventures into this 'more populated universe,' with a coherent theology, opening this reality to a profitable dialogue of faith and culture. Walls (2017:69) also suggests a richer theology of the family and ancestors. Sections 3.15 – 3.16 of this thesis explore the theology of the Communion of Saints in relation to ancestors. This is a somewhat protracted exposition because I recommend a formal programme to merge this theology with the ancestor belief system as a specially structured mission programme.

Walls (2017:70) is insistent that the demographic centre of Christianity has moved from Europe and North America, which have seen recession, to Latin America, some parts of the Asia-Pacific, and especially Africa. New theologies are needed, and they will arise.

## 1.7 Denominationalism

A further factor contributing to different images of Christ being presented, is the diversity of denominations in South Africa (estimated at over 10 000; Landman 2019, below); some churches may have only 20 members or even less). The same Christ is not always being preached. It appears that many AICs omit Christ and focus largely on the Holy Spirit (for example, Magesa in Winter unpublished lectures to Archdiocese of Cape Town, 2012). Varying emphases in church services such as healing, blessings and prosperity also detract from the centrality of Christ and the Christ event, and the Christian experience and meaning of personal suffering. Some people attend church services because they believe they will be blessed financially, as revealed to me by participants, and in general conversations with parishioners, and as evident with the prosperity churches.

Pauw (1975) has expressed his concern as to theological orthodoxy of the many expressions of faith. However, they provide a valuable source of coping and healing for many afflicted with negative life issues. Mugambi (Introduction to Taylor 1963/2000:xxix) comments on the proliferation of denominations which have rendered 'Christianity so pluralistic that non-Christians can hardly tell what holds Christians together.' Some refer to the rapid rise of the AICs as a type of African Reformation, comparable to the European Reformation (Mugambi, Introduction to Taylor 1963/2000:xxxii;). Bediako (2011:216) reports Walls' concern when working in Nigeria, that there were 331 churches in a five-mile radius in one small town.

There is no doubt that the AICs, small and large, contributed much to the spread of Christianity in Africa, including South Africa. Pillay (2021:75) reports that there are few attempts at Christian unity, and there seems more competition than cooperation and unity. Tlhagale contends that the mission churches should dialogue with the Indigenous Churches and challenge their theologies. 'The challenge still looms larger after 200 years of missionary activity' (2018:241). Landman (2019, no page number), with extensive experience in South Africa, makes the following compelling observation:

In South Africa, we have more than 10 000 churches and more are established every day. One can of course not establish a new church if you have not proved yourself to be a healer. And South Africans flock to these healers for physical healing and to find meaning in their misfortune. The state is trying to regulate them, but in fact during the past five years 26% of South Africans have left mainline churches

to join these healing churches, some of them even maintaining dual membership to a mainline and a healing church simultaneously.

## Chapter 2. The Spirits, Dynamistic Forces, Other Sources of Sacred Power

### 2.1 Introduction

The Christian universe is one of invisible beings and forces, comprising guardian angels, angels in heaven, angels at work in our world, the communion of those who are part of the Communion of Saints (not only canonised saints, but souls who are in Heaven and those in Purgatory) and Satan and the evil spirits. They are a daily reality, constantly active in our world, for better or for worse (see Francis, 2019). The saints may be seen as the ancestors, those who have gone before us. Douglas (2012:38) also credits a world ‘full of spiritual beings’, unnumbered, both benign and malign, the latter being the devil and his minions. She sees scope for a development of doctrine in relation to angels. Her way of appropriating the primal worldview of deities and spirits is to ‘assimilate the local pantheon (for example, the ancestors) to the class of guardian spirits under the rule of one God.’ This is similar to my proposal of assigning ancestors to the category of the communion of saints, although Douglas (2012) refers also to ‘deities’, gods, for whom a reclassification as angel would be a type of demotion, not as she describes this tool, a ‘promotion’ to the rank of angels (:42). Douglas (2012: 43) recognises that in formal Catholic doctrine, ‘the dead cannot do any harm.’.

Like Tlhagale (2018), Douglas (2012: 50) states that blaming ‘dead ghosts’ for misfortune amounts to an evasion of responsibility for human failings. She also notes that belief in witchcraft is widespread in Africa. The Catholic Church gives credence to Satanic rituals which can harm people physically and not merely spiritually. In the Congo, Douglas (2012:48) observed that by 1987, seers and diviners emerged within the community, claiming to be able to detect sorcery, without long initiation into sorcery. This seems similar to the situation in South Africa, where accusations of witchcraft arise and *isangomas* are commissioned to ‘sniff out’, identify the witch, the human agent responsible for dangerous events such as unusual lightning.

The respondents expressed belief in this world of spirits, and they described some mysterious and transcendent experiences of this spiritual universe, which cannot be explained by science. These spirits command fear, but perhaps not the ‘obsessive’ fear that some scholars refer to, and neither was this preoccupation greater than their belief in an all-powerful God. There are

evil beings unique to Xhosa culture, which do not match up with the classification of demons in Catholic demonology. There is a minor degree of Manichaean thinking in regard to the world of spirits, whereby there are two gods, one good, and one bad, with the latter responsible for natural evil. Causation insists that there is always a reason beyond the medical or logical explanation for a mishap, it is the work of an enemy. My respondents were not unanimously wedded to this theory, and usually impugned the ancestors for instigating misfortune. This chapter includes a description of religious specialists, a critique by Tlhagale (2019) of *Sangoma*-priests, and an examination of the theological validity of a world of spirits.

All African reality is pervaded by purpose, meaning and consequences, and there is nothing that is superfluous or unimportant (Orobator 2018:8). A cow wandering into the entrance of a hut, for example, can be seen of considerable importance, having serious consequences. There is no word for religion in the indigenous Xhosa vocabulary, *way of life* is the closest approximation (Orobator 2018:13). The worldview is holistic, not divided into religion, politics, economics, science, as in the Western worldview. Life is mysterious, spiritual and rooted in transcendence and immanence, conveyed via ritual, worship, myths and narratives (Orobator 2018:13). Life radiates energy and mystery, not the 'shadows' mentioned in the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* (1965:16), to which Orobator takes exception as an inappropriate remark belittling African culture (2018:18). There is an abundance of communal social capital embedded in ATR, a force for the good of the whole. Walls (2017:40) refers to the map of reality as a 'whole network of spiritual forces of diverse origin, some of them open to manipulation, were at work in the world.' Still today, African Christians turn, in difficulties, to ancestors and religious specialists (Taylor 1963;2000:57).

## 2.2 Ancestors

Ancestors are discussed more fully in Chapter 3. The extent to which Catholic parishioners communicate with ancestors and religious specialists reveals an underlying belief in these forces, and the ability of healers to harness their powers. All the interviews I conducted, as well as general conversations, revealed that even very ardent Catholics participated in ancestor rituals, though with different degrees of dedication. There was a robust appreciation of the activity of ancestors, although two of the more ardent Catholics questioned the utility of communicating with the ancestors. Even a male parishioner whom I would classify as a very

Christ-centred person, from an extensive conversation with him, would travel to the Eastern Cape (the traditional home of the Xhosa, and where many from Cape Town have family or retain property) most years to conduct ancestor rituals. Many were convinced that ancestors could do serious harm to their descendants. There are also Catholics who frequent healing churches, as well as traditional healers. A Xhosa seminarian interviewed (Goldie 2006) expressed considerable fear of ancestors and their ability to invite serious misfortune on their progeny. One parishioner believed that her late uncle is an evil ancestor who killed her brother.

The ancestors can punish you 'If you don't do what they want you to do' (G14). Asked whether she had ever been punished by them, she replied: 'Yes, like let's say like if you don't do something, like a ceremony for them. Then they come, they make you broke and all that stuff' (G14). 'You don't have money. Because you don't believe in them, you don't do their wishes' (G15). This is also noted in Chapter 3.

Tlhagale (2018) seems uncertain as to whether the ancestors receive more or less attention than God amongst the people at this stage. My respondents locate the living dead below God but still highly prominent. Ancestor rites are still performed, and they are regarded as efficacious (Tlhagale 2018:233). Some 200 years of mission have not eroded the ancestor belief system. Tlhagale (2018:151) remains convinced that 'Spirits are deeply revered alongside God'. In a context of suffering, there is a search for a remedy via the ancestors. Parishioners in their urban settings pray to ancestors, privately, or at formal rituals where there is more ceremony. The data from my respondents demonstrates that God has displaced the ancestors as the centre of religious consciousness, nevertheless, these spirits still command much attention, even disproportionate consideration, according to theologians such as Tlhagale (2018).

### 2.3 Literature and Respondents and their Beliefs in the World of Spirits

For two-thirds of the world population in the so-called 'third world,' life is governed by primal religion. The universe is full of active but invisible spirits, many of which are malevolent. In addition, there is a field of dynamistic forces, which can be manipulated. Primal religions are faith systems that have grown from the local context, including the geographic specificities of



the region. Their worldview is an orally transmitted religion. There is no literate tradition, and no apparent influence from other religions excepting proximate nature religions. Animism sees all things as animated by a spiritual force. Dynamism envisages a universe of forces, which need to be kept in balance by rituals, as they can cause harm or be beneficial. Some, such as Pauw (1975), refer to these forces as magico-religious forces. Primal religions are also described as ethnic religions and nature religions.

Tlhagale (2018:229) accepts the notion that for the African, the indigenous cosmos was replete with spirit-beings; the greatest source of power to those who communicated with them. In Africa, spirits and ancestors are a daily reality, constantly intervening, interfering, harming, or helping (Luzbetak 1988/2002:253). The visible and invisible worlds are grasped as two aspects of one and the same reality. One of the biggest concerns is how to cope with these powers, these forces. If the Christian church does not provide the necessary means, other religious specialists are sought. Pentecostal churches focus on these daily issues, in particular healing, and therefore attract the support of Christian Africans. However, their emphasis is more on the Holy Spirit and ancestor rituals are not usually part of the church services, but they are conducted privately. The healing rituals in these churches replace those which emanate from traditional healers outside the church.

In my interviews, there was no explicit acknowledgement of dynamistic forces as such, but these are implicitly harnessed via the rituals effected for the ancestors. With regard to the world of spirits, Taylor (1963/2001:110, 111) also observes the 'glib rationalism' of the West apropos the world of evil spirits, and he perceives Christ as the one with the supreme power over all evil. Respondents resort to alternative remedies to cope with this pantheon of dominions and powers. They do not resort instinctively to Christ for protection.

The parishioners and priests share beliefs in a world of invisible beings, predominantly the ancestors, discussed in Chapter 3, but also in evil spirits, angels and other spirits like the spirits of the river, more associated with the *amagqirha* (traditional healers), those with 'white beads' who go down to the river. Their 'ancestors are there in the river, some of them' (A6). Some families may slaughter a goat in the river to settle ancestral issues: 'so that everything can be finished there' (A6). Rituals are concerned with thanksgiving to ancestors or resolving family matters, 'issues', which arise such as ill health.

There was some initial scepticism with regard to belief in invisible beings from some participants, but on reflection, respondents divulged their convictions openly. A parishioner deemed that things may happen at night when asleep, when witchcraft and evil happenings occurred, including bewitchment. It may pass unnoticed during the day, but it would become apparent as to whether the source was from an evil spirit or good spirit by the deeds that ensued. They concluded that a father who rapes a child or uncle who rapes a niece are 'spirit of the evil spirit'(B1). This same respondent has been aware of evil presences in their house for which they would invite a Catholic priest to expel the presences, and failing a satisfactory outcome, would solicit the aid of a traditional healer. The world is a dangerous place for this person, but their faith in God as a constant presence and provider gives a counter measure to balance to the covert menaces. Invisible beings are seen to have intellect, will and powers, which for some originate from God and for others from Satan.

A young parishioner accorded unquestionable credence to a world of spirits, angels and ancestors. The catalyst which brings this world to mind is usually a threatening experience, it is not a habitual preoccupation. For this person God is 'definitely higher' than the ancestors: 'so it's like God, and then the angels and the ancestors, basically the deceased family members who are like your guardian angels' (C3). This equating of ancestors with guardian angels is a compelling theory. From accounts which scientists would no doubt classify as subjective and apocryphal, there are alleged experiences in which progeny have been aware of their ancestors providing support in difficult situations. In one such case, a woman claimed that while she was being attacked, she sensed the presence of her late grandfather assuring her that she would survive the ordeal (a radio announcement, not from a respondent). The Catholic Church does accept the notion of guardian angels, created spirits who are continually present to pray for us and protect us from moral dangers. Another young parishioner shared their belief in the invisible world:

He [God] is the one who is in charge of, of the ancestors themselves. So, it's just like believing in God and the ancestors and then the angels. Well in this world, with the challenges that I'm faced I do believe there are evil forces around. (D3).

He supposed that these forces would get their powers from Satan.

A priest respondent's initial reaction to the topic of evil spirits is 'to switch off' and when it comes to spirits other than ancestors, he reveals he has a lot of questions to ask. Nevertheless, he subsequently conceded that evil spirits and Satan exist. He thought that evil spirits come from Satan. Satan was one of God's angels 'and then he obviously decided to go his own way...' (E11). He does believe in the Communion of Saints and the existence of saints and angels. Protection from evil is accomplished by praying over people, holy water, and exorcism. But he does not feel the Church does enough for protection.

Another priest respondent believes that through the dreams and experiences we have, we do interact with invisible forces, whether they be ancestors, evil spirits or 'African Magic', which he describes as a force, or a supernatural gift given to some to use for good or for evil (F1). He did not know where evil spirits came from and seemed uninterested and unfamiliar with this topic. But my impression from his comments was that he entertained a profound belief in ancestors and ATR. A third priest, on the topic of evil beings, averred:

I don't usually focus on them, but I think they do exist. But I think you tap into those spirits, eh, through what you do, or perhaps how you become and how you treat others, and, and behave. You can sometimes tap into those particular spirits (H1).

He believes that there are both good and bad spirits), but he has problems accepting the reality of ancestors and their purported powers(H2).

A middle-aged respondent recognised evil spirits who are 'mostly present,' (G4) and who bring 'bad luck' (G2). This respondent described an evil experience: 'The evil spirit was about the time when I had a depression. So I was like seeing, seeing the ancestors, like the old people that had passed away. They were alive like talking to me' (G2). In this experience she was scared, and the spirits appeared to interact with her. 'It's like they were telling me, they are alive. I have to be careful. Like accidents and everything is gonna (sic) happen to me' (G3). She was involved in an accident when a taxi on the way to the Eastern Cape overturned, but 'Lucky, I got saved.' They escaped with a small scratch. This was the accident they were forewarned about, and they were sure the agents were evil spirits, not ancestors, because 'Ah, the evil spirit is always telling you the negative things' (G3). 'Because ja (yes), I can say it's a devil.' Asked if evil spirits are always present, they replied: 'Mostly, yes' (G4). As for God: 'He is protecting us' (G4), 'and maybe the ancestors, the way we believe' (G3). They also used

the term *abaphantsi* (those below, the ancestors) spontaneously, to describe their assistance in the incident.

A young male was uncertain as to whether there might be curses or spells.

Well, there are witch doctors who, we call them um, *amaxhwele* which they do mostly evil things. And also there are people who go there to them for, for, for instance to get power or good luck or to win the lottery or to get a better job. And they do, this *ixhwele*, ask them to do something which is outrageous like for instance killing a small baby, or killing a family member or something, so *ja* (yes)... (D10).

This is the most extreme of all actions described by respondents. The *ixhwele* is usually identified as an herbalist, but some parishioners believe these agents also concoct evil *muthi* (medicine).

He believes that ancestors could protect you from a bullet or poison: 'Well in a way it's very impossible but if, well I think they can, I think they can, *ja* (yes)' (D12). This seems to have been one problem in the Marikana tragedy, where the protagonists were led to feel invulnerable from bullets via special ancestral protection and immunity guaranteed by a traditional healer. This is an interesting admission for one of his age (20), when a more scientific or secular viewpoint could have prevailed. There is some ambivalence in his answers as to the ability of the traditional healers to produce good or evil effects, which fits in with his younger age, but is possibly a reflection that this is the product of the first time that he has thought of these issues. As he matures, he may be drawn more deeply into African rituals.

In speaking about the world of spirits a priest distinguished between 'those who are inspired by the Holy Spirit, [the] spirit of the ancestors who will be given sangomas or African doctors, [and the] spirit which is normally bought by money, which will be from uh, will be from certain animals that may give one some spiritual powers' (F3). There is some depth not unearthed in this statement, there appears to be a complex world envisaged by this priest, which no doubt corresponds to ATR. He sought but could not find the term for half-human/ half-animal being, and there was no further input on this matter.

The 'African force' is a lineage gift to one of the family members, a gift of spiritual powers, and 'it depends to the one who has them whether to use them for good or to use them for

bad' (F2). The person 'who has the gift is in charge to use it for good or for bad' (F2). There is a good force and a bad force. The gift is 'for some' from the ancestors or 'from God' (F2).

An experience of magical forces was a dream he (F2) had of his maternal grandfather's home, which 'had already been destroyed' but now they were living in Cape Town. He says that 'through the dreams I got the picture of how my grandfather's home used to look like'. It had been destroyed but he had a picture of what it looked like, even though he had never seen it. As to whether these beings could harm people, he answered: 'Yes, they can, they can, they can' (F3). He recounted a dream of eating a certain animal (lamb) and he felt because of that he was hospitalised and for three weeks he did not eat. Elsewhere he contends that the ancestors do not harm people.

Asked if he thought the ancestors were the most important part of the spirit world, he replied that God was. People intercede to the supreme being through the ancestors. After that came the ancestors 'then after the ancestors there will be those who, who, have the power to connect with the ancestors on behalf of the community, whether that be the first son or the *isangoma*' (F4). A female parishioner was sure that God had the most power over evil spirits and that the ancestors are more powerful than the evil beings (G13). However, some aver that ancestors are not omnipotent, and can be outdone by different spirits, who can override their protection.

Penoukou (1991/2002:41) refers to an obsessive fear of evil and spirits of the Ewe-Mina Christians (Benin). Mtuze (2003:29) a Xhosa Anglican priest and professor, confirms the strong fear of malevolent spirits that threaten life daily. Kraft (2003:28) also observes that fear of evil spirits is one of the greatest concerns of a Nigerian tribe, even more than the relationship with God. Spirits, not germs, cause illness (2003:56). In the West non-material reality is largely discounted and seen as subjective and personal. Sarpong (2002:18) contends:

We all know that there are ideas about witchcraft, magic and spirits everywhere in Africa. It is a spirit obsessed life, a spirit-dominated life that we lead in Africa. We have Catholics who have one foot in traditional religion and another foot in Christianity.

Although the participants in the research, even the young respondents were mindful of a universe of benign and malign spirits, and Satan and demons, the fear did not seem to warrant the designation of the 'obsessive' fear Penoukou refers to above, nor was the fear of a greater

concern than their relationship with God (according to Kraft as noted above). There is a robust fear and awareness of evil, but God and the ancestors predominate their consciousness.

It is possible that experiences of misfortune stimulate deliberations of the evil, invisible entities, but the reflex action seems to be to turn to God and ancestors. Some examples of misfortune include a mature parishioner who was defrauded of R2 300, and after praying the Rosary, a kind stranger gave them the same sum of money. A mature male participant and his family, while travelling in their car, rode over what seemed to be a large snake, experienced sudden intense rain, and voices telling him he was going to die. His wife was praying, in great fear. When the car came to a stop, the weather had cleared, and he invoked the ancestors and God. A young female participant was robbed at gun point, prayed to God and ancestors, and fifteen minutes later received her cell phone back. A priest respondent, sick in hospital, was prayed over by a mysterious nurse who was never seen again, telling him he still had work to do. A priest who did not know him had a vision of this sick priest and had prayed for him. God was perceived as active in these experiences. A female parishioner believed that evil spirits warned her she was going to have an accident. Soon afterwards, her taxi overturned, but she escaped unharmed. She attributed this protection to God and ancestors. A mature and very dedicated Catholic participant saw a snake on the stove at home. Later, relatives advised him that it was an ancestor, and he was not to be unduly perturbed. A young male participant recounted how he heard a young woman speak with an old man's voice at a ritual. A priest respondent attributed a job for his wife and other fortuitous occurrences to God's interventions. These episodes do not suggest constant 'obsessive fear', but there is genuine openness to the transcendent and the mysterious, to God as protector and provider, and the ancestors. There is also the potential to accept mysterious and transcendent experiences as a product of invisible, evil entities, as well as benign entities.

A middle-aged parishioner worries about evil spirits 'a lot.' They attend Mass regularly but see the ancestors as God-given aids to life's problems. They visit a traditional healer regularly. The healer, at a consultation, will get in touch with the ancestors of the client, and inform them what needs to be done. This type of divination attracts censure in the Bible, labelling it as necromancy. A Biblical illustration of this is witnessed in King Saul's visit to a diviner whom he asks to 'Conjure up Samuel' (1 Sam 28:7-29). One respondent feared an attack by evil

spirits when sangomas set out to engage with the spirit world, in other words, there was a distinct possibility that the *isangoma* would arouse evil spirits.

Some believe that the ancestors can harm their progeny by withdrawing support, rather than by active measures which cause harm. They pray firstly to God and secondly, they resort to the ancestors. The ancestors, have powers that can be harnessed by the *igqirha* (traditional healer). They register no sense of conflict or lack of harmony between different sources of sacred power: God, the ancestors, Jesus. Calling up spirits is of questionable Christian theology and raises the possibility of the intrusion of evil spirits, according to one parishioner. Another parishioner insisted that it is only the progeny that can call on the ancestors not religious specialists. However, another respondent wanted to be present with the *igqirha* when they were performing rituals and talking to her ancestors: 'Just to be there on her special place [the traditional diviner] and talk to my ancestors' (K7). This again highlights the dual world of many Catholics. There seems to be no questioning as to how communicating with the ancestors fits in with God and his heavenly kingdom. This respondent agreed that Xhosa people fear evil spirits, but she did not share in this fear and would use holy water and incense to chase the spirits away (K6).

#### 2.4 Spirits, Invisible Beings

Amongst the Xhosa people, the following are the most feared of spirits; rogue spirits of ancestors, ancestors not properly buried, or spirits of foreign nationals and displeased ancestors. One of the reasons for the considerable activity a death generates relates to the fear of incurring the displeasure of the living dead (as referred to by Nürnberger 2007). Often, services for the deceased include an hour to an hour and a half at the home of the deceased from Monday to Friday where there is singing, praying and preaching. These are followed by tea and snacks. A service is held at the home with the coffin present on the Saturday morning of the burial. A Mass is conducted for Catholics at the church, and there are further prayers at the graveyard. Lunch is provided at the home of the deceased, and sometimes a second lunch is served the next day. Sheep are generally slaughtered and cooked. The custom is a costly one, and there seems to be some fear of purchasing an inferior coffin. I have witnessed these customs with my parishioners which pertain to the situation before the Covid 19 pandemic, which has reduced the number of prayer meetings.

Traditional malign beings include the following:

*uTikoloshe*- a very short, hairy man seen with an outsize penis who has sex with witches and can be used to make people ill or kill them (see Mtuze 2003:55-57 for further elaboration); *uTikoloshe* is very amorous towards women with the ability to become invisible by swallowing a pebble.

*impundulu* –lightning bird; can appear as a beautiful young man able to shift shapes. This spirit is used as a witch's familiar and can cause illness and death. In addition, because of its size it can attack people and drink their blood. *Impundulu* can harm pregnant women, causing miscarriages and other problems (Sipuka 2000:127). This bird can grow to the size of a human being, and it can summon lightning and storms.

Other animals such as *uthekwane* (shadow bird), *intsikizi* (ground hornbill) and *isikhova* (owl) can cause bad luck and even death (Sipuka 2000:128).

*Inyoka yabafazi* is a snake of the women; a snake which passes on from mother to daughter, which can harm and kill (:127).

*Groot slang*, Afrikaans for big snake, is said to live in a cave called the Wonder Hole in the Richtersveld area. It was said to be so powerful that the gods subdivided it into two species, the elephant and the snake. It can grow up to 60 feet long (about 18 metres).<sup>32</sup>

*Ichanti* is a fabled water sprite (a type of fairy or mythical being) or snake which can harm the viewer.

Other water spirits. *Inkanyamba*: a huge, carnivorous eel-like creature, found in Xhosa and Zulu legends, which has fins and can grow to huge sizes; it is said they can control the weather.<sup>33</sup> *Abantu umamlambo* are spirits of the river as are *abantu basemloyeni*.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://newcastleadvertiser.co.za/66545/must-read-5-african-mythoogical-creatures/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://newcastleadvertiser.co.za/66545/must-read-5-african-mythoogical-creatures/>  
<https://thestoryofgods.wordpress.com/2015/04/19/an-introduction-to-xhosa-myths/>



*Umamlambo* is a dangerous charm that can turn into a snake but can also bring great prosperity (Mtuze 2003:58).

*Isithunzele* is a resurrected corpse or zombie, the living dead. This is a corpse that has been brought to life via witchcraft and is used as a slave (Mtuze 2003:58).

*Ufufunyane* are spirits captured by sorcerers and are therefore more dangerous than the *indiki*. The latter are the spirits of migrants who were never buried properly (Tlhagale 2018:131). The spirits are employed for evil purposes. These spirits attack in legions and are of mixed cultural origin. Typically, they are thousands of white people, people of Indian descent and hundreds of Sotho and Zulu people (Kiernan 1995:80,81). Victims possessed by these spirits 'give vent to uncontrollable hysterical behaviour verging on the suicidal.' *Ufufunynane* hordes can be expelled by the infusion of regiments of benevolent spirits gathered by the diviner and by replacing the foreign spirits with the spirits of the deceased's male ancestral spirit (Tlhagale 2018:131). Over a period of time, the invading *indiki* spirit can be replaced by a protective male ancestor (Mtuze 2003:81). These spirits are a more recent development; a result of the interaction with new cultures in face of severe social disruption (Mtuze 2003:81). Tlhagale pertinently observes that since the world experiences many people who die badly without proper burials, it would be overwhelmed with evil spirits. He does not accept this and so discards the notion of *indiki* spirits (2018:143). I present a theology of spirits below, and I agree with the notion of a universe of spirits, good and evil, but with different geneses and characteristics.

*Umthakathi* (plural *Abathakathi*) (from *thakatha* – to bewitch, do harmful magic) is a witch. The other Xhosa word for a witch is *igqwirha*. They are the epitome of evil and can cause illness and all manner of mishap, and they can kill. Witches are usually seen as female, and they use spells, familiars (a spirit in the form of an animal; used by a witch), body parts and various concoctions to hurt their victims. Healers and religious specialists are not witches, and it is an insult to label any one of them a witch doctor.

*Umtyholi* is a type of satanic figure borrowed from the Khoisan people and is described as 'one who wilfully accuses another for the purpose of injuring him, a slanderer, a devil' (Kiernan 1995:95).

There is the belief that a person who harbours unconscious anger towards another may be a witch because their deep emotions can actually harm the source or target of their anger. This has led to many accusations of witchcraft, particularly of women, notably in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. People use *sangomas* or *amagqirha* to 'smell out' witches, and once identified, the person accused of being a witch may be harassed or killed by the community.

Only one parishioner rendered spontaneous reference to some of the above-named life forces, and they were not specifically asked about them. Witches are a source of fear and in many African cultures are viewed as the ultimate evil (Taylor 1963/2000:132).

## 2.5 Dynamistic Forces, Cosmogony, Philosophy

The African worldview, its culturally constructed reality, has been confronted with Christian mission, colonization, industrialisation, and postmodernity for some two centuries. The traditional Xhosa cosmology is described briefly in this chapter as a backdrop to this worldview. This traditionalist worldview is a background to the persons interviewed in this thesis. They have been journeying from this philosophical location to one which is more Christian, but also prone to powerful postmodern forces which act to undermine fixed religious systems such as Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

The animistic view sees all objects as endowed with spirits, while the dynamistic view sees all objects as endowed with a power or life force, energy. Animism is found more in West Africa, and dynamism is found among Bantu speaking people in Southern and East Africa (Nürnberg 2007:22). Despite the pre-occupation with spirits, invisible forces and the hidden God, African cosmogony is anthropocentric and centred on the human beings and their interaction with other forces. The interviews with participants revealed a largely pragmatic worldview that was centred on family and children, but also on God. The extent of involvement with ancestors validates the notion expressed in Xhosa literature of a world of invisible forces that are discerned from Xhosa culture and from the Christian mission. These forces are ancestors, dynamistic forces (harnessed by traditional diviners and referred to by some as magical forces), angels and evil spirits. This traditional worldview exists separately from the Christian worldview, existing as a dual religious system, which offers two socially

constructed realities, one from ATR and the other from Christianity. This is also discovered in my interviews.

The person is the centre of creation who experiences evil from human sources (human evil) and from outside forces (natural evil) (Domingues 2000:20). Not all forces are necessarily evil. Misfortune is a result of a negative flow of energies and good fortune stems from a positive flow of these energies. The human takes the central space in the universe of forces (Shutte 2001/2004:12), and these forces interact with each other. 'The person exists only as part of the different relationships that bind us together' (Shutte 2001,2004:12). Social, political, and economic life are seen as one with religious beliefs.

There is a graduated strength of life force (thus people have greater life force than animals, which have greater life force than plants) (Shutte 2001:22). Life force emanates from the source of all force; God, and then descends in magnitude from the strongest (ancestors) to the weakest (animals, material objects). Humanity occupies the central position, open to stronger and weaker forces on either side. The universe is a forest of symbols with visible phenomena pointing to invisible realities.

The flow of dynamistic power can be channelled via rituals performed by traditional healers or diviners, and by secret manipulation by witches and sorcerers for good or for evil (Nürnberg 2007:22). 'Because these forces cannot be seen, the traditionalist lives in a dangerous world' (:22). Religious specialists, including elders can tap into this power by way of the ancestral spirits (:22). This author rationalises the dynamistic world of forces (dangerous and benign) as 'externalised symbols of subjectively experienced forces such as hatred, anger, jealousy, failure or shame'. (:45). These types of forces need healing, forgiving, suffering and transformation by the Gospel. For Nürnberg, then, the central issue is a psycho-spiritual one; a construct of the mind disclosing a deeper need of the indwelling spirit for healing. This contrasts with the Catholic theology of the Communion of Saints, which proffers the reality of a universe of saints as well as angels, as well as evil spirits who do have paranormal powers.

Despite huge change, ATR persists and 'the vitality of certain magico-religious cults is actively increasing, even in industrial cities' (*Secretarius Pro Non-Christianis* 1968:13. Still a valid observation for today). Today, in a city environment, the number of permutations of possible

mishaps are multiplied in a complex environment, and religious specialists are still much in demand. Tlhagale (2018) has observed that certain *Sangoma*-priests practice magic and divination. Magic is 'accomplished' by symbolic action, words and objects not related to Christianity. As such, the sacraments could also be labelled as magic by outsiders to the Christian faith. *Sangoma*-priests have been known to incant in a foreign indigenous language mixed with Latin phrases (Tlhagale 2018:144). Tlhagale describes various objects, which in the indigenous cosmos are richly endowed with spiritual meaning (2018:136-137), such as the drum, beads, divining bones, and shrines. These are types of 'sacramentals' used by the traditional healer. Catholics have their own reserve of religious items that add a sense of the numinous to ceremonies, and these include items such as crucifixes, holy oils and incense.

The apparent absence of a Supreme Being in ATR leads to the philosophy of a life force, or vital force, as a type of surrogate for God. Magesa (2004:180), quoting Tempel's words, offers:

Every human person, every individual is as it were one link in a chain of vital forces: a living link both exercising and receiving influence, a link that establishes the bond with previous generations and with the forces that support his own existence. The individual is necessarily an individual adhering to the clan.

After death, the vital force and the participation of the deceased in the community does not cease neither in the house nor in the clan circle.

Bujo (1986,2003:29) shows how imitation of the past engages the power of life forces and facilitates the fullness of life. This is achieved via rituals, and it is paralleled in Catholicism by the sacrament of the Mass, which makes present the cross and resurrection of Christ empowering the church and its members. Placide Tempels (1959) offers the notion of vital force as the central philosophy of African Religion. Life force is at the centre of the African worldview and religion. African people seek life in its fullness in the present moment. The Gospel of John chapter 10 verse 10 (NJB 1985) supports the search for life to the full (Stinton 2004:75). The apparent absence of a supreme being in ATR guided the philosophy of a life force, or vital force, as a type of surrogate for God. Gehman (2005:87 in Resane 2020:11):

The chief purpose of religion in African culture is to acquire greater life- force from the other higher beings and lesser creatures or objects in order to enhance health, wealth and status in life.

## 2.6 The Notion of Evil

The universe has people as its centre and is structured so that life may flow continually. However, life is always under threat from death, illness, barrenness, accidents, droughts, witchcraft and sorcery (Domingues 2000:24). When magic is used to hurt someone, it diminishes the perpetrator's life since any action against life is a sin against the divine order, which will be punished by God by pre-established sanctions. These constitute punishment because the whole world of ontological relationships has been damaged and needs reparation (Domingues 2000:23). The world is a dangerous place with ever present threats including witchcraft and sorcery as a daily reality affecting people in every sphere including university professors (:21). Witches need to be 'smelt out'; detected and dealt with (:26). Rivalries, jealousy, hatred, and tensions give rise to anti-life responses. Misfortune, in general, is a result of a working out of forces in the visible and invisible worlds. Vagaries of nature need to be dealt with and evil forces lurk everywhere. Suffering, mishaps, accidents and illness are rarely regarded as the result of neutral natural forces (*Secretariatus Pro Non-Christianis* 1968:65).

A mature parishioner blamed natural evil such as snakes on pastors who do 'devil things' with snakes, and they are a type of punishment for humanity. Some pastors were 'devil makers' who compelled their flock to eat grass, drink petrol and be sprayed with insecticide, according to the respondent. Demons come from Satan (A18). Satan comes from God. God and ancestors protect people from attacks of evil. Praying protects from evil spirits (A22). God made Satan 'Because God shows the right way, and he takes his own way.' This to me is a convincing description of the origin of Satan because it implies a type of angelic rebellion from God (A18).

A priest regarded snakes and cockroaches as 'irritations,' not evil and

they too serve a purpose. God created all things, even the evil spirits; they are part of God's creation. The evil spirits are a, they are, they are created... (sic) they are a force that we tap into when either we are jealous, or we're angry or we are...so the, they come out of a behaviour driven by those (H8).

‘But they (evil spirits) are separate beings’ (H8). In other words, they are not only inner psychological phenomena but beings in their own right. They too derive their powers from God even if these powers are abused.

When asked if witches could harness Satanic powers to hurt someone, he seemed unsure:

I think they might actually eh, but I think I always associate it with a more evil heart but that can drive them to tap into a particular force of nature. When I say force of nature but I am talking about those evil spirits. They can tap into that, *ja* (yes) (H11).

He understands inner evil as something which evil spirits can act upon, it is like opening the door to them.

A mature male participant believed that evil spirits come from Satan, they have powers and influence, and that is why:

we have to live in that probability of balancing things. So if you are not awake then the evil spirit will take you away even from the church and will take you because they are always fighting against God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit you know. They want us to follow their footstep. They are enticing the people... (B8).

The reference to balancing things matches the ideas of Nürnberger (2007), who frequently refers to the perceived need of the African person to keep the ubiquitous dynamistic forces in balance via rituals. A mature male participant thought the evil spirits come from Satan. They have powers and influence that is why ‘we have to live in the probability of balancing things’ (B8). He and his wife and children were in a car when they had an experience of real evil, which he interpreted as the work of an evil spirit. He volunteered the following names for the spirits: *tikiloshe*, *impundulu*, and ghosts.

He saw Satan as having a big organization ‘of evil spirits that’s pulling people from God because people they come to church, then they end up out of church because of this, this evil spirit’ (B8). Referring again to the incident he underwent in 2008, he is convinced that ‘that was really an evil spirit.’ He was amazed and could not believe the event because ‘it was very hot and then all of a sudden it turned like it was raining very heavily, it was dark, I could not see. So, then after that suddenly it disappeared’ (B9). During the ordeal both husband and wife prayed to God and to ancestors. He sees Satan as the creator of evil things:

Satan always wants to compete with God. if God's doing the good thing, he will do the bad thing the other side, the devil (B8).

This is some evidence of the Manichaeian thesis of two coeternal and opposed principles of creation, a notion rejected by the Catholic Church. Traditional healers who use their powers for evil get their power from Satan according to the parishioner. Satan as the creator of 'evil' things conflicts with the tenet that God created all things.

A young female participant seemed uncertain as to the origin and nature of these beings: 'like they are just there' (C2), but the implication is they are from God. Evil spirits can try to hurt us 'but it might not happen that way' (C2). They can be used for witchcraft, for good or for bad (C3). She said that God made 'evil' things like snakes and *amaphela* (cockroaches) for no particular reason. As to why there is suffering, she replied: '*Hayi* (No), I guess to balance things out' (C9). Evil spirits do not come from God but from the devil (C13). The devil came from heaven: 'Okay, the Devil fell down from heaven,' which theologically, is a fair reply. When prompted, she agreed that he did something wrong 'up there' in the heavens. In Revelations 12 we read how war broke out in heaven and 'Satan...was hurled down to the earth and his angels were hurled down with him' (Rev 12:9). Good spirits can provide an intuition:

that something might happen that way (C2). And then you decide not to go, and then later you hear of someone saying yoh! (exclamation), this and this happened there. So, you like ah (gasp), if I had been there that would have been a mess (C3). (She had been warned by a good spirit or ancestor).

A young male said that God created everything including snakes and *amaphela*, 'because we also created by, we also in a way animals (sic), and we also like everything that is around us is created by God' (D9). He thought that evil spirits came from Satan. Satan was an angel of God; 'but to his jealousy and evil thoughts God was like no, go to where you belong' (D13). He observed that some people believe that snakes are actually the devil, but 'even the Bible says everything was created by God' (D9). He is unsure as to why God made 'those evil things' (D9). He does not believe that the ancestors concoct spells but help their progeny with problems (D10). Some traditional healers who engage in evil get their powers from Satan.

A priest interviewed thought that evil spirits come from Satan. Satan was one of God's angels 'and then he obviously decided to go his own way...' (E11). Another priest believes that through dreams and experiences we interact with invisible forces whether they be ancestors,

evil spirits or 'African magic' (F1). He also referred to the existence of half-animal, half-human beings. A middle-aged female participant when asked who made 'evil' things like snakes or cockroaches replied it was the devil 'because he doesn't want people to be happy and he wants the people to believe that God is not there' (G10). Evil spirits come from the devil, and they get their powers from the devil (G10). There is suffering 'because people are far away from God. They don't believe that God is alive' (G10). The way she copes with evil spirits and witches is: 'The only thing that helps me is to kneel down, read the Bible and pray' (G13). She felt that the ancestors were more powerful than the evil spirits (G13). But that there is also evil and suffering which comes from the ancestors. The ancestors are conceded significant powers to punish their progeny. It was not clear how she upset the ancestors specifically apart from not performing a certain ceremony.

A priest was asked if ancestors could help protect one from dangers such as poison, he did not think so, but: 'When, when we talking (sic) about ancestors they might, remember when, when we talk about witches I think on the other hand we then have ancestors that can block perhaps that power' (H12). He feels that it is in this type of protection, blocking the powers of evil, that the ancestors are involved in (H12).

Asked why there was suffering he said it was not due to the man born blind's sin (Jn 9ff), nor that of his parents:

It's an opportunity for God's work to, you know, to be done. So I, I don't have one answer for that but I do believe in what Jesus taught there. But sometimes when something happens to me or to close, I take that suffering as some sort of a test (H10).

Theologically speaking, he sees it as an opportunity 'for God's grace to be done' (H10). Applying the situation to himself, he may conclude that there is something he needs to do, to be 'alert' about, 'and how do I use this as an opportunity for growth, *ja* (yes)' (H10).

He considers inner evil as something which evil spirits can act upon; it is like opening the door to them. God has the most power over evil (H12), not the ancestors. A mature male participant perceived creatures such as snakes and cockroaches as part of the ecosystem, 'and they are there for humans 'to learn situations in life.' He sees suffering philosophically: 'There are always tough times in your life, father'. Misfortune arises from 'unsafe acts', 'being



careless,’ not from angry or evil ancestor, evil spirits or witchcraft. God does not answer every prayer for healing, but he makes the burden lighter’.

A mature female participant feared going to a traditional healer as there was a good chance that the healer would be the source and cause of an attack of evil spirits. She never goes to traditional healers in any event. God created all things and God is the source of all life, not the ancestors or unseen powers. She does recognise that there are evil forces that can be harnessed, but these relate to Satan and demonic forces, which can be channelled to cause harm to others.

According to a priest, protection from evil is accomplished by praying over people, using holy water and exorcism. But he does not feel the Church does enough for protection against evil. He noted that people who may want exorcism or praying over by the official exorcist did not always have transport to reach him, and so more priests should be allowed to perform the ministry. Pauw’s research (1975:337) discovers no precedent for believing in Satan. Witches and sorcerers are the prime icons of evil. The belief in witchcraft is the nearest to the belief in a devil (Healey, Sybertz 2000:218). The acceptance of the existence of Satan must first come from Christian mission. It is a new import to the world of life forces, one eminently recognised by the respondents.

In summary, evil can come from (Domingues 2000:65, 66):

- God, by his permission.
- A witch, knowingly or unknowingly.
- The spirit of a dead witch.
- Spirits of dead people, displeased ancestors; rogue ancestors; those not properly buried.
- The spiritual forces that assist a healer; dynamistic forces out of harmony; evil magic.
- Moral offences, breaking taboos, pollution.
- Other spirits, the ‘fallen angels’.

At a funeral I presided at for a person who was killed by a stabbing in Langa (a township comprising Black isiXhosa and Sotho speaking residents.) in 2001, the women and children were not allowed into the graveyard. Some parishioners did not know why, whilst others maintained it was to limit the effect of potential evil on 'weaker' members of the community. Evil was residing in the situation because of an unnatural death. There was a sense of potential evil ready to harm the women and children, a type of bad 'karma', to use this word liberally. Another male parishioner, however, expressed the strong opinion that women are often sources of witchcraft and may be the cause of the evil death, averring that women need to 'know their place' (note 2023/04/28). This was confirmed by another male who felt that women could not be trusted, and it was females in general who were excluded from the cemetery, girls as well (conversation May 2023).

Evil can afflict not only persons but also commercial enterprises. Cumes (2004:69) records the case of an *isangoma* who was tasked to undertake a *femba* healing ritual on a large business. Some have described AICs as hospitals because of the emphasis on healing or delivering people from evil spells, and bad luck.

## 2.7 Causation

Some observers (such as Nürnberger) maintain that traditional societies look for causes of adversity, and project their hardships on to the outside world. An example would be when someone is blamed for evil because a person is afflicted by serious illness. It was not the germs, but deliberate evil, or in some cases, the unconscious but nonetheless malevolent thoughts of a human agent that caused the illness. There is a degree of unavoidable misfortune, and all misfortune is explainable as a result of the malevolence of some person. There is a sense of an enemy, a foe, who needs to be identified and dealt with, with the help of the ancestors. Jesus (Mt 15:19) clarifies the issue by stating that evil intentions and actions come from within the heart, and it is surely here that the demonic forces are prone to visit and tempt. In cases of affliction, African converts to Christianity find it difficult to ascribe their suffering to God. It is more appealing to ascribe causation to the ancestors (Kiernan 1995:79). Ancestors are the agents that assist religious specialists such as diviners or healers in their search for those responsible for the cause of a misfortune. (Mtuzi 2003:75).

Misfortune never occurs by chance. Some being has caused it. If a person is hurt, the question is 'why me and not someone else?' (Domingues 2000:25). The first 'spear' is the misfortune. The second 'spear' is the one who brought it about. Domingues (2000:25) derives this nomenclature from the *Azande* tribe in Sudan. The 'second spear' needs to be identified or it will strike again (:26). A person who dies prematurely is seen to have been bewitched (Healey, Sybertz 1996,2000:206). As noted in the review of ancestors, a Xhosa parishioner blamed the death of her brother on her dead uncle, whom she identified as an evil ancestor. But not all the Xhosa parishioners agree with this 'second spear' interpretation. Some saw misfortune as a random event with no evil agency behind it. In the Gospel we note how Jesus disassociates sin and illness, that the one does not necessarily cause the other, as the Pharisees believed (Jn 9:1-3). However, the consequences of some sins can cause physical and mental harm in terms of ill health (for example alcoholism) and the loss of the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as peace and joy. The Bible suggests that God at times punishes severely, as in the case of David the King of Israel punished for his sins of adultery and murder. Tlhagale (2018:145) confirms that 'In societies steeped in magic, there is no uncaused behaviour.' He also considers the claim by *isangoma*-priests that their act of divination is similar to prophetic divination found in the Old Testament, a claim he regards as 'preposterous.'

Sin is seen from a horizontal plane, as an offence against the neighbour rather than against God (Healey, Sybertz 1996/2000:218). These authors note that the anxiety and fear of malevolent magic does not decline with education and urbanization, in fact, the opportunities for personal conflict are multiplied in urban settings (Healey, Sybertz 1996/2000:293). The mystery of evil is deeply engraved in the life experience of African people. Physical illness comes from spiritual and social relationships because someone is behind it (Domingues 2000:59). It places a person in a liminal space, which affects relationships with the living and the dead. When taboos are broken, healing is necessary as the breach goes against the laws that govern life (Healey, Sybertz 1996/2000:60). Conditions such as depression and disassociation are a result of social disintegration and radical upheaval (Healey, Sybertz 1996/2000:). The authors observe social disorganization, instability, endless job-seeking and despair (:66). This results in serious psycho-somatic illness among youth in urban and semi-urban areas (Healey, Sybertz 1996/2000:68).

Illness points to a serious disruption of harmony of relationships at all levels (Domingues 2000:65, Stinton 2004:81). Techniques of healing are part of the symbolic universe from which they emerge (Stinton 2004:82). Research shows that the image of Christ as healer is well accepted by Africans. Divination and fortune telling are viewed as doorways to evil spirits and evil in general (Knox 2008:52). A Xhosa woman parishioner feared the employment of diviners as they were more likely to bring about an attack of evil spirits, as one never knew what evil spirits they themselves were unknowingly harbouring. Nevertheless, not all share this view and religious specialists have an important role within the urban area of Cape Town. Sin is the poisoning of a community's life blood by diminishing or destroying life (Orobator 2008:63). I perceive sin in the Christian tradition as an act which offends God, our neighbour and oneself. Although the Xhosa people's belief system parallels the 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> commandments of the Decalogue with their own similar social precepts (see also Bujo 1986/2003), the essence of sin is that it is anti-social; it hurts the community and is less seen as an offence against God, it is an anthropological reality. The Xhosa anthropology of communalism avers that 'I participate, therefore I am', a principle which defines sin as an action, which causes a tear in the social fabric (Taylor 1963/2001:27). The whole of life is sacred and accompanied by the ancestors at all stages. For an African person, an illness is a rent in the social fabric. Life is so primary and highly regarded that healers are accorded high levels of status (Kolie 1991:132).

A priest describes an experience of misfortune in December 2018 when he had a car accident.

He was driving at 60 km/hr and another car knocked my car on the, on the driver's seat. The car was written off, just a random thing, and eh, I think two days after that my mother fell very ill, um was hospitalised and those are random things after, after one another (H8, 9).

He seems to struggle with the notion that they were necessarily random events and wondered if there was more to the 'the strange happenings' (H9). When he was asked if there was anyone to blame for these two happenings, he said there was not. 'There was no bewitchment or anything like that' (H9).

However, 'Actually, no. I...the strange thing about that is when, when I shared with my sisters, I have four elder sisters, they felt that there was something that we needed to do at home' (H9). When I asked if they meant a ritual, he said:

Like a ritual, yes, and, and someone was able to pinpoint which ritual is that (sic) but I must be honest to say I didn't believe in that. Eh, we ended up doing the ritual. But in me, that was not, that was not the reason why those things happened. Eh, for me it was just it happened. Perhaps a test of my character, a test to me as to what will I do. So, so it was, for me it was a time of prayer and reflection (H9).

He added that he did not want to do the ritual but did not want to be difficult (H10), 'Because then some other things happen to them as well' (H10). He seems to be concerned that the rest of the family, if they reneged on the ritual, would blame any future mishap on this failure (H10). The family believed that there was a reason for the mishaps, and so he felt that: 'And so there was, and so there's always that struggle, eh...' (H10). It appears that his Christian faith and theological studies challenge these attributes of ATR.

A mature female participant felt that people who believe in *sangomas* or *amagqirha* would also believe that if a close one is ill, there is someone responsible for it. This is what the traditional healers do. They attribute the cause of the illness to a neighbour. For example, if a son is using drugs or abusing alcohol, the neighbour is to blame (A20). She believed that it may happen to people who do not go to church. Some wrongly blame neighbours or members of the family, but it is just a normal sickness (A20). Another priest did not believe that illness or suffering was necessarily caused by someone working via a witch or traditional specialist, but he agreed that some people might believe in that causation.

A mature male participant when asked if he believed that sickness was caused by someone's malevolence and witchcraft was inclined to attribute the cause to nature (B9). Although he does opine that evil spirits can hurt them severely and bewitch them, and that ancestors:

can cause us to die or: they put you in a wheelchair. Sometimes it may be the devil, but sometimes it is you, you don't listen to the wise guys, the ancestors who are working with God (B16).

This may imply that God, with whom the ancestors are working, punishes. A middle-aged parishioner when asked if misfortune is always caused by someone noted that maybe they went to a traditional doctor or *ixhwele*. She continued, 'Sometimes yes, I believe that but 'Not always' (G10). A sickness could be caused by someone, 'Yes, it's just my body sometimes' (G11). Asked how she would decide, she replied, 'I pray' (G11). The cause of her problems is basic poverty, and at times, the displeasure of the ancestors.

A mature male participant who described himself as an independent thinker, did not think the ancestors can harm a person, nor was a mishap a result of something more sinister (I13). He observes that people do believe in causation, and giving the example of John the Baptist who was arrested, maintained:

If John was an African, maybe people will say, *Ja* (yes), that is why Jesus Christ never came to rescue him because he has done whatever.

He related that the Xhosa people saw women and children as weaker, and they were therefore sometimes excluded from entering a cemetery when violence was the cause of the death for a person, as there were evil forces thought to be present (I16).

There is no unanimous preference for the first spear/second spear model of causation among the Xhosa people. Respondents were more cautious about this theory than Tlhagale (2018), but the possibility was clearly entertained, even if cautiously. The review of the literature, however, supports causation theory as a reality for the African believer. The ancestors emerge as the main source of misfortune rather than angry people who have orchestrated the evil via a sorcerer or another religious specialist, according to my sample.

## 2.8 Religious Specialists

This term is a general one covering all traditional healers with whom many African Christians consult on a regular basis. They have special skills that result from training and initiation by existing healers. Western Christianity is not seen to offer solutions to the concerns of many African Christians. They therefore resort to answers to their dilemmas by consulting ATR. The key aspiration of the African person is life in fullness, which results in a deep esteem for those whom they believe have healing powers (Stinton 2004:99). Sometimes the healers are also regarded with fear for their purported ability to harness evil forces and to harm people. They mediate between the natural and the spiritual worlds (Waruta 1989, 2003:45; in Mugambi and Magesa, (eds)). They present another source of sacred power which is not offered by the Christian Church. The rites performed by these specialists are not acts of worship in themselves, but pragmatic means for resolving existential issues (Taylor 1963, 2001:69-71), by which ancestors are expected to reciprocate with specific benefits.

*Igqirha* (plural *amagqirha*) is a traditional healer (possibly derived from *ugqirha*- medical doctor). Traditional healers are able to communicate with ancestors, tap into the ancestral powers and be 'possessed' by them. Thagale (2018) expresses considerable disquiet and disbelief about these putative powers, which include discerning the reason for a misfortune such as illness, identifying the person/s behind the evil and recommending a solution.

*Ixhwele* (plural *amaxhwele*) is an herbalist who formulates herbal remedies. One parishioner credited the herbalist with the power to concoct medicine (*muthi*), which can kill an enemy. *Igqwirha* (plural *amagqwirha*) - a witch.

*Umthakathi* (plural *Abathakathi*) (from *thakatha* – to bewitch, do harmful magic) – witch. Witches are the epitome of evil and can cause illness and all manner of mishap, including killing. They are usually identified as female. They use spells, familiars (animals such as baboons, in the control of the witch), body parts and various concoctions to hurt their victim. Healers and religious specialists are not witches, and for some it is an insult to be labelled as a witch doctor.

*Nyanga* is a healer (to cure, treat, heal) and *Isangoma* the Zulu designation for traditional healer, but it is used more generally outside of the Zulu culture. The Xhosa equivalent is *igqirha*.

Traditional healers can heal people who are displaying symptoms of *ukuthwasa*, a condition which is viewed as a calling to become a healer. The person is subjected to a complex of rituals, after which they are qualified to perform the function of an *igqirha*. The symptoms of *ukuthwasa* suggest severe psychological disturbance, and Buhrmann (1984), a psychologist, has researched the process and concludes that the rituals healer's performance bears resemblance to western biomedical therapeutic techniques. There have been occasions where Catholic parishioners have themselves felt this calling and have acknowledged it and acted on it. Not all who feel called have the symptoms of voices and hallucinations. The ancestors show a person who has a calling in a dream to whom they must go to fulfil their vocation. The fact that Catholics have actually pursued such calls reveals the degree of cooperation with ATR. Respondents indicate that their first reaction to a problem is to pray to God, but 'cultural' avenues are sought if this does not meet expectations. They have been socialized to seek healing from religious specialists.

A mature parishioner opined that these specialists are capable of killing someone with their *muthi* (specially concocted medicine) but he had never experienced an actual occurrence of this. (B11). This medicine can also be used to bewitch, and 'you can use *muthi* to get fortune (sic), you know' (B11). Leaflets are handed out in cities such as Cape Town advertise the services of many healers and 'doctors', which offer solutions to a wide variety of issues including: winning a jackpot, winning a bride or girlfriend, and all types of healing remedies. These pamphlets promote remedies and invite those in need to consult with the healer, for which payment is required. Traditional healers may use drumming and dancing to tap into their psyche at a subliminal level thereby attaining an altered state of consciousness from which the solution will emerge. This also facilitates the encounter with the ancestors, who provide the required remedy.

Some respondents thought the power of evil healers came from Satan (B11). God has more power than the *sangomas*; he has the greatest power on earth, 'That is why even those witchcraft (sic), they pray to God to kill you' (B12). He infers that even the evil agents are well aware of God's power, and even pray to him for their own nefarious purposes. Those traditional healers who use powers for evil get their power from Satan (B11). He agreed that these specialists can kill someone with their *muthi* (specially concocted medicine), but he had never experienced an actual occasion of this nature (B11). This medicine can also be used to bewitch, and 'you can use muthi to get fortune, you know' (B11).

*Amagqirha* get their power from the ancestors: 'they say they get it from their ancestors' (G11). Some also believe the ancestors can bestow protection via the traditional healers/doctors to the extent of immunity to bullets or poison (G12). Nevertheless, God has the most power over evil spirits (G13). Generally speaking, it is the ancestors who supply the supernatural powers to the religious specialists according to ATR. It appears that Satanic forces can be harnessed by evil agents, which produce effects of a supernatural order, which are somehow allowed by the all-powerful God for his mysterious reasons.

A mature male parishioner avowed that there were fake healers: 'Especially now in South Africa...there are so many churches that are here. So, I believe those are fake because they are doing that for money (B11). [The] things they are giving to people, they are unbelievable' (B11), including making people drink oil and eat grass (B12). There are false healers who



consult mainly for money (according to a young male respondent). Some people do not get healed because they are not listening correctly to God's word or neglect to follow the advice of the ancestors or are stubborn (D12). God may allow us to suffer: 'he in this way he's testing our faith in him' (D12).

A mature male participant averred that he never uses the services of traditional healers. He suggested that some people become poor because of the cost of consulting traditional healers (I14). He contends that 'there are some diseases that you cannot be healed from, father.' He concedes that God allows people to suffer for his own reasons. A mature female parishioner explained to me that if you pay, for example R100 you get a blessing, if you pay R200 you get a 'bigger' blessing. There is a type of perceived price and expected benefit relationship.

Prophets in primal religions can exert major influence on whole tribes in times of crisis, and still sway African Christians today. There are popular healers and prophets who are widely sought, even outside South Africa, such as the now late popular Prophet T. B. Joshua. A parishioner, who was asked if she had to pay for healing, said: 'No, it's a church.' No, I don't give money' (G12). She qualified this by saying: 'They (the traditional healers) want money, but I don't give because I don't have. But they do want money' (G12). Asked if they want a lot, she replied: 'Yes, the *sangomas* want a lot' (G12).

A priest did not want to visit religious specialists. The priest claimed never to consult religious specialists for assistance, except on one occasion when he admitted:

Eh, but of course that again was the pressure of my mother. Um, there was, there was a time I was, I am asthmatic, but there was a time I had so many asthma attacks, that they were very serious. And I tried all different things, I mean I, I had medicine from the doctor but it didn't really help until my brother-in-law, well that's my theory, but it happened at the same time. Today my mother took me to an *iqgirha*, eh, the following day my brother-in-law organised some of those ozone treatment, those things that you put and then they, I think that's what opened me' (H11).

His mother insisted that it was because he went to the traditional healer that he recovered, and there is the suggestion that the visit also led to his brother's intervention; he took him for the ozone treatment. This was thus a direct result of his visit to the *iqgirha*. When asked if he would go to a traditional healer now, he replied: 'On my own, no' (H11). Then he added:

‘Well, I, I think a herbalist maybe. But not, not someone that would eh, tap into the ancestors. I, I have struggles with that personally’. He had never been to other churches for healing even before becoming a priest (H12).

A mature woman (respondent), in a case of illness or mishap, does not go to a healing church or religious specialist, she resorts to the rosary: ‘miracles will happen’. Also, she prays to God, when Jesus, who apparently prompts her to pray. A mature male parishioner also declines healing churches when experiencing mishap, but he visits herbalists for assistance. Another mature male participant never employs the traditional route for healing though he notes that that some Catholics do. He accepts that ‘there are some diseases that you cannot be healed from, father’. A mature female participant never consults *amagqirha*, but she maintains that other Catholic parishioners do. Rituals involving the ancestors can bring healing. However, she believes that some healers are more likely to provoke an attack of evil spirits on a client, since they deal indiscriminately within the world of spirits. She feared that some healers would even unknowingly, call into play evil spirits, and by performing rituals, a client might ‘end up in an asylum.’

A mature male participant noted that a bad dream or sleeplessness could occasion fear and the intuition ‘that there is a bad spirit in the house’ (B12). He would ask a priest to visit and pray but if the problem continued, he resorted to traditional means. These being herbs ‘because they don’t have side effects, they’re natural you know’ (B12). Whilst the Catholic Church can assist healing with prayer and holy water, the participant still goes to traditional healers ‘At times, but mostly I believe in God’ (B12).

A young male had only gone to a healing church when invited by a friend, ‘but I know my faith; my church is the best church for me and it’s being helping me on my spiritual journey’ (D11). He revealed that at another church he went to people who spoke in tongues. He was not certain that they were actually speaking in tongues: ‘not that I judge them or anything, but I find it strange in a way because we don’t’ (D11). Some members of the Charismatic Renewal in Cape Town have the gift of glossolalia, but this is not confined to charismatics.

A middle-aged female participant consults *amagqirha*: ‘Yes I do sometimes’ (G11). She had also visited some healing churches including: the Christ Embassy Church, the Universal Church and the Zion church. When asked about the Zion Church she replied: ‘Z A.’ I ventured Zion

Christian Church, and she replied affirmatively. But it was uncertain to me that she meant the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC). She observed that sometimes 'they like to shake the bones' (G11). She said: 'They help me, yes. It always goes with how you believe, with your spirit' (G12). In addition, 'Your faith, it goes with the faith' (G12). There is a need to have the requisite faith in healing, presumably a stipulation made by the healer.

A young female participant did not frequent healing churches but had consulted a traditional healer. In event of a mishap, she would pray to God and the ancestors, and if necessary, a traditional healer, to 'see if there is a cultural reason behind why you sick' (sic) (C10). In one case of illness, she took her medicine (anti-biotic), but her mother also wanted to see if there was a 'cultural reason' for the sickness (C10). She admitted that 'you just want to find out' (C10). There may be a cause beyond a random experience, but usually she seemed to think 'not really (there is no enemy behind the scenes), sometimes things just happen' (C10). However, she added that it could be that some ancestral ceremony had not been performed. A traditional healer should be able to know what is happening. She seems somewhat ambivalent about the issues of dealing with traditional healers. She had never been to a healing church. She acknowledged that some healers were evil 'like you get western doctors who are good and some who are not so good' (C11). There were false healers as well (C12).

She claimed to have a lot of dreams and was able to discuss them with an extended family member who was an *igqirha* (C13). The healer would interpret the dream and connect it to the membership of the appropriate clan. She told her mother about a dream which was very real, and she took it as a warning: 'And then, some time went by, like months went by, and then that exact thing happened' (C13). The dream was about her mother, who was 'almost in danger' (C13) because of a co-worker who almost put her mother's career 'in danger and everything' (C14). She felt 'panicked' after the dream 'cause (sic; because) part of the dream there was this thing, like a shadowy thing coming out so it was like, I couldn't move' (C14). The memory no longer scared her as she knew what it was about. Her ambivalence as to 'cultural' phenomena is evident, possibly a reflection of her age (20) and being more ensconced in the secular world. Another young person, however, had readily embraced the ancestral belief system, as is evident from his responses.

The respondents generally sought God first when problems arose, and some were sure that other Catholics frequent healing churches and traditional healers. Even those who did not use the services of healers credit them with substantial powers, and the ability to communicate with ancestors. This is a proficiency sharply discredited by Tlhagale (2018). There is a general belief in evil spirits and in ancestral spirits who are also the object of petitions. There was some degree of ambivalence as to consulting traditional healers, but generally they are visited. The Internet advertises many such services, but many are suspect and the Traditional Healers' Organization cautions against the credulity, if not naivety of people in their search for healing or some expected benefit.

The Catholic Church helps with healing via priests and prayer 'And you take your holy water, you drink it and you get cured' (mature female; A23). A mature male also saw prayer and holy water as apposite for healing 'because water makes wonders, that holy water' (B12). A mature female participant thought that the church helps a lot with healing via priests and prayer, and holy water. Even drinking it was a powerful means of healing. There is the danger that sacramentals such as holy water are used in a way that promotes the idea that they have a magical effect with guaranteed results in the same way as certain medicines concocted by traditional healers.

Asked if the Catholic Church could do more about healing such as flu, or depression, a young female participant replied that it does not help depression because she was studying psychology and:

especially in the Black communities it's like oh, we're Black, we don't know about those things. Those are White problems. We don't have time for that (C12).

The highly communal life of the Xhosa people may have been an antidote to illnesses such as depression, but in the more impersonal township life with its many challenges, dangers and frustrations, the African person is becoming more prone to depression, according to research done by Mamphela Ramphele (2002).

As to healing within the Catholic Church she noted that healing Masses, which had been conducted with the use of oils for anointing 'or like a revival, like singing, some people feel

better with healing. Like when I prefer to sing' (C11). Asked if the Catholic Church could do more to protect people from evil spirits, she replied that the Church was a source of prayer:

but at the same time people come into the church with like different energy. Some people don't come to church just to pray, some just coming to like look to other people. And evil is not just stalking, but it's also in the form of like jealousy, envy and other people being rude to people like unnecessarily at church like, going out of your way to be unkind (C14).

For her, evil resides in human relationships.

A young male said that the Catholic Church does well in regard to healing. He believes that 'we do, we do healing each and every Sunday, in the Mass. Yes it's in the Mass. It's whenever we celebrate God, whenever we are having a celebration with God, whether it's a healing Mass or a prayer service or just Mass itself' (D11).

This is a confident endorsement of the effects of the Mass. In reply to how the Catholic Church could do more to protect people from evil and to effect healing he observed: 'Uh, through Mass, receiving Jesus every day, every Sunday, and also having some um also having some healing Masses...' (D13). Asked if the Catholic Church provides healing, a female parishioner replied: 'Because they give you...they anoint you with oil' (G13). She had been thus anointed.

The Catholic Church, according to a priest respondent, can provide healing with its sacrament of healing and the Eucharist. 'Well I believe that the sacrament of anointing, that is where a Catholic would receive healing, strength...' (E12). Asked whether the Catholic Church did enough for healing or protection, he replied:

I don't think...well, well my experience is that I don't think we, we do enough of that healing. I think we tend to focus on when there is a sick call then we quickly get the oils. But you know, we don't put a healing service uh, just for those who want it. It's, it's very rare (E13).

He tries to have a healing service twice a year. 'When there is a mission in the parish, there is a day for laying on of hands and anointing' (E13). At a special healing service hands are laid on all people, not only those who qualify for anointing of the sick. Asked if he laid hands on people or just anointed he said, 'that depended on if there were enough priests, otherwise he would just anoint' (E13). From this it is clear that community healing services are not a

regular feature, as for example in healing churches, where every service centres on the Bible and healing.

To cope with evil spirits, witches and spells he would use prayer and holy water and salt (E14). Holy water and praying over people and exorcism are how the Catholic Church protects people from evil and evil spirits. But he does not feel that the Catholic Church does enough for protection (E14). He feels that some people who are experiencing evil spirits do not always have the transport to reach the locally appointed exorcist, so more priests should be allowed to perform the ministry (E15). When he has a problem, his first choice of sacred power was God, not ancestors or Jesus. Asked whether ancestors can protect one from dangers such as poison or attacks or accidents, he replied that they could.

A young male volunteered this about a special healing Mass at his parish:

...which in this, in the Xhosa African churches we have um, services where we um celebrate Mass, we have benediction first, and then have a healing Mass where we invite *sangomas* to come, and also um, um switch on the incense which is *impepho*, we call it *impepho*. And then we pray. We light candles, um (D13).

In terms of the official Catholic Church's role of approving proposed adaptations to the Mass, always conscious of the integrity of the Eucharist and its heritage of Eucharistic tradition, this seems to have been an adventurous Mass.

A priest feels that the Catholic Church does not do enough to provide healing and protection (H12).

I think sometimes I, I downplay eh, God's healing, and so don't actually sometimes provide for, for God's healing to happen eh, through prayer, through eh, sacraments, um, I, I sometimes just stick to what is prescribed and perhaps not move beyond that (H13).

He seems to feel that more can be done beyond the usual sacraments. He would limit himself to sick visits and hospital visits. If people request, he would lay hands on them, especially requests for safe travel. On travel blessings, he notes:

Yes (laughter) actually when I come to think of it, they, they actually do come and request. I mean when people are going home to the Eastern Cape, they (come) after Mass for the laying of hands for safety, for safe travel (H13).

Parishioners also ask for prayer before operations: 'But, but people do lots of requests' (H13).

A mature parishioner argues that people need to accept that there will not be guaranteed healing, whether through traditional healers or the Catholic Church. He feels that healing starts inwards, but we must also 'just accept that you will not recover from the situation.'

Healing in the Catholic Church includes the sacrament of reconciliation:

Father (the priest) will pray for the candles, will pray for your feelings, we go to confession and all that.  
I mean, for me, healing starts with that.

A mature female parishioner believes that the Catholic Church can do healing. She recalls Fr Peter-John (a Catholic priest who participates in Catholic Charismatic services), whom she has seen praying over people at charismatic services.

The Catholic Church, it appears, could do more in domain of healing, noting that black parishioners visit healing churches or traditional healers. The Catholic Church should also pray over people. This continues to be a neglected area of the Church's ministry. One consideration in regard to healing ministry is that the Church does not want to undermine the sacraments of the anointing of the sick, the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist. A healing service may attract more attention than a Mass. Some experiments with healing services by Catholic priests in Cape Town ended with disagreement as to the methods to be used and their potential for subverting the sacraments of healing, such as the anointing of the sick, the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist (appraisal of healing services in 2006).

Other 'religious specialists' include the sorcerer, a person who is approached to make use of spells and 'bad' medicine to hurt someone (Domingues 2000:27). Sorcerers have no intrinsic powers, but they use forces external to themselves. The failure of an evil ritual may be due to the incorrect technique, or the victim is protected by forces superior to those directed against them (Domingues 2000:28). Sorcerers and witches are regarded as profoundly anti-social and evil (Domingues 2000:61). The sorcerer is detested, but protection can be secured (Domingues 2000:29) because a person never knows who may harbour evil against them. Many seek to protect themselves permanently using charms or fetishes endowed with protective powers these include: finger rings, armbands, waste bands and foot bands. Other charms are placed on doors, hung at the entrance of a home, or buried. We see parallels in

western Christianity with those who wear rosaries, crucifixes, scapulars and other religious attire as a form of protection and intercession to God or the hoped-for protection of a particular saint. The rosary is popular as an item to be worn for spiritual protection by many Xhosa Catholics. Another reason for this could be that rosaries are fashioned from beads, which are popular in African culture. An upscale men's-clothing store in Cape Town was actually selling rosaries, whether for adornment or spiritual protection was not clear.

The witch is an evil 'religious specialist' who carries evil at the deep level of their being (Domingues 2000:29). Witches are radically against good life. They use hidden knowledge and activities to achieve their designs. It may be that a person is not aware of the inner evil they carry, which in itself can harm another person. Inner evil is the result of harbouring bad thoughts such as jealousy, hatred, malevolence or desiring someone's death of (Healey, Sybertz 2000:218). Sometimes it is only the soul of the witch that does the evil work, while the body remains asleep in their bed (Healey, Sybertz 2000:30). Witches are believed to gather at night to drum, dance and to eat human flesh (Healey, Sybertz 2000:30). A witch may remove the soul of a person's body, who will pine and fade away to death. A witch is a contradiction of all that is human and good (Healey, Sybertz 2000:31). Many African people believe that a family member was killed by a witch. Noting Catholic prayers of exorcism, or to nullify curses, the Catholic Church entertains the possibility of people being able engage the power of evil spirits and to cause physical harm via supernatural means<sup>34</sup>. This remains one of the mysteries because it is not understood why God allows such evil to occur. Traditional healers are incorrectly labelled 'witch doctors'.

Witchcraft accusations proliferate in situations of social instability and change (Healey, Sybertz 2000:34). Domingues (2000:56) argues that Christ needs to be experienced where people experience the mystery of evil. Catholic parishioners interviewed in this research made no overt comments about witchcraft, but my general experience with Xhosa people reveals a view of witches as the most wicked of contenders for evil in the world of ATR. The first accredited South African saint, Benedict Daswa, was killed apparently because of his refusal to contribute to a collection to pay a isangoma to identify whether a witch was

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04573d.htm>



responsible for unusual lightening. There have been no witch hunts involving local parishioners. It is nevertheless necessary to establish God as the one with all power, which is agreed upon by my study participants, but it seems more effective to establish Jesus as the one to whom all authority has been given, and there are many Biblical passages which define his absolute powers.

Pauw's research on the Xhosa (1975:337) discovers no precedent for a belief in Satan. Witches and sorcerers are the prime icons of evil. The belief in witchcraft is the nearest to the belief in a devil (Healey, Sybertz 2000:218). The witch is the personification of evil, a nightmare, 'public enemy number one' (:218). Familiars of witches are sometimes seen as demons.

The biggest felt need of African people, according to some scholars, is to be protected from evil and to be delivered from an evil spell (Healey, Sybertz 2000:218.). This fear of evil does not diminish among the more educated a person is; the socialization process in ATR is not overcome by western rationality and the suspicion of all that is not observable. Accusations of witchcraft have resulted in unjust punishment of weaker members of society (Domingues 2000:62). Witchcraft accusations proliferate in situations of social instability and change (Healey, Sybertz 2000:34).

There is an appreciation of the reality of evil spirits and the need for protection by the participants in my research. It is something that could be more methodically addressed by the clergy in the Archdiocese of Cape Town in order to offer efficacious means of coping with this reality to their parishioners. However, as important as this issue is, this sample did not seem to confirm that the need for protection from evil spirits as the 'biggest felt need of the African' (Healey, Sybertz, 2000:218). Coping with life's struggles such as family and offspring issues, crime and ancestors commanded the most attention. There is evidence from the respondents that the religious specialists do vie for sacred power with the Church, in particular its sacraments, and the centrality of Christ, who is overshadowed by 'God'. Nürnberger (2007:42) observes that even in South Africa, the most modernised and Christianised part of Sub-Saharan Africa, millions of Black South Africans turn to 'hundreds of thousands' of diviners and healers.

## 2.9 Tlhagale's Assessment of the *Isangoma*-priest as a Religious Specialist

Tlhagale (2018:130-168), in his article on the *Sangoma*-priest, exposes the recent phenomenon of these religious specialists. These include priests and religious brothers and sisters. They perform all the functions of the traditional healers but have at their disposal an additional store of Christian spiritual technology. African people respect and fear those who engage with the spirit world. The Catholic Church has obscured the healing ministry of Christ, so Christians seek other agents. *Sangoma*-priests are the unofficial Catholic answer to the intense preoccupation with healing in the AICs and Pentecostal churches with their abundance of prophet-healers. Catholic mission and education have failed to eradicate 'superstitious' customs (Tlhagale 2018:236). The Catholic Church in Southern Africa has forbidden the *isangoma*-diviner practices which blend Christian and African rites purportedly soliciting the authority of the ancestors and the sacred power of the Church's rites. The agents operate without the approval of the Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference. The 'blind', namely the hybrid Catholic priest or religious who does not have faculties from their superior and are imprudently and ineffectively blending two sometimes opposing theologies, are leading the blind, the laity, who are not aware that the syncretistic services are of dubious efficacy, in terms of spiritual sustenance (Tlhagale 2018:140).

Tlhagale questions the 'palpable clash' of belief systems, which defies blind integration, in other words, which cannot be reconciled or harmonised with Catholic teaching. He describes this period as a liminal one for inculturation, searching for answers which have given rise to essentially syncretistic solutions. He questions the theology of these self-appointed healers whose capacities have been well defined by the authority structures of the Church, yet usurp this authority, and venture into unorthodox (in the eyes of the Church) ministry.

Tlhagale records that 'ostensibly well-educated and cultivated Catholics' patronised *Sangoma*-priests (2018:141). Most of my Catholic respondents admitted to visiting traditional healers, and as noted elsewhere, some are likely to search for 'successful' prophets and healers on the Internet. The religious hybrids understand that healing comes from the ancestors, not Christ (Tlhagale:141). These priests belong to two 'unequal' belief systems and have divided loyalties and theologically betray their Catholic faith, and even if unknowingly, God. The ancestors and 'bush' spirits are different sources of sacred power, and the Christ

figure is nowhere to be seen. Tlhagale (2018) identifies considerable blurring of the distinction between traditional healers, isangoma-priests and prophets of 'spirit' churches (AICs or Pentecostal churches), who summon the Holy Spirit to achieve the desired outcome..

Religious priests and sisters subject themselves to vows, including chastity, which precludes marriage, and diocesan priests vow to remain celibate. This status of being unmarried and subject to sexual taboos is seen as enhancing their status as diviners (Tlhagale), as well as their association with a powerful institution such as the Catholic Church. Traditional healers are meant to observe sexual taboos meticulously (Tlhagale 2018:141). Abstinence is required for healers, diviners, circumcision, sorcery, iron-melting, or pottery, which assists the agent to be in touch with the ancestors (as well as spirits, and witches). Tlhagale (2018:146), in regard to healing, foretelling, divination and similarities with the Old Testament, concludes that the Old Testament has been fulfilled by the New Testament, and ancient methods should have fallen by the wayside because 'Christ emerged as the supreme healer. He instructed his disciples to heal and forgive sins in his name.' For some Christians, including *isangoma*-priests, healing emanates from the ancestors not Christ (:147).

He (Tlhagale:183) avers that it is 'preposterous' that traditional healers communicate with the ancestors and prescribe the proper remedy. He fears that the Catholic paraphernalia such as rosaries, candles and holy water may assume a 'magical' quality with the expectation of guaranteed results. Tlhagale (2018:187) is critical of the 'stubborn' belief in witchcraft. Tlhagale also refers to the gullibility of many who seek the services of traditional healers.

Conversion to Christianity should include upholding God as the unique source of power (Tlhagale 2018:148). Appealing to other powers compromises monotheism (:148). He observes how some Catholic traditional healers hope to incorporate Catholic rites, the Bible and prayers into their cultural ministry, but they hesitate because there is no authoritative response from the Church. He also suggests that a return to traditional methods of healing in contrast to the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is misleading as it is not grounded in Christ and the Church. It is the Church in Christ that heals, not the ancestors (Tlhagale 2018:155). Diviner-priests confuse the newly converted returning them to 'magical' rites and all the confusing 'sacramentals' of the healer as opposed to those of the Catholic Church. Tlhagale answers the later rationalization which claims that the power of ancestors to heal comes from

God with the view that this is ‘torturous logic;’ a facile argument that is unilaterally constructed, and one of unsupported convenience (Tlhagale 2018:156).

He sees the claim that traditional healers receive messages from the ancestors and talk to them, and the idea that ancestors can inflict hardship and prescribe cures as ‘preposterous’ (:183). He (:184) does acknowledge that credence in magic, divination and witchcraft are waning; the ‘yoke’ (implying a burden) has been loosened. Magic is a false postulate.

Prophets claim substantial powers today, operating without well-defined systems of belief and are given to spontaneity and improvisation. Waruta (1989,2003:47) claims that prophets resist identification with Christ and ‘his followers do not see much difference and such a prophet gets the type of reverence and status accorded to Jesus.’

The Pastoral Statement of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC) on Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith (in Knox 2008:236-243) explicitly forbids *ubuNgoma* practices. The statement critiques the underlying fear of the spirit world, which these healers claim to address as well as the notion that ancestors acquire new-found supernatural powers equal to God. The SACBC statement eschews any form of divination and attempts to harness occult forces and appraises the wearing of charms as ‘reprehensible’ (Knox 2008:241). This practice is in evidence amongst parishioners in Cape Town.

Sipuka (2020:1, 2) observes that Christian pastors (not Catholic priests) of ‘populist Pentecostal churches’, have assumed the role of the traditional diviner who normally would identify a person’s problems and prescribe a remedy. He attributes this information to Archbishop Tlhagale (cited in Sipuka 2020:1; email reply to my questionnaire). These pastors will for example pray over a person’s *curriculum vitae* or identity document or any item belonging to the person in order to achieve a certain goal such as success with a job application. Community tensions and jealousies lead to accusations of witchcraft, where the witch is regarded as the embodiment of evil (Tlhagale 2018:187). The bishop sees the accused as scapegoats for local problems. The accused are harassed and even killed.

Pastoral visits to Xhosa Catholic parishioners in Cape Town by a parish priest in the Archdiocese of Cape Town, revealed a certain allegiance to local personalities who boast special healing successes (their pictures were on the wall), and there is also some degree of

following the well-known TV evangelist T.B. Joshua (died 2021, age 57). Some Catholics visit healing churches such as the Universal Church of Christ, and the Christ Embassy Church. The latter claims great success in healing, including HIV/AIDS, to the extent that the South African Advertising Standards Board censured that church. I believe that parishioners are not averse to exploring the internet for prominent healers and prophetic figures.

Christ and the Catholic Church then vie for attention, which is given to religious specialists including pastors/prophets who claim to heal, and who interpret the bible fundamentally or very spontaneously and liberally. Many Catholics visit healing churches and go to Mass. These parishioners attend Mass in the morning and a healer or a healing church in the afternoon, according to my respondents. Sipuka (2020:1) further observes that Catholics who leave the Church seek the material prosperity or healing that Pentecostal churches claim to bring. Nürnberger (2007:68) notes that the Catholic Church encouraged the spirituality of people. In Europe, legendary heroes became saints.

In Latin America, West African cults thrive under the cover of the veneration of saints. In Africa the Catholic Church seems to be battling whether it should be supportive of ancestor veneration. This strange inconsistency certainly helped the Church to remain popular with grass roots masses. (Nürnberger 2007:68).

Cumes (2004:xv) uses Eastern spiritualism and yoga principles to explain the healing power of African healers. To access the force, *moya* (*qi* or *chi* –Taoist: *ruah* – Hebrew; *prana* – Sanskrit) healers use drumming, dancing, chanting singing to tap the cosmic field, which contains the universal unconscious (the term used by Carl Jung). Cumes (2004) argues that healers access these forces (including the ancestors) through altered states of consciousness, which allow entry to oceans of archetypal ancestral consciousness, also described as an alpha state, or the cosmic zone. The drumming and dancing also help the healer to ‘step aside’ to allow the ancestor to enter (2004:36). Cumes refers to an *isangoma* who claimed that all illness comes from the ancestors, who can open the gates of healing (:29). He refers to contact with Zionists (an African-Christian Church) and healers, who:

become possessed, achieving profoundly altered states of consciousness that allow them to access the spirit realm or cosmic field, which they call God or Jesus.

A diviner with whom Cumes (2004:81) worked invoked various names in their rituals including Jesus, Jehovah and Moses. This confirms the general impression that for many Jesus has been relativized. He is one source of power among various other sources. Furthermore, one parishioner averred that African rituals are prefaced with appeals to God, Abraham, David, but never Jesus, revealing a predilection for the Old Testament, and a telling exclusion of the New Testament.

## 2.10 The World of Spirits from a Catholic Perspective

Having described the underlying theology of the African worldview, which makes up a 'SEE' or social analysis including a phenomenological analysis, I postulate that the Catholic Church angelology provides a constructive engagement of faith with life which explicates God's creation, the fall of the angels and the absolute supremacy of Christ over all of creation including Satan and the evil spirits, whom God allows to operate in our world for his own cryptic purposes. The fallen angels also rely on God's sustaining power for their on-going existence and capacities. Therefore, God has absolute power over them, but allows them to trouble humanity. Walls (2017:69) suggests that Africa:

...which knows so much about systemic evil, and where the principalities and powers are not such a strange concept, may open the way to a more developed theology of evil, as the issues already appearing in African pastoral practice are thrashed out.

The 'principalities and powers' refer to the hierarchy of evil beings identified by Paul (Ephesians 6:10-13).

Angels are Biblically attested and include guardian angels for every human being (see Catechism of the Catholic Church; 'CCC' 1994:336). They intercede for us and protect us against moral dangers. The fall of angels is found in their radical and irrevocable rejection of God (CCC 392; Rev 12:7-10). There are ostensibly a large number of these evil spirits (Rev 12:4). Pope Francis (in his book, *Rebuking the Devil*, 2019), discerns Satanic influence in our world on a very substantial scale.

Whereas the Xhosa parishioners may be overly cognizant of the invisible world, the Western mind is still far too intolerant and even disparaging of this reality, and it is said that the evil spirits prefer to remain improbable and incredible, so as to be more capable of influencing

people without their explicit awareness. The Catholic tradition of types of evil spirits differs from many expositions of the world of evil spirits identified by ATR, but I conclude that the Xhosa and Catholic traditions agree on a spirit filled world. However, the two would partially disagree on the nature and purpose of these spirits. Walls judges the enlightenment worldview as too pared down; limiting itself to the rational world and distinguishing sharply between the empirical world and the world of spirit (2006:35). This abbreviated exposition constitutes a type of Judge analysis, in the three-fold See, Judge, Act methodology, corroborating the African belief of a world filled with spirits, but with certain qualifications.

Christianity would see the role of evil as one largely of corruption and seduction to sin, and a sentence of eternal damnation. For the Xhosa person evil beings attack the body and soul of the subject and his community to harm or kill in this life. I refer to Okure as an African theologian who as a Biblical scholar takes seriously the presence of evil spirits (see Chapter 3.16).

## Chapter 3. The Ancestors

### 3.1 Introduction

Ancestors describe collective and individual identity, shore up the hierarchical structure, validate roles and support cultural values. They are an authority which provides values, meaning and allocate roles and statuses. They interpose in daily concerns of their progeny. They provide the assistance when problems or ill health arise, are solicited via special rituals, and impart protection (Tlhagale 2018:169).

They are an integral part of most of African life. My thesis seeks to establish the overall influence of the ancestors on our Catholic parishioners in relation to God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Tlhagale (2018) observes that Christianity (and Islam) demand exclusive worship of God (:167). Where Christ is not seen to provide the vacuum is filled by the ancestors who have always been part of the traditional belief system. These needs include physical healing, illness of the mind, and deliverance from evil spirits and malevolent enemies.

Ancestors are viewed as guardians of the social order with specific powers and roles, which is evident from the literature and the respondents to my questionnaire. God in relation to ancestors and his supremacy, the resurgence of the ancestor cult, their ability to punish progeny and the need for proper funerals and rituals are also noted, and ancestor rituals and sacrifice are discussed. The third section of this chapter focuses on an evaluation of the ancestor system showing some congruencies with the Communion of Saints, and examining certain Councils of the Catholic Church which present a theology of a world of spirits and their roles in God's interventions in this world. The fourth section presents a critique of the ancestor belief system.

### 3.2 The Ancestor Belief System

Ancestor veneration, found in primal religions where traditional culture has survived (Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, Australia) continues to thrive in the modern world, and is seen as a defining feature of primal religion. In these primal religions, traditional culture has survived globalizing and modernizing forces, but 'The monster (postmodernism) has been let loose and will never be captured again' and some see this force as particularly challenging to



once sheltered societies (also noted above in Section 1.2; Nürnberger 2007:188). The traditional African village is replete with belief in dynamistic forces, including the living dead, namely the ancestors. The Xhosa words for ancestor are *inyanya* (plural *izinyanya*; *abaphantsi*- those below; also, *amawethu*- those of us; *ithongo*). Names of parents such as oomakhulu (grandmothers), oobawomkhulu (grandfathers) are also used to address the ancestors (Sipuka 2000:121). It was a status sometimes achieved by males with high moral standards who were exemplars to their progeny, although today the criteria are less demanding, and parents and grandparents of both genders are routinely considered to be ancestors. Wanamaker (1997:287), however, is more specific by observing that a virtuous life is not a requirement among the South African Bantu. It is more important to have progeny, to be buried correctly and to ritually installed as an ancestor. My parishioners in fact treat any deceased relative as a target of petition, not only parents and grandparents.

Sipuka (2000:120) refers to *ukukhapa* (to accompany), a ritual incorporating the killing of an ox to ritually “reunite” the separate souls of the deceased with the land of the spirits. *Ukuguqula* or *ukubuyisa* (to return), a year or so later, achieves a return of the ancestor to the progeny, to be continually involved with their descendants. There is a measure of fear, but also respect and affection for ancestors. One parishioner (conversation December 2015) was convinced that her evil ancestor, an uncle, killed her brother. Another respondent averred that: ‘They can cause death, or they put you in a wheelchair’ (B16). Neglect of ancestors was regarded as dangerous to varying degrees by respondents to my questions. Ancestors are honoured by their progeny on average from four to six generations, after which they are absorbed into the company of spirits and become ancestral shades (Sipuka 2000:12).

Wanamaker (1997:296) is certain that after two centuries Christianity has not been able to suppress the ancestors from the daily lives of African Christians, and in fact observes that Christianity is now being Africanised to accommodate the traditional beliefs of African Christians for whom the ancestors provide a sense of belonging in their families. Jesus Christ ‘is undergoing Africanization’ (Wannamaker 1997:296).

### 3.3 Guardians of the Social Order

Wanamaker (1997:287) claims that the most crucial role of ancestors is as guardians of the social and moral order. They maintain continuity of social structure and authority, which is 'inviolable and unchallengeable, and thus able to mobilize the consent of all who must comply with it' (Fortes 1965; 122-142, Wanamaker 1997:287). Ancestors transmit and safeguard life and are responsible for blessings and ill fortune. They are recalled especially at key points in life such as birth, initiation and marriage. Those ancestors who lived good lives will show their progeny how to utilize their life force (Bujo 2003:73). They write a type of 'last will and testament,' a treasure of customs for their progeny. Ancestors are invisible participants in the ongoing lives of their progeny (Stinton 2004:135). The ties of kinship continue beyond death. Rituals and prayers to ancestors are acts of remembrance which actualise the presence of the ancestors. Ancestor traditions are envisaged as a gift from God and ancestor rituals 'bring into effect the fullness of life they signify' (Stinton 2004:141). Nürnberger (2007:45) questions whether Christ provides meaning through defining acceptable behaviour, exposing evil, punishing transgressions and keeping the community together. The ancestors and religious specialists perform these tasks, which include coping with evil spirits and witches (Nürnberger 2007:45). They, then, are prime sources of sacred power.

Within this traditional view advanced by the literature, the impact of God's natural law can be discerned, and for each of the Commandments of the Decalogue, there is an African custom that bears resemblance to the precepts of Yahweh. Most cultures have tenets that resemble the ten commandments, in particular those commands in relating to neighbours (honouring parents, not killing or hurting, no adultery, no stealing, no lies which harm community, no jealousy leading to witchcraft, and the orthodox expression of sexuality). Participants in my research responded to ancestors as guardians of society but not as profoundly consciously as suggested by Wanamaker (1997) and Bujo (2003). Rituals do signal that there is a proper conduct, but the many taboos of ATR and the finer details were not explored in this thesis. The thanksgiving ancestor rituals do acknowledge significant ancestral influence. Sometimes it is beyond the financial means of a person to perform a ritual, which necessitates the purchase of animals for sacrifice.

Awareness of ancestors is effortlessly brought to the surface and into conversations, for some respondents more than others. In a general discussion with a mature parishioner, it was clear that she was confident that her various parish initiatives were inspired by her ancestors, and she seemed to think of them frequently. Life challenges such as a robbery, would instigate the thought of ancestors, but God was more readily recalled by the respondents. When questioned about life purpose and priorities, there was mention only twice of the ancestors instead God and family dominated as central issues. God, faith, family, survival, children and neighbours were frequently noted topics of major concern, but ancestors are there to help.

Kiernan does show that as a result of the disruption of descent groups because of migrant workers, urbanization, and the 'declining capacity of the land', that ancestors have lost importance as boundary markers. It is rare for a whole descent group to come together and act collectively as a whole group presided over by the lineage head (Kiernan 1995:78):

The effective unit of social organization is the small domestic group of at most three generations, in which ritual remembrance of the dead addresses parents and grandparents only...

To the extent that the effective kin structure of the Xhosa has diminished, the influence of ancestors has lessened but still remains very important (Kiernan 1995:79).

A respondent's range of ancestors was limited, she could not recall special or famous ancestors of her clan: 'There are, father, although I don't know their names' (K6).

There are very few rituals in ATR dedicated to a supreme being. The Xhosa focus on individual ancestors and rituals are predominantly intended for the ancestors as grantors of favours or dispensers of misfortune in their own right. It is a domestic affair, although there may be certain famous ancestors acknowledged by a clan and at the level of the tribe. From my interaction with parishioners and responses to questions, ancestors are the recipients of constant prayers, invocations, appeals for favours and thanksgiving. The practice of remembering and re-enacting ancestral deeds is:

a memorial narrative act of salvation, designed to secure total community, both before and after death, with all good and benevolent ancestors. Furthermore, the human vocation, in the African tradition, is simply to preserve and transmit the all-embracing life which each receives from the ancestor (Bujo 2003:72 and 84).

Mission that embraces this logic and compares it to the memorial narrative act of salvation in the Mass seems to offer great potential as a bridge between ancestor rituals and the Eucharist. As people recall their ancestors, and ideally their deeds, the Catholic Church recalls the surpassing deed of Christ, his Death and Resurrection, in every celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist as thanksgiving, also seems to offer a natural link with the ancestor rituals, *imicimbi*, which are celebrations of thanksgiving for blessings received from the ancestors.

It is interesting to note the view of Kiernan (1995:77) who believes that titles for God in the Zulu language such as *uNkulunkulu* and *Modimo* in Sotho, refer to the first human beings, the founding ancestors and have been incorrectly assumed by missionaries as the indigenous name for the supreme being.

### 3.4 Ancestral Powers

Ancestors are purported to have considerable powers having achieved a higher state of ontological being thus they have greater powers than when they lived (Kraft 2003:228 and Nürnberger 2007:14). Kasabele (2002:118) confirms that by death ancestors become more powerful than human beings. They have greater ability to increase or decrease the vital force of their progeny. The more influential the person is when alive, the more powerful they will be as an ancestor. Ancestors are the highest after God, in the hierarchy of being. They provide fertility, health, prosperity, successful hunting and successful living (Kasabele 2002:119). Any physical property of a person may provide a conduit to them as an ancestor. In an untitled and undated survey of some 40 Sotho people a significant level of fear of ancestors is recorded (approx. 1987, received from a priest who spent many years teaching at the Roma seminary in Lesotho). Luzbetak (2002:88) also sees the ancestor cult as a religion of fear. A Xhosa seminarian confessed considerable fear of his ancestors (Goldie 2006). Respondents in my research credited the ancestors with powers to hurt and even kill. Bujo (2003:30) counters the Western verdict of Africans having a 'paralyzing fear' of ancestors as an exaggeration, but my respondents evinced considerable fear and at times, dread. Bujo (2003:20) orders the invisible hierarchy of power as follows: God, deities, heroes, oldest ancestors, recent ancestors, grandfather, father, and eldest son. He orders the visible hierarchy as king, queen mother, chief of clans, oldest member of family, heads of households and family members.

In the theology of the Communion of Saints (see below, based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church and various Church pronouncements), those who have died exist as spirits or souls until the Last Day when Christ brings all things to an end and the worthy receive immortal bodies. They are present to their loved ones solely by God's power and permission. They are deemed to have a much greater degree of wisdom, they intercede for their progeny and may be permitted some limited communication with their loved ones. In ATR, however, the forebears have greater powers as shown above and are seen to act autonomously. A 60-year-old Xhosa parishioner of the Catholic church informed me that having dreamed of their dead uncle, who was seen as an evil ancestor, believed the subsequent death of their brother was orchestrated by that uncle. Effectively, the evil ancestor killed their brother (conversation December Goldie 2014). This is an example of the power some parishioners believe that ancestors wield. As noted above, ancestors can provide the means of immunity to poison or bullets (D12). A priest also thought that the ancestors could provide such invulnerability (E12).

Ancestors are a source of good fortune (*ithamsaqa*, or an English sourced word: *ilaki* = lucky) and *ilishwa* (plural *amashwa*) misfortune, adversity and suffering. The misfortune may be blamed on witchcraft or sorcery, but it is seen as dangerous to disregard an ancestor. They are seen more as the orchestration of good fortune and blessings such as children, a home, a good marriage or passing exams (Pauw 1975:150, 223). However, others maintain it is seriously wrong to ignore the authority of superiors, alive or dead, as it can have serious repercussions (Nürnberg 2007:268 footnote 70). This is in line with the responses of my interviewees.

Kiernan (1995:78) contends that for the African person, God does not offer an effective counter to sorcery or witches, but the ancestors do. The belief in sorcery and witchcraft remains largely unchanged. These practices thrive on human envy, malice, anger and jealousy.

Ancestors envisaged by respondents have powers which include protection from poison and even bullets as noted elsewhere. Again, these powers are not correlated to God in whose hands all the departed souls are contained, according to Catholic theology; assistance is mainly in the form of intercession. They have powers to punish, guide, harm ('put you in a wheelchair'), and according to one mature parishioner, the ability to kill. They are able to

communicate via dreams, and in one instance, appeared to a parishioner as a snake. They are guardians of the social order, but amongst my participants there was more evidence of assistance in concrete daily situations and emergencies (such as a robbery), rather than interventions which had wider communal or societal implications. One parishioner remonstrated with his cousin for beating his wife because he was also raising his hand to the people around her all the time (I5). One priest was more reticent about ancestral powers and deeds, but I detected that he was imbued with a robust belief in the ancestral system and ATR in general, as evident in his responses, including that of people with special gifts.

A mature male participant related that at 10 pm one Sunday he saw a snake on the stove in his house. He led his wife outside in case she saw the snake. It was yellow and he referred to it as '*inqanqa*'. He telephoned a relative in the Eastern Cape for elucidation. In their family, it seems there is a snake that comes to visit. The snake is regarded as an ancestor. It was the first and only time he saw the snake. His relatives advised him that 'it was just a case of go with it, don't worry'. There is a world of mystery in the above incident. The world of ancestors exists in situations which are inexplicable, and there is a sense of omnipresent ancestors. Taylor elucidates that many tribes view snakes as embodiments of a particular ancestor (1963/2000:48).

The ancestors may not influence who one votes for, but on further reflection a mature male thought they were supposed to care 'because they cannot let you vote for a criminal' (B17). They do not want someone 'who is an evil spirit, or (sic) is evil hearted' (B18). A priest did not think the ancestors were worried about the political situation (H17). There was no sense of current problems in South Africa being the product of neglect of ancestors. This explanation has surfaced before when the president of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa petitioned the ancestors to rescue the ailing ANC political party.

All respondents, except one priest prayed to the ancestors. 'And we wait for them, for an answer from the ancestors' (A2, mature female). Answers do come, and the ancestors open up the way for their progeny. Sometimes it is the ancestors themselves that initiate the communication, often through a dream and via traditional healers. One mature female participant prayed only to her late grandmother, but she agreed that prayers to ancestors in general did solicit their help. A mature male participant insisted that he prayed *for* his

ancestors, not *to* them. He thought his late mother and father may need prayers, as he remembered stressful events, which involved them and himself, and he was concerned for their happiness. 'We [mature female] pray mostly to God, every night, and as for the ancestors, they are usually the ones who initiate contact as and when and they require attention.' A mature male participant indicated that he always includes his ancestors because they are spirit 'they are also looking after me, working hand in glove with God' (B3). After a life-threatening and mysterious experience from which he and his wife emerged unscathed, he invoked the ancestors and God.

A mature parishioner explained how she would assist her sister, a traditional healer:

And what I like when she's doing her rituals. I want to be on her special place and talk to my ancestors. Ja (yes), I used her rituals to talk with my ancestors. And she believes that if I took part in that, her things would become lucky. I think, father, I think that they do, when I talk to them, they do hear me (K7-8).

The respondent had no doubt that the ancestors could hear them, and attributed on one occasion, being able to procure a cow for a ritual despite having insufficient money (K8).

### 3.5 The Role of Ancestors: Respondents to the Questionnaire

A middle-aged female participant saw her ancestors as protectors. She admitted that she had experiences of her ancestors.

When they, it's like when they are talking to you letting you know they are there to protect you, they are alive, they are watching over you. You don't hear them spiritually but you dream about them (G13-14).

The ancestors prescribe courses of action in a proper fashion, such as burying a person correctly. God and the ancestors 'worked' in the house of a parishioner; on one occasion, the respondent was sure of that. The power of God was manifest, and on prompting, the ancestors were also perceived to be working with God. This was the conclusion after three criminals entered her house and left empty-handed.

The ancestors get their power from God, because they are spirit and work hand in glove with God (B10). This mature respondent's brother 'failed with the car three times. But he did not

even have a scratch' (B15). This testifies to the protection of God and the ancestors. If someone gets a new car they should go 'to the kraal and then talk to the ancestors and they must protect you. Because the car to us, it is like a coffin' (B15). This expresses great confidence in the ancestors. A respondent related that he did ask for ancestral help if he was sick (E12). Despite some initial scepticism or hesitation, he conceded he believed in the world of ancestors, who are everywhere in the world (E12). I suspect he was reluctant to admit communication with the ancestors, since he is a priest. There seems to be some inner conflict manifesting itself, between African tradition and the Christian tradition.

According to a middle-aged female parishioner God protected her from sustaining serious harm in the accident she was warned about; 'and maybe the ancestors, the way we believe' (G3). She used the Xhosa word "*abaphantsi*" (those below, the ancestors). Mentioning the ancestors as helpers, and the use of the Xhosa word emerged spontaneously as this participant spoke. When she was asked if the ancestors or traditional healers could protect one from dangers like poison, she replied 'I believe only God can do that' (G12). However, when she was asked about the ancestors she said, 'The ancestors can protect you, yes' (G12). She admitted that she had experience of ancestors: 'When they, it's like when they are talking to you letting you know they are there to protect you, they are alive, they are watching over you' (G13). A young female participant was uncertain whether a certain dream she had had come from God or the ancestors, but the dream contained a clear warning (C15). She did eventually believe that the ancestors were helping her (C15). Perhaps her ambivalence is a product of her age (20), being less steeped in ATR, or it could reflect a family with only a mother to hand on tradition, and without grandparents.

A priest, when asked if he thought the ancestors could help in the case of mishap, said it was 'more like guiding' (H10).

Eh, not in, in change (sic) something, I think more like guiding where when, ja (yes) eh, for you to perhaps take a particular path, eh, because something reminds me, reminds you of this person, this person came, or you had a dream about it and...I think, I think it's more like it triggers eh, you to perhaps take a particular decision or take a particular path. So for me, so that's the realm of their work. I don't, it's like, it's like God's angels, God sends them to actually guide and help you. So, so that's, that for me is where they exist, as, as entities that God eh, you know... (H11).



For him ancestors seem to be additional assistance, or guidance, used by God. Here there is more acceptance by this priest of the reality of ancestors and their involvement in the lives of their progeny. But he limited ancestral intervention 'into witchcraft and evil not getting into me' (H17). 'I think, I think that for me is their realm' (H17). Asked if ancestors could help protect one from dangers such as poison, this priest did not think so, but said 'When, when we talking about ancestors they might, remember when, when we talk about witches I think on the other hand we then have ancestors that can block perhaps that power' (H12). He feels that it is in this type of protection, blocking the powers of evil, that the ancestors are involved in (H12). He therefore does not pray to his ancestors. He stated that he prays to God to address his personal issues. He saw mishaps as personal challenges, but his family believed that the ancestors could help, following two mishaps, one after the other (H10).

When I asked a mature parishioner if he knew his ancestors by name or if they were a general category, he was quite categorical that the ancestors 'are not general' (B14). He said that they 'are one's grandparents and, grand, grand grandparents' (B14). When communicating with them, 'You call them by the clan name.' His forebears have their tombs in the Eastern Cape, although he is originally from there, he believes that 'everywhere I go I go with them (the ancestors)' (B1).

A young female participant recalled the names of her more immediate deceased family, which included a cousin. But she did not have detailed recall of her forebears. For her, ancestors were former clan members. A young male participant identified his clan as *Ngxuba*, and his ancestors were all in this lineage. He was not acquainted with all of them.

Principal ancestors are grandparents and parents, but other relatives may be included, according to a respondent, who prayed to her late cousin. There was no evidence of the worthiness of a prospective forebear to qualify as an ancestor. It is important in Africa to have children. A priest explained 'so that the name of your family continues, you know as a person committed to celibacy', he concluded that 'unfortunately faith and God come first' (E16). A middle-aged female participant agreed it was important to have children so that they could remember her as an ancestor (G16). Her children could also care for her, as a single mother, when she was ill. A daughter with a bursary was able to provide her mother with modest donations. A mature female approached this from the viewpoint of God's will. She added that

if married, it is important to have children if it is God's will, but not for the specific reason of having descendants who will establish you as ancestors.

### 3.6 God and the Ancestors

Ancestors convey messages from people to God, who works together with them, according to my respondents, but elsewhere it is evident that on many occasions the spirits operate independently of God. Ancestors are closer to God:

and can easily transfer the message from me to God because they are in the spirit (B2). The ancestors are those who make his spirit 'to be connected with God' (B1).

They get their power from God because they are spirit and they work hand in glove with God (B10), according to a mature respondent.

He asks God 'to work with my ancestors' because God is working through them and because they are spirit. 'They (the ancestors) are nearer to him (God) than me' (B2b). In his prayers he includes his ancestors 'to work hand in glove with God. They are always looking after me, working hand in glove with God' (B3). Even when driving, he believes that God and the ancestors are present (B15). More evidence of the importance of the ancestors and his confidence in their powers is evident in the advice he gives when someone acquires a new car, they need to ask the ancestors for protection (B15; see above).

The ancestors get their power from God because they are spirit and work hand in glove with God (B10). 'But my ancestors are like the Holy Spirit because they are spirit, they are living as spirit now' (B17). The ancestors are part of God's providence, although they can harm their progeny, as if in their own right, independent of God's wishes, as it seems.

A young female contends that God is 'definitely higher' than the ancestors:

so it's like God, and the angels and the ancestors, basically the deceased family members who are like your guardian angels.' Okay, the way I understand ancestors is that they are basically your family members who have passed on but who become your guardian angels (C3).

The link between ancestor and guardian is a beguiling one, as there have been accounts of people who have experienced the assistance of their ancestors in this life. It is easy to envisage that God will be partial to souls in heaven praying for help for their descendants. Ancestors

are everywhere, but she seemed uncertain as to whether this applied to white people as well. 'But I think it depends on someone's belief and culture.' (C2).

A young male participant averred:

Um, in my belief, um, God he's on top of everything. He is the one who is in charge of, of the ancestors themselves. So it's just like believing in God and also ancestors and then the angels (D3).

He also stated that if he had a problem he went to his mother, 'Or I would first turn to God. Go to God himself' (D13). He was unsure, when asked, as to whether the ancestors are omnipresent, perhaps because he was unsure as to whether other cultures regard their forebears as ancestors. He said that 'we all have different ways of praising ancestors if you believe in them' (D1). It depends on the culture as to whether 'you want to praise them in a way' (D1). Clan members have special ways of praising ancestors, but this does not suggest anything beyond honouring them. I note, however, references by Mills (1995:158) which suggest that there may be more than just veneration, bordering on worship, but the SACBC believe it is not worship (Pastoral Statement on *Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith* (Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 11 August 2006). There are special 'praise' names addressed to the forebears, after which the descendants will present their issue or petition (conversation 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020). A Xhosa male hesitates to use the word 'holy' for the kraal where a ritual is performed, but it bears the mark of being set aside, a consecrated space, for special use. Women are not allowed in kraals. A mature female participant explained that she reserved a special place in her township garden for addressing her ancestors. It is notable that the agents helping were usually God and ancestors; Jesus was normally cited only after a prompt.

### 3.7 God's Supremacy over the Ancestors: The Respondents

A young male participant addresses prayer for healing both to God and ancestors. For healing he says, 'Just make sure to stick to our praying sessions and mostly pray wherever we go' (D13). If he has a problem, he goes to his mother, but 'Or I would first turn to God. Go to God himself' (D13). For a priest respondent, God is supreme: 'God is the most important person, and certainly for me it is God who is first, who is our Father and Creator, and then the

ancestors will come second' (E3). There was no spontaneous mention of Christ. As to a choice between God, Jesus, or ancestors to resolve a problem his immediate choice was God.

Asked if he thought the ancestors were the most important part of the spirit world, another priest replied that God was. People intercede to the supreme being through the ancestors. After that came the ancestors:

then after the ancestors there will be those who, who, have the power to connect with the ancestors on behalf of the community, whether that be the first son or the *sangoma* or the kings...Then after that then there will be human beings (F4).

This reflects the traditional view of the hierarchy, combining ATR (ancestors, kings, lineage members), with Christianity, incorporating a 'new' element, namely God who was traditionally remote and distant, but who now dominates the religious view of all of the parishioners interviewed.

This same priest, if he experiences suffering, goes first to God, and 'I may ask the ancestors to accompany me, to pray with me' (F15). He believes the ancestors can help him. He has a strong sense of tradition and belief in ancestors, and family rights and responsibilities in the African kinship system (F15). He says that ancestors may not be always present because:

sometimes there is a belief that if you do not work with them they side-line you, or they take a back-stand... "maybe they are always present but not always active (F3).

A middle-aged female participant was confident that 'You can always go to God' (G17) with prayers. There were no prayers, which were better answered by ancestors. God is more important than the ancestors to her. He occupies the central position in her life. The ancestors do still have considerable influence, such as being able to cause shortages of money, so they must still be remembered. In case of any mishap a young parishioner would turn firstly to God (C10) and then the ancestors (C10). She would ask the ancestors or her late cousin for help, 'please pray for me' (C10). Referring to a robbery she experienced, she explained: 'I prayed to God and I asked my ancestors to guide me' (C9).

A mature male participant with regard to daily problems such as health, finances, love problems said that God is his centre, he is:

above everything, but because of the Holy Spirit, I always bind, I always include my ancestors...my ancestors are like the Holy Spirit, because they are spirit, they are living as spirit now (B17).

The conclusion is that God has displaced the ancestors from their central role, but at the same time the ancestors continue to command very substantial powers, occupying a parallel world of influence independently of God's sovereignty. In this world the ancestors are able to elicit reverence, fear and cooperation with their perceived demands. This image of God is discussed below, but it is no longer the traditional notion of a distant and disinterested god of African Traditional Religion. Two religious sisters, who have a combined working experience of over 100 years in one of the smaller apartheid designated townships in Cape Town seemed unconvinced that the ancestors occupied second place after God in the hierarchy of sacred power (conversation 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021). However, to reflect the respondents' narratives, I contend that the monotheistic God is perceived as the supreme source of sacred power among Xhosa-speaking Catholics.

It is interesting to record observations of Walls (2017:36, 37) who contends that even if the traditional religion incorporated god or a supreme being with its own vernacular name and worldview, cultural maps are operational, which means that considerably more attention would be directed to 'territorial divinities who control the land, or to the ancestors who maintain the family and the clan, or to intermediary beings of some kind, than to God.' The ancestors were the crucial agents for maintaining well-being, but according to my respondents, they now occupy second ranking as sources of sacred power, with God first. The ancestors have more significance than God in the primal worldview. With Christian mission, most primal religions revise their worldview, but they are seldom abandoned.

### 3.8 The Resurgence of Ancestral Cult

Knox (2008:39) observes a revival of interest by Black theologians in the ancestor cult as a foundation of African spirituality. Knox (:91) presents various researchers who discover a resurgence of the ancestor cult, even after many years during which Christians publicly disassociated themselves with this custom, and it is still of relevance to young Africans. Knox (2008:133-134) reports how the Vatican revoked the ban on participation of Catholics in public ceremonies which involved ancestors in China, Japan, Korea and Africa concluding that cultural practices were based on profound values, including respect for the elderly. The

African Synod document, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995:67) maintains that ATR possesses values that are a preparation for the Gospel; *semina verbi*, (seeds of the word), and must therefore be treated with great respect. The Decalogue, especially numbers four to ten, are identifiable in Xhosa customs. These are the Word of God, (the Second Person of the Trinity), and constitute seeds of the Word, according to my interpretation of this theology. Knox (2008:137). observes that the word 'ancestor' occurs only four times in the document, which sees the ancestor cult as a preparation for the belief in the Communion of Saints. Since the mid Twentieth Century the Catholic Church has softened its attitude to other cultures (:133). Customs once treated with suspicion were subsequently seen as worthy of study (:135). Magesa (1997:3, the page before 'Contents'), dedicates his work on African Religion:

To the Elders and Ancestors, especially the following: Odiria Nyakwesi Chuma, Cornelli Magoti Mujora, Anatazia Nyangeta Magoti and John J. Rudin, M.M.

Nelson Mandela's (former president of South Africa) funeral was conducted largely according to African custom. Nelson Mandela had said he was about to join his ancestors. The funeral rites were according to ATR (Farajii 2014, associate professor of African studies).

Stinton (2004:133) also notes that the notion of communion with the dead and the cult of ancestors is widespread, but her research shows some weakening of this belief system among the younger generations. Magesa (2004:126) contends that African ancestor-hood cannot be eliminated 'without damaging the African personality'. He notes that some argue that the role of the living dead is incompatible with the Biblical theocentric perception (:201). In Catholic theology, saints are regarded as having a share in the intercession of Christ, an intercession which draws its strength from the prime intercession of Christ and complements it. Stinton observes that African Christians now see ancestors as mediators between God and humanity (2004:135), although in many cases the ancestors are one part of the dual religious system, and they are not necessarily linked with Christ or God but serve as grantors of good fortune and bad fortune independently of Christ. This emerges from my experience with isiXhosa-speaking parishioners in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town. The Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue (to honour parents) has been used to justify ancestor veneration (Sipuka 2000:202). The Gospel of Matthew (5:17) where Jesus claims he came not to abolish but to fulfil the law has been used to validate retention of Xhosa customs. Walls (1996/2002:136)

confirms the revitalization of primal religions resulting from a new assertion of cultural identity, reclaiming cultural confidence and the denunciation of European norms as the sole standard. 'African and Afro-American scholars, artists and intellectuals are rediscovering and reaffirming the African culture heritage.'

Older research by Pauw (1975:14) revealed a high level of belief in ancestors (90.9% rural, 88.9% urban) and most of the respondents reported an experience or intervention of ancestors. A higher level of education did not change the extent of belief materially, but the proportion of those who claimed an experience or intervention of an ancestor decreased substantially as the level of education increased. Fewer young people experienced an ancestor intervention, but it needs to be kept in mind that youth are brought into ancestor rituals at a later age (Pauw 1975:142) and young females claimed a higher degree of intervention than males. Traditional Xhosa revealed a higher proportion of experience of ancestors. Sotho respondents revealed similar results. Sotho speaking people generally have a similar ancestor cult system (:143). This older research also shows that 'an ancestor cult of considerable vitality persists among Xhosa Christians' (:205). At that time, Pauw (1975:208) maintained that church opposition to Xhosa tradition had become less militant and even some African Christian ministers had their sons initiated. White clergy had little contact with members geographically distant from the main church centre:

Thus, most White ministers and priests are too far removed from the Christianity of the homestead and the township yard to be keenly aware of adherence to ancestor beliefs and rituals (:208).

It is obvious that the socialization of Xhosa people with ATR continued in the homesteads, perhaps overlooked by the missionaries. Advances in the social sciences made missionaries aware of culture and its prominence, and they came to realize that banned customs often went underground (Pauw 1975:208). Of interest is Taylor's opinion that God prevails over the ancestors (Taylor 1963/2000:109), which is confirmed by my respondents, but the ancestors still remain a very significant element of their faith system, but not always correlated to God's dominion over all things.

All the participants in my research communicated with the ancestors, except for one priest, who did however, think that the ancestors were a defence against evil such as in witchcraft. One young female seemed ambivalent about her relationships with her ancestors, she both

prayed to them but also had some doubts, whilst her mother reinforced her need to examine if there were 'cultural' (in other words, ancestral) reasons for misfortune. A young male had no doubt as to the world of ancestors. There are many pastoral situations where I discerned that children from nine upwards (the age at which catechesis began) disclosed without reservation that they prayed to their ancestors. The experience of a religious worker teaching catechism in various townships in Cape Town confirmed that young children around this age have been inculcated with the ancestor belief system by their parents and grandparents. I also discerned a strong belief in Jesus, who was the target of their prayers. I found this somewhat surprising, but we must acknowledge this reality, even if Jesus is one agent of sacred power amongst various others. My experience with youth being catechised does reveal a strong belief in Christ. It is possible that this belief could be relegated as they are drawn more into ancestor rituals.

### 3.9 The Role of Ancestors: Literature

The majority of isiXhosa-speaking Christians accept that ancestors influence their lives (Wanamaker 1997:281). Sipuka (2020:1) is convinced that 'ancestors are largely (but not exclusively) seen as providers of well-being hence they command fear and submission.' He describes the relationship as a 'disposition' of fear and submission, an assessment which accords with the replies of my respondents, most of whom were fearful of their ancestors to varying degrees. This trepidation is part of their socialization process from an early age. A young female participant was coaxed by her mother into investigating whether a certain problem was due to 'cultural reasons,' a situation of 'just in case.' However, my respondents unanimously put God in front of all other sources of sacred power including the ancestors.

The ancestor belief system is not a purely secular aspect of ATR since African Traditional Religion does not distinguish between the religious and the secular. The religious and the secular cannot be separated in African tradition. Wanamaker (1997:286) concludes that ancestor veneration needs to be studied both as a social and as a religious phenomenon. There is an indivisible unity between the visible and invisible reality of the 'South African Bantu. However, it is not the afterlife that is important, but the way in which the dead continue to be involved in this life among the living' (Ray 1976:140; see Wannamaker 1997:286).



With their greater ontological powers, ancestors can have a significant influence on the lives of their descendants, and they are present as 'mentors and protectors,' (see Wanamaker 1997:286) and as providers and sustainers. My respondents did as a rule, attribute considerable powers to the ancestors. Ancestors are for many, a daily part of life and affirmation 'of the central significance of the family among African people' (Wanamaker 1997:286). Communication with the ancestors is achieved via rituals performed by traditional healers, through dreams, through interventions and as agents behind good or bad fortune. There is a strong respect for seniority along the male line, which mostly defines relationships among family members. Under the influence of Christianity, the ancestors are seen to be mediators between their descendants and God (Wanamaker 1997:286:287).

Ancestor veneration is at the very centre of the African spirit world and is still widely adhered to even in urban areas. However, there has been some dilution because of the break-up of the kinship group in the African diaspora to the cities, and the attempts of white missionaries to put an end to this practice (Knox 2008:92), and the Christian notion of Christ as the unique intercessor. The ancestor cult is a part of everyday life and connects people through daily events with the visible and the invisible. Wanamaker (1997:281) is confident that the 'vast majority' of Xhosa Christians still embrace ATR. He also contends that it is difficult to introduce Christ into the African universe, in his capacity as intercessor, guide and judge because these roles conflict with the traditional functions of the ancestors. African customs have been handed down 'with as much authority as written sacred text' (:283; my underlining). As long as the living dead, the ancestors, are remembered they are in a state of permanent immortality. At ancestor rituals, the clan spirits are praised, and it is here that their immortality is acknowledged. In addition, many of my participants pray informally to their forebears for assistance with life issues, without formal rituals. Constant remembering of the deceased with attendant rituals has commonality with the constant remembering of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ (Healy, Sybertz (1996/2000:211). The authors claim that All Souls Day in the Christian calendar is very significant for Africans because the names of the deceased are written and placed upon the Christian altar (:213). I have not detected this amongst my parishioners.

A good life is rewarded by 'a harmonious integration in the beyond, the country of origin of human beings' (Healy, Sybertz 1996/2000:35). African people believe that as long as ancestors are deliberately remembered, they retain their immortality (Healey and Sybertz 2000:211). When ancestors move beyond the range of memory, they are deemed to belong to the general body of tribal ancestors as opposed to an ancestor tied to one family. Participants in my research were more concerned about meeting the challenges of life than meriting the special honour of becoming a revered ancestor via exceptional contributions to society. Nor did the respondents uphold distinctive eschatological objectives. People were concerned with their present circumstances their family and with God as their provider. This differs from the view presented by Bujo (2003) and Penoukou (in Schreiter, ed., 2002), who argue that there is a discernible eschatology, but it concurs with Sipuka who regards the ancestors as being available to ensure present well-being. There was limited indication of looking back to a long tradition of clan and family ancestors, although some were conversant with their clan heritage.

Ancestors deliver salvation in the here and now; they are for the flesh whilst Christian prayers to God are for the spirit (Pauw 1975:227). In the same book, Pauw argues that the complementary nature of ATR and Christianity 'make for a peaceful coexistence.' God and Christianity are not seen as effective counters to sorcery thus protection is still sought from the ancestors (Kiernan 1995:79). Chapter 1 above highlights the complementary nature of ATR and Christianity, explaining their 'peaceful coexistence.' The African exodus from the country to the city, multiplies the number of opportunities for strained relationships (competition for houses, jobs, schools, finances, etc.), on a daily basis. In this uncertain competitive context, there is need for even more frequent recourse to a diviner. Ancestors have become mediators between God and their progeny, but this is a result of Christian influence and has not always been the case with South African Bantu speaking people (Wanamaker 1997:290). Setiloane (1986:21-28) contends that Bantu speaking people did not have a notion of a personal deity.

In the Foreword of Nürnberger's book (2007:vii), Tlhaqale states that the African Christians 'cling tenaciously' to their traditional values. The deceased continue to inspire Africans today, evident also in the hero worship of fallen soldiers and the way in which Africans care for

graves (Nürnberg 2007:4). In Christian 'spirit' services, the Holy Spirit and prayer over-rides ancestors, but the latter are part of the dual religious system and feature prominently in African rituals, which are performed outside of the church celebration. Ancestors are now both paternal and maternal, and female ancestors command as much importance as male ancestors. Tlhagale (2018:182) however, qualifies his views by averring that the god-like status of superhuman beings has been reduced to the status of deceased persons. The ancestors cease to be the cornerstone of religious consciousness, 'though they remain an essential part of it (:182). Faith in God has increasingly become the determining component of religious consciousness. There is less need to perform rituals although the greater number or permutations of problems in the more complex urban living multiply the need for protection and guidance. Sacrifices do continue but are according to my respondents, usually prefaced by some prayers to God.

A Protestant viewpoint according to Mills (1995:158) surmises that 'almost any killing carried the overtones of pleasing the ancestors', which begins to border on heathenism or a possible deifying of the ancestors. Mills (1995:158), cites Warner, a Wesleyan missionary, to the effect that certain Xhosa customs are not merely 'isolated' superstitions, and even if there are no 'visible symbols' of their supernatural entities:

It is the spirits of their departed friends and ancestors, whom they dread, in whom they trust, and whom they endeavour to propitiate. This is the foundation of that system of superstition.

Warner supported the uncompromising missionary stance in Maclean's compendium.<sup>35</sup>

The *igqira* (traditional healer) constitutes a type of 'priesthood', a dispenser of sacred power who conducts 'heathenish' rituals (Warner in Mills 1995:158). These practices constitute a

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<sup>35</sup> Col C.B. Maclean, 1858. A Compendium, Kafir Laws and Customs, 78-112. There is no reference data on Warner's comment.

proper religious system, which must be 'nationally abandoned' and 'denounced and overturned.'<sup>36</sup>

Otherwise there will be a danger of building Christianity on the rotten foundations of their pagan superstitions, as the Roman Catholic Missionaries have done in some parts of the world. (Warner in Mills 1995:158).

There is no specific mention of where the Catholic Church has actually implemented such policies. This is a more radical view than taken by Sipuka (2000), and Tlhagale (2018) sometimes seems to suggest that the ancestors are worshipped. But the main trajectory of my respondents placed God well above the ancestors, although they attract much cognitive deliberation, more so, as I often contend, than Christ. Tlhagale (2018:151) remains convinced, however, that 'spirits are deeply revered alongside God'.

### 3.10 Ancestors and the Ability to Dispense Punishment

A Xhosa 60-year-old Catholic parishioner in the Archdiocese of Cape town informed me that having dreamed of their dead uncle, who was regarded as an evil ancestor, the subsequent death of their brother was orchestrated by that uncle. Effectively, the evil ancestor killed their brother (conversation December Goldie 2014). This is an example of the power some parishioners believe that ancestors wield. As noted above, it is believed that ancestors can provide the means of immunity to poison or bullets (D12). A priest also thought that the ancestors could provide such invulnerability (E12).

A young parishioner admitted that 'you just want to find out' if a misfortune or illness is attributable to the ancestors (C10). They seemed to wrestle with the notion that ancestors can and do act in the lives of their family. They felt that 'sometimes things just happen' (C10). The event was purely random. However, there is still a deeper suspicion that some ancestral ceremony has not been performed. A traditional healer would be able to discern the situation

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<sup>36</sup> Other objections of protestant missionaries noted in Mills (1995:158) concerned 'immoral' dancing, beer drinking, *lobola* (payment for a bride), *intonjane* (female initiation), polygyny and certain initiation customs, which encouraged youthful romances and 'immoralities'.

and recommend a solution that would bring closure. Despite their doubts, they pray to ancestors to asked for guidance 'about this issue cause (because) I don't know what to do now' (C3). They contend that the ancestors are always present. They are not sure if the ancestors get their powers from God but 'I will just say they are interceding' (C10). There is a need to see if there is a 'cultural' reason for a mishap when it occurs, where culture dictates that the ancestors must be involved, and a traditional healer needs to be consulted.

A mature female participant was sure that the ancestors could harm them:

If you don't follow the rules they give you, they hurt you. Sometimes you have bad luck, you have no money, then the money is finished, you don't know where the money is, you just waste money. You don't exactly do bad things (A4).

This is a type of chastisement meted out because of not following the directives of the ancestors. This is notably similar to Haggai 1:7 where Yahweh addresses Israel and cautions them to think carefully about their behaviour: much was sown but little was harvested. Drink never satisfied thirst, clothes provided inadequate warmth, and wages were put in a bag with a hole in it (NJB pg1574). She did not think that the ancestors could harm people outside of the clan, but they can harm their descendants (A5). Although she claimed she did not fear their forebears, she still warned that if 'you don't listen they will give you punishment' (A25).

A mature male participant does not fear the ancestors but respects them and does not want to work against them as they provide protection. If they 'are tired of you', like God who gives us ample opportunity without forcing us to follow Jesus, they can neglect you because you have ignored their warnings (B15):

And then you must wake up. (B15). In such a case "They must expect the unexpected (sic) because they are tired of you, just like God" (B15). "We have been given that freedom" (B15). They can cause death, [or] they put you in a wheelchair. Sometimes it may be the devil, but sometimes it is you, you don't listen to the wise guys, the ancestors who are working with God (B15-16).

Asked how the ancestors can hurt us specifically, he related 'but I believe they can hurt you in any way' (B16).

This suggests that the ancestors can do things in their own right. Although he mentions God, there is a sense of separation between the ancestral world and God, with the former having

powers to hurt as if independently of God. He correlates God's withdrawal of support for humans after many warnings, with the eventual and similar impatience of the ancestors who let their progeny go their way, which often leads to major problems and according to some observers, even at the national level. Some observers have blamed national problems on ancestral neglect by black South Africans, and as noted before, the then Deputy Prime Minister Cyril Ramaphosa blamed neglect of our forebears for the declining fortunes of the ANC, the ruling party. However, none of my respondents took a broad macro-view of ancestral influence, but they confined their ancestral concerns to family matters:

Maybe they can take you away with them. Since you don't do your job, come with us. You become one of us, and we have other people to, to progress because you don't want to progress (B16).

This credits the ancestors with considerable powers. Again, it can be noted there is no reference to how these types of punishment fit in with God who is more powerful than all of creation, and whom they have asserted is the centre of their faith.

As to the ancestors being able to punish their progeny, a young female seemed to fear the neglect of a traditional ceremony (she consistently uses the word ceremony rather than ritual) the result of which 'things can go wrong for that child. Like the child gets sick a lot or so...' (C16). She felt it was not about punishing, 'but I think it's just wanting to be recognised I guess' (C16). She was not scared of her ancestors (C17) although she acknowledges that they can effectively cause illness (for example a child getting sick a lot (C16)), which qualifies her notion of limited ancestral retribution. At times, however, this same respondent seemed unsure as to the reality of ancestors involving themselves in the daily life of their progeny.

A young male participant did not believe that the ancestors concocted spells to harm, but he believed they help their progeny with problems (D10). He has not had an experience of ancestors and is doubtful as to whether they can harm their own kin (D14).

Well, they can but they can't. No, not really um let you, well harm you. Um, but they can step away in a way if you are in danger because of you not listening to their advice or to, to this protection from them (D14).

He described an experience of an apparent ancestral phenomenon where a young woman began to speak with the voice of an older man. Despite his confidence that ancestors do not harm their family, he confessed that he was fearful of the ancestors.

A respondent did not think that ancestors could punish their children or kill someone, nor could the ancestors do things independently of God (E15). This contrasts with a high degree of fear expressed by this same person some 14 years ago when I interviewed him for my master's thesis. I am inclined to think he is still fearful and is now supplying answers to appear orthodox. There is ambivalence here, and it reflects two belief systems struggling with one another, and the strength of the traditional one is probably somewhat understated by him when contrasted with his responses in the previous interview. His answer to the question about the existence of invisible spirits was at first negative, and afterwards positive. He is fearful of ancestors if we do not do the right thing (E16). As to whether ancestors can protect one from dangers such as poison, attacks or accidents, he replied that they could. This in itself reveals substantial faith in the powers of ancestors.

A middle-aged female contends that the ancestors can punish you 'If you don't do what they want you to do' (G14). When asked if she had ever been punished by them, she replied:

Yes, like let's say like if you don't do something, like a ceremony for them. Then they come, they make you broke and all that stuff. You don't have money. Because you don't believe in them, you don't do their wishes (G14-15).

She does not fear the ancestors, even if they can punish their progeny: 'I'm not scared because it's mostly the people that you know. It's just that they passed away, they (sic) not alive anymore' (G15). When she was asked if the ancestors could kill her, she said that she had never heard about something like that.

When asked if the ancestors can punish, even hurt their progeny, a priest saw them more as protectors against evil such as witchcraft, 'So I think they won't punish you per se but they will just allow that witchcraft to get into you' (H14). Punishment comes by inaction by the ancestors in the face of evil besetting their progeny. They cannot otherwise harm or kill their progeny (H14). When asked if he was fearful of his ancestors, he said: 'Not really, not, not fearful but respectful' (H15).

A mature male participant felt that ancestors could be disappointed with their progeny, but they would not punish them. Ancestors do not have the power to hurt (I6). A mature female is respectful of ancestors and does not fear them. She has not had any experience of ancestors, but she does think they can harm if they are angry. The only ancestor she prays to is her grandmother when she is in a 'tight spot'. They cannot kill a person according to her, but she understands that others think this is possible.

Pauw (1975:222) observed that ancestor rituals were sometimes modified for disguise because of opposition towards the rituals from missionaries. This was in an effort to reconcile conflicting values and to adapt to modern values. Business failure or success has also been attributed to the ancestors (:223).

Ancestors oversee their kinship network (Kiernan 1995:78). Ancestors are now acknowledged as much on the maternal side as on the paternal side, and female ancestors may be regarded as important or even more important. Progeny can choose from a wide range of ancestors for protection and benefits, depending also on the closeness of the relationship with the deceased (Kiernan 1995:78). Ancestors are purveyors of good or bad fortune, they can bless or afflict their progeny (:79).

### 3.11 Proper Funerals

The *Secretariatus Pro-non Christianis* (a Vatican statement on African religion, 1968:67) records that there must be a proper funeral, or the soul may be unappeased and dangerous to the family. The deceased is maintained by the living by means of rituals, including sacrifice, which reinforce solidarity with the living dead and facilitates prosperity and health. If not properly buried, a second death is envisaged, where the deceased is consigned to the village of the dead. Some refer to improperly buried deceased as potential rogue ancestors who can harm their progeny. Funerals are occasions for reinforcing the on-going life of the community (Kraft 2003:226). Funeral rites are important as improper rites can result in punishment from the ancestor. Luzbetak (2002:288) refers to elaborate funeral and memorial rites.

In my inquiries into the motives for elaborate funerals, these entrenched purposes expounded in literature were not clearly explicated. However, in my experience in urban townships, funerals are very significant, and parishioners make special effort to attend a



funeral often traveling long distances to do so. In Cape Town, before Covid 19, there were prayers at the home of the deceased from Monday to Friday (involving prayer, preaching and singing), a service in the home on Saturday, the church service, the burial, and then a return to the home where a meal is provided, and a more private 'after tears' celebration subsequently.

When a person dies 'badly', there is a hasty funeral and fewer rites are observed. Dying badly can include drowning, sudden stroke, murder, suicide, dying abroad or in childbirth. All desire to die 'well'. I have noted elsewhere how women and children are not allowed into the graveyard when there has been a bad death because of the latent presence of evil which caused the death (see Chapter 2.6).

The dead can leave an example of how to live by their good lives. The last words of a dying person are especially important (Bujo 2003:73). The deceased, whilst withdrawing from the community truly lives on in it (:73). Their presence is kept alive via rituals including sacrifices, which reinforce solidarity with the living dead and facilitate good fortune. Ancestors, in a sense, are dependent on their progeny for happiness.

Burial rituals always involve ancestors, as well as brewing African beer (*umqombothi*). In Chapter 3.12 below I note the eschatological anticipation of the late Nelson Mandela when approaching his death. When a father, a mature male dies, 3 to 5 years later a beast is slaughtered to invite the person home and to provide protection 'as our ancestor's spirit' (B13). A respondent's uncle asked the respondent to approach his male cousin and ask him why he had not welcomed him home. The deceased uncle wondered if he had done anything wrong. In addition, the deceased uncle had left his son with cows thus he was equipped to perform the apposite ritual.

In another dream about his uncle, the same respondent was asked why he had not invited his brother, who had passed away, to come into the home. He referred to this tradition as a *wamkela* (welcome, accept) (B13). There is communication with the ancestors, as opposed to God, although most parishioners preface a ritual with a prayer to God. Nevertheless, there is a level of duality here, a world apart as if independent of God, where the ancestors are the causative agents. A mature Xhosa female related how their late mother communicated to them: 'I'm getting cold.' Eventually the message became clear; 'My child, when are you going

to cover my bones with a blanket' (A3). Even though the parishioner is God-centred in their prayer life and faith, the ancestral world manifested itself to the extent that they had their mother's body exhumed, wrapped in a blanket and reburied. This indeed is powerful testimony to the on-going authority of ancestral faith and a robust measure of trepidation engendered by the ancestors.

### 3.12 Ancestors Rituals

Pauw (1975:256) observes that some Xhosa Christians approve of Xhosa methods for matters of the 'flesh', and the Christian Church provides for the 'spirit', other worldly salvation. The former includes witches and sorcerers who are 'killers of the flesh'. Xhosa tradition provides what the Xhosa people perceive the Church is unable or is not prepared to provide. 'African traditions are for the flesh, the prayers to God are for the spirit' (:227). This corresponds with Sipuka's view (2020:1) that the Xhosa people are pragmatic and procure what is the best from each belief system (Christianity and ATR). The ancestors provide well-being (they are often turned to in times of need) and Christianity caters for upright lives, the spirit. Pauw's observations, I believe, merit continued attention and cohere with later views.

The combining of the two traditions is described by Pauw (1975:224) as the:

...formal adaptation of the Xhosa tradition to the Christian tradition by modification, taking the form of elimination of certain details, or simplification, change of name, or the substitution or replacement of Western Christian forms for Xhosa forms.

The combining does not always achieve theological consistency (Pauw 1975:226). Rites of passage are seen as making a person fully human, which in keeping with Christianity seek to model human life on the example of Christ the perfect human. However, my respondents were quick to turn to God (as well as ancestors) for pressing daily issues, not for the distant eschatological future. God proved to be at the forefront of their consciousness.

The Christian Church, according to Pauw, offers voluntary membership, wide-ranging associations, universalistic values, and predominantly other-worldly salvation. The ancestor cult offers conditional membership based on kinship relations, this worldly salvation and small kinship groupings. Sipuka and Pauw do not see an easy blend of worldviews and note that the traditional worldview was driven underground, a source of tension among black Christians,

who in some cases, effected camouflaged rites to hide them from the missionaries. Today, the traditional view is more openly acknowledged, and it seems safe to conclude from various comments, that my parishioners feel that the Catholic Church has never spoken against their African customs and do not contemplate contradictions within the two faith systems.

The late Nelson Mandela, answering a question about his mortality, said he would be joining his ancestors. He was buried in the tradition of *Themba* royalty. Despite Christian mission, Islam and other forces, African Tradition is still very much alive. Commenting on this, Faraji (2014:8), concludes that neither the state nor Christianity had the final say, thus former State President Nelson Mandela's funeral rites were very much in line with Xhosa tradition.<sup>37</sup>

Mayson (2010:123) quotes Nelson Mandela, who records how his father remained aloof from Christianity and retained his faith in 'the great spirit of the Xhosa, *Qamata*.' His father, not an ordained pastor of a church, presided over Xhosa rituals such as the slaughtering of animals, and rituals involving planting, harvest, birth, marriage, initiation and funerals.

He did not need to be ordained, for the traditional religion of the Xhosas is characterized by cosmic wholeness, so that there is little distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the natural and the supernatural. Nelson Mandela, (*Long Walk to Freedom*), Johannesburg: Macdonald Purnell, 1994, in Mayson 2010:123).

Cyril Ramaphosa (currently President of the Republic of South Africa), in efforts to bolster the African National Congress' fortunes, resorted to ancestor rituals.<sup>38</sup>

St Prosper of Aquitaine formulated the tenet '*lex orandi lex credendi*', which avers that what we pray or celebrate in ritual reveals the principles of our faith. Oral prayers, or ceremony, are a form of faith expressed in primary images (pictures, psalms, symbols, dances, rituals), which can be analysed and presented more scientifically in secondary form, namely theology (faith seeking understanding). The Xhosa belief system is expressed in a variety of rituals, dances, songs and music. The Xhosa theology is thus found in these rituals. These rituals

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<sup>37</sup> S Farajii, Associate Professor of African Studies. 2014. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* Vol 6, No 7, February 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Cape Times Newspaper, 12/01/2019.

continue to reveal the profound importance of the ancestral spirits and the need to appease them, honour them, remember them and petition them.

*Imbeleko*, introduces the new-born to the ancestors of the clan, and assigns ancestral protection to the new-born (and sometimes older children; one reason for a later celebration is lack of money). This discloses the underlying belief in the ability of the ancestors to protect their progeny. This credits the ancestors with more authority and power than is attributed to the Catholic notion of saints who cannot act independently of God. Ancestors seem to occupy almost a different realm, according to my respondents, acting in their own right. Loyalty to the ancestors is clearly robust. Although my participants had a strong faith in God, they seemed to be unaware of certain contradictions with Christianity, in particular the doctrine of the Communion of Saints and the subservience of all souls to God in the afterlife. They assign ancestors to an alternate worldview, a different realm, with no conscious contrast to Christianity in the forefront of their cognitive deliberations. Ancestors tended to be talked about separately from the Christian worldview. A fuller examination of the 'judgment' or reflection on the ancestors in the light of Scripture and Tradition is provided below.

Money was a constraint for a parishioner: 'I want to but I think you have to provide because there's all that money thing' (G18). She recounts her experience of slaughtering at ancestor rituals: 'You slaughter a cow, or a sheep, or a goat,' but money is needed to perform a ritual (G19).

There are key Xhosa rituals the neglect of which invites ill fortune and failure in life. There is a need to apologize to ancestors for neglecting these ceremonies. These include *imbeleko*, adult initiation for young males, *ukubuyisa* (inviting an ancestor back to the household at a ceremony at the grave often including the unveiling of the tombstone). Animal sacrifice to the ancestors *ukuphalaza igazi*, literally to shed blood, and libations of food and drink are regular customs either to petition ancestors in the case of misfortune, or to give thanks for blessings received- *umcimbi*. Other reasons for the *umcimbi* may be safe travel, remembrance and objectives attained. A young parishioner replied that: 'we usually do umcimbi. Which is either we do celebration or we thanking (sic) the ancestors of guiding us through certain journeys of our lives and *ja* (yes)' (D17). Despite his young age rituals have been an important part of his life.

The ritual of *izila* involves the slaughter of a bull for a deceased father, and a cow for a deceased mother. A mature female parishioner, after a communication from an ancestor, was reminded that she had not performed a ritual for her mother when she passed away. A mature male respondent related an ancestral dream in which he saw a bull, which he had to slaughter for his grandfather. The beast had to be a certain colour and the ritual had to take place at midday. Another male respondent was reminded to welcome his late relative home, especially as cows had been left behind to expedite the ritual. Many Xhosa born in Cape Town perform their rituals in the environs of the city.

A young female respondent described an African ritual, that occurred after her grandfather passed away:

My mother is like the head of the family so whenever we gonna ('going to') have a traditional ceremony she is the one who is like: okay, family meeting. And then we sit around and there's a lighting of *mpepho* [a form of incense] so then we like okay: family, let's discuss...(C20).).

At a ritual, the parishioner related how both God and the ancestors are called upon (C20). Firstly, God is thanked for life,

...and everything and we talk to the ancestors and like: and we're here now and we just want to say that we remember you and every...cause when we, my grandmother when she, she...it's usually for her late mother"... and my grandfather (C20-21).

Sometimes Jesus is asked to bless food and is thanked for life. It depends on the person. In this way rituals are combined with Christianity (C20). It is important to have children who will honour you as an ancestor when you die, but she qualified this admission with the fact that certain rituals involve a practice where 'they chop off the fingers' (C17). The ritual 'it's going to hurt you. Some families do that, but my family doesn't' (C17). She had never been 'cut' including scarification (such as cut marks on the face) (C17). She thought that adults also underwent scarification. She volunteered 'I don't think you should be cutting a child' (C18). A young male respondent displayed no hesitation in expressing his belief in the ancestors and rituals. There was no convincing evidence that the younger respondents were unambiguously rejecting ATR, and it is possible that this worldview could strengthen as and when they are drawn into future rituals.

I experienced a fervent reaction from a seventeen-year-old female Xhosa parishioner whose parent had summoned a traditional healer to their home to tend to their ailing grandfather and involved her in the rituals. The healer indicated he required the girls to be cut, involving a 4 to 5 centimetre cut of the shoulder of two girls to facilitate healing of the grandparent. The cut was not deep, but it left a mark. The granddaughter told her mother quite resolutely that she never wanted to be involved in being 'cut' again. Two other girls present at this discussion, (about 17 years old) also claimed to have been 'cut' (conversation June 2015). There is a discontinuity between the cultural expectations of younger and older Xhosa people. It seems probable that these practices will lose favour in the urban settings. However, the two young respondents to my questionnaire revealed on-going attention to ancestors. The female respondent seemed to be more ambivalent as to the actual roles of ancestors, but guardedly acknowledged them.

Asked if there was anyone to blame for two mishaps in his family, which happened one after the other, a priest said there was not. There was no bewitchment, or anything like that (H9), but his family saw the need for a traditional remedy, or ritual.

Actually, no. I...the strange thing about that is when, when I shared with my sisters, I have four elder sisters, they felt that there was something that we needed to do at home (H9).

When I asked if they meant a ritual, he said:

*"Like a ritual, yes, and...and someone was able to pinpoint which ritual is that (sic) but I must be honest to say I didn't believe in that. Eh, we ended up doing the ritual. But in me, that was not, that was not the reason why those things happened. Eh, for me it was just it happened. Perhaps a test of my character, a test to me as to what will I do. So, so it was, for me it was a time of prayer and reflection (H9).*

It seems his role as a priest and his theological training make him reluctant to accept certain aspects of ATR. He added that he did not want to do the ritual but did not want to be difficult, 'Because then some other things happen to them as well' (H10). He seems to be concerned that the rest of the family, if they reneged on the ritual, would blame any future mishap on this failure (H10). The family believed that there was a reason for the mishaps, and so he said, 'And so there was, and so there's always that struggle, eh...' (H10). I interpret this as his own

inner struggle with ATR as against modern science and his theological training, which might interpret the performance of rituals as contrary to Christian principles.

A mature male parishioner reflected that if a person ignores milestone rituals, the family will view you as a 'bad person'. Despite his questioning attitude regarding aspects of Xhosa culture, when asked if he performed rituals simply to fit in, he confessed: 'No, you do it because you want to'. When he went for initiation, his father had lost the 'protection' he was supposed to bring with to the bush. When he returned safely, his father was amazed and expressed the belief that he thought his son would never return (I4). As the participant was a member of a soccer team, which wanted to use traditional methods to assist the team by 'magic', he pretended to have the appropriate traditional protection simply to assuage his team-mates (I4).

Ancestor rites are also performed for healing purposes. There are many healing rites for the sick. A ritual may be conducted to assure the ancestors that 'we haven't forgotten about you' (E18). The quest for healing leads many to consult traditional healers who by contacting the ancestors will discern the suitable remedy.

Some Zulu priests (Oblates of Mary Immaculate order), assisting in Cape Town in the apartheid designated townships, were surprised at the effort expended on funerals referring to a 'culture of death' amongst the parishioners. There were many prayer services, vigils at the house, Mass, graveyard ceremonies, lunch at the house and some further family observances thereafter. A Xhosa priest explained:

Paying your last respects to the dead and showing them that you know, they played an important part in the family, and that just burying them quick, quick (sic) shows them that we didn't want to get rid of you so quickly, you know. So spending time, prayers and, and having almost the whole morning, day funeral is a way of showing appreciation to that, that person (E19).

He replied that the reason women danced around the coffin was fairly new 'ritual'. The dancing' in my view, is more of a rhythmically ordered procession. It represents their final goodbye to the person who had been a member of their Church sodality, a special moment to say goodbye, as this was done when the person was alive (E19). Another reason, expounded in literature, which only partially surfaced in the replies to the questionnaire, is that a person must be buried properly otherwise they will make their displeasure known to

their progeny who may suffer mishap subsequently. Another priest was less voluble on the subject of ATR rituals, but I believe that ATR is a very important in his life. He explained the African understanding that all rituals are done through a meal. He concluded that if the Eucharist were explained as a meal, it would assist the African understanding of the Eucharist (F16). Sipuka (2000) also perceives sacrifice as an integral part of ancestor rituals, and links this to the Eucharist as a sacrifice.

Catholic parishioners who could be classified as devout admit, sometimes reluctantly, their involvement in African traditional rites. However, almost all of my respondents were not reluctant to expose their communications with their ancestors. There are other practices which have become customs in Cape town, such as going to the seaside on the first day of January to 'wash off' any bad luck or negative forces by immersion in the water. When a woman's family member dies, she does not come to church services, but stays at home, often seated on a mattress, to receive mourners. Mirrors are covered with whitewash. These customs override the attendance of church services, which arguably could offer profound spiritual consolation. An unmarried pregnant woman does not attend Sunday worship services as there is a degree of shame attached to her situation. It is often more important to attend a funeral society meeting than attending Mass from my experience with parishioners.

Sacrifice is central among the Xhosa people: 'from birth to death the life of the Xhosa person is marked by various types of sacrifice' (Sipuka 2000:133). The purpose is to propitiate ancestors, to request assistance, to appease, to give thanks, to uncover reasons for hardship, to assure them they are not forgotten. There are rituals without sacrifice, and according to my respondent, the making of African beer was always involved as part of any ritual. Not all rituals involve sacrifice (Sipuka 2000:137). The challenge for the Christian Church, is to insert Christ into ancestral rites, in a way which defines his pre-imminence and preserves theological norms.

Male circumcision (*Ukwaluka*) continues to be an imperative of the Xhosa and Sotho. The Sotho initiation period is three months, whilst the Xhosa people in Cape Town spend four weeks (formerly 3 months) in the bush (a secluded area), possibly a pragmatic reduction to fit in with township life, and school holidays. In principle, this rite of passage is meritorious as it purports to prepare boys for adult life, to leave behind any irresponsibility and to take on



an adult perspective. One biomedical medical doctor insisted that the medical danger with circumcision is high because when an initiate is circumcised, it is imperative for him to hydrate, and it is at this point that an initiate is obliged not to take any water for a length of time. There has also been scepticism as to the quality of instruction which an elder is supposed to impart, and some Xhosa parishioners claim that the young adults return to normal life worse than before.

A priest who seemed to struggle with the world of ancestral beliefs, nevertheless confessed: 'my plan is that I'll take my boys through medical circumcision and then take them to the mountain for learning' (H17). He considered circumcision as,

Yes very, very, very important...I think it's identifying with the community eh, and, and being part of the community. Eh, and having that time of learning as well (H17).

It is interesting to see how he wants to identify with the community. Learning refers to the time of instruction of the initiate in the secluded area. He would ensure that the males received proper instruction, aware of the fact that some of the teachers imparted doubtful instruction: Other men 'can pass wrong teaching to those boys.' (H18).

A mature male was critical of Xhosa culture, and he referred to a film '*Inxeba*' (the wound) (I3), which he argues shows *the* 'oppressiveness' of Xhosa culture. He contends that as young boys they 'go into the bush and we come back even worse'. Some teachers who are male members of the family are not qualified to instruct the initiates with proper life skills for one casting off the irresponsibility of youth and accepting the mantle of adulthood and living a community-centred life. The male suggested taking 'married people and go and teach the young boys in the bush'. Some males return having acquired the habit of smoking and drinking; 'so there is part of the culture that is lacking there'. In this way culture can be 'oppressive, it can even do bad things'.

The ideal of male initiation is described by Wauchope (1995:162).<sup>39</sup> He lauded the discipline, physical endurance, exercise and impressive moral teachings on 'bravery, sobriety, chastity,

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<sup>39</sup> 1901; Primitive Native Customs: Their Moral Aspects; in Mills (1995:162).

honesty, modesty and obedience'. From various discussions with parishioners, it is clear that these noble objectives today are not always accomplished.

Pauw (1975:88; see Mills 1995:165) observed that male initiation is 'the traditional institution most tenaciously adhered to by the urban Xhosa-speaking people'. However, some of the traditional details have been curtailed, and in Cape Town, as noted above, the seclusion period has been shortened to four weeks and is also slotted into local school holidays for convenience. There are also specific rituals for traditional weddings. There are a number of Catholic parishioners who are culturally married but have not acquiesced to a sacramental union.

### 3.13 Rituals and God

A parishioner explained that before the killing of an animal, 'they (the elders) say something, they give a message' (A24). At rituals, participants revealed that both God and the ancestors are called upon (C20); young female). Firstly, God is thanked for life,

and everything and we talk to the ancestors and like, and we're here now and we just want to say that we remember you and every...cause when we, my grandmother when she, she...it's usually for her late mother...and my grandfather (C20-21).

Sometimes Jesus is asked to bless food and is thanked for life, but it is usually God who is invoked. In this limited way rituals are combined with Christianity (C20). With regard to Xhosa rituals, a young female participant elaborated:

But some people don't because they say they're Christian so they won't think, they won't do um, ceremonies because they say they're Christian. They won't partake or they won't even show up (C21).

This reveals that some African Christians have been encouraged to abandon African rituals. Most of the Catholic parishioners were not intimidated by conscience about engaging in rituals, but as noted in the quotation, some have religious objections to traditional rituals.

When ancestors are called upon, God is included in prayers 'we first pray to him (God) then we start the service where we include the ancestors' (D17). When prompted, the young male participant said Jesus was included in the prayers. When he was informed that some parishioners specifically omitted Jesus (but not God) from their prayers, he noted 'You see, *ja*

(yes) I know, that's not good' (D17). He saw male initiation as an important part of life (D17-18). He was involved in rituals which include slaughtering and rituals as well as,

asking for things, thanksgiving and maybe if you are going out of your home, maybe to a different city, different country you do such to ask for protection (D18).

When a middle-aged female participant was asked if God was brought into ancestor rituals she said: 'They bring him with. They first...they first pray to God. Then when, when...they don't pray in fact...they pray and when they talk, they'll talk to the ancestors' (G19). A priest said adamantly that God was not included in ancestor rituals. The impression was gained that he has a rich involvement in traditional practices, and he sees no need to 'mix' these with Christianity. This separation is likely to hinder fruitful dialogue between ATR and Christianity.

When asked if any prayers to God were included, a priest said that rituals have nothing to do with God. There may be prayers to God during the week, but a ritual was not prefaced by Christian prayers. It is of course interesting to reflect on his statement that 'rituals have nothing to do with God'. This was said in a manner that suggests that they belong to two different, mutually exclusive realms, and should not be put together (F16). There seems to be a strong sense of pride in African traditions, as well as keeping it separate from Christianity.

Asked if he prayed Christian prayers with the rituals, a priest said: 'Yes, actually I pray before we slaughter. I pray before we dish the meat, and ja (yes)' (H19). He prays to God. He does not bring traditional rituals into the Church (H19). As noted elsewhere, at family rituals, a parishioner explained that God and Old Testament personages were invoked with rituals, but never Jesus. Another parishioner explained that only progeny can call upon their ancestors, disputing the claim that the traditional healer contacts the ancestors for them to hear what they have to say. He insists that the ancestors are near God, whose help is always sought, and after calling on their ancestors they would address them, praise them, and ask for assistance or thank them for blessings. These examples illustrate one level at which ATR and Christianity are linked by the parishioners, but it is Christianity with Christ in the background, and 'God' and the ancestors in the foreground. They have varied individual views, pointing to a certain degree in a common direction.

### 3.14 Sacrifice Rituals

Sipuka (2000:135-151) catalogues a variety of sacrifices for different occasions and purposes, disclosing fourteen different types. Sipuka does not agree with those who interpret these sacrifices as constituting worship (2000:157). The ancestors usually acquire their status through consanguinity and death, not through exceptional qualities. In addition, as caretakers of tradition, they are meritorious of respect, not worship (2000:158). Sacrifice is the most common expression of ancestor rituals (Domingues 2000:36). Most sacrifice is made to the ancestors. In case of national emergencies such as war or prolonged drought, God was specifically addressed. Sacrifice is addressed to those most directly concerned with a person's well-being, namely their ancestor (2000:40). Sipuka (2000:265-266) resists the notion that the spilling of blood<sup>40</sup> gives the impression that 'blood is the major constitutive element of sacrifice.' He is confident that there is no 'convincing evidence that blood is of great significance' (2000:266). Sacrifice is more about communion with the ancestors than about petitioning them.

### 3.15 Sacrifice in Modern Times

Sipuka (2000:170-186) examines how the practice of Xhosa sacrifice has fared in more modern times. Sacrifice continues, as observed in leading figures and celebrities, even in 'upmarket' suburbs, but the manner and meaning attached to this has changed. Sipuka mentions the celebrity pop star Brenda Fassie, who in thanksgiving, slaughtered two cows, two goats and a sheep in her driveway in 1999. Thabo Mbeki, former State President of South Africa, performed rituals involving sacrifice in a makeshift kraal, also in 1999. One newspaper article (1993, no further reference) reported that young men were given Bibles as gifts instead of *kieries* (sticks).

Certain birth sacrifices are fading out, but *Imbeleko* survives. A Catholic parishioner who I see as very Christ-centred in his spiritual life, nevertheless, makes regular trips to the Eastern Cape to perform ancestor rituals. He has done *Imbeleko* for all three of his children. A cow is slaughtered (for others it may be a goat, or sheep) and it is very important for the cow to

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<sup>40</sup> which some Xhosa refer to as *ukuphalaza igazi*- to shed blood.

bellow at a certain stage of the slaughtering, as this is taken as approval and acceptance by the ancestors. The purpose of the ritual is to introduce the child to the ancestors and this child now belongs to the lineage/family and is accepted by the ancestors and can now participate in all the rituals of the clan. God is prayed to at or before the start of the ritual. The Lord's Prayer may be recited. God is prayed to because he is seen as 'older' by the parishioner and others, as he is the 'Father'. Typically, most of the participants in the study prayed to God, not to Jesus, even though, when questioned about the Trinity elsewhere, the respondents would divulge that all three are one. There is an almost unconscious perception that Jesus is less than the Father, and it is to the latter that prayers are commonly addressed, confirming a diminished view of Christ.

Sacrifices for thanksgiving endure, whilst those aimed at addressing misfortune ostensibly sent by the ancestors, have dwindled, as the 'Xhosa ascribe benevolence more than they do misfortune to ancestors' (Sipuka 2000:175).

Death sacrifices (*ukukapha*- to send off and *ukubuyisa* - to bring back), have seen a loss of the sacrificial significance and have become merely a funeral meal, to provide food for the guests (Sipuka). The slaughtering of an animal follows a set procedure as well as its dissection. The meat is cooked and eaten. There are discontinuities with tradition. For example, sacrifice is not performed in a kraal but as noted above, in a driveway, or according to a parishioner, in a sacred space in their garden. National sacrifice such as rainmaking, or in times of war, have disappeared. The meaning of sacrifices, and their value have become more restricted to immediate family rather than the wider clan. Some rituals are called dinners instead of sacrifices. However,

a majority of Christians continue to perform pure Xhosa sacrifice while remaining committed to the belief about Christ's absolute sacrifice (Sipuka 2000:178).

Unlike Sipuka, I contend that the Xhosa people's commitment to Christ's absolute sacrifice is often a nominal one, confirmed by the opinion of one Xhosa priest who argues that after the celebration of the Word, most of the parishioners would happily go home, and that many do not understand the difference between a Mass and a Communion service. This confirms my supposition that not only is there ignorance of the Bible (there is no Catholic preoccupation with Christ as the fullness of revelation), which implies ignorance of Christ, but that ignorance

of the Mass is ignorance of Christ as well. Sipuka (2000:264) is adamant from an analysis of Xhosa cosmology, that sacrifice to ancestors does not constitute worship.

With the end of traditional leadership, sacrifice is no longer a tribal affair, and national sacrifices have ended. In towns, Xhosa men would have had to be continually on the alert, in the bush or in their yards, so that the police did not stop their sacrifice, which was made illegal in terms of regulations penned by local authorities, mostly Whites. Dispossession from ancestral land meant that black South Africans could not perform sacrifices in the vicinity of their graves. Farm evictions also led to scattering of living lineage members, as well as the geographic dispersion caused by the process of urbanization. Lineage members are substituted by clan members as well as friends rather than kinsmen (Sipuka 2000:191), as including church members and friends, who grace the rituals with their presence. December, because many have holidays from work, has become known as the month of issues (rituals), *inyanga yemicimbi*, and many Catholic parishioners travel to the Eastern Cape to settle ancestral matters. It is almost with shock that priests from outside Cape Town, ministering in a township parish, found that on the high feast day of Christmas day, some parish churches were almost empty. They had gone to the Eastern Cape for the month of December! All my respondents were confident that their ancestors were everywhere, but they are visualised as more especially present at their graves, the kraal and the village of their descendants (Sipuka 2000:193).

It is also costly to sacrifice; sometimes financial considerations constrain the performance of rituals. Obviously, a kraal (area where cows are kept) is not available in towns and cities. In modern suburbs, there are many requirements to be fulfilled before obtaining the necessary permission to perform animal sacrifice. The ancestors, or those who have died, are regarded by many Protestants, as 'asleep' until the last day. Therefore, to sacrifice to them is fruitless as well as betrayal of faith in one God.

There is evidence that in the towns and cities the number of occasions for misfortune or suffering or needs such as employment are multiplied in the complex urban environment, and Sipuka (2000:193) detects a focus more on personal protection and thanksgiving; the individualisation of rituals, rather than lineage solidarity via rituals. Reasons for thanksgiving in my experience include blessings seen as emanating from ancestors, and as noted by Sipuka

can include return from mines, return from journeys, passing examinations and other successes. Lineage heads were responsible for communicating with ancestors. Today individuals converse directly with ancestors, although some parishioners claim that it is only through a traditional healer that they can communicate with their ancestors in a way that the healer can perceive the ancestor's speak (:194). Personal prayer to the ancestors may be a surrogate for a formal ritual. In fact, all the respondents in this research confirmed that they prayed to their ancestors, which for reasons noted above are often their immediate forebears parents and grandparents. As noted elsewhere, most of my participants were clear that ancestor rituals always included prayer to God. A conversation relays the fact that some parishioners call only on God and Old Testament personalities. Christ and the New Testament are always excluded. They feel there is more resonance with the Old Testament. My informant attends the Sunday Mass regularly and receives Holy Communion, despite the exclusion of Christ from Xhosa rituals. The general meaning of the Eucharist and Holy Communion (the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ) does not appear to have influence on his alternate belief system.

Sipuka (2000:196) detects how certain rituals have been modified, simplified or have found substitutes for elements of the ritual. Some Xhosa celebrate dinners (*idinala*, adapted from the English word) instead of a pure Xhosa ritual. Sipuka (:198) contends that Xhosa theologians need to clarify what is happening when a dinner is held. Until then 'the suspicion that 'dinner' is a camouflaged Xhosa sacrifice will continue to persist'. Sipuka uses the word 'dichotomous' for what anthropologists describe as dual religious systems. Dichotomous refers to:

Xhosa Christians who openly practice Xhosa sacrifice understand it and Christ's sacrifice as both valid beliefs in their own realms. There is no attempt to synthesise the two because they are understood and explained separately. (Sipuka 2000:198).

Sipuka uses the word 'heterodox' (:198) as simultaneously holding different views of which some are 'wrong', but he settles for the term 'dichotomous understanding' where there is no 'judgment'.

This is similar to the replies of my respondents who when conversing about their ancestors and their capacities to affect human lives do not seem to be aware of certain contradictions

between their Christian faith and their traditional position. Again I refer to a conversation with a parishioner who was convinced that her uncle, an evil ancestor, killed her brother despite a lifetime of Catholicism and was not able to explain how God featured in this incident. Less extreme is the fear that they have for their 'good' ancestors who can also instigate trouble for them. An elderly parishioner who is a life-time Catholic and has initiated some successful outreaches for the community of Gugulethu (township in Cape Town), confidently ascribes her frequent inspirations to her ancestors (note recorded in January 2020). The notion of her ancestors seemed to slip effortlessly into her mind.

Mtuze (2003:49-50) avers that the living-dead take the ontological position between spirits and people, and between God and people. He also describes some of the Xhosa rituals such as *ukukhapa* (*accompany*), and *ukubuyisa* (*return*) (:50). Sacrifice is seen as more powerful than prayer (Domingues 2000:40). Cattle are religiously significant as they have been designated by God as the appropriate vehicle for sacrifice (:41). Goats, sheep and chickens are also used in sacrifice. Libations of drink and small offerings of food are also made in deference to the ancestors and their on-going presence.

Sipuka (2000:205) sees continuity and discontinuity between traditional and modern practices. Sacrifice has become limited more to a nuclear family affair because of the geographical scattering of lineage members (:206). Most Xhosa people uphold Xhosa tradition and Christianity without trying to harmonise them (:207). Sipuka sees that the destabilizing effect of modernity 'is changing Xhosa sacrifice from being a lineage affair into a nuclear family affair.' Some argue it may even become an individual concern (such as Sipuka 2000:206). My respondents were accustomed to petitioning their ancestors in prayer.

Many African scholars, including Sipuka (2000:202), observe resurgence in the practice of the ancestor belief system, which is ascribed to a quest by the indigenous people to reclaim their African identity.

These customs, which include communication with the ancestors through sacrifice, are seen by black South Africans in general and by the Xhosa in particular as instrumental in asserting their uniqueness and equality to those who previously regarded them as inferior. (Sipuka 2000:202).

This can be classified partially as a political motivation. Sipuka (2000:235) contends that the death and resurrection of Christ forms the kernel of Catholic faith. The Church 'needs to



render the Eucharist meaningful to all the members of the Church,' to the diverse cultures that share our faith. He hopes to make the Eucharist meaningful to the Xhosa. This constitutes the process of inculturation and mission in general. God uses but is not limited to culture to reveal himself (:238).

*Ukuthwasa* ('coming out', appearing gradually- Pauw 1975:166), is a condition whereby a person, male or female, is possessed by ancestral spirits, displaying symptoms such as nervousness, palpitations, fainting, derangement, and hearing voices. This is usually taken as a sign that the person is called to become a healer, and they need to be assigned to a healer to receive training and the accompanying rituals eventually graduating as a healer. Some African Christians who feel the ancestral call to become a diviner feel constrained by their Christian faith and resist the call. Tlhagale (2019:27-28) discusses spirit possession and he confirms Pauw's (1975) observations of the *ukuthwasa* phenomenon. There have been several instances of Catholic parishioners who have felt the calling to be inducted as traditional healers. The complex of rites this would involve the parishioner in underscores the strong degree of adherence to Xhosa tradition. Tlhagale (2019) suggests that ancestor spirit possession is a possible bridge to understanding the reception of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, of being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.

### 3.16 The Communion of Saints and Ancestors; Conflict or Concord?

In African culture and tradition, the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African loves children who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God.

The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints? (Ecclesia in Africa "EA" 1995:43. Document on African Synod).

Healey and Sybertz (2000:213) refer to a homily by Saint Pope John Paul II at the opening Mass of the 1994 African Synod who stated that 'the ardent quest for one God through the veneration of the ancestors' reflects an instinctive belief that the dead continue to live, and

this is a preparation for belief in the Communion of Saints (:215). These two reflections are repeated in Chapter 10.2 below.

Since the African ancestor system of belief has survived two centuries of Christian mission, I note briefly some aspects of the theology of the Communion of Saints for possible coherence with this very important system of traditional belief. This theology derives from the Church's tradition of councils and statements, which although are not all dogmatic pronouncements, constitute a convincing corpus of contributions to eschatology. I have limited my literature review to these Catholic documents. In brief, those who have gone before us are not 'asleep' but are communion with their progeny (except those consigned to hell), having experienced immediate judgement after death and immediate reward or punishment. The documents contend that it is not only the canonised saints who are present to us, but all those in heaven and purgatory as well. In the same way that African ancestors need acknowledgement by their progeny, but for different reasons, some of our departed may need prayers to facilitate their process of purification in purgatory. Those who have gone before us no doubt possess a very special interest in our wellbeing, and being present to us, will no doubt pray for us. All that they achieve, however, is only made possible by the power of God, there are no special powers independent of God. There is then a universe of invisible beings, both benevolent, and as shown elsewhere, malevolent.

The departed are a benign presence, with our best interests at heart (there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner repenting...Lk 15:7). Ancestors, once seen as the prime focus of black Africans, are with Christianity, now sometimes seen as mediators between God and humankind. The intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and of the saints (canonised or not), share in the intercession of Christ, which in no way rivals the Son's unique intercession, but enhances it. All prayer, whether directly to God, or indirectly through the saints, goes through the Son, there is no usurping of this theological roadmap. The intercession of the saints, then, is a gift from God. All the Catholics whom I have questioned, pray to the ancestors. There is no mysterious invoking of spirits, but I fear danger from evil spirits when traditional healers set out to summons ancestors. Necromancy or any form of divination, or spiritism, is forbidden by the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2115-

2117). All also pray to God, but less to Jesus, and all those I questioned prayed to their ancestors, privately and at family rituals.

The saints are not an essential route to God, but by virtue of their heroic lives, may claim some special influence with God, and in the case of family, a special concern for their progeny. Those in heaven are in a higher ontological state of existence and are valid sources of wisdom. Various Prefaces of the Catholic Mass refer to the Saints as guiding us still, protecting us, communicating with us, giving us inspiration and strength. The saints are not independent of God, as the ancestor cult seems to suggest, and it seems questionable as to whether the saints can actually hurt or harm us, as many people believe, and are fearful of the ancestors. From research it is clear that the ancestors evoke a sizeable measure of fear among many Black Africans, and the neglect of the ancestors or disobedience of what they seem to be telling their progeny can cause severe harm to their family or clan and even to a nation. They are seen to be able to act independently of God and act even in a capricious manner. I do not find support of these contentions in the Christian faith, and it is clearly an area which needs to be addressed. Events which cause some forms of suffering are thought to have a cause for the African person, and the ancestors or enemies get the blame. The ancestors are seen as protection from evil spirits, which feature strongly in African tradition. If the African person is too preoccupied with the world of evil spirits, the Western mind is too dismissive of this reality. If a person receives a communication from an ancestor, I believe this is positively within the realm of possibility. But it could also be from an evil spirit, or it could be a psychological phenomenon. A correct interpretation is critical. The views of various theologians are also noted regarding ancestor veneration.

Many African scholars believe that the dismissal of African Traditional Religious beliefs such as ancestor veneration results in a hidden, inner adherence, disguised from the missionaries. Without studied dialogue between faith and culture, evangelisation simply drives the powerful existing beliefs underground, and we end up with a dual religious system, at the expense of a more profound conversion to Christ, and with the many qualifications which scholars such as Tlhagale (2018) proffer.

### 3.17 A Precipitous of the Communion of Saints and Critique of the Ancestor Belief System

Various Catholic Church documents endorse the view that those who have gone before us, either in heaven or purgatory, are indeed present to their progeny by God's goodness and power, and canonised Saints enjoy a wider universal presence with those on earth who pray to them.<sup>41</sup> The Church distinguishes three Church communions, those in heaven (the Church in Glory), those in purgatory (the Church Expectant) and those on earth (the Pilgrim Church) (*Lumen Gentium* 1965:49). Those in the heavenly realm await their immortal body at the end of time, but they are not 'asleep' and are active agents of intercession.<sup>42</sup> Hebrews 12:1 refers to a great crowd of heavenly witnesses, and it is not only the canonized Saints who are present, but also the saints with a small s, the departed in heaven and purgatory. Whilst the canonised saints have a universal presence, the latter, it seems, are permitted a limited presence to their progeny, with God's good graces. It is important to note that Catholic theology understands that the departed are by no means 'asleep' but are in communion with the living, even if there is no reciprocal communication. Their bodies are 'asleep' in graves. In an Apostolic Constitution,<sup>43</sup> Pope Paul VI refers to the tradition according to which those in heaven (the sons (sic) of God) are joined through Christ to all on earth 'by a wonderful link in the supernatural oneness of the mystical Body of Christ, in one mystical person as it were.'<sup>44</sup> Death does not end the union of the departed with those on earth. The document asserts that both those in heaven, and those in purgatory are involved in 'an abundant exchange of goods,' which suggests an awareness by these agents of those still on their earthly pilgrimage.<sup>45</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (1964:412; paragraph 51) also confirms that the saints in heaven and those being purified are in living communion with us. It is these agents that can be envisioned as living ancestors.

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<sup>41</sup> Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, Pope Paul VI, 1967; Neuner & Dupuis 1992:533.

<sup>42</sup> Constitution *Benedictus Deus* 1336; Neuner & Dupuis 1992:768

<sup>43</sup> Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*; Pope Paul VI, 1967; a statement on the system of indulgences: Neuner & Dupuis. 533.

<sup>44</sup> J. Neuner & J. Dupuis, 533.

<sup>45</sup> Neuner & Dupuis, 534.

Nyamiti (1986, 1989, 2003:12) speaks of the Ugandan martyrs as heavenly ancestors. The Council of Trent (1653; Neuner & Dupuis 1992:401), and *Vicesimus Quintus Annus* (1987; Neuner & Dupuis 1992:395-398) contend that the saints pray for humanity sharing by God's power and generosity in the intercession of Christ, draw their strength from this unique intercession and complement it. *Lumen Gentium* (1965:60) refers to Mary's intercession for us, and the Third Eucharistic Prayer of the Catholic Mass submits that the Saints are constantly interceding for us, enjoying a degree of greater intimacy with Christ by virtue of their heroic and meritorious earthly lives. There is no automatic two-way communication with the saints, although at times we on earth may be aware of our ancestor saint in a dream. There is no doubting the supremacy of Christ,<sup>46</sup> who in his benevolence offers a supplementary source of spiritual power, which serves to reinforce our faith in the afterlife and in the great 'cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1) urging us on, not only on earth, but also from the heavenly realm. For example, Preface of Holy Men and Women, refers to a 'great company of witnesses' (The Weekday Missal 1982, sixth printing, p 136). Pope Francis warns us of 'excessive' devotion to Mary or to a particular Saint. LG 62 states that there is no hesitation in professing the subordinate role of Mary, and of course of all the angels and saints. The ancestors should also not be seen as an impenetrable barrier blocking them off from Christ, but that Christ is always present to us (Mt 28:20b –I am with you always; yes, to the end of time' The Weekday Missal 1982:1659).

The exhortation in the Lord's Prayer, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'<sup>47</sup> attests to the reality that in the afterlife all are in God's control, and all do his will perfectly, which challenges the belief that ancestors can harm their progeny. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue, which requires us to honour our parents, has been used to justify ancestor veneration. Healey and Sybertz (2000:213) refer to a homily by Saint Pope John Paul II at the opening Mass of the 1994 African Synod (13<sup>th</sup> April 1994) who correlates ancestors with the Communion of Saints (:215). Mtuze (2003:4) sees commonality between the theology of the Communion of Saints and the ancestor belief system. Angels, the Apostles, holy men and women and martyrs are of constant assistance to the pilgrim Church. The saints in heaven,

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<sup>46</sup> Many Scripture references attest to this, for example Mt 28:18; Phil. 2:10; Jn 10:30; Hb 1:3b

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 6:10, NJB 1985:1618)

having met God, are deemed to have a superior wisdom, one which emphasizes salvation, not necessarily an answer to every human request.

The Xhosa worldview holds concurrently the power of Christ and that of the ancestor. The two seem to coexist without however, a conscious meeting and interaction of the two worldviews. Based on my research, I agree with Tlhagale (2018:182) that the ancestors 'have increasingly ceased to be the cornerstone of the African's religious consciousness, though they remain an essential part of it'.

Okure (1998:5) also avers that it is impossible to successfully evangelise Africa 'without taking seriously the reality of the African spirit world.' Okure (1998:6-7) quotes Milingo (1985): 'Until the people see the role of Jesus in the hierarchy of the spirit world, that is, of our ancestors, it will be hard to uproot them completely from their beliefs'. For Okure (1998:7) it means that a culture based on Christology is essential for proper evangelisation in Africa. If the Holy Spirit now enables Africans to access the formerly inaccessible, remote God, then there is no theological need for the ancestors (1998:16). Whilst Okure (1998:23) agrees that evangelization needs to consider the African worldview, she insists that there must be a sound Christological and Pneumatological basis which acknowledges the infinitely higher authority of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ's free gift of the Holy Spirit is better than anything the ancestors can offer, which situates these as the prime sources of sacred power, not the saints, who are effectively optional extras. This gift is obtainable without 'arduous' rituals (Okure 1998:21). For Okure, African Traditional Religion is the equivalent of what the Old Testament was for the Jewish faith, a preparation for the fullness of revelation.

Mission is directed to Christ 'because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phi 3:4-16; Okure 1998:19). If ancestors are perceived as part of God's heavenly kingdom, they will not be viewed fearfully, and the concern of the African person will move beyond clan to the universal Communion of Saints. 'Tribal' differences will be forgotten, and not be seen as an excuse to create 'ethnic ghettos' which bring conflict to Africa (Okure 1998:22). Okure (1998:13) writes that fear more than love determines and regulates the relationship with the ancestors. If the Greek Church needed Christianity to dialogue with its own philosophies for many centuries, to really make the religion its own, we need to continue

our efforts, and in the end, to encourage African priests to take inculturation to its deeper levels.

It took centuries for the global West to develop this identity, and therefore the African worldview is not about to 'implode' (Tlhagale 2019:32-33). Powerful forces such as the dominance of postmodernity, education, science, migration, dislocation, travel and Christian and Islamic mission represent a 'massive challenge' to the traditional cosmos (:33). But,

The struggle against the spirits will be harder because it is an invisible war. It is destined to be even harder than the dethronement of the colonial powers (:33).

Tlhagale regards the apparent ability of healers to communicate directly with ancestors and receive answers to their petitions as 'preposterous'. (:183). The dead, he claims, cannot talk back, inflict sickness, or prescribe cures. Tlhagale is severe in his denunciation of diviners who prey on the ignorant and gullible, and on ignorance and credulousness.

The *Cape Times*,<sup>48</sup> on its front page, recorded that the newly elected African National Congress president, Cyril Ramaphosa, as a solution to the misfortunes of the African National Congress political party, described as 'down and out, riddled with foreign tendencies' and requiring ancestral intervention visited the graves of its former presidents and other key leaders to talk to them and to 'shake' them up, in order to counter the misfortune being experienced by the party.

In a statement by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC: 2006) on Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith, the Catholic hierarchy dispute the claim that the ancestors do acquire supernatural powers with which to help or harm their progeny. This, they claim is tantamount to idolatry. Without God, the ancestors are powerless, as Hebrews 1:3b it states that the Word of God sustains all things in creation therefore they owe their very continued existence to the Word (Christ). The attention given to ancestors borders on paying excessive attention to false gods, a transgression of the First Commandment of the Decalogue (SACBC 2006:3). This precept proscribes this practice as superstition and irreligion. The SACBC statement (2006:4) advises the faithful to venerate, not adore the ancestors. A

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<sup>48</sup> *The Cape Times*, South African (Cape Town) newspaper, Wednesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2018.

Church term is to honour, as in the Catholic tradition, we honour the saints, venerate Mary and worship God alone. To honour a saint, is to honour even more the God whose graces facilitated their life of sanctity. Any attempt to harness occult powers, or witchcraft, either to help someone or to harm them, is a grave sin (SACBC 2006:6). It is not clear from this whether the statement censures sacrifice to ancestors, but it does tolerate honouring ancestors. Tlhagale (2018) contends that it is quite plausible that traditional Africans worshipped their ancestors. He (2018:149) refers to religious obeisance to 'capricious, fear-instilling, dangerous spirits'. He argues that the assertion that they merely venerated their forebears as a development that was a result of Christian mission. Sipuka (2000), on the other hand, does not interpret ancestor devotion as idolatrous.

Nürnberg (2007:101) discussing the absolute authority which the early Church was seen to wield, fears a similar, severe authority image if Christ is proclaimed as ancestor in Africa. He recommends the 'Suffering Servant' image, one who liberates and empowers and is available to the weak and suffering.

The message that Christ, the great Servant, is the divine model or authentic ancestorship could be of incredible importance for the psychological and social transformation in an African context (:101)

He doubts if the gentler, servant model of Christ would be appropriated. He also doubts if Christ can replace the more recently deceased ancestors, because as founder ancestor, he would still be remote in existential terms. He would have to be ancestor of a new clan, of all people, not only related by blood 'yet be as close to the individual as the most proximate ancestor used to be' (:101). He deems this very unlikely. Yet an outright rejection of Christ as ancestor continues to shroud a powerful constituent of the African belief system. Christ as ancestor is a *bridge* to establishing him as above all the forebears, a task which could be accomplished in small group training and catechetics. Wanamaker (1997:28) also contends that it is difficult to introduce Christ into the African universe, in his capacity as intercessor, guide and judge, as these roles conflict with the traditional functions of the ancestors. African customs have been handed down 'with as much authority as written sacred text.'

Tlhagale (2018:127) regards ancestor veneration as 'one of the major challenges to evangelisation in Southern Africa today.' Christianity has not been able to integrate this belief system for over 200 years. It seems clear to me that no one has truly tried. Describing the



complex rituals which an initiate must undergo to become traditional healer, he observes that this cultural reality 'has not yet being penetrated by the proclamation of the Gospel' (Tlhagale 2018:128). Attempts to abolish dualism in other nations (:239) and eras shows that this leaves an unhealthy vacuum. Tlhagale wonders if the negative can be removed 'without destroying the life-giving aspects of culture and religion' (:240). I believe that a reconciliation of the ancestor cult with Catholicism needs to be taken as far as it can proceed without doctrinal error, and that the remaining elements be sensitively opened for dialogue.

There is more devotion to the ancestors than to Christ, who is ostensibly graded well above the forebears but is effectively less acknowledged than the ancestral shades, who claim a generous portion of the religious activity of the Xhosa parishioner, more devotion than Christ commands. Christ has a partial foothold in the worldview of the Xhosa, but the 'Good News' of an energising relationship with the fullness of revelation in Christ, has a long way to go. Christ needs to be in dialogue with the ancestral belief system.

Tlhagale (2019:33) agrees that the ancestors have been displaced from their position of hegemony in the life of the African Christian. Some see the ancestors as occupying a complementary role, but many see this role as excessive in relation to Christ. Tlhagale (2018:149) regards the straddling of two belief systems as a 'tragic compromise' The respondents in my research substantiate this conclusion. Their map of reality is God first, and then the ancestors. Christ emerges in this religious arena often only when the participator is prompted about Christ, which denotes a serious flaw in evangelization to date. If Christ as God's foremost revelation as the Way and the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6) is only secondarily acknowledged, even at times omitted, mission has only been partly effective. Mission has succeeded in transferring God from his distant aloofness in ATR, to an ever-present provider and protector who listens to prayers, but the passage to a fuller revelation in Christ seems far from complete amongst the Xhosa parishioners. Many western churchgoers in the Catholic Church in Cape Town also exhibit a partial relationship with Christ, manifest in various ways, signalling a nominal membership of the Church. There has never been an attempt, to my knowledge, to comprehensively dialogue the essential tenets of both religious systems, namely ATR and Christianity with Catholic parishioners within the Archdiocese of Cape Town.

Christ has a real foothold in the worldview of the Xhosa, but the Good News of an energising relationship with the fullness of revelation in Christ, has a long way to go. Christ needs to be dialogued with the ancestral belief system. The ancestors need to be 'demoted' to the level of being an optional supplement or discretionary spiritual aid, as are the world of saints and angels that are gifts to us from a generous God who nevertheless demands foremost attention. We seek to befriend the spirit world with the Communion of Saints, and where the companions differ, Christ is the final arbiter.

The Church has been cautious about prophets, concerned with false prophecy and deceptions by evil spirits, and regards them as a type of rival source of sacred power to God (Decock 1999:37-50). This author (:38) draws attention to Leviticus (19:31 and 20:6), which censures recourse to 'spirits of the dead' or 'magicians' (NJB 158, 160). As noted above, the SACBC refers to false gods, idolatry, and advocates honouring ancestors, not worshipping them. Pope Benedict XIV in a letter to Bishop of Peking, 1744, expressed official Church policy, still valid today; (according to Luzbetak):

Let it be known to everyone that in matters pertaining to religious truth, when it is a question of superstition or idolatry, sympathy or tolerance is utterly impossible, as Tertullian put it: "Any such tolerance is itself a form of idolatry" (in Luzbetak 1988/2002:283).

The Catholic Church in South Africa seems to be tolerating an unqualified ancestral belief system in its lack of a national intervention, but needs to proceed with respect, openness and with pertinent theology. Tlhagale, Okure and Nyamiti suggest approaches to this correlation of the two related belief systems, but with some reservation by Nürnberger.

In summary, the Communion of Saints theology does envisage a constant presence of the departed, aware of our earthly experiences and interceding for us as sharers in Christ's intercession, which draws its strength from this intercession and complements it. Christ, in his benevolence, offers a complementary source of spiritual power, to encourage our belief in the afterlife and a concerned cloud of witnesses urging us on and assisting us with efficacious prayers. The ancestors must also be perceived as part of God's kingdom, effectively close at hand but subject to God. A statement by the SACBC significantly qualifies the alleged powers of ancestors in the traditional view and permits veneration of the departed, but no degree of worship. In the Catholic tradition, therefore, belief in ancestors is

not proscribed, but requires qualified acceptance, and should be further dialogued with Catholic convention.

## Chapter 4. The Supreme Being: God

### 4.1 Introduction

Hodgson (1982:3-16) provides a brief history of the Nguni peoples who moved from central Africa perhaps around 1300AD with the Xhosa settling south of the Mthatha River at the end of the sixteenth century. The separation of the Xhosa people from the Zulu people saw the Zulu settling in the province now referred to as Kwa-Zulu Natal, whilst the Xhosa moved gradually westward from 1550 to 1850AD into what is now the Eastern Cape. The move was more of an expansion than a deliberate migration. Sons of reigning Xhosa chiefs hived off to form new chieftainships. There was also the search for new hunting grounds and grazing land. The Xhosa people herded cattle, hunted and cultivated sorghum and other foodstuffs.

They met the Khoi and the San around the Kei River. These were driven from their hunting grounds. There was some conflict, and intermarriage on a limited scale. Some of these two indigenous peoples were incorporated into Xhosa society, generally as inferior partners in the overall contact with the Xhosa. The influence on the Xhosa language was significant, assuming many of the so-called 'clicks', many of which are not found in the Zulu language. There were also some significant changes in the Xhosa traditional religion with influence from the Khoi-San people.

### 4.2 Myths of Origin in African Traditional Religion

Historical records show that there were no creation stories in Xhosa Traditional Religion (XTR), but myths of origin. People first emerged from a previous existence, and the supreme being somehow enabled them to emerge (Hodgson 1982:18). Men and women and animals existed in caverns in the bowels of the earth and emerged either in a cavern or a marsh overgrown with reeds.

Scholars see *Untu* (:25) as the first chief from whom other chiefs descended, either Xhosa or Zulu. *Untu*, the son of *Eluhlangeni*, or *wo-Hlanga*, brought customs and laws with him. *Ntu* was regarded as the progenitor of the *abantu* (people). The term *hlanga*, refers to the point of entrance from the bowels of the earth, also seen as creator or source. Thus, the place of origin was referred to as *umhlanga*, or *eluhlangeni* (from the cave). At the same time that

they emerged, the sun and the moon and vegetation came into being. They were taught how to milk cows, grow corn, brew beer, by the first set of ancestors. The indentations on rocks were believed to be footprints of the first people and animals. The concept of a supreme being was a 'shadowy' one with more apparent emphasis on the people and animals than a 'first cause' of earthly life (Hodgson 1982:26). It is interesting to note that the Ngoni of Malawi use *Uluhlanga* to mean 'the Original Source' (:47). There are also myths which account for the separation between God and humanity. We can be aware of Magesa's objection to the term African Traditional Religion was that it was inaccurate and anachronistic. He preferred the term 'African Religion.' (Rausch 2021:64). My choice of the term tradition is to draw awareness to the constant handing down of the ancestor belief system to youth, as evident still with young people we minister to today, even if with less biographical history (for example, of famous ancestors) than before.

#### 4.3 Names for the Supreme Being

Because there are virtually no systems of rites involving a supreme being, there are those who believe there was no conception of a god by the Nguni peoples. Hodgson (1982) notes certain praise names common to the Xhosa and the Zulu, namely *uDali*, *uMdali*,<sup>49</sup> and *uMenzi*.<sup>50</sup> Some scholars argue that these names were introduced by the missionaries. J.H. Soga (1931) claims that *uDali* was originally used by the Xhosa to denote the centre of all life. Pauw's research in the 1960s in the Eastern Cape among the Xhosa supports the existence of a creator God in the minds of his respondents (in Hodgson 1982:45). Mbiti (1970:45) observes that 'practically all' Africans believe in a Creator God

Names for God such as *uMdali*, *uMenzi*, *uHlanga*, *iNkosi yeZulu* (Lord of the Skies) and *uNkulunkulu* are common terms among the Zulu and Xhosa (:62). Hodgson argues that these names for God date to the time before the Xhosa hived off from the Nguni body and could well be of ancient origin. The northern Nguni, (the Zulu), did not use the names of *Qamata* or *Thixo*, therefore these names originated from the contact with the Khoi-San subsequent to

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<sup>49</sup> from the Xhosa word *ukudala*, to create.

<sup>50</sup> from *ukwenza*, to make.

the split of the Nguni into Xhosa and Zulu. The phonetic 'clicks' in the Xhosa language are related to the Khoi-San languages.

The idea of a supreme being and active ancestor veneration are the most striking common factors in African religion (Crafford in Meiring 1996 (ed.). 13). This being is described as *deus otiosus*; a God uninvolved with daily life, concealed and remote, and approached usually only by mediators, seldom directly, and then only in extreme circumstances such as serious drought and national emergencies. All life force flows from God through the ancestors to people, animals and plants (:13), and his existence 'makes the whole of existing reality a field of force, a sacred environment which may not be drastically altered' (:13). Crafford maintains that God is seen as spirit and he can be good and merciful as well as angry and punishing allowing catastrophe to occur. There are few rituals involving the African God. Many African scholars disagree that the African God is an Absent God, maintaining he is never far from the African thoughts and life (Han 2013:78). Upkong (1983:187) also contends that God is constantly on the lips of the people, as well as being invoked in desperate situations. This, however, may be a more recent awareness, flowing from Christian mission.

#### 4.4 The Name *Qamata*

The God name of *Qamata* is definitely of Khoi-San origin (Hodgson 1982:69), and it was a name too sacred to be used freely, in the same way the people of Israel never verbalised their name for God, namely Yahweh (Hodgson 1982:66). There are references by Xhosa men to *Qamata* as the great spirit, greater than the spirit of all the chiefs, as he created them (:69, :70). In addition, *Qamata* was never a man, the first man, or a chief. He was greater than all creation. He was everywhere, saw all things, was petitioned for assistance and was believed to respond.

#### 4.5 The Name *uThixo*

The name *Thixo* for God derives from a great hero of the Khoi (*Tsui//Goab*), and the word is rendered in various spellings. The name means 'wounded knee'. A battle between two Khoi chiefs resulted in the victor receiving a blow on his knees therefore he was lame. Later generations deified him, as he was reputed to have had extraordinary powers and legends credit him with coming to life on several occasions after dying. The name *Tsui//Goab* was the

God who provided rain, food, good health and protection from evil. He was invoked each day at dawn (Hodgson 1982:91- 92). The Xhosa king Ngqika used the Hottentot word to express deity, namely *Tuikwa*. The missionary, Van der Kemp (1800) believed there was no conception as a nation of a supreme being but that there were many individuals who had a notion of God whom they named *Thiko* a corruption of the Khoi word *Thuike*. The missionaries decided on the use of the name *uThixo* to represent the Christian God to the Xhosa and to the *Gqunukhwebe* converts (a grouping consisting of Xhosa and Gonaqua people). There were various spellings of the word (:92-93). We must wonder if the appropriation of this name for the Xhosa by the missionaries included associations from prior usage (Xhosa tradition) which the missionaries would have censured if they had realised exactly what was being adopted.

Hodgson (1982:103) writes that *Qamata* was conceptualised as the ultimate source of power. Rites were borrowed from the Khoi-San and developed by the Xhosa to approach the supreme being in case of national crisis, which was considered beyond the control of the ancestors (:103). Qualities of *Qamata* and *Thixo* 'existed side by side for a considerable length of time' (:103). The author (1982) detected a strong move to replace the name of *Thixo* 'which is regarded as being foisted on them by the missionaries, with *Qamata*' (:104).

This conforms with the desire to recover past traditions as part of the black cultural renaissance and goes together with the resurgence of the ancestor cult.

Mtuzi (2003:65) claims that Xhosa people should be worshipping *Ntu*, not *uThixo*. In the same way that missionaries incorrectly chose *Modimo* as the Christian equivalent for God for mission to the Sotho, they chose *Thixo*, which is not a pure Xhosa word or concept, but was borrowed from the Khoi and Khoisan people and was wrongly promoted by Ntsikana and others.

The White missionaries rejected names such as *Zimu*, *Mdali*, *Rameseti*, and *Qamata* as 'heathen' (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001:28). Missionaries effectively converted many indigenous people from an ancestor dominated worldview to one where God prevails. Christian mission almost invariably expands the God component on worldview maps (Walls 2017:45) reducing the weight of ancestors, as has happened with the Xhosa parishioners in Cape Town. God is the principal agent to whom the convert is tutored to approach for power and protection (:46).

#### 4.6 Some Aspects of African Religion

Africa is described by many as a deeply religious continent (Orobator 2018:19). The African is a natural believer whose faith did not begin with Christian mission. African faith is open to spiritual reality, and this made it open to the Christian message, which rests alongside this spiritual base rather than replacing it. Orobator (2018:20) notes how Africa has been perfectly capable of 'mixing and matching' African religion, Islam and Christianity. He regards the hospitality and tolerance of African spirituality as 'a resource for global Christianity, which is in need of models of dialogue, tolerance, and mutuality' (:21). Orobator (2018) enumerates various characteristics of African religion. African religion is classified as primal, an original evolution from the beginning of religious consciousness, relatively unaltered by other religions until the advent of Christian mission. It is noted above in Chapter 1.3 that ATR greatly facilitated Christian mission because of deep underlying compatibility.

Orobator (2018) sets out his understanding of African Religion. It comprises:

1. Faith in an ultimate reality and secondly in lesser spirits and human agents of religion. The preoccupation is generally with the secondary spirits notably the ancestors, or deities, lesser gods and nature spirits. This corresponds with the worldview of my respondents, however, the prime source of sacred power, in my analysis was God, with the ancestors generally second.
2. A visible spiritual realm and an invisible one, which interact to cause either misfortune or wellbeing. Communication with the invisible is both possible and frequent. The conviction that the universe is arrayed by varying degrees of spiritual entities and forces that impinge on the natural order of things, including the affairs of humanity, is a general fundamental belief in most African traditional religions (Green 1983; In Owusu-Gyamfi 2020:24). The respondents acknowledged a world of spirits, malign and benign, of mysterious forces and phenomena.
3. Rituals used to harness the invisible forces for the better, or by enemies, for the worse. My participators involved themselves in ancestor rituals, meant to engage forces usually emanating from the ancestors. One mature parishioner only experienced rituals at family gatherings, and never initiated rituals themselves.



4. Ethics which focus on life and are measured by whether an action strengthens or weakens the life force and community.
5. An intense preoccupation with wellbeing and protection from threats. Prayer to God among my interviewees were generally petitionary in nature, seeking solutions to problems.
6. The use of symbols and rituals to transmit values. Religious meaning is embedded in rituals and symbols. There are no written theologies. There was evidence of African items worn to engage with ancestors and for protection amongst my parishioners, but not to a great extent. Two parishioners who had undergone training to become *sangomas* wore more beading.

The Xhosa do not look for a personal relationship with God, hence the absence of formal rituals dedicated to God (Sipuka 2000:189). Taylor (1963/2000: xxiv) disputes that African Religion is one of nature worship or ancestor worship. Nature and culture are 'manifestations of divine blessing and endowment.'

African religion is holistic in the sense that the spiritual and the real are not separated from each other but intricately and inexplicably intertwined (Setiloane, 2012). Setiloane aimed to bring African spirituality into the public realm, government and corporate institutions. It is a *sine qua non* that African religion operates in these spheres. 'Every African carries this spirituality and morality into his or her workplace everyday (sic) of their lives' (Setiloane, 2012:2). Divinity is at work in all corners of society, in the totality of life. Africans are dissatisfied with Christianity in practice. They have a far deeper and more adequate sensitivity and perception of the divine at work in human relationships and society and nature at large (:3) rather than in a separate 'religious' sphere. Bediako (2004:xvi) sees African Religion as part of daily consciousness connected to everyday life, which contrasts with the European secular understanding separating religion from daily life. He argues that the West set the Gospel and culture against each other, which is evident in Chapter 1 of my thesis.

Walls (2017:144) observes the existence of primal religions in various parts of the world and records how the Old Testament chronicles conflicts between Yahweh and the local divinities (primal religions) who diverted attention from Yahweh. Walls' research reveals that many of

the fundamental beliefs and practices of ATR also occur outside Africa. Primal religions are earlier and anterior to the so-called world religions; they are also about the basics of religion, that is, the relationship of human beings with the transcendent world. Primal religions 'underlie all the other faiths, and often exist in symbiosis with them, continuing (sometimes more, sometimes less transformed) to have an active life within and around cultures and communities influenced by those faiths' (Walls 2002:119). Primal religions are found in Africa, the Indian sub-continent, Southeast Asia, Inner Asia, North and South America, Australia and the Pacific (:120). Primal religions seek the cause of mishaps, engage traditional healers to resolve the problem and prevent future reoccurrence. Asamoah-Giyadu avers that all Christians are 'primalists' underneath (2011:198).

#### 4.7 Prosperity and African Christians

Harries (2013) makes interesting observations which inform missionaries of the initial (and on-going?) attraction of Christianity to Africans, in particular the prosperity churches. The attraction is more complex than basic love of money. ATR is pragmatic, oriented to fullness of life in the present moment. It is concerned with wealth, healing, and 'how to put food on the table, and how to avoid death' (Harries 2013:2). Religion is not about ultimate questions, as is evident in responses of participants in this research or fitting in church attendance on the weekend with leisure pursuits. It encompasses all of life, whether it be disease, marriage problems, business failure. It has not lost influence as Christianity has lost its hegemony in the west. Africans join prosperity churches for some benefit and fear their illness, for example, will return if they leave the newly elected church. ATR well-being derives from rituals, western prosperity from Christianity.

#### 4.8 Recent Literature on God and the amaXhosa

Pauw (1975) grants that the God to the Xhosa Christians is now closer and more accessible and involved in daily affairs, but 'the mediation of the Son of God in their manner remains vague and neutral' (:77). The essential Christ image is lacking. Although church leaders and members confess the Triune God, there is the 'definite impression that Christ as the Son of God is not prominent in the thoughts of the average member' (:78).

The overall impression is that God is a Unitarian Father God, and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are inadequately linked to the notion of God. Xhosa Christians profess belief in Christ as man and God, Son of God, as well as the Holy Spirit, but the interior associations with these two persons are obscure and there is little 'conversation' between Xhosa Christians and Christ and the Holy Spirit (Pauw 1975:220). Setiloane (1986) states that ancestors were not mediators as it was not possible to mediate with the supreme being. He argues that the influence of Christian mission and writers such as JH Soga (1931) resulted in this incorrect notion that ancestors are now the mediators between God and humankind. He thinks that ancestors have lost influence to the more well-defined Christian God, and this is confirmed by my respondents. In Bantu society intermediaries were chosen to bridge the gap between those of authority and inferior members, hence this facilitated the notion of ancestors as intermediaries between God and people.

The Holy Spirit is ranked alongside the ancestors. Most of the orthodox churches only have a 'vague consciousness' of the Holy Spirit. Some parishioners see the Catholic Theology of the Communion of Saints as a legitimization of ancestor beliefs by the Catholic Church. Pauw (1975:225) attributes the continual underestimation of the Holy Spirit to 'the continual concern with ancestor spirits.'

A notably Catholic view of the ancestor belief system was seen in Reverend Bhengu, affiliated with the Assemblies of God, who tactfully rejected Xhosa traditional religion. He claimed that the ancestors and evil spirits 'are under God's control, and his power alone can save one' (Pauw 1975:294). He explicitly opposed ancestor rituals but was more tolerant towards male initiation. He saw the Gospel as relevant to the afterlife, as well as daily life issues (:295). Pauw (:301) notes that some see a relationship between the Holy Spirit and the ancestors: 'The Spirit becomes like the ancestors: they speak to one coming like a person in a dream: the Spirit is just like that.'

There is significantly more attention given to God than before Christian mission. This represents a shift from religion based on magico-religious forces (concerned with manipulating dynamistic flows of energy) to being more God-centred (:313). But the strong belief in witchcraft, sorcery, and ancestral demands, and the need for counter measures, remains, as does the belief in the ancestor rituals, which enable these measures to be taken.

Signs of secularism are in evidence in that the Xhosa people's worldview is no longer the same as religion because the economy and polity have tended to be separated from the general, holistic, religious lens through which the Xhosa see reality (:336).

Pauw (1975:338) argues that salvation offered by God in Christ, which the Church must proclaim, is a liberation which affects the whole person as an individual and as a member of society. He is convinced that at least some members of Xhosa Christian churches have 'experienced something of this liberation, however imperfectly.' My research concludes that the whole person has in general not been converted to Christ, he is one contender for sacred power amongst various others. Sipuka (2000:264) disagrees that the Xhosa worship ancestors.

Orobator (2018) seems to be comfortable with 'the mixing and matching' of elements of the two faith traditions: ATR and Christianity. Rather than branding this a 'syncretic proclivity, there is scope for a healthy form of religious coexistence and tolerance' in a broader context of fundamentalism, sectarianism and extremism found in Africa (Orobator 2018:74). He rejects terms such as syncretism and religious schizophrenia, which attempt to describe the duality in pejorative terms. He contends Africans that take their religion seriously, 'religion works for them,' [and the people] invent freely and creatively their terms and modes of engagement in religion' (:165). He approves of the ability to 'mix and match', to engage creatively with the two systems of belief. He (:171). does not identify theological clashes, which might occur, and he proffers a 'live and let live' attitude ATR partners with Christianity in this schema, there is not a competition but an amicable relationship between the two worldviews. I contend that this does not provide a complete answer to potential clashes, and that conviction in the superiority of revelation over culture needs to be conceded.

#### 4.9 Life Purpose, Priorities

Respondents to the questionnaire were to communicate firstly the most important things in their lives, their priorities. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls for belief in eternal life

through Christ, the sole agent of salvation, and to be united as one Church (1994:29, 30)<sup>51</sup>. This is a broad macro-objective, an overall orientation, a call to a new way of life.

The answers to the questions volunteered by the respondents about what encompassed the most important things in life were broad and un-reflected upon and possibly, the spontaneous replies would be different from those preceded by some deliberation. Many of the immediate responses manifested an anthropocentric perspective and a preoccupation with existential issues in line with the African concern about life in its fullness in the present moment. This is in contrast to broader and more abstract yearnings for eternal life, the salvation of one's soul or doing God's will.

A mature respondent was acutely concerned with children, the dangers of them succumbing to drugs, alcohol, crime, and more serious actions which proceed from this lifestyle, namely rape and killing. They were concerned with the effects of divorce on children, which could lead them to substance abuse. She thought that children needed to be taught in order to be good parents themselves. She also spoke about peace, and the need to love people. Children are seen as a gift from God. Another mature male respondent's order of concerns was God, children and their education. They contended with unemployment and the need to provide food and education for the children.

A young female participant saw life's purpose as having experiences in life. She wanted to reach their full potential and wanted to be more than just 'physical'. She saw the world as greedy and then chose family, laughter, and adventure as the three most important goals in their life. When she was asked her biggest worry in life was, her disquieting reply was: 'Well I am black, and I am female, so I'm worried about getting killed, raped' (C8). This statement reflects the high level of crime and gender-based violence in the country and a substantial degree of anxiety. They spoke about greed, but they added that 'it's never just a binary way of thinking of the world' (C1).

Another participant wanted to achieve purpose, to be decisive about their goals, and to discern whether to 'live your life to the full or limit yourself in so many things' (D1). A more

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<sup>51</sup> "CCC"; Jn 17:3; 1 Tm 2:4; Acts 4:12. Catechism of the Catholic Church

social goal was loving one another and taking care of one another. Challenges need to be met and their religious contribution was that we exist, 'we (are) God's creation first of all' (D1). The three major preoccupations in life were family, career 'And also serving God' (D1). They were concerned whether the chosen career would have adequate support systems, and with 'negative' comments made about them.

A spontaneous reply of a priest to the purpose of life was life is 'about living, living to the full with different experiences' (E1). The world is about taking part 'in whatever is happening in the world' (E1). These are very worldly goals but also included is to recognise the world as being of God's creation, so that we may be able 'to acknowledge him, to praise him...and that we give thanks to him' (E1). The three priorities in life are God, faith, and family.

Another priest favoured family, neighbour, and extended family, including the community. The world is all about relationships with oneself, with parents, with extended family and with the world around us, as well as with the living and the 'spiritually living'. A third priest chose God, family and Church as their priorities. Theirs was the only response which immediately put God as a priority. They were also moved by the levels of poverty and violence, a wider, more societal concern, as opposed to family concerns.

A financially challenged respondent saw meeting the challenges faced in life presented by poverty and family. There were no overt religious objectives. Priorities are family, children and finances. Children were important because they can help when the parent is ill, protect one, and assist financially. They need to be 'raised,' which was a challenge (G1). Their daughter was able to provide some financial assistance from her bursary money.

A mature respondent was clearly preoccupied with their twin grandchildren, neglected by their mother, and concerned that they would be tempted with substance abuse or gangs. They had managed thus far to steer the twins to second year university level. A mature person rated their main concerns as Church, work and family. Life was about service and preserving what was around us. They have fond memories of their experience in a Catholic school, but in their adolescence had an experience of prodigality, and then underwent a conversion experience which has led to them attending daily Mass and being installed as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, a duty they take very seriously.

The participants' worldviews are quite pragmatic, but half spontaneously volunteered God as one of their prime concerns, before any existential issues. However, God was usually mentioned subsequently by the others after prompting. Only two respondents made unprompted acknowledgment of ancestors, the 'spiritually living' as their top priorities. This was only one occasion of reference to ancestors emerging in the forefront of worldview. Two other participants, when prompted, saw it was important to have children so that the name of the ancestors will continue with the children. The question needed to be asked, in other words, there was only one spontaneous mention of the ancestors, referred to obliquely as the 'spiritually living'. God was frequently mentioned, but at this stage, the name of Jesus or Christ was only mentioned once, and the Holy Spirit was never mentioned unprompted. A respondent explained that their children saw them as Jesus, 'Jesus, I'm like God to them because they don't know everything' (B16). He was their caregiver and provided for them. At a St Anne's Sodality meeting (July 2007) I observed that a predominant problem faced by the Catholic female parishioners was related to children. This was the most frequently occurring concern. A mature female rated God, the ancestors and her family as her three most important priorities (K1). There were worldly goals such as adventure and living life to the full, but no conscious choice of eschatological objectives, but God is a constant in all replies as to why we were created. When existential crises occur, then there is immediate recourse to God, who is always ready to assist, according to the participants.

#### 4.10 God as the Centre of Faith

A respondent argued that we are in the world because of God and his love. A good reply, as we understand that God did not need creation for his happiness, he was perfectly happy within himself but created us that we might enjoy the gift of life and aspire to happiness imperfectly in this world but perfectly in the next. Our purpose is to know about God.

We are here in this world:

in order to fulfil God-given duties or given privileges, in order to raise our families, so that we may look after our children, look after our families, look after ah, our neighbours, look after our church mates, look after our friends, look after everything that is given, even the animals around us, I think that's what God created us for (B1).

Here humanity is seen as a steward of creation, with responsibilities that extend beyond familial relationships to the animal kingdom. There is no pure eschatological motive here. The responsibility to 'fulfil God-given duties or given privileges' implies a measure of concern with future judgment, of responsibility, of looking to a future date when performance of duties will be adjudicated. The task of 'looking after' is one of the present moment, of caring for the now, the African preoccupation with life in its fullness, in full abundance. As for children, we must 'raise and mould them (the children) with the word of God' (B1). God is the most important thing in life: 'So God is to me the greatest thing to me in my life in any way. I praise it every day' (B3).

A mature male respondent was grateful that he woke up every day 'because there are people (sic) they are sleeping that did not wake up' (B2b). God is the centre of his faith, and he prays every day to God and the ancestors (B2b). A young respondent was unsure of who God was for them: 'I'm still trying to figure that out. I don't want to look at God, mm, mm, don't do this or you are going to hell' (C4). It seems they have been deflected from God and even repelled by the notion of a God as a severe punisher.

A priest said that God was supreme: 'God is the most important person, and certainly for me it is God who is first who is our Father and creator, and then the ancestors will come second' (E3). There was no spontaneous mention of Christ. God is the centre of his faith. Life force comes directly from God not the ancestors (E4). Another priest referred to God as a supreme being and creator; 'the one who use (sic) everything for our best' (F6). We are here in this world as a gift from the supreme being (F1). One priest put God before worldly concerns, unlike many of the other spontaneous replies, which were prefaced with daily life issues or problems.

A mature-aged woman also saw God as the centre of her faith 'because if you don't believe, if you don't pray, the answer will never come' (A6). Her first reaction to a problem is to turn to God in prayer. A young female interviewee also saw God as the centre of her faith, as did a young male, and he spends most of his time praying to God and secondarily to ancestors. (D3). A middle-aged woman said God was the centre of her faith and she turned to God for help because of financial pressures. A priest labelled God as the supreme being, creator, 'the



one who use (sic) everything for our best' (F6). Asked which of the Trinity he saw as the centre of his faith, he replied 'The Spirit who helps me to understand the Father and the Son' (F12).

Although God was spontaneously chosen by half the respondents as the most important agent in life, all the others subsequently referred to God. God was at the forefront of their consciousness, a daily and instinctive awareness, before the ancestors although the latter were quickly referenced when mishaps arose. This attentiveness is far removed from the traditional view that because God is distant and unconcerned, when the ancestors predominated as the primary religious agents. The ancestors have been relegated to second place although some would put science (for example, a medical doctor) as second in the case of illness, and thereafter the ancestors should the Western biomedical model not prove effective. The three age-groupings did not exhibit major variances in outlook. The similarity of many of the answers of the respondents substantiates the interpretation that there is considerable coherence in this worldview amongst the participators. However, the one young respondent was somewhat ambivalent about the view that ancestors are constantly at work in their lives.

#### 4.11 Names for God

Most participants agreed that *Qamata* was the name used by the traditional Xhosa for God, and there was no apparent awareness that this was of Khoi-San origin. *uThixo* (also of Khoi-San origin), was chosen by missionaries without any conscious regard for potential cultural encumbrances. There were some more personal nomenclatures among the participants that projected intimacy and affectivity.

The Xhosa name for God is *Qamata*, a name formerly used by Xhosa people before Christian mission. This was agreed upon by all the respondents. It has been a term used by the 'deep' Xhosa; those steeped in Xhosa culture. Most respondents saw *Qamata* as the same God as the Christian God, although one averred that *Qamata* is a different God to *uThixo*, where the latter is understood as the conventional name for God today amongst the Xhosa. One senior parishioner (conversation March 2001) thought that *Qamata* was different from the Christian God. *uThixo* is also derived from the Khoi-San peoples, and it was chosen by the missionaries

as the correct name to address the Christian God. Ngoetjane (2002) claims that the choice by missionaries of *Modimo* for the Sotho people was incorrect because *Modimo* was encumbered with many Sotho cultural characteristics, which do not correspond with those of the Christian God. Harries (2002) warns against adopting vernacular terms without knowing their fuller meanings with their concealed cultural subtleties.

A young female saw God as *uThixo*, as well as *Bawo*, (Father). The Biblical name for God was Yahweh. She said that there were no other gods. A mature male labelled God as *nKulukulu*, *uThixo* and 'Jesu, which is Jesus' word' (B3). He always prays to God and the Son and the Holy Spirit: 'I always pray them together' (B3). For him there is only one God for all people that incorporates 'Jah', the Rastafarian God as well.

A young male's personal names for God included 'Creator, my Father, my best friend' (D4). He added: 'And someone that I look up to each and every day, or every second of my life' (D5). He sees God as looking like a human being, as we are made in God's image and likeness. He uses *uThixo* as the Xhosa name for the Christian God. Another designation for God was *Somandla*, (from *amandla*- power) (D7). The Biblical name for God according to him was *Messiah* (D5).

A priest's personal name for God is '*ikhaka*' a shield, literally a person or thing that protects (Fisher 1985:579). More fully, God was '*ikhaka isiqalo*' (first shield). Here God is a protector. He also saw God as *ihlathi*, a forest. (E6). 'God for me, would look like *ihlathi* or *umthi* [tree]' (E5). A popular appellation for God, *uBawo* (Father God) was also one he used. 'And uBawo is someone that we pay a, a great respect to, you know, simply of who he is to us' (E4).

You know, *umthi*, I think that is a better one. *Umthi*, *umthi* a tree, um, you know I look at trees which you know are always green and have life. And I look at that and say this is the picture of God, because God is always, God is life. And when I need, if it's hot, and I need to go under the shade or something, I can go there, I mean I can even hide as well, you know, so...(E6).

This is a very personal, intimate image of God, a God of life, of providing solace (shade). As for Biblical names, he volunteered *uThixo*, *Jehova*, *Ndikhoyo* ('I Am') (E6). *Qamata* is the same as *uThixo*, which is the name for God chosen by missionaries. There are no other gods, according to this respondent.

A middle-aged respondent admitted that 'Actually to be honest, I don't know the difference between God and Jesus,' although they read the Bible (G16). They said they saw Jesus as an old man. As to the Biblical name of God they volunteered 'Holy Spirit' (G6). They were aware of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The latter is everywhere and is of the same importance as Jesus. Asked who was more important of the three persons of the Trinity, they chose the Holy Spirit, and when asked again, they chose the Father (G8). Recounting an experience of God, they said 'It looked like an old person' (G5). They thought that 'Qamata is the olden person that people used to believe in the olden days' (G8). He is different from *uThixo*, according to them.

A priest volunteered the following names for God: 'Emmanuel, Creator, *Yahweh*, *Adonai*' (F7). He recalled that as a young person God was represented as scary, but that was now a thing of the past. He confirmed that *uThixo* was the acceptable name for God for the Xhosa people, and he did not think there were any other gods. Another priest agreed with this and saw God as Father, as *Somandla*, and saw God as a parent who understood his limitations. A mature participant did not concur that *uThixo* was the appropriate word for God, it did not convey enough respect:

But for me, when I say *uThixo*, I don't feel I give enough respect. It is better when I say *Jehovah*, it's much better to me, but when I say *uThixo*, it's like I don't give enough respect really. It's how I feel, father (I11).

A mature parishioner described God as follows: 'God is my anchor, is my life, is my everything. He is my anchor. Yes, I can call it that way' (K2).

These are rich terms describing God. God is an object of love and a central, dominant part of the participants' lives. God intervenes in their affairs, at times in response to petitions and at other times gratuitously as an omnipresent God aware of the circumstances of his creatures.

#### 4.12 Images of God

Among my research participants, there were scant visual images of God and no signs of a frightening God or distant Supreme Being, in line with the former view of God, but rich qualities are ascribed to God.

A mature woman revealed that she was not fearful of God or Jesus, but she respected them. The Christian God is not the awesome, frightening, distant God that the Xhosa image of God portrays, nor like the same unapproachable supreme being of the Sotho, *Modimo*, whom Ngoetjana (2002) depicts in his thesis as IT to distinguish IT from Christian partiality in labelling God.

A mature male participant had no visual image of God. 'Yes, I know I have a picture of Jesus, but God...' (B4). A young respondent was unsure of who God was for them: 'I'm still trying to figure that out. I don't want to look at God, mm, mm, don't do this or you are going to hell' (C4). It seems they have been deflected from God or even repelled by the notion of a God of severe punishment. Perhaps this is in line with the postmodern worldview that sees freedom as supreme, and moral pronouncements as arrogant, presumptuous, imperialistic, meddlesome.

A middle-aged respondent, in response to what God looked like, said:

He's like a white man. Because the face, that's how we believe. Maybe we going to the Roman Catholic churches. Yes, so as we see the father (priest) and the bishops, so we believe [God] is like that (G5-6).

When asked if they saw Jesus as a 'white man's' God, they replied, 'It's not true because Jesus is for everyone; white, black, green or purple or coloured' (G17). However, the experience of white missionaries has influenced their image of God to some extent. In general, God does not inspire a specific visual image. A mature male did not see Jesus as too much of a 'white' God, or too western.

A middle-aged priest saw God as a parent:

Like a parent eh, that understands and guides, um, that inspires me to, to do the right thing so that I don't, in any way, disappoint and that I am willing to serve. So *ja* (yes) that's the parent that even when sometimes I fall short, the parent understands because the parent has been with me and so understands some of my limitations (H3).

He is a God who gives second chances to his people even after they have failed Him in some way. A mature male participant came to realise that 'God really loved me and was with me all of the time.' A mature parishioner related:

to my imagination...he is a big man, with beard, white beard, yes, because to me he is an old person. A grown up, I cannot say old, a grown-up man, big, caring, always with a smile...*ja* (yes)" (K3).

These are warm, affective images of a kindly and generous God, always present, ever attentive.

#### 4.13 Presence of God

All participants felt God was near and omnipresent, at work with his creatures, present in their daily circumstances and present in their rescues from danger. A God who 'every day gives us blessings to do what we do, the blessing of being alive' (K3).

A male of mature age felt that God was always present even during the interview with me and even when sleeping at night. God is omnipotent; without God 'I don't think there is anything that can survive' (B1). This has the trace of a cosmic conception of a God who sustains all things in existence (Hb 1:3b). With belief in God everything should be easy. He is a God-centred person more than a problem centred person. God over-rides human issues. God is in control:

But God is working in our consciousness, even the guys that are doing bad things. God is working in the consciousness to keep them from destroying this universe (B3).

God has more power than the *sangomas*, he has the greatest power on earth:

that is why even those witchcraft (sic) they pray to God to kill you. 'They ask God: God, give me power. Instead of asking Satan because they know there's someone who's got the power of all things (B12).

Here the respondent avers that even witches turn to God to support their perverse practices recognising the source of greatest power residing in the omnipotent God.

It is God who gives life day after day. This question was raised because there is a more recent trend by some scholars to say that God mediates life through the ancestors. A young male sees God as the centre of his faith and experiences God in everyday circumstances. He is unstinting in attributing daily experiences to God's providence. When asked how he could identify the nature of this experience he said it was a 'spiritual thing; 'when you feel some sort of peace within yourself then you believe that, okay, yes, God is there...' (D4). A respondent who was kidnapped at a young age, was in a shack for two days and they prayed

to God with the result that 'Well I felt, you know, the fact that they didn't do any harm which they could have, I felt (God) was right there present' (E4).

Most respondents claimed that God was near. Some said God was 'everywhere' (G5). God is always there: 'in my mind; in my heart' (G16). This is an emotive statement speaking of real affectivity as did other the responses that were rich with gratitude and warmth. This same respondent was confident that God is 'a Father, he's a protector' (G5). When a priest was asked what name he gave to God he replied:

Well, um, I choose to understand God as an understanding Father, not just a Father but an understanding Father. Not a discipliner but someone who will always believe in a second chance; someone who has a better picture (F7).

He also spoke of God's presence:

He is near when we need him or when we are really in need or lonely. Sometimes he is far but it's not really far, but he allowing (sic) things to happen because he knows at the end they'll work for our best (F7).

#### 4.14 God as Provider and Protector

Examples and stories abound of God's generous and timeous interventions despite the self-confessed flaws of some of the respondents who expressed gratefulness for blessings received despite their blemishes. A mature female said that on one occasion God worked in her house; the respondent was sure of that. The power of God was manifest, and on prompting, the ancestors were also seen to be working with God. The participant came to this conclusion after three criminals entered her house and left empty-handed.

A mature male participant sees God as a provider, a God who is 'above everything' and despite the fact that he had not had full-time employment for years, 'I get jobs here and there; I never sleep without food' (B2b). God is provident to society, as he sees God's greatest act as a provider:

People are not sleeping without food. God is looking after people, they are not sleeping without food, are safe, the justice (sic) is prevailing (B3).

God is also a protector who rescued him and his wife from an evil experience (B3): 'So God is to me the greatest thing on earth that is looking after, after all of us, not just me alone' (B3). This is a high praise for one who battles continuously with joblessness. For this person, God's will is unassailable, even: 'If somebody, even if he's shot with twenty bullets, but if God does not want you to die, you don't die, because you are God's people' (B17).

A young female participant saw God as her provider because when she was sick; she somehow 'pulled through' her senior school exams (C4). A protecting, delivering, provident God was clearly delineated in stories or incidents of mishaps. There is mystery in these stories, but delivery from serious mishap by God was the recurring pattern. God is a rescuer from danger; one who is omnipresent; one who hears and answers prayers. God protects his people from enemies in the invisible world 'He is protecting us' (G4). A respondent said: 'He is keeping me in prayers;' a way of saying that God constantly supported them in their state of poverty (G5). They added 'He has protected me. He is keeping me alive' (G5). Again, in relation to the invisible world, God is also protecting them (G4).

A middle-aged priest gratefully described God in the following manner:

...he has been very understanding, like uh, a caring Father. In all of the good and bad that I have done he kept pushing me to the best side (F6).

A God who does not give up on him, it seems, despite some wrong turns. Another priest was grateful for God's intervention when he was transferred from the country to Cape Town, and his wife was surprisingly offered a job in Cape Town. While most of the interviewees engaged with ancestors, although only secondarily, one mature male dealt only with God to resolve problems.

#### 4.15 God's Greatest Acts

One priest took a macro-view and identified God's greatest actions as creation and salvation. The rest chose personal stories of God's intervention in cases of theft, unemployment, kidnap, protection from bad company, a conversion experience, dealing with children and interventions through other people. There was considerable gratefulness and praise of God's mediation on behalf of his needy and dependent flock.

A mature female described how she was defrauded of R2 300, and a benefactor kindly donated this sum to her: 'God is always there' she claimed. A mature male said: 'So God is to me the greatest thing on earth that is looking after, after all of us, not just me alone' (B3). For many the question around God's greatest act was interpreted at the level of their personal experience not in terms of broader soteriology. This respondent attributed getting a job in 1995, 'fresh from college', to God as well as many other occasions when he was offered temporary employment (B9). He believed he was not prone to 'bad luck' because God was 'always with me' (B9). He praises God for his marvellous providence. A young respondent identified God's greatest act for her as health, because 'besides being sick now, I've always been a sick child' (C4). She also accredited being able to write her senior school exams despite being sick to God's intervention.

When a young respondent was asked about what God had done for him he responded:

He's done so many things. He firstly has given me first of all, a gift of life to have been able to wake up every day and do everything I do which is positive in my life (D4).

He displays considerable gratefulness and attributes to God his freedom to 'do which is positive in my life' (D4). It is God who brings life day after day. God's greatest acts are kindness, lovingness, humanity and humility (D4). God is always nearby (D4). Again, there is the witness of gratefulness and an awareness of a provident, proactive God.

A priest, was asked if there was anything else of great importance, and he replied:

Um, *ja* (yes), I think most important is, is saving me and also just being present in my life. Even today I acknowledge him as present in my life, being part of my life, yes (E4).

God's greatest act is love, compassion; and he is present not far away.

Another priest saw God's greatest act as personal involvement in his life, and not giving up on him: 'it's even using our mistakes and our faults...' 'to educate us, and to strengthen us for the future. Instead of giving up or side-lining us because of what we have done to fall' (F6). The respondent seems to have experienced some disappointments some which he blames himself for, but God intervened in his life giving him 'a second chance' (F7), not being a 'discipliner'.



A middle-aged priest saw God's greatest act as a universal one not a personal experience. The act was 'creation and salvation' (H3). This is an answer one can expect from a theologically trained priest. The two other priests who participated in this research referred to personal events in their lives whereas this priest took a global view. A mature male also took a personal experience as God's greatest act. He experienced a profound conversion, from a degree of prodigality to becoming one who attends daily Mass and has been commissioned as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. God helped him 'to rediscover myself. When I discover myself then I realise the true meaning of life after that thing that happened to me'. Asked what God had done for him, he replied:

Many things, father. There were so many things God has done for me. He has given me life, father, he has given me life. And the second best thing that God has gave me was to look back into my life and to see all the things that I thought were tests or hardship, all along they were there, they were there only because God loved me. (17).

Before his conversion no one listened to him, but now people sought him out. He also confessed that 'although all these years I was saying bad things about God...things about religious people, but he never removed his light from me' (18- 19).

A mature female participant was most grateful to God for helping her to steer her two twin grandchildren through school and successfully resisting the temptations of substance abuse, promiscuity and gangs. They were in their senior school year but have since then progressed to second year university. She felt God answered most of her prayers.

#### 4.16 Ancestors and God

A dual belief system is described in which the actions of ancestors especially in relation to their capacity to chastise are unconsciously disconnected from God, who is nevertheless seen as the nucleus of faith. The participants may circumvent God due to various circumstances and interact preferentially with the ancestors. God emerges as the foremost one to claim sacred attention, but the ancestors maintain a robust presence in the religious consciousness of the respondents. Taylor (1963/2000:138) sees the African God's detachment and remoteness as a creation of people inspired by fear, and the more remote God is the greater the resort to the ancestors and deities and the world of 'magic'. As I note below, this

remoteness and fearful semblance has changed substantially and there are now very affirmative images of God.

A mature female participant avers that ancestors convey messages to God, but it does not mean 'we put aside the message of God' (A1). God and the ancestors answer prayers; they both open the way. 'The ancestors and God, they working (sic) together' (A2). The ancestors see God's presence in their lives in practical ways. In the description of an attempted robbery where thieves left empty-handed, the respondent concluded that the ancestors had worked with God. If there is a problem with the ancestors, 'before we do anything we pray, then you nominate somebody to take all this to God' (A29). While the ancestors have a privileged locus, it does not mean 'we put aside the message of God' (A1).

A mature male, acknowledging that God is 'above everything but because of that Holy Spirit, I always bind, I always include my ancestors because I believe my ancestors are the Holy Spirit' (B17). A further comment qualified this assertion: 'my ancestors are like the Holy Spirit because they are spirit, they are living as spirit now' (B17). He asks God 'to work with my ancestors' because God is working through them because they are spirit, and 'they are looking after me, working hand in glove with God' (B3). After emerging unscathed from an evil incident, he invoked God and the ancestors (B2).

When asked whether it was God or the ancestors who give life every day, this same participant indicated that God gave life directly not via the ancestors. However 'as well as through the ancestors if there are things that he's unable to reach me, but he try (sic) by all means to reach me every day' (B3). Perhaps two issues are interspersed here. I was concerned as to whether sustaining life force is seen to come from the ancestors, according to some scholars, and not directly from God. The participant's reference to the ancestors was in relation to their communication of messages. 'When I dream about my ancestors, I said, okay, God has now told the ancestors, now they are giving me direction because I believe in dreams as well' (B3). God uses the ancestors to communicate to him.

He does not fear the ancestors but respects them and does not want to work against them as they provide protection (B15). If they 'are tired of you, like God who gives us ample opportunity without forcing us to follow Jesus, they can neglect you because you have ignored their warnings. And then you must wake up' (B15). This raises the issue as to whether

ancestors can do things in their own right, even causing death. The assertions that ancestors can put a person 'into a wheelchair' (B16), and 'I believe they can hurt you in any way' illustrate aptly the power ancestors are believed to hold, which challenges his assertion that he does not fear the ancestors (B16). Respondents generally are primarily oriented to God, but there are contradictions when it comes to gauging the powers of the ancestors who are seen to act autonomously from God.

A young female, referring to a robbery she experienced, explained 'I prayed to God, and I asked my ancestors to guide me' (C9). In case of any mishap, she would turn firstly to God and then the ancestors (C10). She would ask her ancestors for help or say to her cousin (her ancestor) 'please pray for me' (C10). Her awareness of her late cousin reveals perhaps an instinctive identification with life after death, of ancestral presence. God is definitely higher than the ancestors: 'so it's like God, and then the angels and the ancestors, basically the deceased family members who are like your guardian angels' (C3). Anecdotally, it has been noted more than a few times that people have experienced an awareness of the presence of departed family members. This lends some credence to the belief that they are in touch with us both as ancestors and as guardians. Elsewhere, this same respondent, expresses some ambivalence as to ancestral intervention.

A young male participant was asked why he would ask the ancestors for help instead of God. He replied: 'Because it's in my culture to actually believe in them, and, and also most of the Bible sometimes mentions the ancestors you know like David for instance' (D11). Despite his young age, the ancestors are clearly a strong force in his life although he is basically God centred. We might have expected that as a modern urban young person he would have deviated from this feature of traditional religion. There is an interesting coupling of the Bible to the ancestors where he deemed David to be one of the ancestors, and a coupling of the ancestors with religion. He is not unfamiliar with the Bible.

He confessed that he was fearful of the ancestors (D14), even though he had maintained that the ancestors cannot harm their family. For assistance for with daily issues he prays to God, Jesus and the ancestors in that order (D15-D16). Jesus is higher than the ancestors. The hierarchy in the invisible world is described by him as follows:

In my belief, um, God he's on the top of everything. He is the one who is charge of, of the ancestors themselves. So it's like believing in God and also ancestors and then the angels (D3).

A priest addressed problems by praying to God first and the ancestors second (E17). Another priest prays mostly to God, and from the ancestors he expects 'some sort of help' (F16). He insisted that he prays *with* ancestors, not *to* them. If he experiences a problem, he goes first to God and 'I may ask the ancestors to accompany me, to pray with me' (F15). The ancestors get their power from God. A middle-aged female participant thought that prayers are better answered by God than the ancestors. She believed God protected her from serious harm in an accident, 'and maybe the ancestors, the way we believe' (G3). She used the word *abaphantsi* (those below, the ancestors) spontaneously, without prompting. Asked if the ancestors or traditional healers could protect a person from dangers like poison, she replied 'Only God can do that.' But when I asked about the ancestors, she said, 'The ancestors can protect you, yes' (G12). God has the most power over evil spirits, she avers.

A priest thought that God and the ancestors bring daily life, but 'even when it's through the ancestors, it's still God' (H3). This is a bold statement, locating ancestors as mediators of life with God. Theologically, Jesus is the mediator of life sustaining all things in existence. He credits the ancestors with considerable power with this assertion, which maybe he did not fully think through, as the following statement suggests:

I think, I think that's my, that's my take. Even when...I would say I have tapped into that spirit but it's, it's still in God's realm. That's what I understand, eh (H3).

He refers to tapping into the ancestral spirit, as if this is his way of communication with this spirit.

When he was asked if the ancestors are less powerful than Jesus (and by implication, God) he said: 'Of course!' (H15). He added that they have 'way less' power. All their power comes from God. Asked who helped with issues such as health, love, finances and family problems he said: 'I think God' (H17). Then he was asked if he included petitioning the ancestors, and he replied that he did not. He limited ancestral intervention 'into witchcraft and evil not getting into me' (H17). The ancestors are there for cultural reasons within a world of invisible spirits. But I opine that it is not only the African realm, but the whole world which lives in a world of good

and evil spirits including the presence of our forebears, but somewhat different in constitution and roles.

A mature male who has experienced a conversion from a prodigal life to a devout Catholic claimed that he never turned to the ancestors for help. Nevertheless, he is insistent that he saw a snake in his house, which his relatives identified as a family ancestor. A mature female's involvement with her ancestors was to pray and talk to her grandmother, as well as attending family rituals as a matter of duty. She believes God is more concerned about people than are ancestors.

#### 4.17 Prayer

Prayer is a very important category or theme, one of the consistent means by which respondents objectify their faith in God. Participants were regular in prayer, in the form of supplications firstly to God, and then to the ancestors. Petitionary prayer dominates the relationship with God, who is seen as principal provider of solutions to existential issues. Respondents revealed gratefulness for prayers answered. There was less emphasis on praise and worship in prayer life. However, petition is a form of praise, because we perceive God as having the power to grant requests. Ancestor rituals include thanksgiving to the living-dead for blessings believed to arise from their interventions. The Eucharist seems to be less seen as thanksgiving but is rather a vehicle for blessings.

The Rosary was prayed by at least three of the respondents. Parishioners and priests expressed much confidence in God as one who answers many prayers. Bahemuka (1989/2003:9) corroborates this devotion to prayer: 'Prayer is seen as the centre of worship and Africans are men and women of prayer.' This author detects a real and loving, ever-present protector God in prayers to the Creator, and maintains that Christ can be found 'in the midst of this intimacy' (Mugambi, Magesa 2003:11), but as to the hidden presence of Christ, I do not find this readily apparent amongst the respondents.

A mature female recounted how she is always praying to God, who is always listening to her prayers, and answers prayers 'a lot'. She explained how someone used her bank card details to withdraw R2 300 and after sitting down and praying a man became aware of her problem and donated the same sum to her. One of the observers, a bank teller, noted that: This is truly

a miracle that you will never forget in your life' (A7). In another incident three criminals left her house empty handed, and she concluded that God had 'worked' in that house. The power of God was manifest, and on prompting, she acknowledged that the ancestors worked with God in that situation.

She is a God-centred person whose first reaction to a problem is to turn to God, who is a problem solver, provider of solutions, and dispenser of assistance. 'Through prayer you will get everything' (A27). If you have no money, a visitor may come to your house with something to eat, and 'That was the answer of God when I pray' (A27). 'Through prayer you will get everything' (A27). 'God, because {he} send someone to help you' (A27). God helps with home problems such as a husband who is abusing a wife; 'when the only thing that will help me is just to go to God and pray' (A28). There is a profound belief in petitionary prayer, with God as the first resort when daily and more exceptional problems occur.

A mature male also saw God as the one who assists with daily problems, such as health, finances and love problems. God is the centre of his faith; every morning and night he prays to God and the ancestors. A young male participant addressed prayers for healing to God and the ancestors. He said that for healing, 'Just make sure to stick to our praying sessions and mostly pray wherever we go' (D13). Those who assist with daily problems are God, Jesus (after a prompt) and the ancestors. For all types of daily issues God is the prime source of help, and in the case of a medical problem, a doctor as well. He also asks his mother for help. A priest's first choice of assistance is God and then the ancestors. A middle-aged female participant noted with regard to all types of problems, 'Only God can help you' (G13). She did include ancestors in her prayers, but God was central. Her struggle with poverty compels her to turn to God recurrently.

A priest resorts to God to address problems and 'I may ask the ancestors to accompany me, to pray with me' (F16). Another priest also turned to God for general problems and to Jesus for certain issues. A mature female participant turned faithfully to God in prayer for all occasions, although she also spoke and prayed to her late grandmother. She also attended family rituals as a matter of duty. She believed that God is more concerned about people than are the ancestors. God is a saviour 'always there for you'. A mature male participant said his first reaction to a problem was to pray (I13). In his less mature days, he might have consulted

a traditional healer if he had had the money. He experienced a conversion from a prodigal life to being a devout Catholic. He claimed that he never turned to the ancestors for help, nevertheless, he is insistent that he saw a snake in his house, which his relatives identified as a family ancestor. For him too, a mysterious world exists.

#### 4.18 Evil

This topic is discussed more fully in Chapter 2 above. There was little evidence of a Manichaean philosophy of two principles of creation and two creators, and respondents mostly rejected the notion that there were other gods.

When a priest was asked about who made evil things such as snakes and *amaphela* (cockroaches) he replied that God made all creation, but he could not understand why there was evil; he stated, ‘...because I am not close to God. He is the one who has got the bigger picture. Nothing came into existence without the understanding of God, the creation of God’ (F12). A mature male participant understood ‘evil’ creatures such as snakes and, cockroaches in terms of the ‘ecosystem’, and as being there for us to learn about difficult situations in life (I12).

A priest was dubious of the theology that God gave his angels a test, which some failed (Rev 12:7-10; where war breaks out in heaven), as this would mean that God is not all knowing: ‘If God is all knowing he was supposed to know that if I created this, they will be tempted and choose this’ (F12). But God also knew that Adam and Eve would ‘fail’ their test. He feels we cannot blame wrongful actions on Satan, even if we are tempted.

It’s even why I have a problem when people speak about Satan: he is a fallen angel, and then his side is fighting with God and he will use us. That will mean that we don’t take responsibility of our own actions. We will say that I was tempted by God. (F12).

He seems to need people to have a sense of responsibility for their actions, not to blame God or the Devil. He notes that at times we ourselves tempt ourselves ‘or put ourselves in that situation of temptation’ (F13). A middle-aged female participant coped with evil spirits and witches in the following manner: ‘The only thing that helps me is to kneel down, read the Bible and pray’ (G13). A priest was confident that God had created evil spirits: ‘I think God

created everything, eh, and so they are part of God's creation' (H2). God has the most power over evil spirits.

#### 4.19 Politics

Noting the then Deputy Prime Minister Cyril Ramaphosa's public resort to the ancestors for help to restore the fortunes of the African National Party in 2018, the issue of whether respondents incorporated politics into their relationship with God arose.

A middle-aged female participant did not think God or the ancestors were concerned with whom people vote for. A mature male respondent thought God's power extended to the realm of politics, because 'even if it's a political party it wouldn't be there if God did not allow it to be here' (B17). He added: 'Even if you are going to be president you must pray to God because it is God who put you there' (B17). He was adamant that it is God who appoints people to such positions not the people. A young respondent felt God did not come into political decisions although he thought that the ancestors might care for whom one votes (D16). There was no immediate support for the contention that the ancestors influenced life at a broader, societal level.

#### 4.20 Other

A young respondent understood that the Xhosa always believed in a God. This is also found in the writings of African theologians.

I remember my Xhosa teacher in high school used to tell us all that we as, as Black people, when white people came to Africa, they were like this is God, this is the Bible. We had God, it wasn't like we were heathens; we just call God in a different language (C7).

This respondent also observed an interesting custom about praying to God. In addressing God, one uses:

*uThixo, Bawo*, sometimes God, depending on what you are praying about. There is a joke among the Black people, that if you pray in English, then your problems are small. So it's like you speaking in your mother tongue that you know you are in deep trouble, and you need God right now (C5).



It is probable that this correlates with Pauw's research which concludes that ATR is used for contemporary issues, things of the body, of real life, while Christian prayer tends to be about spiritual matters, and life after death.

A priest refers to God as the Supreme Being because this is the understanding of the African person, as opposed to the Christian God, but they are the same. It is interesting that he makes the distinction, and there is a strong impression of pride in African tradition, even though he has been exposed to two Christian seminaries, marked by their own brand of western culture and traditions.

He believed in a God of diversity:

...of diversity, hence, um, um, I won't be limited to say God is like this. I will say God is in all of us, in our images. You know this if you, if you look at the, the, at the many churches that we have now who worship God, I think this is the kind of God who is flexible (F7).

It is possible that his move from one denomination to another, occasioned this conclusion.

A mature male has the following to say about the mother of Jesus (I9):

Mother, Mother Mary, father, is one of the most important aspects of my faith, because I should think Mary is powerful, and so strong and powerful to have given birth to Jesus Christ, father. It must have taken a special somebody. A special someone, father.

He prays the Rosary every day. He is always praying the prayer the 'Hail Mary'. For him it is a powerful prayer. He wears a rosary around his neck.

It is of course interesting to reflect on a priest's statement that 'rituals have nothing to do with God'. This was said in a manner that suggests that they belong to two different, mutually exclusive realms and should not be put together (F16). There seems to be a strong sense of pride in African traditions, as well as keeping them separate from Christianity, a type of 'hands off' attitude. This seems a pity, as mission should seek to integrate life, culture and Christianity. It intimates that some traditionalists do not want Christianity to intrude into ATR. Inculturation requires that culture and Christianity engage in dialogue.

#### 4.21 The Bible

Since God wants all to be saved and know the truth (1 Tm 2:4), that is, of Christ and through him (Jn 14:6), it proffers divine revelation to promote access to the Father, through Christ, in a manner which incorporates cultural worldviews. A few questions about the Bible were addressed to the participants to form an impression of their awareness of the role of revelation in the Old Testament reaching its fulfilment in the New Testament as a measure of how Christ-centred they were. Their responses are summarised below.

A mature respondent chose the event of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as their favourite part. Here Jesus found his disciples sleeping when he was praying in the garden. The disciples did not fulfil the command to pray and to stay awake because their faith was weak. They were worried, knowing what Jesus had to face, and though they were tired; they were supposed to wait with him. (A14-A15). They also favoured the Psalm 23, 'The Lord is My Shepherd'. Even when you walk in the dark, God is there for you, and you feel strong. There was a further reference to a Psalm about being bound and God loosening you, but he could not identify the correct one.

Another mature respondent selected the Gospel of John as his favourite part of the Bible, but he seemed to confuse John with John the Baptist (B17). However, he correctly identified John as the author of the passage where Jesus assures us that the house is not full at the Father's mansion (Jn 14:1-6 (B7)). Because of John our eyes are opened.

A young participant referred to:

the Scripture on treasures in jars of clay. At the end it says, um, for our light...no momentary troubles are a...I actually know this, but I don't know why it's not coming to mind right now" (C7). In 2 Cor 4:7: 'But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware...' (NJB 1985:1914).

The passage continues that despite many hardships, we never despair, and the 'temporary, light burden of our hardships is earning for us an utterly incomparable, eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor 4:17). This selection indicates an experience of personal suffering and a passage which provides consolation. They reveal that they have experienced a chronic affliction. This young person has discovered a very appropriate passage to parallel their physical condition.

Another possible Bible link I volunteer is in 1 Pt 4:13: 'in so far as you share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, so that you may enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed'.

Another young respondent saw the New Testament as their favourite part of the Bible 'because it involving what is happening now in our current time' (D7). Their preferred book is Revelation, 'because it's basically telling you what's going to happen in the future and what we should prepare for' (D7). They stick to this choice. It can be noted that Revelation is open to considerable misinterpretation, written with many codes, depicted in dramatic, codified form, which conceal its actual meaning. For him, the Gospels 'basically tell us about the love of Jesus and how we should also lead to live that kind of life' (D8).

A priest selected the New Testament as his favourite part of the Bible, particularly the Gospels, which are 'easy to relate to, to follow, and also to relate with' (E9). He saw God as the most important person in the bible followed by Jesus. Another priest chose the part where Joseph was thinking of separating from Mary because she was pregnant, and the Angel of God explained what had transpired and Joseph accepted this (Mt 1:18-21) (F11). This seems to reflect his personal life because he married a woman who already had a child, which he accepted with the aid of this biblical validation. Personal experience seems to have dictated his choice, not purely theological considerations. He continued: 'And I think that in South Africa that is a good image that men might use too, to need to understand because sometimes you'll find a woman already with a child' (F11).

A different priest, as to the most important part of the Bible, explained that:

I would think it's the Psalms even though the New Testament is supposed to be the most important, it's the Psalms. Whether you are in a good spirit or bad spirit you sing with them. Yes, because as Africans we sing when whether we are happy, whether we are sad, whether we are *toyi toying* (an African dance which expresses protest and other emotions) for money, whether we are coming from the bush. So Psalms are the right image because that's what the Jews used to do, whether they were in exile or before exile or after exile (F11).

A parishioner in Langa (Black township in Cape Town) volunteered that when Africa is happy, Africa sings, and when Africa is sad, Africa sings.

A middle-aged respondent favoured the *Indumiso*, the Psalms: 'Because, that's how he keeps me...that's how he keeps me having faith. Believing in that God, that's how it protects my

spirit' (G9). The most important person in the Bible for her was Jesus, and after him Abraham. A middle-aged priest prefers the Old Testament because 'I, I think I identify with the journey of that nation' (H6). This does not suggest a lack of familiarity with the Christ Event as elsewhere he delineates the Cross Event as central. 'And the fact that I think God mostly speaks to the nation and not more so to individuals, but even if there's an individual it also relates to the nation' (H7). As to special parts of the Old Testament he explained: 'I think it depends, for me, for the past two years it's been Isaiah, for the past two years. So I think it depends on perhaps where I am in my life, and *ja* (yes)' (H7). For him Jesus is the most important person in the Bible, and after him Moses.

A mature respondent chose the Gospels as the most important part of the Bible because their stories relate to everyday life. It is also their favourite part. They also expressed a liking for the Psalms, and Jesus was the most important person in the Bible. The most important person in the Bible for another mature participant was Peter because the Church was built on him, and he is among the first disciples to meet Jesus. A young respondent's response to the questions about the most important person in the bible volunteered: 'A person like Paul or Esther?' (C7). Another youth identified Jesus as the most important person, Biblically. A priest chose God as the most significant personage, and when asked about Jesus, he agreed to include him.

The favourite part of the Bible for a mature respondent was the passion of the Cross 'The path that Jesus walked to the Cross, the Stations of the Cross I can say' (I12). He referred to himself falling many times, in the moral sense, presumably relating this to the three occasions of the Stations of the Cross when Jesus falls. For him the most important person in the Bible was Abraham. He finds a message from any part of the Bible. Prompted, he agrees that the Cross of Jesus was the centre of the bible. A mature person saw the Gospel as the most important part of the bible because its stories relate to everyday life. Their favourite are the Gospels and the Psalms, and Jesus is the most important part of the Bible because he is the Son of God and the centre of our faith.

There was a general preference for the New Testament, but not to the extent of revealing a clear preoccupation with a crucified Jesus as the central message of the Bible. All respondents referred to the Bible, even one who was unsure of the difference between the three persons

of the Trinity, but they used the Bible to pray. There was no discernible gender difference. Favoured passages reflected more personal preferences than theological conclusions, and Jesus paralleled with Abraham, Moses, Peter, Paul and Esther as the most important personage of the Bible. The Psalms were popular with five of the participants. One interviewee chose a passage from Corinthians as especially relevant to their state of life, one of chronic malady.

The priests seemed to be more aware of the centrality of the New Testament, and moderate attention was given to Jesus, who does not, however, stand out as a dominating theme, as a passion, as a real person in the life of the individual, claiming the bulk of the person's attention, love and service. As with the western world, mission or evangelisation has failed to present Christ as the most important focus in life, but God is more dominant, as shown elsewhere, to the subordination of the role of the Son of God. In Dt 6:4-9,<sup>52</sup> God sets out his exclusive claim for humanity's prior attention, Yahweh, the only God, to love with all the heart, and with the necessity to remind children constantly and to promote this inimitability with every opportunity. In Luke 14:26 and (Mt 10:37) Jesus effectively claims this exclusive attention for himself (where Jesus instructs us to 'hate' our relatives, to put him first). The priests were more God-centred, whilst the laity were preoccupied with the exigencies of life.

The question of interpretation of Christian Scripture by parishioners and within other churches and AICs, all 10 000 of them (Landman 2019), is of major relevance, as well as use of the 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. For example, priests have reported a pre-occupation with the Old Testament at funeral services in certain instances at the expense of resurrection narratives which are meant to nurture faith in the afterlife. This is the experience of a priest who has attended many funerals in isiXhosa-speaking and Sotho-speaking churches, and also in Protestant churches where he witnessed the frequent use of the Book of Job to support funeral homilies. Pastors in some churches claim personal experiences, which they place on par with scriptural revelation. There appears to be a growth in the number of organizations offering Bible courses and theological training.

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<sup>52</sup> See also Mt 22:37, Mk 12:33, and Lk 10:27

The Catholic Church needs to offer Bible courses to all parishioners, and to outside members, with a well-defined Christological and ecclesial hermeneutic, and without covert proselytism.

The scholar Wanamaker (1997:283) also contends that it is difficult to introduce Christ into the African universe in his capacity as intercessor, guide and judge as these roles conflict with the traditional functions of the ancestors. African customs have been handed down 'with as much authority as written sacred text'.

In conclusion, there was no clear preference for the Old Testament, but the New Testament did not receive the focus it merits as the fullest of God's revelation, and the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, the pivotal event of all salvation history for the Catholic Church, did not attain the focus this event merits.

## Chapter 5. Jesus Christ

### 5.1 Key Theological Issues

Jesus is the heart of catechesis (*Catechesi Tradendae* 1979:5)<sup>53</sup>. As the fullness of the revelation of God, and the image of the unseen God (1 Col1:15), humanity has the RIGHT to hear the Good News (*Redemptoris Missio*, missionary encyclical 1990, sections 8, 44, 46). This is a powerful assertion. A true 'Christian is but another Christ' (Luzbetak 1988/2002:133). Christianity aims to transform us into the image of Christ (Häring 1976:14). This centrality of Christ challenges the churches that underestimate Christ in favour of the Holy Spirit, or simply 'God', and also, indubitably, all the other sources of sacred power that vie for attention which should centre on Christ. Christ's Cross and Resurrection is the cardinal revelation within salvation history for the Catholic Church.

Christianity is an encounter with a person, not a 'lofty' idea, one which provides decisive direction (Pope Benedict 2015:1; *Deus Caritas Est*; encyclical). Relationship takes precedence over theology in this definition. A personal association with Christ prompts Paul to exclaim 'yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me' (Gal 2:19). Again, the Gospel is primarily a 'living relationship with Jesus the Christ that involves our whole being, cognitive, affective and moral' (Hiebert 2008:22). However, many, even Christians, 'lack awareness that it is possible to know him (Christ) and be known and loved personally by him' (Mallon 2016:30). This is a profound challenge to mission spirituality. Christianity is therefore a fellowship with Christ to start with, not merely a compendium of doctrine and rules, or an abstract propositional truth. The primacy should be relationship, a concern of the science of spirituality. It is a living, ongoing two-way rapport with Jesus Christ. This relationship is the starting point, a response to the basic *kerygma*. We now realize that many have been taught doctrine first, with the assumption that there already exists a living affiliation with Christ. This should lead to radical commitment and provide an energizing dynamism to respond to this encounter. The Pope (Francis) fears that there is an overemphasis on doctrine and moral issues, such as an emphasis on the evil of today's world, chastity, birth control, at the expense of the encounter

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<sup>53</sup>In *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 426, 450; Also *Gaudium et Spes* 1965:110. *Catechesi Tradendae* is a document on Catechesis in our Time, Pope John Paul II.

with the *kerygma*, which for youth should be ‘the foundational experience of encounter with God through Christ’s death and resurrection’ (*Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis 2019:213).

The Old Testament (OT) needs to be read as a preparation for the Christ Event, and while the respondents in my research did not display an exclusive preoccupation with the OT, experience in the field observes that the OT is at times interpreted without a satisfactory Christological or ecclesial hermeneutic. It also appears that for some, the OT is not seen as a preparation for the Christ Event but is self-sufficient, needing no further revelation. We correspondingly need to preach a crucified Christ (1 Cor 1:23), and again, if this central event is overlooked, proclamation has not been complete. The Easter mystery is underestimated if Christ is underestimated.

In Hebrews 1:3b we comprehend that the Word of God (Jesus) sustains all things in existence, therefore he is the centre of reality even in the somatic sense. *Dominus Iesus* (2000:13, Vatican document) insists that we are saved by Christ alone (see Acts 4:12). Failure to appropriate Christ as the centre of faith depreciates the Christ Event, in particular the Paschal mystery, the Cross and Resurrection, the theology of God on the Cross, the love that this unveils, and the sacraments instituted by Christ. It is therefore at fault both theologically and affectively and detrimental to an ardent, personal relationship with the Risen Lord.

The Eucharist contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself. In the Mass, Jesus ‘truly gives himself entirely into our hands’ (Ratzinger 2007:145). In every Eucharist Christ’s saving action, his Cross and Resurrection, is actualized. Given the priority of the Mass in the Catholic Church, therefore, failure to centre on the Christ event is detrimental to a fuller appreciation of the faith and depreciates substantially the sublime Easter mystery.

## 5.2 African Theologians on Christ

Pauw’s basic research question is also a practical one and similar to mine: ‘wanting to know what Christianity is like among the Xhosa and to understand why it is like that.’ (1975:7). He covers a far wider scope than targeted in this thesis. His research covers the period of 1960 to 1964, and it includes many quantitative analyses and also some more qualitative material. His informants are rural and urban Xhosa, and he classifies the Xhosa culture as having reached an intermediate state, combining Xhosa culture and Christianity. He concludes that the Xhosa operate two systems, which he elucidates as the “*Grand*” more universal tradition



of Christianity and the 'small' tradition of the Xhosa (:67). This corresponds to the dual religious system I have commented on, namely, two faith systems (the African Traditional beliefs and the Catholic tradition) entertained by parishioners.

All authors locate Jesus as central to the Christian faith.

Christology is, in the final analysis, the most basic and central issue of Christian theology. (Mugambi, Magesa: 1989:x).

In the same book:

In fact, to be precise, theology is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ as the answer to the human quest, and as the answer to people who ask the reason for the hope that all Christians hold through faith. (:x)

Bujo argues that:

If Jesus is truly the Way, the Truth and the Life, then he is the final answer to the aspirations of the whole human race and not only of Africans. All human cultures manifest the longing for fullness of life. Jesus is the true vital force and energy par excellence which flows into all of his descendants. (Bujo 1990: 83. In Stinton (2004:75)).

Jesus is the foundation and goal of the Christian. Christianity's goal is to 'reveal the Father and to win followers for His Son' (Mugambi and Magesa 1989/2003:5). Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian religion (:x). In him revelation reaches its peak. Theology is not Christian at all 'when it does not offer Jesus of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest' (:x). In an article by J M Bahemuka (2003:4) the author argues that Christ is not a stranger to ATR, but he is hidden just as Christ was to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). There is no elucidation of this assertion, but my interpretation of this assertion is the contention that Christ assures us he is with us until the end of time (Mt 28:20). In Jesus, we understand all that the Father wants to reveal to us (Jn 14:9 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father').

The Gospels were written to bring faith in Jesus and to tell of the 'enduring meaning and universal significance of Jesus Christ' (Orobator: 2008:69). Okure (1990:71, 72) sees Jesus as the prime target of inculturation, he is the Good News who needs to be concretised:

We need to bring Jesus live and at home to our people. They need to touch and feel him, to hear him speak their own languages, to see him walk their streets, visit their homes, share meals and challenge and transform their lives and values in all their daily dimensions and locations.

Christianity needs to dialogue with culture, otherwise it remains foreign, obscure and inaccessible. African Christology should start with the humanity of Christ (a bottom-up approach), and his roles and his functions. Christ is better understood for what he did rather than who he is, especially in metaphysical terms. Christ is the catalyst for personal and communitarian existence, 'the Lord of history and of the cosmos, the origin, the providential sustainer, the orientation, the purpose and end of every creature' (Tlhagale 2018:165).

JM Bahemuka (2003:8) advises that Africa needs to view Christ in the eyes of St John (1 Jn 1:1), something, someone, that has existed from the beginning, that Africans have heard and 'seen' and touched in order to be truly born in the continent.

Christ is at the right hand of the Father, which unfortunately removes him from the sphere of existential relevance for the African. Nürnberger (2007:48), with whom I agree, argues that 'we must pull Christ out of heaven and down to earth, that is, we must discover the authority, power and presence of Christ in the here and now.' We need to present Jesus at 'rock bottom', washing the feet of his unimportant disciples (:48). Ratzinger presents a compelling argument that Jesus' ascension into heaven was an entry into the mystery of God, who has dominion over space itself; so by the ascension, Christ becomes universally present to all people (Ratzinger 2011:279-284). Many Christians, I would argue, visualise Christ as remote, and existing in the distant heavens. Former Pope Benedict argues convincingly that the Father is Lord and Creator in relation to all space, over which he has dominion; his presence is divine, not spatial, not residing in some secluded cosmic domain. Jesus at the right hand of the Father therefore does not constitute absence, but intimate presence, especially as he sustains all things in existence (Hb 1:3b). He is thinking of us every moment. Jesus, by his return to the Father, fills all of creation with his presence, and is not limited by space; and therefore the 'ascension' is an event of presence to all rather than a withdrawal from humanity. In eternity, Jesus is present to all of creation, to every human being. This aspect of ascension and of being at the right hand of the Father needs to be carefully addressed, or people project Christ far into the heavens, and render him inaccessible and inconsequential.

Nürnberg (2007:40) perceives the impact of the Gospel on Africa as 'partial and incomplete'. We recall that theologians identify ATR as the dominant partner amongst African Christians. Christ has not covered the 'most pressing spiritual needs' of Africans; thus, ancestors occupy this spiritual vacuum. To quote Nürnberg again:

The impact of Christianity has been ridiculously insignificant after more than one and a half centuries of mission work by various churches following a great variety of approaches, this seems to be the situation in a great many contexts all across Africa (2007:42).

The African church has become a 'Sunday cult' as in the West, where Christ is forgotten about for the rest of the week, since he has not been presented as relevant to the fullness of life, including the world of work (:42). An Africa 'bristling with the quest for life in its fullness' (:43, see also Jn 10:10), has been presented with an other-worldly religion that shuns the world, relegating it to a stoic acceptance of life issues in expectation of future heavenly rewards, obscuring the possibility of pursuing life to the full which Jesus promises in John 10:10.

Nürnberg questions whether Christ provides meaning, and whether Christ is able to define acceptable behaviour and expose evil, while also punishing transgressions, and keeping the community together (:45). The ancestors and religious specialists perform these tasks, including coping with evil spirits and witches (:45). He observes that African seminaries ignore ancestor veneration, witchcraft, and healing, emphasizing Western philosophers thereby neglecting the needs of Africa (:46). Christ needs to be seen as in charge of invisible forces or risk being surpassed by the traditional agents, which, I claim, is what has transpired. Africans visit the Christian pastor not to confess sins, but to seek protection, healing, success, and even fertility (:47). As noted above, Christ needs to be pulled down to earth, to discover his 'authority, power and presence in our lives here and now' (:48). He avers that Christ is not part of the inner circle, hailing from a different time, culture and language and has unfortunately been seen as complicit with colonial forces (:49). Sentimental pictures of Christ from the West do little to imbue an African image in the minds of Africans. He also needs to come closer than any ancestor (:50). The ancestors are powerful authorities (:51). I note that the Bible has ample verses which delineate the absolute authority of Christ. Nürnberg is convinced that the historical Jesus and 'dogmatic' Christ 'cannot compete with the most proximate ancestors in terms of familiarity' (:55). This confirms the reality that the family,

which socialises the children, relies on Christian pastors to plant the Christians faith, while they instil the African traditions. Pastors have inadequate opportunity to respond to this early socialization of the young; a special intervention is needed.

Nürnbergers construes that if God is perceived as being too high and overly elevated above the world for African Christians, they tend to return to traditional agents who do resolve daily, mundane issues. He warns that if God remains 'outside', Africa's preoccupation with 'worldliness' 'will turn to materialism' (Taylor 2001:57; Nürnbergers 2007:283, footnote 212). He argues that this has indeed transpired; a similar trend has been observed with Western Christians. Nürnbergers submits that God has not been made relevant to the new modern and postmodern context (:52). This is my contention as well, that God in Christ needs to be dialogued with the new context of the postmodern world in order to construct a realistic pastoral response.

We have seen how in chapter 1 the basic problem is one of a significant under-estimation of Christ and a 'diluted' Christianity. Bujo (2003:84) postulates that:

a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible in Africa when the foundation of the African's whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories.

Schreiter's editorship of *'Faces of Jesus in Africa'* presents a variety of African categories with which to incarnate Jesus into the culture and realities of African life (1991/2002). Sanon (1991/2002:85) quotes Sambou (s a, p 32), to the effect that the prime theological urgency in most African countries is to discover the true face of Jesus, and to have a living experience of that face, that image, according to their own genius.

This author volunteers Jesus as a master of initiation who makes us progressively more human in the journey from childhood to ancestorship (also in foreword, Schreiter 2002:xi). Other models of Christ are proffered, such as Chief, elder brother, victor, as well as liberator over the forces of oppression, including economic and political oppression; and additionally, and crucially, also as healer, and ancestor. The latter title engenders considerable controversy because of the diverse ways in which ancestors are interpreted (:xii). Jesus as a healer is a critically important category, given the substantial attention Africans lend to traditional healers, ancestors and particularly the newer healing churches.

The loss of the sense of clan with the urbanization and the diffusion of former clan members who were once living together in close proximity appears to have eroded a memory of famous ancestors who could be perceived as Christ figures by virtue of their self-sacrificing lives, lived for the benefit of the clan or tribe. It seems to me that the late Nelson Mandela could qualify as one who walked in the footsteps of Christ. He dedicated his life to ending evil oppression, as Jesus came to deliver us from the evil of sin and death. He was tempted, no doubt, to compromise with evil by becoming a token head of a structure that was inherently evil, and like Jesus, he was threatened. As Jesus was crucified, his incarceration was a descent into 'hell', only to 'resurrect' 27 years later and establish a just regime. His cooperation with God's graces, wishes, is abundantly evident in his freedom from bitterness and anger, as well as in his desire to reconcile. This modern-day parable could likewise be linked to other legendary ancestors.

Conversion involves 'turning what is already there - including one's past - toward Christ' (Walls 2017:38). Walls postulates that becoming Christian may signify that 'Christ is plotted on the operational map for the first time' (:38). This map that deals with real, daily, existential issues. Christ should therefore be perceived as the one who fosters people in their journey through life, and this is not patently the case for my participators. He is partnered, or more correctly, eclipsed, by the ancestors, who are almost instinctively selected when the need arises. *De facto*, Jesus is perceived as less than the Father.

Walls avers that, as Christian teaching progresses, more information is added to the mental map (:39). Since the African person sees no distinction between the sacred and the secular, and all is seen as religious (Mugambi, Magesa 1989/2003:2, and other scholars), introducing God who is both human and divine should find favourable reception, but this has not transpired in a noteworthy way in the Archdiocese of Cape Town. If Christ is accompanying the people on their life journey, what is preventing them from recognizing him as their God and in the breaking of bread? (see Lk 24:13-35). The Xhosa Christians in Cape Town need a deeper encounter with Christ, and his relationship with the ancestors needs to be demarcated. This is not simply a matter of preaching but also of incorporating African Christological reflection into official catechesis (see also Mugambi, Magesa 1989/2003:xv). The African authors identify Christ as the key to Christian faith and recognise the need to

proclaim him using African categories. Jesus as one who existed and exists for others, is the 'lost Presence that the primal faith of man (sic) has always sensed' (Taylor 1963/2000:58, 59). The discovery of this in Jesus is deficient among my respondents and I would also argue, among many 'Coloured' and White Catholics in Cape Town,

### 5.3 The Cross and Resurrection

The centrality of Christ, as well as his passion, death and resurrection, is very apparent in the letters of Paul; for example in Col 1:19b-20, we read:

and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and on earth, making peace through his death on the cross.

Jesus' death was the tip of the iceberg, in which resided the whole cosmos and its radical reconciliation in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bringing to fulfilment humanity, creation and its complete perfection (Domingues 2000:88). O' Collins (1983:96, 108) observes the necessity of preaching a crucified Christ,<sup>54</sup> as well as the Easter mystery, the Resurrection, the events pivotal to the Christian faith (1 Cor 15:14). It is in Christ that humanity, and in fact all creation, come to eschatological fulfilment.

Jesus cannot be understood apart from his Cross and Resurrection. The apostles preach a crucified Christ (1Cor 1:23), an obstacle to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. 1 Cor 2:2 affirms Paul's focus on the Crucified Christ, which is at the heart of the Gospel. Each Eucharist makes the Easter mystery (Cross and Resurrection) present, this central event, and the climax of his mission. A theology which overlooks or under-emphasizes the Cross and Resurrection is for the Catholic Church, a theologically incomplete doctrine and diminishes the animating power of the Easter mystery. Jesus is the grain of wheat which dies in the soil to give life. His death and resurrection are crucial.<sup>55</sup> Hearne (1990:91) warns that there cannot be a *theologia gloriae* without a *theologia crucis*, which contrasts with ATR and the search for fullness in the present moment, where a mishap occasions an immediate proactive response. To illustrate this, one respondent, after a mysterious and frightening experience, exclaimed: 'Oh my

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<sup>54</sup> 1 Cor 1:23; Luke 24:26; NJB: 'Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?'.

<sup>55</sup> see Pope Francis, Vatican City, 21<sup>st</sup> March; Catholic News Agency; accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021.

goodness, my ancestors, O God!' (B2). Another, discovering they had been defrauded, reacted by calling on God and praying the rosary (A7).

#### 5.4 Christ's Acceptance in the African Worldview

Pauw (1975) grants that God in the eyes of the Xhosa Christians is now closer and more accessible and involved in daily affairs, but 'the mediation of the Son of God in their manner remains vague and neutral' (:77). The essential Christ image is lacking. Although church leaders and members confess the Triune God, there is the definite impression that Christ as the Son of God is not prominent in the thoughts of the average member (:78). Pauw reports that he needed to resort to a 'considerable degree' of direction on his part to draw people to speak about Christ in personal conversation. This resonates with my experience with the respondents, who seldom volunteered Christ spontaneously, often only when prompted. Generally, replies to questions showed an underestimation of the Christ figure. Jesus emerges more as a Son of Man as opposed to being one with the Father, God as well. He appears to be somewhat separate from the Father rather than one with him, more subject to him than equal with him. 'The Holy Spirit is even more relegated to the background' (:78). Many recent converts felt that the significant teaching and prayer related mandate of the Church was for the individual to pray directly to God, so there are more prayers to the Father than to Christ (:97). Xhosa Christians profess belief in Christ as man and God, Son of God, as well as the Holy Spirit, but the interior associations with these two persons are obscure and there is little 'conversation' between the Xhosa Christians and Christ and the Holy Spirit (:220).

Research into AICs indicates a preference for the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and an absence of the Christ figure. Certain Bantu prophets receive more attention than Christ. AIC members seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Pauw 1975:311). Healing is not attributed to Jesus, but to the 'spirit', which could be the Holy Spirit or ancestral spirits. However, Bate (1995:280) believes that it is the Trinitarian Holy Spirit that has resulted in the emergence of the many healing-coping AICs. Whether or not these churches are strictly orthodox is less important than the need for strength in what can be a particularly challenging township environment. Pauw (1975:338) argues that salvation offered by God in Christ, which the Church must proclaim, is a liberation which affects the whole person, as an individual and as a member of society. He is convinced that at least some members of Xhosa Christian

churches have 'experienced something of this liberation, however imperfectly'. Otherwise, Jesus, on the whole, remains underestimated some 60 years later, in the worldview of my parishioners; the fullness of God's revelation in Christ is incomplete, for reasons noted below. De Mesa (2018:197) urges that Christians need to become profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ.

The African was always a believer in a Supreme Being, or God (some scholars disagree with this in the case of the Zulu, e.g., Kiernan 1995), but the missionary introduction of Christ as the God made flesh has not been successfully implanted. Waliggo (2004:48) is positive that Africa always believed in God, but Jesus was introduced as one unrelated to the God previously known in Africa, and Jesus has been seen as distinct from God. As early as 1751 (Stinton 2004:48), it has been recorded by a missionary that when he preached about God, he secured authentic attention, but when he preached Christ, his audience lost interest. It is essential that Jesus be presented as rooted in God, even as the pre-existent Christ, as in the Gospel of John (1:1): 'In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God'. There is the case for discovering the hidden Christ in cultures, as opposed to the pessimistic perception of the 1910 World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh), which declared that there was virtually no preparation for Christianity in primal religions (Stinton 2004:22). Mbiti (2009:151) on the other hand argues that the introduction of Jesus Christ resulted 'in an avalanche of Christian expansion...and even many Christians have been martyred, not because of their belief in God as such, but their Faith in Jesus Christ'. This differs considerably from the opinion of other commentators.

Historically and theologically the Christ image appears to be undervalued in relation to African ancestors and other sources of sacred power and does not occupy the authoritative role the Biblical model suggests:

the Christ they have come to know through the message of the missionaries, subsequent indigenous leaders, even their own reading of the Bible, does not seem to have covered their most pressing and spiritual needs. (Nürnberg 2007:40).

These are daily needs for protection from evil and a benign flow of dynamistic forces, which are not generally recognised by expatriate pastors or given much consideration. These needs are seen to be supplied by the ancestors. Paul (2 Cor 3:15, 16. 4:3,4) alludes to the hearts of



the people of Israel covered with a veil, which will remain until they turn to Jesus, and that unbelievers' minds are blinded 'by the god of this world'. It seems credible to regard the ancestors as one such veil, which obscures in part, a fuller appropriation of Christ.

Shorter (1994:1-2) refers to the difficulty of Africans accepting a prophet 'of another age, race and country, and of abandoning their own religious heritage which did cater for the religious needs of African believers without the need for mission'. He stresses that Christianity has no meaning without Christ (:3), who is the Good News. Christianity is at the heart a religion of a person, and is a relationship, far more than simply a doctrinal understanding, although the latter can play a crucial role in augmenting faith (particularly faith seeking understanding). Christianity is an encounter with the risen Christ; a relationship with the Lord. This is achieved and nourished by sacraments, especially the Eucharist, prayer and the Bible. The Passion, Death and Resurrection, made present in the Eucharist, is the central event in the Bible and in salvation history. But this event appears to be understated by many AICs.

Sundkler (1948/1976:278-289) observed that Christ was seriously undermined by Zionists and discerned among them a search for a Black Christ. He foregrounds the high degree of concentration on *uMoya* (the Spirit) in these churches (see 238-253). Shembe was seen by some as a Black Christ.

The West tends to over-emphasise Jesus Christ at the expense of the Holy Spirit, whilst Africans tend to focus more on the Spirit at the expense of the Risen Jesus and the possibility of a personal relationship with him. In a presentation by L. Magesa to the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town (July 2012; unpublished) on the topic of the Church in Africa, the presenter agreed with the observation that the Holy Spirit was over-represented in comparison to Christ by African churches. On the other hand, in the West, he contended that the Holy Spirit was under-represented in comparison to Christ. It is interesting to note that Magesa dedicates his book to his Elders and Ancestors (Magesa 1997/2008).<sup>56</sup>

Nthamburi (1991/2002:68) perceives Christ as removing the dichotomy between the human and the divine. But if Africa is notoriously religious, where do we locate Christ, the centre of

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<sup>56</sup> page before Contents, in *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*.

Christianity? Does he occupy the role and substance our faith intimates? Is he called to mind as readily as the ancestors? My research yields a negative answer to these key questions.

God is the centre of African Religion in various African cultures, Christ is not (Stinton 2004:48). Africans know God but not the Son of God (Mtuze 2003:74). Missionaries did not bring God to Africa; he was already there. Jesus was the newness, but thus far ineffectually presented and therefore defectively appropriated. Mtuze (2003:73) comments on the nominal adherence to Christianity by many Africans and their reversion to ATR in times of crisis, a dual religious instinct rather than a conscious dual religious system. The missiological task therefore is how to integrate Jesus into African culture. There is the need to show that to be truly Christian and truly African is not in opposition. However, my respondents as a rule perceived Christ as omnipresent, not at all distant, in response to direct questioning, but not in response to an existential crisis, when the ancestors are preferentially entreated. Christ appears to be perceived as relatively impersonal, and there is lack of intimacy with the Lord who proposes himself as a personal collaborator, friend, elder brother, and God. He has not apparently withdrawn into the distant heavens, neither is he instinctively supplicated. God too is omnipresent and proximate.

Classic theology has reduced Christ to an abstraction, a distant pacifist, with little bearing on actual life, relevant only to the spiritual dimension and detached from real life and suffering (Waliggo 2003; 105, 106). For many he is a Christ who comes in the shape of a food container and Red Cross vehicle. Eurocentric pictures of Christ with West European features have done little to stimulate a real Christ image that makes sense to an African person (Nürnberg 2007:49). He is a stranger with a different culture, language, worldview, circumstances and even history. He has been brought by foreigners who criticised African culture, undermined their politics and attempted to ban crucial aspects of ATR such as ancestor veneration (:49). Africans have been brought a North Atlantic brand of Christianity, which they have been unable to appropriate, instead of the Biblical Christ (Stinton 2004:41).

Missionaries have noticed that when God was preached, the audience reaction was positive, but interest was lost when the preaching turned to Christ (Stinton 2004:48). Christ has not replaced the African God (:49). The author (:58) has also observed that people at work, and during the week, never speak about Christ and his relevance until Sunday. This fits in with the

general European 'boxed' view of Christ, who is only 'unpacked' on Sundays, and compartmentalised into a God only of the poor, captives and sick. Nürnberger also labels the African Church a Sunday cult (2007:42). Orobator (2008:72) observes how in many parts of Africa Jesus has become a popular name, the subject of songs and humorous stories, but not, it seems, in an orthodox manner or conducive of an energising relationship. Africa is struggling with the Christ image. The author feels we need to 'recast' expatriate images of Christ into the rich and varied African worldview. We need to 'reconcile the relatively new personality of Jesus' with the image Africans had of God before the missionaries (:73); although indeed, for some the traditional God was an obscure Being, distant and remote.

Trinitarian and Christological theologies are beyond the understanding and interest of people who are looking for life in its fullness now (Nürnberger: 48). He adds: 'even Westerners do not know what to make of such doctrines'. Our dogmatic proclamation has 'unintentionally defined Christ out of the sphere of existential relevance.' Trinity and Christology are expressed in the form of ontological facts rather than captivating, affective terms which inspire relationship, and therefore incomprehensible to believers not educated in theology (:102). There is the obvious need for a relational approach to Christ, rather than a complex doctrinal presentation (Stinton 2004:244). Faith needs to be caught as well as taught. Magesa (2004:186) detects a docetic tendency in mainline Christianity, in terms of which the humanity of Christ is under-estimated. Jesus is sensed as not being completely human because he is God. Christ remains largely a distant figure for many Africans (Schreiter, Introduction. 2002:ix). My ongoing experience in an African township confirms this distant image, acknowledged in theory, but overlooked in practice.

### 5.5 Christ and the Holy Spirit

There is a type of parallel belief in Christ and the Holy Spirit, with little connection between these and the ancestors. In interviews, Pauw (1975) noted that people never spoke spontaneously about Christ and the Holy Spirit in relation to God, as the ancestors were referred to as communicating with God, but they agreed to this possibility when it was suggested to them (:220). In other words, Christ and the Holy Spirit are intercessors with God as are the ancestors. Some see little difference between the ancestors and Jesus. Some use Christ as a universal intercessor and ancestors as intercessors for their relatives only (:221).

The Holy Spirit is ranked alongside the ancestors. Most of the orthodox churches only have a 'vague consciousness' of the Holy Spirit, which is probably true of many Western Catholics. Some also view the Holy Spirit as the soul within a person's body. Some see the Catholic theology of the Communion of Saints as a legitimization of ancestor beliefs by the Catholic Church. Pauw (1975) attributes continual underestimation of the Holy Spirit to 'the continual concern with ancestor spirits' (:225). Some include ancestors in their prayers to God. Again, there was a notable absence of the Christ figure in recorded responses to Pauw's questions (:260). Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000:301) observe a strong faith in the Holy Spirit, and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, notably not just for clergy. People claim to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He is used for commissioning church leaders, new parish council members, catechists and new additions to ministries.

It seems that for many AICs, the emphasis is more on '*uMoya*', the Spirit, and not necessarily the Holy Spirit with the qualities that the theology of the Triune God proffers. A firm Christ image is critically lacking. In their book,<sup>57</sup> Ngada and Mofokeng set out their Church theology in an African way. The 'Almighty Spirit' was present 'healing us long before the missionaries landed on our shores' (2001:23). This Spirit and the ancestral spirits are introduced to children, who develop respect for these agents. The emphasis on the Spirit undermines the centrality of Jesus, and the Spirit also does not appear to be related as proceeding from the Father and the Son. A relatively short section on Jesus Christ (pages 28-29) understates the role of Christ and the Christ Event and his relationship to the Holy Spirit.

Although they aver that Jesus Christ, Son of God, is the central message of the Bible (2001:29), the Holy Spirit by far receives the most attention in their exposition and is not associated adequately with the Second Person of the Trinity. The central Christ Event (the Cross and Resurrection of Christ) receives little consideration. The authors recognise a world of spirits of ancestors, evil and good spirits, and:

above all the Almighty and Supernatural Spirit, the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit.

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<sup>57</sup> *African Christian Witness. The movement of the Spirit in the African Indigenous Churches.* 2001.

They aver that at the end of the mission of Christ, he poured out his Spirit, creating a church. Good Friday is their most important day (incorporating the Seven Words, preaching, fasting and cleansing). It is interesting to note the Resurrection merits less attention than the Seven Words liturgy.

They postulate the Holy Spirit as the centre of AIC (African Indigenous Church) doctrine. The Holy Spirit inspires prophets, leaders and the church, diagnoses, heals and exorcises (:23). They claim that the spiritual culture of Africa facilitates the central role of the Holy Spirit. There are many spirits: ancestral, good and bad spirits, spirits of human beings, and above all the Almighty and Supernatural Spirit, the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit (:23). The 'Almighty Holy Spirit' was in Africa well before missionaries arrived. At all stages of their lives there are customs involving the world of spirits (:24). They maintain that there is no contradiction between African spiritual culture and what is revealed in the Bible about the Holy Spirit (:26).

The authors write that Africans depend on the Spirit of God who works through the spirits of the ancestors rather than directly (:25). In their comments on the Bible, the focus is largely on the Holy Spirit and Jesus is barely mentioned when they justify the power of the Holy Spirit Biblically. They perceive no distinction between ATR and the written word of God and maintain that in fact many ATR beliefs are confirmed in the Bible (:27). Despite the articulation of Christ in their theological presentation, the Christ figure appears significantly underestimated in their church, and in many AICs.

Conversely, Wanamaker (1997:293) maintains that the nature of Christ's death is not important to the African. The fact of his death leads him to become an ancestor and is united with the ancestors. It seems that the Resurrection attracts little significance, as well as his passion. These events are undervalued, whilst his appearances are highly valued as they resemble visits from the ancestors. In the Archdiocese of Cape Town, Black Catholics tend to prefer the 'Seven Words' services, over the Good Friday afternoon Passion liturgy. One reason is that it provides laity an opportunity to exercise their passion for preaching. Parishioners are wont to skip the Catholic Good Friday service and attend rather the Protestant 'Seven Words', if the latter service is not offered in the Catholic parish.

Joel 3:1-5 (God will pour of his Spirit on all, sons and daughters will prophesy, there will be visions and dreams, portents and signs), and its quotation in Acts 2:17-21, are key passages

for AICs which are used to justify the ministry of prophets and priests. People become possessors of the Spirit in the Messianic era. There is a belief in ongoing revelation by the Holy Spirit to pastors, with much emphasis on healing. Church leaders may claim that ongoing revelation is on par with the written word in the Bible. Tlhagale (2018:240), noting how AICs have developed their own theologies, with a substantial focus on integral healing, makes the following comment as to how Jesus has been side-lined:

The healing churches have simply suppressed the role of Jesus in favour of the Holy Spirit, who symbolises power. Thus, both the Holy Spirit and the ancestors are the source of the healing power.

The Pentecostal and spirit-type churches 'tend to miss out' on the fact that the Holy Spirit has an 'essential christological (sic) and Trinitarian identity' (Okure 1998:15).

## 5.6 Christ and the Ancestors

Some Xhosa Christians believe that God's blessings come through the ancestors and ancestors have become (at least for some of them) intermediaries between God and Christians, displacing Christ (Pauw 1975:218). It is the ancestors who send misfortune, not God. This is part of the dual religious system in operation, ATR and Christianity. The overall impression is also that God is a Unitarian Father God, and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are inadequately linked to the notion of God. Setiloane (1986: see 21-28) states that ancestors were not mediators as it was not possible to mediate with the Supreme Being. He argues that the influence of Christian mission and writers such as JH Soga resulted in this incorrect notion that ancestors are now the mediators between God and humankind. He feels that ancestors have lost influence to the now more well-defined Christian God. In Bantu society intermediaries were chosen to bridge the gap between those of authority and inferior members, which facilitated the notion that ancestors were intermediaries between God and People. There was evidence among some of my respondents that they perceived the ancestors as serving this intermediary role, but they are *de facto* independent of God, for example, in meting out punishment on their progeny.

A notably Catholic view of the ancestor belief system, was seen in Reverend Bhengu, essentially affiliated with the Assemblies of God, who tactfully questioned ancestor religion. He claimed that the ancestors and evil spirits 'are under God's control, and his power alone

can save one' (Pauw 1975:294). He explicitly opposed ancestor rituals but was more tolerant towards male initiation. He saw the Gospel as relevant to the afterlife, as well as daily life issues (:295), an issue authors such as Nürnberger are particularly concerned about. Pauw (:301) notes that some see a relationship between the Holy Spirit and the ancestors:

The Spirit becomes like the ancestors: they speak to one coming like a person in a dream: the Spirit is just like that.

Sipuka (:170, 175) claims that the custom of sacrifice to the ancestors is still deeply entrenched among the modern Xhosa, even by residents who live in upmarket urban locales. The recipient of the sacrifice is the ancestors. Wanamaker opines that the image of Christ as judge, mentor and intermediary for Christians struggles because these are the traditional functions of the ancestors (1997:281).

Kraft (1979/2003:109) postulates that Jesus may be seen as 'the long-sought-for missing link between themselves (Africans) and God, and thus readily embrace him'. As Jesus said: 'I am with you always' (Mt 28:20b); so are the ancestors a constant presence, but to their progeny only (Kabasele 2002:120). Via the incarnation, Christ assumed the whole of human history including African ancestors. (Nyamiti 1989/2003:25). This is low Christology, the Christ from below. The incarnation enables Christ to be the unique locus of the encounter with African ancestors and allows them to be the locus where the African encounters God (citing Bujo, 1982).

Bujo (1986/2003:16) sees the need for 'enthroning the God of Jesus Christ, not as a rival of the God of the ancestors, but as identical with him'. Jesus, in his earthly life, displayed all the qualities which Africans like to attribute to ancestors (:73). Jesus is not an ancestor in a general sense but in a unique way, with the title of Proto-Ancestor reserved for him alone, who infinitely transcends ancestor virtues and ideals. No other ancestor can have this title (:74). Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of all the virtues of the ancestors. He bears in a transcendent form the primitive 'vital union' and 'vital force'. He enables, via his death and resurrection, a new way for humanity to relate to God and to each other (:75).

Stinton (2004:142) writes that Jesus infinitely transcends the authentic ideals of the ancestors, he is not merely one founding ancestor among many. He is the Proto-Ancestor, the

New Adam, the Last Adam. He is head of the body, the Church (Col 1:18; Eph 1:23), the first born of creation (Col 1:15) and the first-born from the dead (Col 1:18). He is the one through whom reconciliation is accomplished (Col 1:20, Stinton :143). In Hebrews 1:1 we read how God in times past spoke to our ancestors, but now he speaks through his Son, whom he has established as the unique ancestor, from whom all life flows for his descendants. (Stinton 2004:143, citing Bujo 2003:83) 'The African ancestors are in this way forerunners, or images, of the Proto-Ancestor, Jesus Christ' (:143). Jesus 'sustains the universe by his word of power' (Hb 1:3b), thereby being the source of on-going life for all of creation, including the ancestors. He opens the future that the ancestors sought to secure (Stinton 2004:144). The title of Proto-Ancestor, 'when translated into a corresponding theology and catechesis, will be far more meaningful to Africans than titles such as logos ("Word") and Kyrios ("Lord")'. Bujo 'explicitly denies any wish to suppress these later titles' (Stinton 2004:144, citing Bujo 2003:84).

Bujo (2003:84) argues that there is much African enthusiasm for the concept of Proto-Ancestor as the starting-point of Christology, and that it can be validly established that 'the legitimate yearnings of the African ancestors are not only taken up in Jesus, but are transcended in him' (:84, see Stinton 2004:144). Bujo is confident that Jesus the Proto-Ancestor, wants fullness of life for the new People of God in Africa, who in the face of many hardships and challenges, continue their way to eternity, 'searching for greater autonomy and true identity.' Bujo (1990:83) contends that:

To present Jesus Christ in this tragic situation (copious problems in Africa) as Proto-Ancestor is of greatest significance. It amounts to saying that he is the new Moses who, through so many obstacles, sufferings, tears and oppression of all kinds, is steadily leading his African people to the waters of life.

Bujo (see Stinton 2004:144) sees the Proto-Ancestor image as a means of appropriating the identity, the true humanity that the African seeks as well as the fullness of life that their ancestors sought, and which can ultimately be 'found in the person of Christ'. Stinton understands Bujo (2003:91), suggesting that to acknowledge Jesus as Proto-Ancestor means accompanying him on the way of the Cross, and to struggle resolutely against the many forces which 'rob Africa of its vital force' which leads to a premature death. For him Jesus as Proto-Ancestor and source of life 'could become a veritable ferment for the transformation of a post-ancestral and post-colonial Africa' (Bujo 1990:84; see Stinton 2004:145). Bujo



incorporates the element of liberation in his inculturation model by his linking of Proto-Ancestor as against forces which deprive Africa of 'vital force'.

Stinton (:149, 150) makes further points on the topic of Jesus as ancestor. I contend that Jesus as ancestor needs qualification, and since the ancestor belief system remains so culturally relevant and authoritative, it is worth using this image as a stepping-stone in Christology. Bujo insists that the Proto-Ancestor model passes the scrutiny of Biblical theology and is consistent with Pauline Christology (Stinton 2004:159), as well as assisting an understanding of the mysteries of Christ (:160). Comparisons of Christ and the ancestors may result in some confusion, however Jesus and the apostles also used analogies and figurative, first-order language with all the attendant risks.

Bujo sees the African vocation to preserve and transmit the all-embracing life which each one receives from the ancestors (2003:89). Africans who maintain close communion with ancestors 'should not think that becoming Christian means abandoning the ancestors' (:119). Knox (2008:91ff) records that various scholars report a resurgence of the ancestor cult, even after many years in which some Christians publicly disassociated themselves from this custom, and it is a custom that is still of relevance to young Africans. Knox describes the ancestors as 'causative agents par excellence' (:106) who are generally benevolent but can revoke their support.

Pauw (1975:227) observes that for the Xhosa, 'Ancestor rituals are for the flesh, Christian prayers to God are for the spirit'. There is the sense that ATR is for the present moment and Christianity is oriented to life after death, offering a predominantly otherworldly salvation. The Christian Church, with its voluntary membership, universalistic values and other worldly salvation, contrasts with the traditional ancestor beliefs of conditional membership based on kinship, particularistic values, this-worldly salvation, and small kinship groupings (:227). Pauw concludes that 'This complementary nature of the two traditions makes for a peaceful coexistence'. This division of purpose into this-worldly and other-worldly may account for the reason that one respondent in my research said that to pray in isiXhosa as opposed to English means there are more serious problems at hand which demand immediate ancestral intervention (C5). In contrast to Pauw, my respondents were positive that God, *uThixo*, was very much for the present world, decisively not the principle source of sacred power for the

afterlife alone, but the most powerful sustenance for their everyday lives, and generally, the ancestors were second.

Wanamaker (1997:291-296) proffers an ancestor Christology which links the African Christian's identity and experience with significant aspects of Christ's functions. Jesus is the elder brother of the Christian extended family referred to by Paul in his letters to various communities as brothers (Rm 8:29: 'so that he may be the eldest among a large family of brothers'). It is the elder brother who is responsible for the ancestor ritual, receiving his authority from his departed father (:292).

Jesus is seen as an *idlozi* (living-dead) and united with all who have died (Nxumalo 1981:67; see Wanamaker 1997:293). Wanamaker presents a type of theology of punishment by ancestors in certain events in the Book of Acts (such as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) to show that ancestral displeasure is exhibited immediately as opposed to judgment by Jesus at some future point in time, although censure does not normally result in death (:294). Jesus is concerned with the preservation of the moral order, and he exhorted disciples to keep the law of the ancestors (Mt 5:17-20). Wanamaker (:295) also shows how Jesus performs ancestral functions by rewarding his disciples for filial obedience, describing various events in the New Testament. These include healings, exorcisms and deliverance from imprisonment.

As noted above (Chapter 5.4) Magesa dedicates one of his books to his Elders and Ancestors. Jesus the Proto-Ancestor as a theological construct, on the path to a fuller understanding of Christ, establishes a convincing case for use in catechetics and preaching. The fact that Christ is apparently 'lowered' by association with human ancestors is a qualification that applies to any anthropological title. For example, Christ as King faces the similar proviso that there were many evil kings. As a construct, it seems to be a useful, inculturated way of bringing people to a closer understanding of Christ, as well as his superiority in all ways. It is a way of dealing with the reality of ancestors respectfully, as opposed to assuming they are not relevant and leaving this key issue unresolved, retarding the journey of Christ into the heart and mind of the person steeped in ancestral culture. There is a need to bring Jesus into the worldview/mindset of the Xhosa parishioner, and to locate him there in a way which both harmonises and at times challenges ancestral beliefs.

Tlhagale (2018) sees the challenge of liberating indigenous Christians from the irrational fears of spirits (:242), and I would submit that preaching and teaching Christ as higher than all powers, with appropriate quotations from the Bible, would assist this task. His judgment of the prevailing situation shows concern to deepen kerygmatic proclamation (a Christ-centred mission), to 'burst' the chains imposed by custom. God in Christ needs to be the centre of devotion, Christ who is the centre of history. We need to look closer at the prevailing culture, not ignore it. Otherwise, the Bishop is worried that 'the foundations laid by the missionaries are likely to crumble' (:240). This is truly an alarming conclusion.

Tlhagale (2018:156ff), quotes Gal 2:20 ('...yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me' NJB 1985:1926), and so becomes a new person, moulded into the image of the Son by the Father (see also Gal 3:28 'since every one of you has been baptised has been clothed in Christ' NJB 1985:1927). Christ within us is a source of superior power and so ancestors cannot be allowed to be the 'omnipotent spirit'. Ancestors need to pale into insignificance in this new relationship, since they are creatures, against Christ through whom all things were made. This new knowledge of Christ Jesus requires us to demote the ancestral spirits, as it is the Triune God who is ultimately the font of all well-being. Ongoing conversion to Christ requires we abandon ourselves and significant others, to Christ, as was the goal of John the Baptist, who said of Jesus: 'He must grow greater, I must grow less' (Jn 3:30; NJB 1985:1750). There needs to be an interiority of Christ, a personal, intimate relationship.

Tlhagale quotes Jesus: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Mt 28:20; NJB 1985:1659). Jesus is the Lord of the living and the dead (Rm 14:9). 'Lord' implies absolute authority. Tlhagale is severe in his criticism of the excessive authority ascribed to ancestors, referring to 'the inanity of power ascribed to the spirits of the ancestral shades' (2018:158). He is critical of priests-diviners because their ministry as traditional healers confuse the ancestral healing rites with the Church's sacraments and they break the essential link with Christ who instituted them and empty them of their substance (:159). Holy oil for the sick is by no means an equivalent of the traditional tools of healing. He also underscores Canon 834(2) which forbids holding services inspired by different belief systems and materials without approval of the ecclesiastical authority. Any adaption of the Roman rite 'depends entirely on the authority of the Church' (:160). It is permissible to adapt material objects of

local culture, gestures and practices, with the proviso that there has been a radical conversion from the role of ancestral spirits (:160).

He is cognisant of the strong image of ancestors ('as if "riding" on the shoulders of the afflicted and 'whispering' into their ears'; :160, 161). Therefore, the challenge is to remove the association of divinity with the spirits, 'to demythicise' (sic) them, to recognise their true place in the Christian hierarchy. My section on the ancestors and the Communion of Saints seeks to locate ancestors in their place in the Catholic faith. Unlike Bujo, who de-emphasises fear of ancestors, Tlhagale refers to evil spirits, demonic powers and vengeful spirits, and the African mind which is steeped in the existence of these beings, and the considerable fear which may 'spread terror' (:161). Jesus is far above every power (Eph 1:21-23); 'so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus'- Phi 2:10; 'And for this God has raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names' (Phi 2:9). The absolute authority of Christ cannot be challenged. I refer to my section on angelology and believe that the Western world significantly underrates the existence and powers of the evil spirits, whom God in his inscrutable ways allows to tempt and afflict humanity. Jesus dealt with various types of evil spirits in his ministry, including Satan.

Relationship implies regular contact with someone, and Africans keep in touch with their ancestors, via prayers and rituals, whose protective presence is at the heart of their spirituality (Tlhagale 2018:163). This relationship is motivated by need and is one of petitioning as well as thanksgiving. Christianity places Christ at the centre, before all other relationships. My respondents located God as the centre of their attention. The bishop (Tlhagale) wants the priest to bridge the gap between the two religions (:164). The African Christians, in their journey of conversion, move from a family/clan religion, each clan with their separate family spirits, to the Triune God, in my view, via Christ as inspired by the Holy Spirit. Christ is the catalyst for personal and communitarian existence, 'the Lord of history and of the cosmos, the origin, the providential sustainer, the orientation, the purpose and end of every creature' (:165).

Tlhagale (2018:165) avers that ATR is not all intrinsically incompatible with Christianity. Orobator (2018 and Walls 2017) takes a stronger view, and he is adamant that African Religion is 'the ground or substructure of religious consciousness of Africans on which the other two

religions have been superimposed over the course of time with varying degrees of compatibility' (:60). The other two religions refer to Islam and Christianity. These two religions are blossoming, but within 'a field sown with the beliefs and practices of African Religion' (:60).

The fact that the natural and supernatural are one in ATR, facilitates the belief in spirits and spirit possession, with the attendant fears, and 'superstition and magic' still playing a significant role (Tlhagale 2018:166). My exposition of the Christian world of spirits confirms that there is indeed a universe populated with invisible beings (Chapter 2). This presents an opening to inculturating the ancestor belief system with the Communion of Saints theology.

### 5.7 Christ and Colonialism

Stinton (2004:42) quotes Mugambi who avers that Christianity first came coupled with colonialism, the notion of Christendom, and the suppression of culture, suppression, despising African culture, and so came as 'terribly bad news' (Mugambi, 1995:77), and that this has undoubtedly had a negative effect on perceptions of Christ. An oft noted story, also in Stinton (2004:44, with its own variation), relates that when the missionaries first came, the Whites had the Bible, and the Blacks had the land. Soon afterwards, the Blacks had the Bible and the Whites the land.

Western theology and Christology were seen as dominant and unalterable and were forced onto recipients of the message (Stinton 2004:30). While the Gospel proclaimed liberty to captives, Colonialists held Africans captive. Mission has had a poor effect on some Africans' perception of Christ (:43). A Christ was preached who made Africans accept their lot (:45). He was seen as an imperial agent (:218) and as a forceful tyrant who invalidated African culture and remains a stranger, rather than a welcome guest in the home (:24). Christ needs to be relevant to all human contexts but because of the negative attitude of the missionaries, Jesus was rendered a stranger in the spiritual universe of the African consciousness (:25). This unfortunate history should encourage more respect when treating of African culture.

## 5.8 The Old Testament and New Testament

Sundkler (1964:277), observed that the Old Testament was the prime basis of belief for Africa, and where there are conflicts between Old and New, the Old Testament prevailed (see Dickson 1979:97). Dickson also notes the African propensity for ritual and sanctions, found in the Old Testament, as other reasons for the predilection for the OT (:97, 98). Other reasons include the oppression and liberation themes, especially in the time of colonialism, with Moses as the liberator, leader, lawgiver. Africans do not separate religion from life, nor did the people of Israel. Other similarities include male circumcision, animal sacrifice, and a variety of 'folk' stories. Furthermore, similarities in the concepts of time, destiny, land, and the equivalent of ancestors to the fathers in faith such as Abraham, are further parallels, although Dickson warns against simplistic correlations which do not do justice either to the Bible or to African culture. There seems to be generally scant recognition that the Old Testament is a preparation for the fullness of Revelation in Christ. Taylor (1963/2000:78, 79) describes the features of the Old Testament that attract the African person, such as descendancy from the fathers in faith (the ancestors), and rites of incorporation into the faith (or clan). He suggests that portraying Jesus as the Second Adam, whose blood courses through all descendants (:82).

For Okure (1990), African Traditional Religion is the equivalent of what the Old Testament was for the Jewish Christian, a preparation for the fullness of revelation. Christianity goes further than the Old Testament and the ancestors. It calls members to love enemies. It transforms the Jewish faith and the ancestor faith beyond their limits. These faiths are not completely parallel (although there are illuminating parallels), but a preparation, a path to a fuller way. My respondents did not display a convincing bias for the Old Testament, but did not reveal that they saw it as a path to fullness of revelation on Christ, neither did they unambiguously identify the Easter Mystery and the central event of the Bible and indeed of salvation history.

## 5.9 Christ and the Eucharist and the Ancestors

The Letter to the Hebrews states that the blood of animals sacrificed is incapable of taking away sins (Hb 10:5) and that Christ's sacrifice is the one single sacrifice that is efficacious;

nevertheless, the Xhosa practice of animal sacrifice to the ancestors continues, remaining unchallenged by this Biblical statement. However, Xhosa sacrifice is not effected for forgiveness of sins, but for petitioning, thanksgiving, and other events such as a death, and it is addressed to ancestors, not God.

Rituals (words, actions, objects), associated with ancestors have a deep meaning in the life of the African. They are continuously repeated and pave the way for the present and the future. Remembrance is not just a pious remembrance but a return to the very source of life (similar to the Christian Eucharist). This recalling makes present the biographies of the ancestors, including their successes and misfortunes and turns them into a source of life energy (Bujo 1992/2003:70). The memorial-narrative of ancestors is akin to an act of salvation 'designed to secure total community, both before and after death, with all good and benevolent ancestors' (Bujo 2003:72). Again, we can see similarity with the Eucharist which makes present Jesus' saving actions. In a sense, ancestor veneration parallels what Christianity calls for, which is regular, customary devotion, which includes thanksgiving.

#### 5.10 Incarnational Theology

African religion is situational, a faith that is felt in relation to the community and the environment, cognisant of the aspirations, needs, expectations, and experiences that exist within these contexts. It is not a set of abstract ideas. As Jesus was present in a disguised fashion to the two disciples journeying to Emmaus (Mt 16: 12-35), so does Bahemuka believe that Christ is present in Africa, but this is not clearly elaborated upon (Bahemuka in Mugambi and Magesa 2003:4). The 'other worldly' bias of Western Christianity suppresses the relevance of Christ to the African (Stinton 2004:51).

Jesus made use of everyday life, customs and the familiar world of his audience (Bahemuka 2003:11). He was the Word made flesh who spoke like human beings in their own language (:12). Africa needs a relevant Christ who deals with everyday existential issues. Jesus' care for the weak, the marginalised and children resonates with African values of family, as well as care for the elderly and orphans and value of hospitality, but extends beyond the cultural limits of the clan and tribe, and reaches to the whole human race (Bujo 2003:81). But for the participators in my survey, it is God who provides the this-worldly role, revealing a this-

worldly theology, one which should be identified with the Word made flesh, but does not quite reach this goal.

Africans look for fullness of life in the present moment. Thus, the theology of the Cross needs to be carefully presented. Jesus experienced rejection and acceptance, failure and success, humiliation and exaltation, death and liberation. Neither God, nor Christ nor the Holy Spirit effectively resolve every problem or grant every request, but my parishioners never abandon their search for succour from God, and the ancestors.

Theocentric theology encourages other-worldly, top-down theology. Africa needs an anthropocentric reflection, a this-worldly theology related to the needs of the present time, its struggles, joys, successes and failures. Thus, African Christology should start with the humanity of Christ and his role and his functions in our world (Nthamburi, 1989/2003:55). In the same collection, Waruta (1989/2003:51) maintains that Africans are prone to shunning suffering through their problems and waiting for the bliss of heaven. Since Africans are anthropocentric, an ascending Christology is needed, using ancestor patterns of thought, and this 'is central for incarnating Christ in Africa' (Bujo 2003:77). In Africa, God relates to people in concrete, experiential practical ways, rather than in purely mystical and spiritual ways.

Ngada and Mofokeng (2001:22) explain that their church cares for this life (rather than life after death). They claim that they do not passively accept given political circumstances and were highly active in resisting apartheid. They provide an African form of worship. Interestingly enough, ancestral rites are not performed in their churches, although the pastor/prophet's role in healing replaces the role of traditional healer. Such rites are part of African culture and vary from family to family. Christian rituals are the same for all people. Ancestors are given their due respect in separate rituals, while in the African Christian service it is the Holy Spirit who is the prime target of worship and agent of healing.

#### 5.11 Gender Issues

Christology in Africa also needs to address gender issues, as sexism is entrenched in society, whereas an appropriate Christology will seek to prescribe what it means to be fully human (see Stinton. 2004:55-58). Males have been predominant in the writing of theology, and other issues such as blood taboos, domestic violence, and vulnerability to abuse need to be



addressed. Women make up at least fifty percent of the world population, and yet are underrepresented in theological discourse. Male patriarchy in South Africa is a real concern, and certain customs and modern practices conflict with principles of the South African Constitution (thesis by Rice 2015). Fr Donald Zagore, theologian and missionary of the Society for African Missions (SMA), stated that:

Today in Africa, mission cannot be conceived without direct, close and effective collaboration with women. In our continent, women are a fundamental link in the missionary activity of the Church. Women are the strength and vitality of African churches. With their dynamism and constant availability, they keep the flame of faith alive, especially in the most remote areas where the presence of men is sometimes non-existent.

He adds that they transmit faith to children, bring children to church, and if churches continue to live today, it is owed to 'the indefectible genius and commitment of women'. He notes that women are pushed to the side in relation to important ministries, made into 'prisoners of male power'. This cultural phenomenon has roots at the ecclesial level, but women should have real opportunities to be involved in the management of ecclesial life, considering that 'in our churches 90% are women'.<sup>58</sup> In my experience in the Cape Town African townships, females comprised a range of between 65% to 85% of total Mass attendance for observations over the period of a year. I feel it necessary to observe that women not only transmit faith (according to Fr Zagore), but also ATR at the household, and in Cape Town, it seems that transmission is primarily of traditional beliefs, usually in regard to the ancestors.

Magesa (Mugambi and Magesa, (eds), 1989/2003:130) contends that 'for centuries they (women) have been excluded from the full dignity of human persons by their culture and by the patriarchal Church'. In most of the Cape Town Catholic African parishes, still distinguishable by virtue of almost 100% African composition, there is strong opposition to women funeral ministers. On the other hand, women are usually in the majority in the bi-gender sodalities, and in executive positions.

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<sup>58</sup> Source: statement made on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019, by SMA to Fides News Agency, on International Women's Day. From ZENIT, 3/1/2019).

### 5.12 Okure

‘Ultimately, Jesus is the one who must needs be brought into the centre of African life and culture. He is the one, by whom any particular culture and peoples must needs be lifted up’. (Okure 1990:72). Okure worries that undue devotion to ancestors can condemn Africa to an inferior or ‘third-world’ Christianity. The supremacy of not only Christ, but of the Holy Spirit, must be clear. Okure (1998:16) asks that if we have been transferred from the ancestral bloodline to that of Christ, do we still need the ancestor cult? Are all the cultic demands really necessary for a person who has become God’s child, in fact, first born? (:16). I argue that they have valuable bridging roles to play, an *en route* function, but that Christ should be the main focus. In Luke 14:26 Jesus commands us to put him before our closest ties, that we need to ‘hate’ our mother or father.

The Catholic theology of the Communion of Saints claims that we all have been given a share in the unique intercession of Christ (as priests, prophets and kings by baptism), which draws its strength from this intercession, and complements it. Is not God sympathetic to the prayers and hopes of the parents in heaven for their offspring? Okure, however, worries that the Christian may end up serving two masters, where the notion of ancestor is more powerfully embedded in the mind of an African (:16,17). There is also the possibility of evil spirits posing as ancestors to lead people astray (my comment, and Okure 1998).

Whilst Okure (1988:23) agrees that evangelization needs to consider the African worldview, she insists that there must be a sound Christological and Pneumatological basis which acknowledges the infinitely higher authority of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The ‘alleged powers to guide the clan, call and commission individuals to carry out special functions in the community needs to be similarly approached’, that is, to be sound on a Christological and Pneumatological basis. Christ’s free gift of the Holy Spirit is better than anything the ancestors can offer. This gift is obtainable without ‘arduous’ rituals (:21).

### 5.13 Christ in Africa

The actual effect of Christianity in Africa on moral behaviour also needs to be unwrapped. For example, Kenya is 80% Christian, yet ranks third highest in terms of the level of corruption in the whole world (Stinton 2004:59). Other African countries also feature as high on the list of

corruption. Is Christianity superficial, described in fact as nominalism, of going through the motions without a matching interiority? In general, there seems to be a considerable lack of interior conviction in Jesus.

In summary, the presentation of the God in Christ image to the Xhosa in ACT not only seems to be inadequate for the receiving culture but is also a Eurocentric version which is in itself fundamentally inadequate. A high Christological model of preaching and teaching Christ must be balanced with the humanity of Christ, or he will be seen as an unapproachable, inimitable person whom it is impossible to comprehend and please.

Christianity should assure Africans that there is no opposition in being truly Christian and truly African (Bujo 2003:84; in Stinton 2004:144).

There is significantly more attention given to God than before Christian mission, in that he is no longer seen as distant and unapproachable. This represents a shift from religion based on magico-religious forces (centred on a concern with manipulating dynamistic flows of energy), to occupying a more God-centred faith (Pauw 1975:313). But the resilient belief in evil spirits, witchcraft and sorcery and the need for counter measures against these forces remain compelling factors, and additionally the belief in the ancestor rituals which enable these measures to be taken. Christian theology clashes with certain aspects of ancestor beliefs - the challenge is there. Signs of secularism are in evidence, in that the worldview is no longer the same as religion, because the economy and polity have tended to be separated from the general, holistic, religious lens through which the Xhosa saw reality (:336).

There are various 'contenders' for sacred authority. The mainline Christian churches do not provide adequately for the needs for protection from evil. Thus, in the arena of sacred power, 'competing' with Jesus are prophets, diviners, seers, revealers of spirits, possessors of the Spirit, leaders in the community, traditional healers, inspirers of religious and political movements, advisors in time of war, who operate in their own right, dispensing sacred power and solutions to a variety of problems (Waruta 1991/2002:52-64). Also, Thlagale discusses the *isangoma*-priests and their hybrid role. In regard to a world of dynamistic (or magico-religious as described by some) forces:

If Christ is not in charge of the dynamistic forces that make up one's life-world, he cannot protect, he cannot heal, he cannot give direction, he cannot establish justice and peace. (Nürnberg 2007:46).

Tlhagale also notes that in Zulu custom, to honour the son implies a lessening of honour due to the father, and that Shembe, pastor of an African Christian church, gave priority to the Father. This may well apply to many Western people, who unconsciously imagine the Son as less than the Father. Tlhagale (2018:241) records some lines of the Creed of Shembe's church, which expresses belief in the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in the communion of saints, but the Son, or Christ, is absent. Is it actually possible for some of these churches to warrant the designation of Christian given the side-lining of Christ in many of them? Tlhagale contends that the mission churches should dialogue with the Indigenous Churches and challenge their theologies: 'the challenge still looms larger after 200 years of missionary activity' (:241).

There is a need to relate Christ to the family, clan, tribe, nation and the ancestors, but critically, the latter were banned by many missionaries. Nürnberg (2007:49) argues that ancestors were well known when alive, far more intimately than Christ, and therefore Christ cannot be part of the inner circle, 'by any stretch of the imagination'. This reinforces the need to introduce Christ as the First Ancestor, rather than simply banning ancestor rituals. Also, if Christ is at the right-hand side of the Father, 'he is out of reach for the common people', by being present at the top of the spiritual hierarchy, at the level of the Supreme Being who is seen as generally inaccessible and fear inspiring (:48). But this view can be successfully resolved theologically and pastorally, as shown above (Chapter 5:2). Parishioners, instead of asking what Christ wants of them, are wont to probe what the ancestors are alluding to in dreams, or via mishaps and recurring existential concerns.

The rise of *Sangoma*-priests reflects impatience with the slow progress of inculturation. Despite some measures such as use of drums, the vernacular and African composed hymns:

Conditions have not been created that would facilitate the incarnation of the Gospel into local cultures and indeed the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church (Tlhagale 2018:167).

Tlhagale is fearful that if elements of ATR appear, it may be seen by the faithful as a return to the pre-evangelization era, opening the way to syncretism and to magical beliefs (where words and objects achieve their result by a power which supersedes the laws of science).

However, there is much potential to inculturate in other areas of Christianity, not just the Mass. The Catholic Church has experienced 'an exodus of Christians' to the AICs, although Nürnberger (2007:68), maintains that the Catholic Church has lost fewer than many other churches because of its low key (or even non-existent) opposition to the ancestors, construing them as part of the theology of the Communion of Saints but without any thorough or premeditated pronouncements and pastoral policies to support this doctrine. The Church in Southern Africa has not as yet 'made a link between local culture and faith' (Tlhagale 2018:167, 168), and this explains the instinctive resort to African tradition, where they find full support and traditional remedies. He believes that for this reason, the *Sangoma*-priest will continue to serve their purpose because of the real perceived need of the people.

Tlhagale (2018:244), noting that Christianity is 2 000 years old, compared to a 200-year presence in many other parts of Africa, construes that African worshipping communities are overall closer to their ATR than to Christian belief. The system of being socialised into traditions of the Xhosa persists. The urgent question therefore arises after 200 years of Christian mission:

Who is Jesus Christ for the African? The answer cannot be fully answered without critically interrogating their ways of being and doing, and the fabric and texture of their cultural environment. (2018:245).

This thesis hopefully qualifies as an opening to this issue, as a source of reference towards fuller integration of Christ into the indigenous worldview.

Respondents to my questionnaire generally pray to *uThixo* (God), not to Christ, and *de facto* see Christ as less than God. Their responses showed consistently that the target of prayer was *uThixo* first, and on prompting, sometimes Christ, or the ancestors as second. There was some confusion as to whether Jesus, whilst Son of God, was also God. *uThixo* (God), is superior to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Responses from those interviewed as to their favourite part of the Bible did not necessarily reflect their deeper preferences. One chose Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd) as their favourite text. The most important person in the Bible is covered by the blanket title of God. Again, a sense of the lack of centrality of Christ is apparent. The Old Testament was described as powerful. A Xhosa parishioner, in an informal discussion, revealed convincingly that he saw Jesus as the centre of his prayer and life. However, he does involve himself in ancestor rituals, but these are a separate component of his spiritual life. I

am of the opinion that many Western people see God as superior to Jesus, partly because of the cultural mindset that the human father is superior to the son.

I believe that a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible when the foundation of the African's whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories. (Bujo 2003:84; see Stinton 2004:144; my underlining).

Taylor (1963/2001:123 cited by Mugambi in foreword, xxxii) argues that the notion of sin as an offence against God, is on the other hand, in the primal view, an act that is essentially anti-social. The commandments of the Decalogue from 4 to 10 are easily distinguishable in form in the Xhosa tradition, but the sin is against the community rather than against God. The redemptive act of Christ in answer to sin needs to be qualified, as the image of Christ the Redeemer is a major premise of the Gospel.

Jesus remains a stranger, a type of abstraction, and is less considered than he should be given his objective centrality and supremacy. He has been presented theologically rather than experientially, and not definitively correlated to everyday life and culture. Pauw's research concluded that for Xhosa Christians, the ancestors are needed for this world with its existential problems (and God), and Christ is acknowledged for life after death, a complementary adaptation. Jesus should be the link between the people and God. There is much support among theologians for presenting Christ as the Proto Ancestor. There is the need for this-worldly theology, a balance to the emphasis on life after death.

The protective presence of the ancestors, (and at times their chastisement) is at the heart of the people's spirituality. To love Christ is to love his Body, the Church, as well. A weak Christ image can diminish the Church image. To repeat, Tlhagale's disturbing conclusion is that Africans are closer to ATR than to Christianity (2018:244). Two Western religious sisters who have a combined experience of working in an African parish in Cape Town for over 100 years, are convinced that Catholicism has been 'added on' by the Black parishioners, and that they have not relinquished their African Religious Traditions (conversation 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020).

#### 5.14 Jesus as God: The Respondents

Jesus is, to an extent, seen as less than God. According to one respondent 'Yes, you can say he is God', implying a certain qualification of Jesus as an equal: 'Jesus is the bridge to God'

(A11). Through him, 'you can take things to God' (A11). In order to know God, you must know Jesus. 'If you take all our difficulties straight there and your answer will come' (A11). Jesus is correctly seen as the mediator and route ("bridge") between God and humanity. Asked if Jesus is God, a mature parishioner replied 'Ah. (laughs). What an interesting question. Is Jesus God? I will say, yes' (B4). He addresses God as *nKulukulu*, *uThixo*, and: 'Jesu (sic); which is Jesus' word' (B3). It is worth noting that he volunteered the name of Jesus without prompting, one of the few occasions that this occurred in all the interviews.

As to whether Jesus could help more with special problems, a priest chose God, but:

there are certain issues where I, in particular, appeal to Jesus (H16). These issues are: Eh, around issues of temptation, around issues of forgiveness, around issues of, of power and, authority (H16).

When, when I'm confronted with decisions from my perhaps, position of power or authority, so it's that, that, I tap into the Jesus in, in my understanding. So you (sic), my prayer then moves towards Jesus (H16).

As a priest subject to issues of human relationships such as power and authority, and temptation, he turns to Jesus. Otherwise, when he prays, he has 'God' in mind. He chose the most important person in the Bible as Jesus, and after him, considering either of the Testaments, he chose Moses (H7). I would have liked to have unearthed a deeper sense of attention to Christ and intimacy, but this did not seem to be apparent to me. He separates prayers to Jesus and the Father as noted above.

Jesus, for a young participant, is the Son of God 'and he's also, um, he's my creator' (D5). 'He's creator cause (because) he's the image of God. He's the exact image of God' (D5). He pronounced that the name given by the Bible for God is *Messiah* (D5). Prompted, he agreed this is Jesus. As with most of the respondents, Jesus is seen as the Son of God, except a priest who insisted he was God the Son, as if to emphasise his un-createdness, not like a biological son, therefore not the Son of God. A middle-aged woman confessed that 'Actually, to be honest, I don't know the difference between God and Jesus' (G16). Asked who Jesus was, she replied: 'Eh, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (G6), and asked which one Jesus was, she replied 'The Son' (G6). Although a mature female averred that Jesus was Son of God and God as well, she still contended that God is more powerful than Jesus (K4), and her ordering of agents in prayer are the ancestors (it is her belief that she cannot go straight to God, 'because

the ancestors are there') and then 'Mama Maria' (Mother of Christ), and then the Son, then God. But elsewhere she identifies Jesus as less than God, so this ordering is not congruent with her latter statement of her hierarchy of sacred power.

This respondent related that the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sodality had brought her nearer to Jesus, 'And to my God', where it seems that *uThixo* claims a greater degree of devotion (K5). Although she claimed that Catholics pray equally to God and Jesus, and that God is included in rituals to ancestors, with no separation between God and Jesus, the overall impression is that Jesus is a lesser God, and that responsibility is with the Father, who is greater than Jesus.

#### 5.15 Jesus Unequal to God

Asked who is more important, the Father, Jesus or the Holy Spirit, the reply of a mature female was: 'It's the same road: The same, but the one who is powerful is God' (A13). Referring to Jesus on the Cross, praying to the Father, she noted that Christ was 'powerless and the only person that can make him strong is God'. It was God who answered her prayers (A12). There is some measure of a relegation of Jesus to God. On balance, 'God' is seen by her as more powerful than Jesus, although 'Jesus take (sic) all our prayers straight there, up there. Even in the Bible they explain' (A11). Jesus is the intermediary to the all-powerful, who is greater than Jesus. The same applies, in my opinion, to many Western Christians, who see Jesus as somewhat less than the Father. There is thus a degree of subordination of Jesus to the Father that many Christians entertain.

Asked if Jesus is as powerful as God, a mature male replied: 'I think, you talk about the same people here, it's the same person. Jesus is as powerful as the Father' (B4). Here there was no doubt. A young female was not sure if Jesus was as powerful as God, acknowledging that Jesus is powerful 'but again it's like a hierarchy, so God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, they're like one but I think God has the final say' (C5). Another young respondent saw the Holy Spirit, who is all around us, as of the same importance as Jesus (D6). Jesus was both divine and human in his earthly life, and he is also fully God, but despite this he argues that the Father 'He's greater than Jesus' (D7). Nevertheless 'Jesus is in heaven. And he's everywhere around us' (D6).

A priest said Jesus is God the same as God the Father, with the same power. 'Jesus, like God is everywhere' (E7). The most important person in the Bible was God, and then Jesus (E9). As



to Jesus' presence in the Tabernacle of the Church, he explained: 'You (see) now, I come into the church and I know Jesus is present so immediately it's Jesus. But if I'm sitting at home, it's, it's God, you know' (E10). Catholic theology insists on acknowledging the real presence of the Risen Christ in the sacred bread in the Tabernacle, so it is not surprising that the priest is cognisant of this when he enters a church. It is interesting that he switches to God in other situations, suggesting perhaps a lesser degree of importance of Jesus as against God. For this priest, apart from being cognisant of Christ's real presence in the Church, Jesus seems to be undervalued to a certain extent. This is of important consequence in prayer life, when he almost always prays to God, using with the blanket title of God. Although he saw the three persons of the Trinity as equal, Christ could occupy a more prominent role, and the Trinitarian aspect is attenuated. There is too little of Jesus as the unique mediator, and as the summit of God's revelation. His image of Christ as a blanket (noted below) is, however, notably very personal and intimate.

A mature male sees Jesus as subject to the authority of the Father, who is more powerful than Jesus. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and is not far away because the Holy Spirit 'keeps him (Jesus) close'. Jesus for him is the 'arm that does the action' (of the Father), and God according to him, does the controlling. A mature female who was interviewed in order to solicit the stance of a person who belongs to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sodality, stated: 'although I have said earlier on, they are one, but I believe God is more powerful than Jesus' (K4). There is ample congruence in the answers that deem 'God' as superior to Christ. This coherence of thought on the subordination of Jesus is found also in other cultures, where he resides on the periphery of religious consciousness, judging from the severe de-Christianization within the Western world..

#### 5.16 Presence

Jesus is present everywhere, even when we may be careless in traffic, he cautions you of imminent danger for example, of being knocked down by a car (mature female): 'wherever you go he is there for you' (A12). For this person, Jesus is not affixed somewhere at the Right Hand of the Father, an image from the Bible (Col 3:1) which is deceptive in the sense of evoking a vision of absence instead of presence, especially if God is envisioned as residing somewhere in the heavens. This omnipresence, however, is a stated response, and is not in

reality partnered by an automatic turning to Christ when needs arise. I believe it differs from the more instinctive resort to God first and the ancestors second.

A mature male sees Jesus as residing in heaven with the Father: 'that is why you pray with him in conjunction' (B4). He is confident, however, that 'Jesus can see us all. He can even count the number of our hairs' (B4). A young female also saw Jesus as being everywhere. A young male saw Jesus as powerful as God, asserting, 'and Jesus is in heaven. And he's everywhere around us' (D6). A priest said Jesus is God the same as God, and with the same power. 'Jesus, like God is everywhere' (E7). A middle-aged priest said that Jesus was everywhere, however not in the geographic sense, but in the 'spiritual sense' (F9). A mature female said that Jesus was 'Everywhere' but admitted elsewhere that she did not know the difference between Jesus and God (G16). A priest said: 'Jesus is around, um, lives and moves with us' (H5).

The image of Jesus as less than the Father does not diminish the belief that he is ubiquitous, but this does not lead to electing Jesus before the ancestors when confronted with a crisis; the automatic, spontaneous reaction is to invoke God and the ancestors.

#### 5.17 Jesus' Focal Deeds

A mature female saw Jesus as more important than the ancestors, who helps us with our daily problems (A26). Her reference to prayer included the powerlessness of Jesus on the Cross. Asked about Jesus's most important action or deed, a mature male gave a full reply, notably that Jesus came to save us from our sins, to give us light, to give us energy, to give us spirit, 'so that we can work and follow in his footsteps, so that we can run away from Satan. So that we can know how to protect ourselves (sic) from the evil spirit by praying and believing in his Father' (B4). Asked how Jesus saved us, he replied by 'teaching us to fish for ourselves (sic), teaching us how to look after each other, teaching us, as believers to pray, and to organise other people to speak the word of God' (B4). With a prompt, he acknowledged that:

the Cross as the centre of Jesus' life, because every time we look at the Cross, it always reminds us as the followers of Jesus that Jesus dies (sic) for us on that Cross (B5).

The Cross and Resurrection was not his foremost response, but prompted, he did make the above comment as to the Cross being the centre of Jesus' life.

A young female suggested Jesus' most important deed was 'Giving up his life for the people that he loves' (C5). This is a 'good' theological answer, focussing on the central deed of Jesus. He allowed himself to be crucified because of 'Love and forgiveness'. When she was asked who helps her with her health problems, without prompting, she named Jesus, who helps generally with most problems, including financial, love, family and political problems (C19). She did not think the ancestors would care about politics, provided a political party is delivering (C19).

A young male volunteered Jesus' most important deed 'was firstly to die for the people, for the sins of the people, and also to make people believe in, to believe in his Father' (D5). This is a more theologically complete statement than most of the other respondents. Asked if Jesus helped him in any special way with his daily issues, he volunteered 'whenever I have negative thoughts, then I just speak with him and then I find some sort of peace and solution in a way' (D16). Jesus is higher than the ancestors and those that help him with his daily problems are God, Jesus and the ancestors, in that order (D16). A priest saw Jesus' greatest action as saving us, allowing himself to be sacrificed because it was God's will for him.

Asked what Jesus's most important work done for the world, another priest said: 'I think he was the one who gave the people a second chance' (F8). Theologically, this seems to fit with the notion of redemption, of God giving us a second chance after the sin of Adam and Eve. It may also reflect an important second chance God gave him at a certain stage in life, which has conditioned his responses.

And he found people who were not respected because they were fisherman (sic), he gave them chance to lead. So ah, he is that person who believes in giving people chance (F8).

'Um, I think when he found people who were sinning, he gave them a second chance' (F8). Again, a fair comment but perhaps again influenced by his own experience of getting a second chance at a certain juncture of his life. Jesus's most important deed in his life was to 'separate between the human being and the sin of the human being' (F8). A case of love the sinner but hate the sin?

And ah, we might not like the sin that one has done but that does not mean we should not like that person. And also (sic) he, he taught us that um, his, his greatest anger was that um, was towards those

who wanted to be holier than the others. And his greatest eh, mercy was towards those who were look for second chance (F8).

The 'second chance' phrase reoccurs as something both personal to him and also, as a theological premise to describe Christ's act of redemption.

Asked if he saw the crucifixion as Jesus' greatest deed, he gave this reply:

I think his crucifixion was only big because of how he lived his life before it. Otherwise the cross would have been meaningless if he didn't live what he lived. When he died on the cross for us to be forgiven sins, I think he was doing what he was already doing in the three years that he was living, giving people second chance, you know. It was already in his character, this is why we are able to understand the crucifix... (F9).

Again the 'second chance' phrase.

A middle-aged female said Jesus' greatest deed for the world was: 'He has prayed for the world' (G7). Also, he saved the world 'by protecting them' (G7). Protection is a frequent term she uses, in her struggle with indigence and other daily issues. When asked what Jesus did, she said: 'he died for us' (G7). 'He was crucified' (G7). These are theologically accurate statements, despite her confusion as to the different members of the Trinity.

A priest, when asked what Jesus' most important action was in the world, replied: 'Humility and...' and then "" think the ultimate sacrifice of salvation, that's, that's the ultimate...' (H4). This is a good theological reply, to be expected from one who has studied theology. Prompted with the word 'Cross' he said: 'The Cross, that's the ultimate' (H4). No other respondents spontaneously volunteered the Cross as a central motif.

More than that:

And the use of power...of not invoking the authority and power that he had at, at difficult situations. And I think also the forgiveness, which is still challenging but, but how when he was suffering on the cross was, was still able to have that heart of forgiveness (H5).

He is impressed with the fact that Jesus did not exercise the power and authority he could have employed. I note that the Gospel of John emphasises Jesus' control over what transpired. When the Roman cohort and others came to arrest Jesus, and he acknowledged

that he was Jesus of Nazareth, 'they moved back and fell on the ground' (Jn 18:6). The power of Jesus is unmistakable here. *Jesus* chooses the 'hour' (Jn 17:1).

A mature male responded that Jesus was crucified to save us. Despite being all powerful and 'strong', his suffering 'camouflaged' his power and divinity: 'although he was strong, I mean he's the creator, but he is sort of putting a camouflage of poorness'. His favourite part of the Bible is the 'passion of the Cross'. This is the path that Jesus walked; 'the Stations of the Cross, I can say'. He finds encouragement here because he has fallen many times in his lifetime, saying: 'I am the most fallen'. When he reads the Bible, he believes God is talking to him.

A mature female saw Jesus' miracles as God's greatest deeds. This differs from the essence of the Paschal Mystery and concentrates more on God's ability to overcome human problems, as one who assists people with their daily burdens. When I queried the importance of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, she agreed that it was especially important, but it did not seem to be as relevant as her daily existential issues. She felt that Jesus allowed himself to be crucified to prove the existence of God, who was able to raise him from the dead. 'Jesus will come back', she added. She saw Jesus as being able to address all our concerns, he is a problem-solver. He is higher than the ancestors.

Seven of the ten respondents, with some prompting, identified the Cross of Christ as his most focal deed, referring to surrendering his life, dying on the Cross, saving us, saving us from our sins, the passion of Christ, sacrificing his life, a sacrifice of salvation, crucified to save us, praying for the world, and giving sinners a second chance. Two agreed with a prompt, that the Cross was central to his life. No one spoke about the Resurrection, or eternal life as part of their assessment of Jesus' focal deeds, or heaven. There is no explicit preoccupation with eschatological objectives or soteriological motives. Some respondents located Jesus before the ancestors in their replies, but in practice, the ancestors claim more attention, in particular in terms of the amount of time spent on petitioning them, and in conducting ancestor rituals. This preoccupation with the ancestors significantly obscures the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and relegates it to an ancillary role, instead of the central event of salvation. There seems to be little notion of the need for a Redeemer and repentance. Perhaps more importantly, there is little sign of a truly affective relationship, one which should dominate daily consciousness and reveal a deep, intimate, loving relationship.

### 5.18 Images of God/ Jesus

A mature female had no visual image of God, and when asked if he was both God and man, she ventured: 'I think that was what they say is (the) Trinity; (A12). A mature male said that Jesus is Son of God and God will look like everyone 'because he created us from his own image, from his likeness, you know' (B4). With a prompt he agreed that Jesus could look like the statues one sees in a church. He addresses God as nKulukulu, and *uThixo*, and 'Jesu, which is Jesus' word' (B3). It is revealing that he volunteered the name of Jesus without prompting.

He has no particular visual image of God 'Yes, I know I've got a picture of Jesus, but God...' (B4). His image of Jesus arises from pictures of Christ in literature. Also, he is the Son of God, and God will look like everyone 'because he created us from his image, from his likeness, you know' (B4). With a prompt he acknowledged that Jesus could look like the statues of Jesus seen in churches, with a beard.

A young male said that Jesus would look like us as we are created in his image and so 'I look like Jesus' (D6). For him a statue gives an imperfect view of who Jesus is because Jesus was fully human and fully divine when he came here on earth, so a human image would be imperfect. He is also fully God. This contrasts with his earlier view that the Father is more important than Jesus. A young female did not have a visual image of Jesus, but she ventured that 'I think he'll look like how you think he looks like but maybe when you see him, he doesn't even look like that. He could be rainbow coloured for all we know' (C6). Referring to statues of Jesus she remarked that he was always 'either white or caramelly bronze, ja (yes), these colours' (laughter; C6). She replied that she did not have any favourite image of Jesus, but at home, her mother who is a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, has a poster of Jesus with the words 'Jesus I trust in You', 'and Jesus is White. And I always (wonder): how do you know Jesus is White?' (C6).

A priest said his favourite image for Jesus, is a blanket. We cannot do without a blanket (E7).

Even if it hot or cold, you have blankets for each season (E8). You know that you will have a blanket that you will use in winter, and a blanket that you will use in summer. So that for me is the image of Jesus (E8).

This is a rich and intimate image of the Christ figure, an exception to the other more functional replies from the other respondents. Another priest when asked if he had an image of God in his mind, he opined that Jesus had to take some image to be incarnated, but he was not like that in the beginning. So, we cannot confine him to a particular image, 'rather we can understand the image of God in all of us' (F9).

Because he was born, he had to take some image when he was incarnated. But what we also have to understand, that was not his beginning because he is God the Son. So, you can't put an image of God, rather we can understand the image of God in all of us (F9).

This seems to be like a theologian talking, referring to the Son's pre-existence (he existed before the incarnation), and to the Word in us, or perhaps even the Seeds of the Word?

A middle-aged woman said that Jesus 'he is also protecting me. He's always there in my dream, in my mind' (G16). She added: 'In my heart...' (G16). She repeated: '...he's always with me all the time. He's protecting me everywhere I go' (G16).

Asked as to his favourite image of God, a priest said that his work with an HIV/AIDS programme gave him 'the beautiful image that stuck with me from that time', '...of a Jesus that is Black in a way' (H5). A Black Jesus is the dominant image in his mind (H6). Jesus for him is: 'A friend, older brother, um, the one willing to sacrifice for me...' (H3), and the Son of God. Asked if he was fearful of Jesus, he replied: 'I wouldn't say fear. Fear is a strong word but I, I'm inspired to please' (H15).

A mature male as noted above, sees Jesus as the 'arm' of the Father. 'To see that God always loved me and was with me all the time' was a profound conclusion following his conversion experience. He has found God and consolation in the Church: 'you will always find, father, a home in the local church'. He relates Jesus' 'hardships' with his own struggles, arriving at the conclusion that suffering is simply part of life and must be endured.

Participants saw Jesus variously as the statues, a blanket, rainbow coloured, not necessarily white, 'caramelly bronze', Black, the arm of the Father, a responder to prayers, and his image subsistent in us. . For a mature female, her image of God is one who answers prayers. Apart from the blanket metaphor, the images of Christ were limited and more functional than their affective images of God, as noted above, and in chapter 5.22 below. There was limited

acknowledgment of the love of Jesus manifest in his abandonment to the Cross, to do his Father's will, a personal intimate love and similar poignant renderings, as opposed to a functional description of his principal deeds.

My concern with a mental, visual image of Jesus in the mind of the respondents attempts to discern whether Jesus is down to earth, whether he has a clear identity in their imagination, and the nature of personal relationship with him. To follow Christ is also to imitate his perfect humanity, of which there seems to be no firm, outstanding image in the mind of the respondents. Where is the model of his humanity, or is he a heavenly, distant figure? There appears to be no such satisfactory model, but I have discovered a very receptive image of Jesus among some of the teen-age youth, more so than with the adults. We also need to employ African categories to preach and teach Jesus, which resonate with the cultural worldview of both youth and adults.

#### 5.19 A White Jesus?

Asked if Jesus had been brought across in a way which made him a 'white' Jesus of little relevance to the African, a mature male disagreed (B16).

Jesus is just a something that is there for everybody. He represent (sic) everybody, every nation, every colour (B17). Jesus is the centre of our lives regardless of colour, regardless of race; centre of our lives (B17).

It has been noted above that Jesus had been proclaimed as one who freed people, yet because of the complicity of mission with Colonialism, Jesus for some was associated with domination, and a type of imprisonment. This is at odds with the depictions of respondents noted above, there was little sign of viewing Jesus as a tyrant.

A young female averred that she did not have any favourite image of Jesus, but at home, her mother who is a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, has a poster of Jesus with the words 'Jesus I trust in You' 'and Jesus is white. And I always: how do you know Jesus is White?' (C6). This is a healthy reaction to pictorial representations of Jesus as White, a questioning attitude of a young person. There was no particularly strong image of Jesus as more of a white God, as some scholars have argued. The fact that you do not have to pray in English militates



against such an impression, from her point of view (C18). There is an impression here that praying in English gives rise to an impression of Jesus as a white God.

However, further reflection is embedded in the following statement:

It's difficult to say how I see him because sometimes again, you look at the pictures and you like' Jesus is White. So now you like mm, but now does he understand about being Black. So, I'm praying to a White God about being Black, like shouldn't he... (sentence ends. C19).

She expressed a wish to see more pictures of God. 'We can't see God but like Jesus and like my form...' (C19). It seems she would expect Jesus to have a human form, and it seems she would probably welcome seeing a picture of a Black Jesus. There is sensitivity to her Blackness and situations unique to being a Black person, and a Black female person.

As to whether Jesus was portrayed in an overly 'White' fashion, a young male disagreed and argued that 'Um, as I said, God created us in his own image whether you Black, White, Indian, Chinese' (D16). A priest responded to the issue of Jesus as a white God that it was something you grew up with: 'you think of, you think of this white man with long hair' (E16). There was no trace of sarcasm, or bitterness or negative emotions with this response. Another priest simply saw the need for God to choose an image with which to incarnate. His reply was more theological.

Asked what God looked like, a middle-aged female said: 'He's like a white man'. 'Because the face, that's how we believe' (G5). "Maybe because we going to the Roman Catholic Churches. Yes, so as we see the father and the bishops, so we believe he is like that' (G6). Asked if she saw Jesus as more of a white God, she replied: 'It's not true because Jesus is for everyone; white, black, green or purple or coloured' (G17). There is some contradiction here, but her preoccupation is with God, and there is the element of a 'white God' in her mind, a relic of the way she has absorbed Christianity from the White missionaries. It is necessary to recall that she confessed to not knowing the difference between Jesus and God, and that elsewhere she sees Jesus as an old man (G16), so when she articulates the name of Jesus, she denotes God. Asked as to his favourite image of God, a priest said that his work with an HIV/AIDS programme gave him 'the beautiful image that stuck with me from that time...', '...of a Jesus that is Black in a way' (H5).

In general, there is little evidence of perceiving Jesus as a forceful tyrant, an import from the West. Only a young female appeared sensitive to Jesus and his presumed Whiteness, and one priest felt that the image of a Black Jesus was a captivating one (H6). A member of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sodality saw Jesus as in a picture: 'he is a middle-aged man, of course with a beard, but black' (K4).

## 5.20 Jesus and the Ancestors

A mature female rendered an emphatic no! to the question as to whether ancestors are more powerful than Jesus, who 'is higher than the ancestors' (A26). It is Jesus who helps us most with our daily problems. When asked if Jesus could be seen as an ancestor, the answer was no, there is a basic difference, but there was no elaboration. A mature male also did not see Jesus as an ancestor, a Christological construct suggested by some African scholars. 'God, Jesus and the ancestors and the Holy Spirit, I believe, they work hand in glove' (B16).

That is why I am always inviting Jesus when I'm praying. I invite Jesus to work with my ancestors every now and then. Please Jesus work with my ancestors to help me (B16).

For a young female, Jesus is more involved with daily issues and is superior to the ancestors. She did not envisage Jesus as an ancestor because "I look at Jesus from the Trinity..." (C18). She admitted a degree of fear of Jesus: 'I guess he can also punish, I don't know' (C17).

Asked if he is fearful of Jesus, a young male replied yes, but also 'I respect him and love him so much and he is my father, he is my leader...' (D16). As to Jesus being seen as an ancestor, it was felt it made sense 'because David is actually a great ancestor of Jesus which really does make sense that Jesus might also be an ancestor' (D16). Jesus is higher than the ancestors and those who help with his daily problems are God, Jesus, and the ancestors, in that order (D16). In practice, it is the latter who make their demands known more frequently, for special, and sometimes extreme commissions (such as reburial in a blanket, or a sacrifice, or a ritual celebration).

A priest could see Jesus as an ancestor because Jesus advises the respondent (E15). Jesus was more helpful with daily issues than the ancestors (E15). Another priest made little reference to ancestors comparatively, but he insisted that ancestor rituals, in which he involves himself, remain separate from God. No Christian prayers preface a traditional ritual in his view. It

seemed he was reluctant to mix tradition with Christianity. A middle-aged female, asked if she could see Jesus as ancestor, replied: 'Jesus can be an ancestor also' (G16). The ancestors are not more powerful than Jesus.

Another priest could not see Jesus as an ancestor: 'For me I think more broader than an ancestor, I think saying Jesus is an ancestor would be reducing' (H16). He contends that this title would devalue Jesus. But I note elsewhere that any anthropological title devalues Jesus. It is a bridge to an enhanced understanding of Christ. Asked if the ancestors are less powerful than Jesus he said: 'Of course!' (H15). He added that they have 'way less' power. All their power comes from God (H15).

All respondents agreed that the ancestors are far less powerful than Jesus. The ancestors have 'way less' power; all their power comes from God, although when faced with a problem, they are resorted to almost instinctively. One priest could envisage Jesus as an ancestor because he talks to him. Jesus helps more with daily problems than the ancestors do for one respondent. One parishioner could also envisage Jesus as an ancestor, saying that 'Jesus can be an ancestor also' (G16). However, she was not sure of the difference between Jesus and God, so her comments apply to God: 'Because he is always protecting me. He's always there in my dream, in my mind' (G16). One saw Jesus as being of more help than the ancestors.

The various responses appear to demonstrate a convincing preference for Jesus over the ancestral shades, but this arises as a result of direct interrogation, of asking for an 'a' or 'b' choice, rather than a spontaneous reaction to an existential issue. It is possible that I received more theological answers to my questions, unrelated, however, to actual practice when an existential crisis arises, demanding a quick answer. In the latter case, it seems that the ancestors claim more immediate attention than Christ, a case of a dual religious instinct, a reflex reaction revealing the underlying pre-occupation with their predecessors. So despite the various assurances that Jesus is more powerful than the ancestors at the theoretical level, the latter continue to overshadow their mindset, and they continue to communicate with their progeny through dreams, inspirations and religious specialists, and appear, in effect, more extant than Christ in what they stipulate needs to be undertaken. Ancestor rituals remain the standard.

Nürnberg (2007:49) argues that ancestors were well known when alive, far more intimately than Christ, and therefore Christ cannot be part of the inner circle, 'by any stretch of the imagination'. This reinforces the prerequisite to introduce Christ as the First Ancestor, rather than simply endeavouring to proscribe ancestor conventions. Again, the religious sisters referred to above (5.13), are resolute that the ancestors remain prominent in the lives of the Catholic parishioners (conversation 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020). They appeared surprised initially that according to my research, 'God' was rated above the ancestors.

### 5.21 Image of God versus Jesus

In Chapter 4, a plethora of images of God can be garnered from the experiences of the participators in the research. There are rich, affective images of God as provider (food, work), protector and rescuer from dangers (fraud, kidnap, robbery, danger), a thwarter of perils, an anchor, 'my everything' (K2), and in general, acknowledged for timeous interventions, and a presence that manifests in grace through the patient waiting for a prodigal parishioner to convert. He is God who is omnipresent and all powerful, a Father and a parent, a healer, God who gives the blessing of being alive (K3), always assisting with everyday issues and one who answers prayers. He engenders sentiments of respect, gratefulness, love and praise. He is God who is more powerful than Jesus, even to a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, who stated: 'although I have said earlier on they are one but I believe God is more powerful than Jesus' (K4). A parishioner also saw God as the greatest thing on earth, looking after people (B3). Another averred that God is keeping them alive, another that they never slept without food despite intermittent employment; another that he is compassionate and forgives and even uses the mistakes of people to good advantage.

Jesus is seen as the mediator between God and humankind, a bridge to God, the 'arm' of God and omnipresent (he can count the hairs of your head). Like God, he is far superior to the ancestors. The rich portrayals of God as provider and protector, however, are not matched by similar renderings of Jesus, apart from his image as a blanket, which was shared by one respondent. He is seen from a soteriological perspective, in a somewhat functional way, surrendering his life on the Cross. There was no spontaneous reference to the Resurrection,

although elsewhere it is noted by scholars that his post-resurrection appearances reinforce the reported experiences of ancestral manifestations to their progeny. There was a little indication of affectivity, of a special intimate relationship with Christ.

The intimate, loving, tender qualities of the Jesus that is described so eloquently by the Saints, and evident in the Gospels (exuding compassion, healing, patient love, forgiveness), are notably absent. The Aparecida Conference (2007:139) illuminates the affective qualities of Jesus as follows:

In following Jesus Christ, we learn and practice the beatitudes of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ's own style of life: his love and filial obedience to the Father, his tender compassion in the face of human suffering, his closeness to the poor and the insignificant, his fidelity to the mission entrusted to him, his servant love to the point of giving his own life. Today we contemplate Jesus Christ as the gospels transmit him to us so we may know what He did and to discern what we must do in present-day circumstances.

The transition to the New Testament presentation of God in Jesus seems substantially incomplete, deficient. Jesus is more than an appendage of God, he is God who seeks a personal relationship that goes beyond problem solving, a relationship that is radically energizing, that transforms a person into his disciple, whose response is to do mission, to proclaim Christ, and to engage with society to bring about transformation, to advance God's kingdom on earth. The Father has:

made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth" (2019:1; Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa; Ep 1:9-10).

The absolute authority of the Risen Jesus, clearly evident in the New Testament, needs to be proclaimed and seen as superior to anything the ancestors can offer. The ancestors, guardian angels, and any angels in general who protect us, are valid but optional extras, agents who assist Christ, but who are beholden to him and receive all their power from him. However, although for some of the respondents, the hierarchical ranking order is God, Jesus and the ancestors, Jesus is undermined on both sides, and does not captivate the attention and devotion which he should, given that the Bible professes Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God. This was true also of a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, to whom Jesus is primarily a mediator, and God is greater than Christ, whereas the Sodality could be expected to

engender a richer and closer relationship with Christ. There is transcending grace and energy available in a relationship with the Risen Lord, an energy which has galvanised countless missionaries and disciples to perform far greater works than Jesus did (Jn 14:12):

In truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

The Spirit, from whom mighty works will proceed, is sent by Jesus (footnote 14g to NJB 1985:1777). Jesus is the principle who actuates this accomplishment of great works via the Holy Spirit. There was a lack of spontaneity in regard to referring to Christ, whilst the ancestors seemed to be more at the level of immediate spiritual awareness for many. Thus, for example, a mature parishioner stated their three priorities in life as being God, the ancestors and their family (K1). This was despite the fact that they were a member of the Sacred Heart (Of Jesus) Sodality, from which a special devotion to Christ might have been expected. In Dt 6:4-9 (also referred to in Mt 22:37, Mk 12:33-34, and Lk 10:27), God sets out his exclusive claim for humanity's prior attention, as Yahweh, the only God, to be loved with all the heart, and with the necessity to remind children of this constantly and to promote this inimitability with every opportunity. In Luke 14:26 (also Mt 10:37; no one must prefer anyone or anything to Christ), Jesus effectively claims this preeminent attention for himself.

## 5.22 Prayer

Although prayer surfaces within all the other main themes, it merits a special subsection since it is the predominant way in which the respondents objectify their Christian faith on a daily basis. The self-confessed foci of prayer are God, Jesus and the ancestors in that order, but it seems to me that Jesus was included by some as a result of my prompt questions, (for example, the query as to whether Jesus was also prayed to). Two priests prayed specially to Jesus in specific circumstances, otherwise their prayer was addressed mainly to God; this tendency was followed by the majority of the participators. God is seen very much as a provider and protector, by a generally grateful majority, who expressed their considerable conviction in prayer and its efficacy. The ancestors located 'near to God', are also an integral part of their entreaties, and of course the subject of rituals. Some preface their ancestor rituals with prayers to God. Four of the respondents prayed the Rosary regularly, attributing

significant efficacy to this prayer. All exhibited familiarity with the Bible. An interview with a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality revealed a fourth person with a Devotion to Mary the Mother of Jesus, and for them the ancestors were also especially important. Their prayer trajectory was from ancestors, to Mary, to Jesus, to God. Tlhagale's conclusion, as noted above, is that Africans are closer to ATR than to Christianity (2018:244). The preoccupation with the ancestors as opposed to Christ of my respondents intimates a similar conclusion, but I feel a more nuanced interpretation is called for. Jesus is discovered in the cognitive deliberations of the respondents, but he is not supreme in many minds and hearts, he remains too distant, abstract, in comparison with the ancestors at the pragmatic level, where the latter are more regularly petitioned. This appears to be the situation with many Western Christians who have little or no true relationship with Jesus, noting above (see Chapter 1), a severely de-Christianized West.

### 5.23 Focus of Prayer

All the respondents prayed to God. A mature female prays mostly to God, and every night. God is always noted as the agent who answers prayers. The centre of faith of the participants was God, who was the usual recipient of petitions. After a frightening experience of evil, and fortunately emerging unscathed from a dangerous incident, a male invoked both God and ancestors (B2). During the incident, when he was struggling to control the car, his wife was praying 'Oh God, please leave this spirit, go away; let us alone' (B2).

A mature male's answer on how Jesus saved us, was:

teaching us to fish for ourself (sic), teaching us how to look after each other, teaching us, as believers, to pray and to organise other people to speak the word of God (B4; my underling).

A young female prayed mostly to God as the centre of her faith, but also to Jesus. In case of any mishap, she would turn firstly to God (C10), and then the ancestors, specifically her late cousin. 'God' secures more mention.

God is the centre of a young male's faith, and he spends most of his time praying to God (D3). He qualifies this with:

whenever I let, for instance my achievements in life it's because it's through him actually and every time I feel happy, or I feel good about something or when I did something for someone, helping them for instance I actually feel good and I feel that it's God actually taking charge of my life (D3, D4).

He is generous in attributing such experiences to God's providence and taking charge of his life. Asked if he could identify a special experience, he felt it was a 'spiritual thing'; 'when you feel some sort of like peace within yourself then you believe that, okay, yes, God is there...' (D4). 'I pray to Jesus through God'; then qualified by 'I pray to God through Jesus, yes' (D5). He prays more to God than to Jesus, who was mentioned when prompted, but never spontaneously volunteered. Prayers for healing are directed to God and ancestors. For healing 'Just make sure to stick to our praying sessions and mostly pray wherever we go' (D13). If he has a problem he goes to his mother, but 'Or I would first turn to God. Go to God himself' (D13). He would also pray to the ancestors. For issues such as health, finance, love problems, family problems, he turns to God, Jesus and the ancestors in that order (D16), but as with similar replies, Jesus was usually included after a prompt.

Another priest prays usually to God: 'I mention that name (God) a lot' (E10). As to the use of God of Jesus in his prayer life, he amplified with:

You know um, but also it depends on the type of prayer that I am doing at that particular moment, you know. Um, but like if I enter a church, I would always, I would always say, Jesus I'm here, you know. Be with me today and the tasks that lie ahead of me, you know, so it depends really where I am (E10).

You know, I come into the church and I know Jesus is present so immediately it's Jesus. But if I am sitting at home, it's, it's God, you know (E10).

He limits Jesus as the target of prayer to his real presence in the Sacred Bread in the Tabernacle in the church. When he has a problem, his first choice of either God, Jesus or the ancestors, is God. Priests' mandatory prayers are to recite the Divine Office daily. This was never mentioned in the answers to questions, more likely by lack of questioning.

A middle-aged female's order of personages in prayer was God first, 'you can always go to God' (G17). It needs to be recalled that she confessed to not knowing the difference between God and Jesus, so I conclude that she focuses on God. He was her prayer target, and she added: 'he is keeping me in prayers' (G5), a way of saying that he is constantly supporting her.



Prayer is a substantial part of her life. As a needy person, she is constantly turning to God in her condition of poverty.

A priest turned to God for help with daily issues, as well as to his wife and spiritual director. As for God, he said: 'I ja (yes) I think I take it for granted' (H14). Asked if it was God or Jesus who helped, he chose God: 'Although I understand that they are one but...'. 'But my answer would be God' (H14). He did not pray to ancestors but limited their assistance to protecting him from witchcraft: 'into witchcraft and evil not getting into me' (H17). As to whether Jesus could help more with special problems, he chose God, but: 'there are certain issues where I, in particular, appeal to Jesus' (H16). These issues are:

Eh, around issues of temptation, around issues of forgiveness, around issues of, of power and, authority (H16).

When, when I'm confronted with decisions from my perhaps, position of power or authority, so it's that, that, I tap into the Jesus in, in my understanding. So you (see), my prayer then moves towards Jesus (H16).

Although he understands the concept of Trinity: 'but I think for specific, particular issues I then tap into Jesus' (H16). Otherwise, when he prays, he has 'God' in mind. It is clear that prayer is an important part of his life.

A mature male turned to God when he had mishaps. When he was younger, before his conversion, he would have thought of approaching a traditional healer, but lack of money would have precluded this. He is adamant that he does not address ancestors for help or visit traditional healers, but always turns to God.

But I understand that the Holy Spirit is important, Jesus is important, God is most important.

A mature female directs prayers to God who answers most of her prayers. Prayer is the solution to all problems. God is her problem solver, and she does not pray to ancestors except to her late grandmother, whom she consults without rituals when she feels she is in a 'tight spot'. She prays in her house, her church and at her grandmother's grave. She always lights a candle at 12pm. A parish priest advised her also to pray to the patron Saint of the parish church, St Anthony of Padua (Langa, Cape Town) and the more recent Benedict Daswa, a South African Saint.

## 5.24 Prayer and Ancestors

A mature parishioner relates that they pray mostly to God, every night, and as for the ancestors, they are usually the ones who initiate contact and require attention, so attention is directed to them when they communicate with their progeny (mature female). But she does seem to address ancestors without prior instigation by them.

In prayer, a mature male includes his ancestors in order 'to work hand in glove with God' (B2b). He always asks God 'to work with my ancestors', because God is working through them because they are spirit. The centre of his faith is God, and every morning and every night he prays to God and his ancestors as well (B2b). Here there is a strong linking of the activities of the ancestors with God.

In case of any mishap a young female would turn firstly to God (C10) and then the ancestors (C10). She would ask the ancestors for help or for her late cousin to 'please pray for me' (C10). Asked why he would ask the ancestors for help instead of God, a young male replied: 'Because it's in my culture to actually believe in them, and, and also most of the Bible sometimes mentions the ancestors you know like David for instance' (D11). The ancestors are clearly a strong force in his life, although he is primarily God-centred.

If he is sick a priest said he also turns to the ancestors in prayer (E12). When asked if any ancestor rituals included God, another priest said that rituals have nothing to do with God. There may be prayers to God during the week, but a ritual was not prefaced by Christian prayers. It is of course interesting to reflect on his statement that 'rituals have nothing to do with God'. This was said in a manner that suggests that they belong to two different, mutually exclusive realms, and should not be put together (F16). There seems to be a strong sense of pride in African traditions, as well as keeping it separate from Christianity, a type of 'hands off' attitude. This seems a pity, as mission should seek to integrate life, culture and Christianity. He mentions too, a Shrine, which refers to the Schoenstatt shrine of Mary, a representation of which he had at home.

A mature male was resolute that he did not turn to ancestors in prayer. He may pray *for* them, but not *to* them. A mature female said that if she were in a 'tight spot', she would visit her

grandmother's grave and petition her there. This is her only form of prayer to ancestors, apart from participating in family rituals.

#### 5.25 Answers to Prayers

Respondents turn to God in prayer for answers: 'because if you don't believe, if you don't pray, the answer will never come' (A6). This same mature female related how a priest and others prayed a rosary for a husband who came back to his 'normal senses' (A6). When there is a problem with prayer 'you get a (sic) answer where to go' (A26). 'Through prayer you will get everything' (A27). God answers prayers 'a lot'.

She described an incident which proved to her that "*God is always there*", answering prayers. After she had been defrauded of R 2 300, a stranger who heard about this unfortunate incident, donated the same sum to her. She had prayed the Rosary with the intention: 'God, my husband is sick, I have to take this money to take my husband to the...'. A bank teller who observed this assured her: 'This is truly a miracle that you will never forget in your life' (A7). Praying protects one from evil spirits. It also opens the heart and relieves guilt (A7). In another dangerous situation three thieves left her house empty-handed because God had 'worked' in that house.

The same respondent volunteered another example of prayer answered when during a gathering in a stadium in Mitchell's Plain to pray for rain. There were government people present and a personality well known on local television (Angus Buchan; Christian author). They began praying at 10am and at 1.30pm a fine rain began. There was much rain subsequently. God answered because he can see inside, he can see what we do not see (A9). When there is a health problem the first thing is prayer to God, and on prompting, Jesus as well. Prayer shows you the way.

A mature man prays every morning to God and ancestors (B2b). Despite the fact that he does not have a full-time job he testifies that 'I get jobs here and there' (B2b) 'but I never sleep without food'. This for him is the experience of God's providence. He had a job interview coming up: 'I know God is going to help me get that job because it is six years now without (a full-time) job' (B2b). When we pray to Jesus, we can be confident that he will eventually answer the prayers. Despite the adverse circumstances 'I never sleep without food because

he is looking after me. Jesus is after me, because I am praying every day for that' (5). He asked for a special blessing because he would have to miss church on Sunday because of the job interview (2b). His prayers seemed to be formulated in a highly trusting and faith-filled manner. There was no hint of bitterness at his long period of intermittent employment.

Referring to a time she was robbed, a young female recounted:

it wasn't like fifteen minutes before I got my phone back, and those guys were dealt with. So they were like: ha, this child! I was like: no! because I'm praying and afterward I was like yoh! (exclamation), that could have ended badly (C15; my underlining).

A young male thought it could be possible to ask the ancestors for immunity against bullets for example, but this would probably require the concocting of special medicine (*muthi*), not simply prayer. This power, enabling one to thwart normal scientific principles, is also envisaged by other respondents.

A person who has been kidnapped as a young child prayed to the effect of 'God please help me here. And um, they just disappeared' (E1). They was left alone in a shack, and then they made their escape. With the experience of mishap, their first reaction is to pray. To cope with evil spirits, witches, spells, they uses prayer, holy water and salt. A female in such circumstances, affirms: 'The only thing that helps me is to kneel down, read the Bible and pray' (G13).

A mature male concludes that by reading and reflecting on the Bible, 'you see all the answers'. However, not every situation can be overcome, some hardships have to be lived with: 'Life is not about that, about you winning every situation, life is not about that'. Otherwise, prayer is the answer to all things.

A mature female described how some time ago she lit a candle and applied for a job. She received a positive response two days later. That seems to have been a defining spiritual experience, convincing her of the power of prayer. Her reaction to her problem daughter was to pray. God fits in with all aspects of her life, he is with her in all that she does. He provides protection from danger, as well as moral danger, such as her two grandchildren falling under the influence of substances or gangsterism. For health issues she consults medical doctors and prays.

## 5.26 Nature of Prayer

A mature female entreats supplications to God, and she prays the Rosary every day. 'The Rosary is like your faith' (A6). She avers that with the Rosary 'miracles will happen' for illness, and for diabolic possession (A22). Mary is seen as a powerful intercessor. It seems that many who pray the Rosary focus on the exact words of the main prayer (the Hail Mary), rather than using it as a mantra.

A mature male, after a harrowing experience, recounted that: "I just prayed, took the rosary and prayed...the rain the rain was gone' (B2). 'The sun come back and I said: Ja (yes), this thing was coming to me, mos (sic)' (B2). Here the Rosary again emerges as a favourite instrument of prayer.

A young female's exact words about addressing God have an interesting cultural component. She prays to God as:

*uThixo, Bawo*, sometimes God, depending on what you are praying about. There is a joke amongst the Black people, that if you pray in English, then your problems are still small. So, it's only like you speaking in your mother tongue that you know like you're in deep trouble, and you need God right now (C5).

For some reason, praying in the vernacular is seen as being more efficacious. This appears to link with the observation of Pauw that Xhosa tradition provides for this life and Christianity proffers life after death, but God is also petitioned as a resolution to daily existential problems ('you need God right now').

A middle-aged female also used the Bible to pray. A mature male, who works as a groundsman until 4.20 pm each day, claims that he spends not less than two hours a day on prayer. He reads the Bible and uses Bible commentaries to reflect, and from the Bible, 'I've got all the answers'. He is able to sit sometimes for six hours. He also uses a Lumko book 'You are my friends' (Lumko is a Pastoral Institute of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference which assists formation of laity). He attributes his conversion from a secular, prodigal lifestyle to early Catholic schooling as a Catholic. He recites the Our Father (The Lord's Prayer) often, and mentions 'I am always praying the Hail Mary. I believe in that prayer, it is a powerful prayer, really. Hail Mary full of grace...'.

### 5.27 The Presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in ATR

The fourth to tenth commandments of the Decalogue are also discernible in Xhosa culture (respect for elders, do not kill or hurt, no adultery, no theft, no lies, no jealousy, no fornication). If Christ is the Word of God, these commandments reflect the presence of the Son and Holy Spirit, the inspirer of the Word, in Xhosa culture. O' Collins (2018:127-130) volunteers four criteria for discerning the presence of the Second and Third Members of the Trinity. These are realised in Xhosa Tradition.

None of my respondents revealed clear awareness of famous ancestors, who could model the Christ figure by their personal sacrifices and heroic lives. This would have indicated a type of Christ figure, a sacrificial leader. It would be interesting to observe the reaction to presenting the late Nelson Mandela as a model for the Christ image. There was also no immediate consciousness of famous leaders or chiefs, but the ancestors chosen were from immediate family extraction.

### 5.28 Summary

In Catholic teaching, Jesus is the centre of reality, physical and spiritual, God who points to the Father, with whom he is one. We preach a crucified Christ whose unique sacrifice eclipses all other sacrifices; thus, we are saved by no other name, and redeemed by the Christ Event encapsulated in his Cross and Resurrection. The Catholic faith is inchoate where it does not actualise this event. Supreme over all creation, he is nonetheless eminently accessible even as a friend, brother and saviour, a God who uses a Church for his mission to the world, with the Eucharist playing a central role. Many churches omit some of these prerequisites and for some the emphasis is largely if not exclusively on the Holy Spirit, in a manner which does not necessarily evince the qualities related to the Triune God. It seems doubtful that some churches qualify to be labelled Christian, because of the focus on the Holy Spirit, to the exclusion of Christ and the Christ event. These churches do attract the occasional attention of our parishioners, often searching for healing.

Authors such as Bahemuka, Bujo, Magesa, Mugambi, Nürnberger, Okure, Orobator and Tlhagale stress the need to make Jesus real in the daily lives of the people, to be concretised using African categories. While Christian mission has succeeded in supplanting the hegemony

of the ancestors, it has failed to introduce Christ as the substitute, and 'God' is dominant, and despite assurances to the contrary, the ancestors invite more consideration than Christ, who is far from being as prominent in the religious consciousness as are the ancestors, who seem to encroach effortlessly into the mentalities of many Xhosa Catholics. My conclusion is similar to that of Pauw (1975), where I discover from my respondents that Jesus, or Christ, is seldom spontaneously volunteered in responses to the questions, and the Holy Spirit is also relegated to the background. In terms of religious dedication, Jesus is surpassed by ancestors, traditional healers, prophets, even by pastors themselves and by the Holy Spirit. Jesus has not been distinctly proclaimed as the solution to envisaged problems of the Xhosa, such as evil spirits, witches, magic, angry ancestors, the need for healing, and spells. He appears indistinctly positioned within the cultural milieu of the Xhosa.

Pastors have failed to help the Xhosa develop a relationship with Christ, who has been presented in a Eurocentric mould to be pondered on for a short while on a Sunday only. He is not generally regarded as part of daily, existential issues, compared to the ancestors, and has been taught cerebrally rather than at the level of heart, which would have the potential for an energising relationship leading to life-changing commitments and apostolic works. Christ as judge, mentor and intermediary comes into immediate conflict with the functions of the ancestors, whose names predominate in the religious consciousness of Christian Xhosa.

Both Bujo and Wanamaker recommend presenting Christ as the Proto Ancestor, a theological construct supported Biblically, where he is situated as head of the ancestors, immeasurably greater but signally accessible. The ancestors need to pale into insignificance. A colonial stigma to the Christ figure may still subsist; a Christ who came to proclaim liberty but whose advocates held the indigenous people captive. Christianity was presented with a very other-worldly theology, in opposition to the this-worldly focus of the people. Many of the prayers in the Catholic Mass emphasise life after death, although there is scope for 'dedicated' Masses for worldly events such as harvests, inclement weather, progress of peoples to name but a few.

Okure (1998) avers robustly that Christ's free gift of the Spirit is better than anything the ancestors can advance, and the supremacy of these two must not be in dispute. This theologian also doubts the need for 'arduous' rituals. She is concerned that African Christians

may end up serving two masters (see Mt 6:24). Tlhagale contends that the Catholic church has lost many members but Nürnberger corrects this by contending that it has lost less than most because of the apparent tacit acceptance of the ancestor cult by the Catholic Church.

With prompting and direction, seven out of the ten respondents supported Jesus' Cross as his central act, and saw him as much more powerful than the ancestors. Three found a sense of comfort in viewing Jesus as Black. However, Jesus is ranked as less than God, who is the principal target of their prayers. A plethora of images of God were evinced, such as provider, protector, anchor, parent, life sustainer, rescuer, forgiver, blessing, but there were no similar renderings for Jesus. The intimate, affective, gentle qualities of Jesus apparent in the Gospels and professed by the Saints are singularly lacking. There is little evidence of a personal relationship with Jesus that is energising, constructive of an acquiescence to his precepts, a life altering experience which has inspired countless others to dedicate their lives to him as pastors and missionaries and a real power which assists believing (genuine faith), belonging (loyal to the Church) and behaving (loyal to the precepts of the Bible).

There is more evidence of Christ-centredness amongst the 'Western' Catholics in Cape Town, but a significant number, although more familiar with Jesus, have not appropriated him to the extent of Jesus constituting a life-altering presence and experience. There are understandably different degrees of arrogation, but I believe that it can be argued that there is a Christological crisis pertaining to our Xhosa Catholics, and to the Western world as a whole. A small minority have truly made Christ their solid foundation.

Prayer surfaces within all the other main themes, however, it merits a special subsection since it is the predominant way in which the respondents objectify their Christian faith on a daily basis. God is the prime focus of prayers, which seem largely petitionary in nature, and make use of verbal addresses, the Bible, the Rosary and the popular compendium of prayers and hymns, *Bongani nNkosi* (1986; Prayerbook of the "Pastoral Conference of the Xhosa Region"). Diverse successful answers to prayers were volunteered. One male in particular, working intermittently for six years, confidently ascribed to God the fact that his family never slept without food.





## Chapter 6. The Holy Spirit

### 6.1 Key Theological Issues

The role of the Holy Spirit in mission is set out briefly below. The sources of these annotations come from the Tradition of the Catholic Church mostly as presented in various Papal documents, all of which are available on the internet. This provides a type of framework to attempt to evaluate how different churches transact with the Holy Spirit in their faiths.

### 6.2 Summary of Key Theological Issues

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who has spoken to the prophets. The Holy Spirit takes what he hears from the Father and the Son and conveys this to the Church through its ministers. The Holy Spirit guarantees the faithful transmission of Jesus Christ, who is the most complete revelation of God to humanity (*DeV.* 5). Jesus breathes the Spirit on the disciples, and the Spirit enables them to remember what Jesus has taught. The Acts of the Apostles, sometimes referred to as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, proclaim Christ, in the power of the Spirit. A church which omits either Christ or the Holy Spirit is reneging on the fullness of its proclamation. The goal of evangelization is to experience Jesus in the Spirit and thereby to come to know the Father (Mallon 2016:40). Whatever the Holy Spirit effects in people, history, cultures, religions, can only be understood in reference to Christ (*Dominus Iesus* 12). The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from God in Christ, the action of the Holy Spirit is not independent of Christ (my underlining). Whatever is performed by one member of the Trinity, is in a mysterious way the action of the other two, a principle referred to as perichoresis. Whatever the Holy Spirit achieves needs to be seen with reference to Christ, who took flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit (*RM* 29).

The Church is the usual vehicle used by the Spirit to proclaim God's kingdom, but the Holy Spirit blows where it pleases (*Jn* 3:8) and it also works outside of the visible confines of the Church (*GS* 22, *RM* 10, *RM* 28). The Holy Spirit enables Christ to be present sacramentally. The Spirit constantly accomplishes Jesus' act of redemption via the Eucharist (*DeV.* 40). The goal of the Holy Spirit is to draw people to hear the Gospel, to pray together and to share in the Eucharist.

A church which directly or indirectly excludes Christ from its ministry, is not being faithful to Biblical theology, or the essential link between the Spirit and Christ, nor to the purpose of proclamation, namely Christ, who is the fullest of God's revelation to humankind, to be proclaimed to all, and who points continually to the Father. 'There is no true evangelization (my underlining) if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed' (EN 22; Mallon 2016:36). The summit of evangelization is the proclamation of Jesus, 'the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead' who offers salvation to all (EN 33; Mallon :36). The Aparecida Conference (2007:374) is confident that 'We discover the presence of the Holy Spirit in mission lands through signs...The presence of the values of the Kingdom of God in cultures, recreating them from within to transform situations inimical to the gospel'.

### 6.3 The Holy Spirit in the Context of Southern Africa: Key Issues

Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000:301) observe that African Christians have a strong faith in the Holy Spirit, and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not just for clergy. People claim to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He is used for commissioning church leaders, new parish council members, catechists and new additions to ministries. It is worth noting that Catholic laity claim correctly that they too have the gifts of the Spirit and seek to actualise this gift in ministry. The Black laity in Cape Town, possibly influenced by their Protestant colleagues, have a strong desire to preach.

The context in Southern Africa is drawn largely from Anderson's research in Southern Africa (*The Holy Spirit in the African Context*. 1991. University of South Africa, Pretoria). Pneumatology is a neglected aspect of written African theology (:vi), and for this reason Anderson criticises African theologians. He also contends that Pneumatology as retrieved in the Bible is inadequately dealt with by theologians (:9). He suggests convincingly that the African model of theology as found in rituals in AICs is closer to the Biblical pattern of dynamic Pneumatology than previously realised (:7). Analogously, Shorter (1996/1999:22) observes a trend in the North Atlantic Church towards what effectively amounts to practical theology, to text which is illuminated primary form of language, of images, pictures, imagination, more resembling the Biblical texts and recorded experiences of the Biblical protagonists, as opposed to discursive, explanatory, scientific narrative.

The Spirit in Western practice is confined to the spiritual realm and does not meet the need of the African looking for assistance with every-day problems. The West has 'crowded out' the dynamic nature of Biblical Pneumatology with its intellectual, abstract theorizing (Anderson 1991:9). The central focus given to the Holy Spirit in the AICs has stimulated renewed interest in Pneumatology. This theology is implicit in church practices, it is not a formal written theology. Western theology as exported to Africa was too cerebral, analytical, a class-room religion, and in fact a White person's religion (:4). The Western missionaries as a rule, discouraged 'emotionalism', in contrast to the dynamic, lively form of celebration Africans are accustomed to. Mallon identifies Western fear of 'emotionalism' as potentially detrimental to an experience of the Holy Spirit (2016:205). Western observers should be slow to judge the energetic, animated celebrations of the African genius, or risk impeding the actions of the Holy Spirit, but at the same time, discern whether singing is truly animated by the Spirit of worship, not merely by human exuberance, a desire to be lost in emotional experience, disconnected from God as the focus of the singing.

Anderson maintains that the traditional African view of God has been a preparation for the power of the Holy Spirit (1991:vii). The action of the Holy Spirit in these churches is a real one, helping the African in their search for well-being. Speaking in tongues, prophecies, diagnosis and healing characterise these Spirit-type churches. They have been described variously as messianic, prophetic, Zionist, sectarian, syncretic and separatist. The African worldview of life force that pervades all things fits in with the notion of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word sustains all things in existence (Anderson 1991:8. See Heb. 1:3). The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son seems to be absent in the 'spirit' centred churches.

It does appear to me that the Spirit is seen as a force by AICs that responds positively to every request, but this is not the case. The gift of the Spirit is always given, but not every prayer request is granted (see Lk 11:11-13). Ter Haar (2009:23) contends that the spirit-oriented nature of African Christianity relies on the indigenous religions of Africa, that envisage a spirit world with which direct communication is possible. They develop their own doctrines based on their knowledge of the Bible and experience, and the charismatic African churches sometimes condemn African traditional beliefs as evil (:23).

Anderson also rejects the notion that the Holy Spirit has taken over the ancestor's functions (but see Tlhagale below 2018:240). Rather than being concerned about who the Holy Spirit is in academic terms, of more relevance is what the Spirit does in the interaction 'with the existential spirit world of the African' (Anderson 1991:19). The Spirit churches have filled the void made by the Western missionary in providing meaning to their life situations (:25). However, I qualify and challenge this assertion. A church which directly or indirectly excludes Christ from its ministry, is not being faithful to Biblical theology, or the essential link between the Spirit and Christ, nor to the purpose of proclamation, which is namely Christ, who is the fullest of God's revelation to humankind, to be proclaimed to all, and who points continually to the Father. The Holy Spirit guarantees the faithful transmission of this revelation. There is no true evangelization if the name, teaching, and life, promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed (see *EN* 22; also summary above, Chapter 6.2). Evangelization must contain 'a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men, as a gift of God's grace and mercy' (*EN* 22, see Mallon 2016:36). The summit of evangelizing activity is to proclaim Christ, and it is the supreme duty of the Church and every individual (see Mallon 2016:37). Magesa (2004:237) reports an analysis of 299 AIC sermons in Malawi. These churches have been deemed to be 'vanguards of African culture', and addressed themes largely preached in main line churches such as 'adultery, stealing, drunkenness, pride, jealousy, lying, unbelief, witchcraft, in that order' (Mijoga 2001:161). Preachers concentrate largely on the Bible, not on ATR. Healing and deliverance are clearly the principal attractions of these Spirit churches, whilst sermons focus on typical Biblical injunctions, the main transgressions, or sins, although witchcraft is more African.

Anderson presents various scholars who identify the Holy Spirit as the focal point of AICs of Spirit-type churches (1991:34). However, as noted in the paragraph above, this focus on Pneumatology alone is incomplete without Christology, and cannot fairly claim to make Christianity a way of life for Africans. Most of these churches in Southern Africa have a Pneumatology close to that of Western Pentecostalism. Some churches see 'baptism in the Spirit' as essential and at times dispense with sacramental baptism (:35). The Holy Spirit is seen as the power par excellence (:70) and Africans are deeply concerned with receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. My Catholic respondents did not display signs of such deep concern;

‘God’ was their central focus. Anderson compliments the Spirit churches for contributing to a dynamic Pneumatology. They are the ‘raw material’ for contextualizing theology in Africa, an incarnated, ‘grassroots’ theology, one that needs to be developed in written form, as a dynamic, Biblical, African theology (1991:100, 101). This is a compelling argument.

Sipuka (2020:2) observes that Catholics refer to Jesus and God interchangeably, although my respondents focussed on God, *uThixo*, more than on Christ. But there ‘is a big gap with regard to the Holy Spirit, there is little reference except in the Catholic Charismatic groups’ (:2). I agree that the Catholic Charismatic movement in Cape Town, in my experience, retains an appropriate balance between Christ and the Holy Spirit, and that as Ter Haar relates, the Holy Spirit is ‘the poor relation’ in the wider Church. Thlagale (2018:240), noting how AICs have developed their own theologies, with a substantial focus on integral healing, makes the following comment as to how Jesus has been side-lined:

The healing churches have simply suppressed the role of Jesus in favour of the Holy Spirit, who symbolises power. Thus both the Holy Spirit and the ancestors are the source of the healing power.

He also notes that in Zulu custom, to honour the son implies a lessening of honour due to the father, and that Shembe, pastor of an African Christian church, gave priority to the Father, and there is not an equality of the two. This may well apply to many Western people, who unconsciously imagine the Son as less than the Father. Thlagale (2018:241) records some lines of the Creed of Shembe’s church, which expresses belief in the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in the communion of saints, but the Son, or Christ, is absent. Is it possible to merit the name of a Christian given the suppression of Christ? Thlagale contends that the mission churches should dialogue with the Indigenous Churches and challenge their theologies. Indeed, ‘the challenge still looms larger after 200 years of missionary activity’ (241).

#### 6.4 Summary of the Holy Spirit in the Southern African Context

Anderson accuses African Theologians of neglecting Pneumatology. The Pneumatology of the AICs is said to be closer to the Biblical pattern of dynamic theology of the Holy Spirit. The West has obscured the role of the Holy Spirit with abstract theology, and with the fear of ‘emotionalism’ which may lead to sound religion being overwhelmed by emotional experience, subjectivity and perhaps even heresy.

AICs proffer a spirit world with which direct communication is possible, which is much favoured by these churches. These 'Spirit' churches have filled the void created by the Western missionary by providing meaning to life situations. Spirit churches are authentic expressions of African Pneumatology, similar to Western Pentecostalism. Anderson claims that without the Spirit in African Christianity, African Christians would revert to ATR, which is more powerful than the somewhat sterile, rational Christianity imported from the West.

The West accuses AICs of liberally and subjectively applying the notion of life force to the Holy Spirit, a Spirit who does not match the theological profile of the Trinitarian Spirit, and who can be freely manipulated by prayer and laying on of hands. For church members, the Holy Spirit is the power par excellence, and Africans have a deep concern for receiving this Spirit. Some theologians would dispute the way in which pastors presume to harness this Spirit so effortlessly, and with guaranteed outcomes.

Whilst the West is too rational and underestimates the working of the Holy Spirit, AICs are criticised for laissez-faire services with highly subjective interpretations, presumptuous expectations that their prayers and rites will achieve their ends, and ostensibly deficient discernment of spirits. Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church, with its penchant for orthodoxy and dogma, fears wrong doctrine, heresy, and abuse within these movements, but the rediscovery of the Spirit's life in the Church was "*revolutionary*" (Markey 2121:7), a Spirit which blows where it will (Jn 3:8).

I observe the keen desire of laity within charismatic celebrations, and amongst Western parishioners, as well as black African congregants, to exert sacred power, who seem to resent the hegemony of the clergy in matters spiritual. Vatican II emphasized the primacy of baptism and the three-fold gifts of priest, prophet and king for all the baptised, so that the ordained no longer have the official monopoly of sacred power (Rausch 2121:6). Bishop Kilaini (Magesa 2004:60) from Tanzania, views the biggest challenge to the Catholic Church as the Pentecostal churches 'which have captured the typical African feelings of joy and practical inspiration in life'. He identifies the Catholic Charismatic Movement as an adept response to the challenge but it 'must be careful not to go to extremes' or that it becomes 'merely a sentimental church' (:60, 61). In Cape Town, the all-night services of the sodalities, made up of Black parishioners, such as the Catholic Men's Union (*Amadodana*), the Sacred Heart

Sodality and the St Anne's Sodality (including the St Anne's Daughters), provide ample opportunity for members to engage in joyous praying singing and preaching, as well as rhythmic processions, which some construe as dancing. A Mass is also part of the celebration.

There is the curious situation where the Xhosa Catholics entertain God as the focal point of their faith, while the 'Spirit churches' (AICs), converge on the Holy Spirit, both tolerate the ancestors as a part of their dual and separate allegiance, and in my opinion, the West, which centred on Christ, has lost him as the dominant agent within a radically de-Christianised Western society, where Jesus is one alternative amongst many other spiritual agents. Christ not only vies with God as the source of sacred power, but with the Holy Spirit, the ancestors, prophets, pastors, some of whose words are regarded as sacrosanct, traditional healers, and in the West with good witches, Wiccans, New Age, Eastern therapeutic techniques, spirits found within esoteric faiths (such as the American Indians), crystals and many other objects of Western curiosity and novelty which evoke the numinous. If the African lives a dual religious system, many Western Christians entertain a multi-religious system.

#### 6.5 Respondents and the Holy Spirit

A mature parishioner concurred that through Jesus, 'you take all things to God' (A11), and as to Jesus being both man and God they volunteered 'I think that is what they say is Trinity' (A12). The Holy Spirit is 'All over, wherever you go it's there for you' (A13) and 'You don't know you are praying to the Holy Spirit, or you are praying to Jesus Christ' (A13), and 'Jesus Christ is also taking the Holy Spirit to God, up to God' (A13).

The Holy Spirit, according to a mature male, is present with God and Jesus and is everywhere, 'is with us now' (B6). Jesus is with the Father in heaven, 'that is why you always pray to them in conjunction' (B4). The three persons are one and the same thing and 'They are doing the same job for me. That's what I believe in, that's my conviction, they are the same' (b6). 'They are pulling in the same direction' (B6).

A young parishioner seemed unsure as to whether Jesus is truly God, but as Son of God, he is part of the Trinity: 'but I think Jesus has his own identity. He's part of God, but he's not the actual: I know; it's confusing' (C5). Another young respondent said: 'the Holy Spirit is here all around us. He is of the same importance as Jesus' (D6).



A priest explained that:

The Holy Spirit is God and like God he is everywhere, and all three members of the Trinity are equal. I think eh, they are all important because to understand the Son you need the Holy Spirit and to understand the Holy Spirit you need the Father and the Son (F10).

A priest, asked if Jesus is as powerful as God, responded yes, and when queried as to where Jesus is, he said that Jesus was with God and is God, admitting the difficulty of understanding that God and Jesus are one, but that sometimes it is helpful 'to separate them, ja (yes), and say the incarnation understands me better perhaps, on this particular item' (H5). The Holy Spirit 'is within and around us' and is not more important than Jesus.

A middle-aged female, asked who Jesus was, replied 'Eh, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (G6). The respondent seemed to be on unsure ground in these replies. Asked which one he was, she replied 'The Son (G6). The Holy Spirit is everywhere and is of the same importance as Jesus. The middle-aged woman confessed that 'Actually, to be honest, I don't know the difference between God and Jesus' (G16).

A mature male said that God was the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and the Father. Jesus is fully God and fully man. The Holy Spirit 'is in our hearts, it is the quality of humanity'. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father and is not far away because the Holy Spirit 'keeps him (Jesus) close'.

Replies about God generally show God as the dominant agent, Jesus the second, and the Holy Spirit is only mentioned when specifically asked about. The lack of theological correctness is not that important, but it does expose where the attention of the respondent resides. Although respondents treat Jesus and the Holy Spirit as one with the Father, as noted elsewhere in the section on God, it is the Father God who is seen as the most important of the three. Is there a semblance, trace, suggestion of tempered, unconscious Arianism, or as others suggest, Docetism, of minimizing the humanity of Jesus? Jesus is also effectively seen as less than God and commands less attention than the ancestors. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are underestimated, and the Holy Spirit in the Western worldview is often described as the 'poor cousin' of the Trinity, seldom invoked or indeed thought about. The Catholic Charismatic movement in Cape Town seems to have a more balanced view of the Holy Spirit, Jesus and the Father.

## Chapter 7. Inculturation

The informed dialogue between faith and culture is a key to successful evangelization. In one direction, this involves Christianity's challenge of cultural values which conflict with the faith, embellishing those that cohere with the faith, purifying mixed beliefs and inserting new principles. In the other direction this involves expressing the faith in culturally accepted modes, and ways which answer questions Africans are raising, the Africanization of Christianity. This is substantially wanting in mission to Africa.

### 7.1 Early Attempts at Accommodating African Culture

In the earlier part of the 1800s there was a negative view of the indigenous people in the Cape, (Brain 1988:130) describing the Bushmen, Hottentots, Fingoes and 'Caffers' as a 'sad race'; 'they are all base and barbarous', and there was doubt as to whether any good could be accomplished among these people, who had no idea of religion. This was a wide-spread view of people of that era, with no benefit of anthropology and its contribution to an objective view of the native people. One prelate speculated that Catholics who owned slaves should have been aware that the native people had souls and should not have treated them as though they had none, for which they would have to answer to God (:107).

The jaundiced view of indigenous people was a common stance entertained by many immigrants to Africa, appositely exposed in the institution of slavery. Literature depicted a sombre picture of 'darkest' Africa, alluding to savages, primitive culture, and spiritual and bodily misery (Bosch 1991:290; Goldie 2006:82). The former Abbot of the Mariannhill Monastery, Pfanner, authored an essay on the "*Native Question*", which could be resolved by limiting polygamy and drinking and binding the people to the soil, via the practice of true Christianity (Natal Advertiser, 16 November 1893; in Dischl 1982:91). In general, this illustrates the cultural short-sightedness of early mission and its Eurocentric bias, a shortcoming that has not been completely resolved.

In a book on The Catholic Church And Southern Africa (1951; The Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town), reference is made to the exploration of 'Native custom and traditions and its adaptation to Christian principles', referring to mission to the isiXhosa and isiSotho speaking Black community (McCann 1951:112). Also, the use of the vernacular was part of the efforts

of missionaries. Schimlek (:154) avows that the Church soon adopted 'a wise policy of adaptation', alludes to the use of certain Xhosa terms, and that these were 'adapted and filled with the perfections of Catholic theology in a course of intensive and continuous training' (:154). He believed that the Catholic doctrine satisfied the longing of the 'Bantu' for 'communion with the unseen world and to remain connected with it by means of sacrifices. Catholic teaching centred on All Souls' Day as good news from heaven and they soon forget (sic) the cult of the spirits' (:154). He also reveals a 'real fear that the European civilization, by contact with a primitive race at a lower level, could end up submerged in a less progressive life' (in Goldie 2006:83; Schimlek 1951:158). The European civilization was a precious heritage to be carefully preserved. There is a certain degree of pride in 'uplifting' the Black people, seemingly oblivious of the huge socio-political and economic changes and their destruction of traditional life, as well as the creation of huge pools of exploitable labour in a newly industrialized society. However, he acknowledged that Western culture is not a universal panacea, and that all African culture was not bad or negligible. Mbiti (1972:153) advised that ATR needed considerable pruning for its values to be appropriated by Christianity, but also recognised substantial compatibility between ATR and Christianity (:150).

However, we know that Black Catholic parishioners in Cape Town retain a strong devotion to the ancestor cult and they most certainly have not forgotten the 'cult of the spirits', and clearly Schimlek's optimism as to success of Catholic mission was unfounded. Because of the greater number of Coloureds and Whites in the Western Province, and the official policy of Government to keep the Blacks from the Eastern Cape out of Cape Town, less attention was devoted to the Blacks in terms of schools and the establishment of parishes within the Archdiocese of Cape Town. There were far fewer Blacks in this Province than 'Coloureds' and Whites. Apart from using the vernacular in the Mass and popular Xhosa hymns, there has been little systematic attempt to investigate the local culture and we realise that while the isiXhosa and isiSotho were evangelised at the mission, back in their homes they were socialised with ATR, and adapted their appropriation of Christianity within their traditional culture. It is interesting to note that a scientific study of the African is recommended (Schimlek 1951:158), and a Reverend Father H. Dubois (member of the Executive Council of the International Institute of African Language and Cultures) urged that every mission should include one or two fully trained anthropologists and that all missionaries should have

grounding in anthropology. Fifty years ago, the African theologian Mbiti (1972:145) worried that if Africa was not Christianised a near extinction of its Christianity would occur in the next century.

In 1962 the Lumko Missiological Institute was founded, based in the Eastern Cape, to provide training in catechetics, pastoral studies, missiology, anthropology, music and African languages (Bate 1999:23-28). Its principal task was to prepare laity for ministry in the Church. The formation of small Christian communities was also a goal, as a relevant expression of the *local* Church within the Universal Church. Lumko inspired the pastoral plan of the Catholic bishops and the 'Community Serving Humanity' initiative in the early nineties (Bate 1999).

This thesis does not evaluate the work of the Institute, but it seems clear that missiology and anthropology are key contributors to inculturated mission, and this endeavour needs to be renewed. My proposals include a basic course in missiological anthropology for seminarians, based on Luzbetak's book (1963, 2002 tenth printing) and Bate (2002), which do not necessarily require a formal qualification in cultural anthropology, but can be extracted from these two works with the emphasis on practical anthropology. There are practical examples in these books (especially Bate on modern sub-Saharan Africa) which can make students aware of their relative cultural locations. *All life is 'deeply cultural'* (Bate 2002:ix).

## 7.2 Recent Developments

In 1976 the SACBC established the Xhosa and Zulu Regional Pastoral Councils, followed by the Sotho and Tswana Regional Pastoral Councils, to serve pastoral concerns, especially the linguistic needs of the peoples in South Africa. The parish of St Raphael in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, employs the Xhosa Sacramentary and Lectionary, the translation of these Regional Pastoral Councils, and the Xhosa prayer book, *Bongani Nkosi*, which includes provision for certain Xhosa rituals; it is a very popular resource for many Xhosa parishioners. In formulating the Xhosa translations, the Commission claims consultation with laity, use of Xhosa customs and worldviews and use of the dynamic equivalence technique in order to adapt the Roman liturgy to African culture (Karlen 1972: foreword). A booklet published by the SACBC, *Leiturgia* (2001), records enthusiastic meetings to advance inculturation, but this vitality appears to have been lost.

While ancestors have been displaced from the dominant place in the religious consciousness of the Black parishioners, and replaced by God, there is much evidence that the fullness of revelation in Christ is seriously deficient, and effectively, ancestors attract more attentiveness than Christ. With constant immigration from the Eastern Cape, the number of Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cape is estimated at between 50 000 and 80 000, 'Coloured' Catholics total 150 000, and Whites 60 000. The number of Blacks in the Western Cape grew from 10 000 in 1900 to around 2 million in 2020, with a constant inflow from the much poorer Eastern Cape. The estimated Mass attendance of Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cape Town is between 2,8% and 4.6% depending on the estimate of the total number Black Catholics. This is low in comparison with the other two population groupings of between 19% and 20%. It is clear that the majority of Xhosa and Sotho Catholics in Cape Town are either staying at home or attending other churches. It may also be that the AICs, according to Asamoah-Gyadu (2011:206), are being surpassed by prophet-healing churches who assert the power of deliverance from evil, and like Pentecostal churches, seek the palpable presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit and a 'direct address to the problems and frustrations of urban life'. This author also observes that many of these churches have substituted electric keyboards and guitars for drums and pastors often dress in elegant business suits. There seems to be a strong desire to receive gifts of the Spirit, experiential gifts, especially glossolalia, and to proclaim publicly, in a service, personal needs and requests to God.

Western mission to Africa resembled a large business corporation that exported 'European-packaged Christianity, under strictly Western management' (Luzbetak 1988/2002:109). There is no pure, context-free Gospel. There has been insufficient adaptation of mission to African culture, and the original message was expressed in European forms, providing answers, (only partially, I contend) to Western concerns, not African ones. Missions were extensions of North Atlantic presence (Taylor 1963/2000:xxvii), communicating Christendom rather than Christ. While there were attempts after the nineteenth hundreds to inculturate, it seems mission to Africa was prone to proscribing African culture and religion, and there appeared to be the presumption that all that was left was a *tabula rasa*, a clean mental slate in which to insert Christianity, whereas this thesis and literature reveal the ongoing resilience of ATR.

De Mesa (2012:8) quotes Warren (1963:10) about respect for other cultures. We may tread on peoples dreams and 'forget that God was here before our arrival'. Scholars such as Magesa (2014:31) bemoan the 'agonizingly slow' pace of inculturation and the 'sacrilegious destruction' of time-honoured African customs. Okure (1990:72) suggests a variety of ways of bringing Jesus into African settings, such as linking sacraments with key traditional celebrations, to breach the gap between culture and Church. She viewed the period of the Nineties as favourable for implementing inculturation, averring 'God forbid, that we should miss this unique opportunity, and so fail Christ and his Church' (:79). Schreiter (1991/2002:viii) states: 'Inculturation remains more a wish than a realized fact'.

Africa is also a continent of contrasts, for example, Kenya is 80% Christian but is the third highest in the world in terms of corruption. A similar situation exists in South Africa. There are many conflicts in Africa, and grave political problems. In this context, to what extent has conversion to Christianity or Islam produced nominal adherence to the new faiths? How profound has conversion been? From literature and from the interviews with Black Catholic parishioners in Cape Town, it is clear that Christ does not occupy the predominant role in the religious consciousness of the African community. Magesa (2004:91) refers to unconscious, instinctive reactions, which are conditioned by African Tradition, which usually favour tradition (for example, ancestors) as a guide, as opposed to conscious, cognitive responses, a product of Christian doctrine, where responses are made after due deliberation, or to placate the missionary. The participants in my study mostly exhibited this tendency to refer to the ancestors automatically in the face of pressing circumstances.

### 7.3 The Need for Inculturation

A definition of inculturation, or contextualization according to Luzbetak, is a process that blends text (Scripture and Tradition) with the context (culture, circumstances), to produce a blend of Christian living.

This living refers to living as Christ would, here and now, in a particular community. Without God compromising unity and consistency, God delights in what missiologist McGavran (1966? no page reference; in Luzbetak 2002:134) labels 'luxurious human diversity'. Mission should engender an integrated spirituality in the indigenous person, to enrich catechesis and liturgy,

and in-depth knowledge of culture is needed to discern the cultural traits which can be adopted or in the other direction adapted, purified, ennobled or rejected (LG 13; PCID 1993).<sup>59</sup> From a very negative view of African culture, documents such as *Nostra Aetate* (1965:Vatican II), *Ecclesia in Africa*, *Africa Munus* (the latter two emanating from African Synods held in 1994 and 2009) support inculturation as an urgent priority, permanent dialogue with culture, and call for profound respect for African culture.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a "*Pastoral Statement on Inculturation*" (1995) aimed at making Africans 'fully at home in the Church' It viewed this objective as an immense task (:3) and admitted the existence of tensions between local culture and the historic treasures of Catholic liturgy. Study sessions, meetings and workshops are needed (:3), as well as national and diocesan offices, experts, researchers and study centres (:4). The SACBC recommended that parish councils study the document from the African Synod in 1994. There is a type of apology in recognizing an existing deep wound caused by neglecting and even despising local culture for many years (page 2 of leaflet). A further statement dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 2002 (SACBC 2002:1) confirms the dual direction of inculturation, of impregnating cultures with the power of the Good News, and on the other hand the Local Church absorbing valuable elements from the local culture. The rich diversity of cultures can reflect our unity in diversity as one Church (:1). Acknowledgement of many contributions to this task is recorded, namely individuals, IMBISA, SACBC, SACOP (episcopal and priestly associations), certain deceased bishops, various workshops and conferences, as well as committees, and publications (:2). The SACBC made inculturation its priority and there have been experiments with sacraments and in religious life. One Metropole (Durban) has produced a workbook on inculturation, another (Pretoria) has defined guidelines, and various pastoral regions have worked on inculturating certain sacraments. There is also work on an Indian Marriage Rite, as well as translation into Afrikaans (:3). Emphasis is on liturgical inculturation, since this is central to the life of the Church (:4). The authority of the Church must be obeyed by priests and religious in regard to inculturation. The statement delineates

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<sup>59</sup> Letter of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences in Asia, the Americas and Oceania. 21 November, 1993 accessed December 2022.

steps in inculturation efforts (:4-6) and expects fruits measured by producing a 'genuine encounter with the Lord' (:6). It also calls for in-depth research in a variety of areas (:6-7) and a short appendix disseminates guidelines on liturgical inculturation (:9-20). More parameters are outlined (:16-17), areas of adaptation in the Roman Rite are proffered. Liturgical inculturation must be prudently incorporated into the Pastoral Plan (:20). Landman (2013) points out that Practical Theology is the fastest growing discipline in South African universities, theology that begins with the real-life situation, culture, context.

Luzbetak (1988/2002:59) observed that it was becoming the norm not to assign missionaries to other cultures unless they had studied the basics of cultural anthropology and sociology and received orientation to the receiving culture, something more than an appendix such on African studies. Conversely, this does not appear to be the case today. Nigeria boasts a Standing Committee of the Catholic Bishops' Conference on inculturation, which also recommends the study of African religion (Nche, Okwuosa, Nwoga 2016:2). However, concern with inculturation has dwindled, to the detriment, I would argue, of successful mission.

As early as 1953, in an allocution, Pope Pius XII (Luzbetak 1988/2002:46), asserted 'the right to one's culture and national character'.<sup>3</sup> A letter drawing pastoral attention to ATR by Arinze and Fitzgerald (1990:47-51) summarises reasons for inculturation: ongoing relevance of traditional religion; the intellectual elite are declaring themselves to be adherents of ATR; there is a need to preserve all that is true and good in a culture; to meet the felt needs of Africans and make a home in the Church for the local inhabitants; to enrich Christianity. Episcopal conferences should commission research groups and seminaries, ecclesiastical institutes and houses of religious formation to arrange courses on ATR. In 1969, Pope Paul VI declared 'You may, and you must have an African Christianity', in an address to the 1969 SECAM in Kampala (Okure, Van Thiel, et alii, eds. 1990:145). Walls (2017:136; citing Smith 1929) contends that African languages 'house the most sacred items of African consciousness'. He stressed the need for vernacular Christian literature and the missiologist Smith is described by Walls as an early advocate of mother tongue theology. Inculturation should be done ideally in the vernacular for the recipients of mission. 'Faith is only adequately professed, understood, and lived when it makes its way deeply into the cultural substrate of a people. Thus, the full importance of culture for evangelization becomes plain' (Aparecida



Conference 2007:477). A pastoral guide for diocesan priests in churches dependent on the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, issued by this Congregation (1989:28) makes the strong comment that such priests need to be 'convinced proponents of inculturation', it acknowledges too that mission must take into account cultural elements (:35), with the usual proviso of the need to purify customs from negative elements. Popular piety is a distinctive arena for the dialogue between faith and culture (:36) and needs to be carefully analysed for its potential for inculturation, expressing as it does, the wisdom of the people (:36).

Malaty (1995:22) identified Origen as a true missionary 'who realized that he must study philosophy just to be able to expound Christianity to the leading minds of his day (the Greeks) and to answer their difficulties and stress the factors in Christianity likely to appeal to them most'.<sup>60</sup> This applies to the study of African culture as well. As with the importance of the translation of the Bible into Greek in early Christianity, so the vernacular is a powerful instrument of mission (de Mesa 2012:28).

#### 7.4 Areas for Inculturation

I maintain that there should be more attention to cultural dialogue in areas such as catechetics, theological training, preaching, and the sacraments. Catechetics and workshops which aim at situating Christ as the centre of the faith are more pressing than preoccupation with inculturation of the Eucharist alone, which should follow a personal conversion to Christ. However, I do argue that ignorance of the Eucharist is ignorance of Christ and that the Mass needs to be explained in ways which resonate with the culture of the people. Sipuka, in his thesis (2000), sets out to inculturate the Eucharist as sacrifice with the Xhosa culture. He makes suggestions for inculturating the Eucharist, as well as addressing prayers of intercession which encapsulate the reality of the lives of the people, such as healing, dealing with evil spirits, employment. Sipuka (2000) contends that the ancestors can be part of the Eucharistic sacrifice without being seen as vying with God. Tlhagale (2018:190) also makes suggestions for inculturation. *Sedos* (1981; in Okure, van Thiel, et alii, eds., 1990:104), insists that the missionary 'is called to be a catalyst of inculturation, rather than its agent'.

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<sup>60</sup> Origen an early Church theologian; died 254 AD.

## 7.5 Basic Models of Inculturation

Walls (2017:19-34) describes how Origen (d 254AD) used the Greek cultural context to elucidate the Christian faith (:23). The challenge for this Church father was *to* ‘turn an existing way of thought and life towards Christ, how to critique the Greek heritage: affirming, denying, discriminating’ (:25). The last three processes constitute a working model with which to scrutinise the culture. A fuller model of the process of inculturation incorporates modifying existing maps of reality, adding new information, altering, making bigger and making smaller, and deleting some ideas (Walls 2017:37). Culture also contributes to the universal body of theology, for example, Christ as the Logos. Origen saw Christ as the Logos of God, ‘the divine reason at the heart of the universe’ (:24). For this scholar, the unity of the Old Testament and New Testament is found in Christ.

Walls recognises that at this point in time, the task that once dominated Origen’s research is now relevant to those engaged in translating the African faith ‘into the fabric of thought of Africa and Asia and Pacific societies’ (:33). The missionaries’ role will not be very significant now, as they have contributed their effort as Paul had done his work (1 Cor 3:6: ‘I did the planting, Apollos did that watering, but God gave growth’; NJB). As for the convert generation, ‘They too have made their stand, and their contribution’ (:33). The task lies with the new generation, like Origen, reared in the Christian faith, familiar with the Scriptures ‘and yet at home in the old cultural traditions – people who are heirs to both the Christian and that other tradition’ (:33). These people are the future of African theology, as well as ‘the future of Christian theology and of theological scholarship as a whole’. Origen intended to turn the learning of the Greek world ‘to the worship and glorification of God’ (:34). Suitably qualified South African scholars need to be identified to assume this desired role. I maintain that there is still room for evangelization by existing pastors, to further the Christ image in ways set out as pastoral initiatives in Chapter 10.

Ratzinger (2007:188-189) describes Africa as a continent robbed and plundered by the West, which has failed to impart God in Christ and instead has instilled a Godless world where power and profit are paramount. He seems to overlook the vibrancy of the African celebrations and their appropriation of God as the centre of life. Still others classify Christianity up to Vatican

II as essentially Graeco-Roman, not a Church of world cultures (Okure 1990:58). Kiaziku (2009:110) quotes the late Pope John Paul II (1982),

The synthesis between culture and faith is not only a requirement of culture, but also of faith, because a faith that does not become culture is a faith that is not fully accepted, not fully thought through, and not faithfully lived.

The See, Judge, Act formula for contextualizing is a valuable methodology for approaching inculturation.

## 7.6 Inculturated Churches

The West has favoured sombre, intellectual rituals, contrasted with the lively, emotive style of African celebration, with copious singing, rhythmic movements, hand clapping, processions, drums and somatic gestures. Magesa (2004:237) reports an analysis of 299 AIC sermons in Malawi. These churches, deemed to be 'vanguards of African culture', addressed themes largely preached in main line churches such as 'adultery, stealing, drunkenness, pride, jealousy, lying, unbelief, witchcraft, in that order' (Mijoga 2001:161). Preachers concentrate largely on the Bible, not on ATR rituals. The manifest healing orientation of the AICs epitomises their main attraction. Interpretation of the Bible texts is liberal and application to real life circumstances, current life issues, are almost literal (Magesa 2004:238). Congregants rarely question preachers, regarding their words as equivalent to the authority of God in the Bible. Bate (1995:197) identifies the AICs as an original and genuine response to the Gospel. This response, at the grassroots level, should not be overlooked (:158), even if they err in marginalizing Christology. Magesa (2004:238) also identifies the theology taught in the West as pertaining to 'Western speculative philosophy', which results in homilies leaning to the pole of abstract, disembodied theology, instead of the 'joy and hope, grief and anguish' of humanity (GS 1). Xhosa Catholics practice their ancestral rituals separately, and this private attendance to such rituals is the norm elsewhere as well. Luzbetak (1988/2002:108) qualifies the observation that the AICs are models of local inculturation:

Unfortunate are especially the failure of not a few of the African independent churches to recognize Jesus Christ as *sole* Lord and Savior (sic), the presence of a considerable amount of syncretism, and the alienation from the universal Church. The fact is that, despite the efforts made towards ecumenism and the formation of federations, the churches remain mostly isolated.

Tlhagale perceives the need to challenge the theology of the AICs (2014:241). Schreiter questions the extent to which AICs can inculturate without serious syncretism resulting (1985/2002:145). He wonders if AICs should be conferred the status of 'the ultimate of contextualization rather than as some aberration'. Nevertheless, the new churches can evoke new questions which challenge the mission churches (:145) and assist in unearthing more of the deposit of faith. I would add that a church needs to be part of the Vine, or it may lose contact with the font of graces (Jn 15:5: 'for cut off from me you can do nothing'- NJB). This is especially true for the celebration of valid sacraments in the Catholic Church.

### 7.7 Basis for Inculturation

The Pentecost event, where the Gospel was preached in many tongues, is seen as a paradigm for inculturation. Also, in John 1:14 'The Word became flesh and he lived among us', provides the basic Scriptural foundation for the faith taking flesh in all cultures. The Pascal Mystery sees the Risen Christ in his transformed state, overcoming all limits of time and space, including human barriers such as cultures, classes, gender (Shorter 1988:84; Goldie 2006:101). In the risen Christ there is the new, the glorified being, and the old, the wounds, the breaking of bread. Culture retains something of the old, but is also radically new.

Bate (1995:16) contends that the theological model of inculturation is the best way of describing the Church's mission. From one direction, inculturation involves inserting the faith into a culture, challenging negative values, purifying mixed values, and embellishing positive customs. From the other direction of culture into faith, local cultural forms are used to express the faith, including language, local proverbs and stories, as well as cultural artifacts (Goldie 2006:91). However, the Church does profess rites established by the Holy Spirit which may not be changed, so there are limits to; clearly, not all is negotiable. inculturation

The Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963) devotes sections 37 to 40 on norms for adapting the Liturgy to the 'Temperament and Tradition of the Peoples'. It assures that the Church does not impose uniformity in matters which do not affect faith, and the Church respects the qualities of various nations. The Church may admit elements of other cultures not indissolubly bound with superstition and error and harmonize them with the Liturgy. The 'substantial unity of the Roman rites' (:38) must be preserved,

even if provisions for legitimate variations are made, especially in mission countries. This adaptation must be managed by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority (:39). In some cases, more radical adaptation is needed, and with due consideration by experts, proposals must be submitted to the Holy See, which may permit preliminary experiments (:40). Unity in essentials and diversity in cultural forms is the guiding principle. If rituals are correctly tailored to the local community, meaning and emotion can sometimes be conveyed as no other medium can (Luzbetak 1988/2002:84).<sup>61</sup>

Nürnberg (2007:43) observes that only when mission churches started allowing choruses and dancing, did they stop losing attendance of African converts. There is a difference between rhythmic processions and actual dancing. The former is seen as valid in the Mass, but dancing is considered inappropriate (Ratzinger 2004:227-228). Magesa questions the competency of the author to evaluate African dancing. Both African Synods (1994 and 2009) call for study of African culture and encourage courses in ATR. The Gospel of John 15:5 advises that a proper relationship with Christ renders a person or community as part of the vine, able to produce abundant fruit, but 'cut off from me you can do nothing'. There are Biblical and theological limits to inculturation. In Matthew 5:18: 'not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law' (also Lk 16:17; see Luzbetak 1988/2002:81)

God needs to be real, not disembodied, he needs to become a cultural reality. Hastings (1989:20) warns that the flowering of African Catholicism could fail again if the message to have an African Christianity is not applied 'in ways well beyond anything permitted by the regulation of canon law'. This indeed is a pessimistic outlook. The Church of the Province of South Africa (under the auspices of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa) established a body called the African Culture and Christian Standing Commission in 1997. This followed what the Council describes as years of failing to take African culture seriously (Mtuze 2003:86,87). Magesa (2004:199) calls for cultural commissions in all dioceses. He also distinguishes between popular grassroots inculturation, and planned, methodical inculturation, with due regard for orthodoxy (2004:171). The Amazon Synod ('QA' 2020) similarly recommended a commission to advance inculturation (reported in Zenit 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Luzbetak here refers to Chupungco 1982, no further reference.

October 2019). It refers to ministers who can 'understand Amazonian sensibilities and cultures from within' (QA 2020:86). This correlates with Walls who sees the agents for change emerging from local ministers well versed both in local culture and theology (Walls 2017:33). Thus, Walls believes that expatriate missionaries and the older generation of African Christians will not be significant contributors to this new evangelization and inculturation.

### 7.8 Christianity and Wealth

Harries (2013:1) and Van Wyk (2019:10) argue convincingly that there are strong cultural reasons for the African predilection for the prosperity churches, representing life in its fullness in the present moment and access to the material goods brought by the missionaries and Christianity. Van Wyk identifies this clearly in the person of Zuma (former State President of South Africa) and his conspicuous and unabashed embrace of wealth. I believe this is important to keep in mind in relation to the options and temptations our Catholic parishioners are faced with. Magesa (2004:60) also singles out as the biggest challenge to the Catholic Church as the Pentecostal churches 'which have captured the typical African feelings of joy and practical inspiration in life'. Hastings (1989:33) observes that many of the new AICs, intensely evangelical and charismatic, appear more like evangelical, charismatic house churches in other parts of the world, except, I would add, for their possible glossing over of Christ.

### 7.9 Consequences of Neglect of Culture

Mtuzi (2003:v, Foreword) records a public apology by the Anglican Bishop of Grahamstown, for failing to listen to the indigenous people and 'trampling' on their culture, admitting both ignorance and arrogance. A paper issued by the Research Institute for Theology and Religion, from UNISA (2020), records a critical self-assessment by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in which it challenges itself to healing, decolonisation, and Africanisation.

A primary consequence of lack of inculturation has been the emergence of a dual religious system, not wholly at home with Catholic doctrine. Ideally, God in Christ should materialise as the unique source of dispensing of sacred power, with other agents such as the saints, participating in this unique font. However, ancestors, traditional healers, popular prophetic figures and healing churches are regularly resorted to by parishioners, with no sense of truly

participating in the one Divine source of graces. Pauw (1975:208) explains that the Xhosa person is convinced that the consulting of a traditional healer does not conflict with Christianity; it is in fact complementary to the Christian faith. Problems relating to evil beings and witches are regarded as within the competence of ATR 'because there is only one way of driving away Hili (an evil spirit) and that is for the black man's doctor to come and heal him' (:255). Similar reactions are observed by Schreiter (1985/2002:156). My parishioners generally displayed no hesitation in professing their involvement with ancestral rites. Where Christianity is seen to fail in resolving an issue, traditional methods will continue to be employed. This does not exclude utilizing the Western medical model in the case of ill health; all three may be used to resolve a predicament.

Luzbetak (1988/2002:369) describes the New Guineans who had two systems of dealing with existential issues; one for Whites and one employing their traditional methods. As with my experience in Cape Town, a pastor might be called to attend to a sick person, and at a different time a traditional healer would be invited. We can identify syncretistic ideas, for example, that ancestors operate independently of God, which may be part of a process to fuller conversion, but there is little indication from my respondents and conversations, of a diminishment of the ancestor cult, even convincingly amongst youth in Cape Town. This worldview has proved surprisingly resilient. This contrasts with Schreiter (1985/2002:13), who observed that because of the young median age of Third World population, and in an urbanized context, 'much of that traditional religion and culture is being forgotten or not even learned'. From research and other scholars, I cannot agree with this assessment. Although there is a constant handing down of the ancestor belief system, ATR has surely lost some ground and cultural memory in the postmodern world of the Xhosa in the cities of Cape Town. Bediako draws attention to informal theology, found among the people of little formal education (in Walls 2017:153). This paper is focussed on this stratum.

The quality of conversions to Christianity is found wanting. Inculturation has not been a reality. Harries (2009:270) warns that the way Africans interpret mission may have been far from what the missionaries intended, and the reaction to the Eurocentric forms and the inner meanings of symbols to the recipients remains disturbingly unknown. What feelings, emotions, sense of transcendence are invoked by Western liturgies? If the Catholic Church

does not inculturate, it betrays the impetus of Vatican II and remains a Western Church. Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000:19) quote Karl Rahner:

The Church must be inculturated throughout the world if it is to be a World Church...This, then, is the issue. Either the Church sees and recognises these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a World Church and with Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II.

#### 7.10 Christ's Presence in Culture

*Ecclesia in Africa* requires a synthesis between culture and faith and the faith needs to become culture, otherwise it will not be fully accepted. We have failed to bring the Risen Jesus into the worldview of the Catholic parishioner in a way that is truly life-changing, preeminent, and energizing. Schreiter (1985/2002:21) warns:

Without sensitivity to the cultural context, a church and its theology either become a vehicle for outside domination or lapse into docetism, as though its Lord never became flesh.

There does seem to be a docetic tendency, whereby the humanity of Christ and the whole Christ Event and its significance, are materially misapprehended by the parishioners, partly because of the concentration on the ancestors. This attentiveness to ancestors obscures the relevance of the Cross, as well as the accessibility of Jesus as the unique source of sacred power and intercession, (which, however, he allows other agents to share in). It undermines the Easter Mystery, the hub of the Catholic faith.

Schreiter recommends discovering Christ already at work in a culture (1985/2002:39), and Luzbetak also contends that evangelization must be built on the foundation already provided by God, but it also may contain the presence of error. (Luzbetak1988:197). I perceive the Word clearly present in the fourth to tenth Commandments of the Decalogue in Xhosa culture, and indeed in most cultures, which regulate human relationships and prescribe sanctions for disobedience. This is the natural law, which it can be argued, reveals the Word, the Christ. From my interviews, there seems to have been a loss of the sense of idealised ancestors, who might have qualified as Christ figures, as the current focus of families is on the first three or four generations only. It appears to me that Nelson Mandela could serve as one



such figure, given his dedication to justice, his 'death', or incarceration, his resurrection into public life (release), and his cooperation with God in the sense of pursuing reconciliation rather than retribution and his resistance to compromise with unjust government (mirroring Satan's temptations in opposition to the very real grace of God). This appears to be an interesting model to use, and to parallel Mandela as an ancestor, with Christ, acknowledging, of course, the superiority of the Lord.

Schreiter (1991/2002:viii) recalls that embracing Christ seemingly implied rejection of African values, values which, as an example of 'bitter irony', actually resemble the more Semitic values found in the Scriptures and the story of Jesus, than European Christian values. 'Christ is still a largely distant figure for many Africans' (:ix), and I opine this remains the situation, even today amongst my parishioners. The book *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Schreiter, ed., 1991/2002), illustrates examples of how African theologies offer a viable theology suited to African realities; for example, employing a relationist ontology as against individualist varieties of theology.

Luzbetak (1988/2002:197; also in de Mesa 2000:24) contends that cultures contain, even if in some limited sense, a 'hidden Christ' 'the result of God's own action and grace'. Evangelization should be built on the foundation that God in his providence has already laid. The author bases his claim of God's providence on 1 Tim 2:4: 'he (God) wants everybody to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth'.

That foundation is most clearly visible in the people's culture- in their "soul", which happens to be transmitted from generation to generation through the process of enculturation.

Luzbetak (1988/2002:374)<sup>62</sup> records the objections of an Indian Jesuit who complained that the new humanity of Jesus was not apparent, it needed to be seen, touched, tasted, felt. Jesus needs to be illustrated humanly.

All human beings are *cultural* beings. Jesus must be culturally relevant if he is really to be understood and appreciated. This is a most obvious fact unfortunately only too often ignored.

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<sup>62</sup> Also de Mesa in Bevans 2012:12.

### 7.11 The Congolese Rite

The Zairean Mass (also the Congolese Mass) is the only inculturated rite approved after the Second Vatican Council, according to Vatican News. Pope Francis, in the above-mentioned statement by the Church Militant (a movement in the Catholic Church with its own agenda) extols its cultural vibrancy and spirituality, which invites the enhancing of gifts of the Holy Spirit, thereby enriching humanity, animated by African rhythm, drums, as well as other instruments which root the Christian message in the Congolese soul. He perceives it as a 'true place of encounter with Jesus'. He is confident that that inculturation is possible both in Africa and the Amazon 'without upsetting the nature of the Roman Missal, to guarantee continuity with the ancient and universal tradition of the Church'.<sup>63</sup>

In the same article, some liturgists are perturbed by pagan elements, and view invocation of ancestors as theological and liturgical "absurdity", as the ancestors are not incorporated in Christ and evoke elements of fear, magic, superstition. It seems that these objectors question the salvation of the deceased, which cannot be speculated upon, and must be left to God's mercy.<sup>64</sup> Cardinal Monsengwo, from Congo, defends the proposal, noting that the saints are not only the canonised, but all the dead. I have covered this point in Chapter 3.17, where it is maintained that the Communion of saints includes the souls in purgatory, in heaven and the canonized saints. Some features of the Zairean Rite include inserting the penitential rite just before the sign of peace, the use of dance, all male servers carrying spears, and the priests in African-style vestments.

A statement by Pope Francis, commented on by the Church Militant group (December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020), praises an inculturated rite which incorporates 'invocation of the ancestors' as a model for a proposed Amazonian indigenous rite. Shorter describes the Zairean rite and other African celebrations which include dancing, plays that enhance the readings, exuberant gestures of peace, colourful costumes, some of which, however, 'completely relativize the written word on the pages of the Roman Missal' (1996:107, 108). Ratzinger, in

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<sup>63</sup> [Churchmilitant.com/news/article/pope-praises-african-rite-invoking-ancestors](https://churchmilitant.com/news/article/pope-praises-african-rite-invoking-ancestors) Downloaded 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Shaw, Oxford academic, chairman of the Latin Mass Society of England and Wales.

his book the *Spirit of the Liturgy*, would have serious qualms as to whether the true meaning of the Eucharist is upheld in the face of so many increments and the quotation immediately above (footnote 95) is indeed a challenge to liturgical purists, who may perceive the Eucharistic prayer as 'buried beneath a morass of cultural externals and contingencies' (Shorter 1996:108). Further debate on this issue comes from Eboussi-Boulaga who challenges the Christianity imposed by the West, proposing a comprehensive African alternative<sup>65</sup>. Turaki<sup>66</sup> urges the West to comprehend Africa at a deeper level and because of globalization, African needs to understand Western culture.

My experience with the African parishes in Cape Town suggests that singing may overwhelm the words of the liturgy and their import, although hymns are often chosen from the Xhosa Catholic hymnal which proffers hymns which are appropriate for each part of the Mass.

#### 7.12 Concluding Remarks

Douglas (2012:48) also notes that belief in witchcraft is widespread. In the Congo, the writer observed that by 1987, seers and diviners emerged, claiming to be able to detect sorcery, without long initiation into sorcery (:48). This seems similar to the situation in South Africa. Accusations of witchcraft arise and *sangomas* are commissioned to 'sniff out the witch' responsible for dangerous events such as unusual lightning. She also notes that belief in witchcraft is widespread. The Catholic Church gives credence to Satanic rituals which can

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<sup>65</sup> Ferdinand Eboussi-Boulaga. 1984. *Christianity without fetishes: an African critique and recapture of Christianity*.

<sup>66</sup> Turaki, Y. 1999. *Christianity and African gods: a method in theology*. See also: Walt, B.J. 2003. *Understanding and rebuilding Africa: from desperation today to expectation for tomorrow*. Publisher: Institute for Contemporary Christianity in Africa, Potchefstroom. Both studies endorse relevant dialogue between Christianity and African Indigenous Religion and the latter expresses regret at the critical lack of insight of the social, economic and political context of Africa, both from outsiders as well as Africans themselves.

harm people physically, not merely spiritually. The Church needs to give consideration to these aspects of belief and determine a policy response.

Douglas (2001, in Bevens 2012:35), lauds Luzbetak's book 'The Church and Cultures', written in 1963, revised in 1988 and in its tenth printing in 2002, for its contribution to making anthropology accessible to missiologists. Whiteman (2003, in Bevens (ed.) 2012:79) also applauds the work of Luzbetak, who showed the path to missiological anthropology that is appropriate to the present age of global Christianity. He reflects the opinion that in the mid-Nineties missionaries were more poorly trained in cross-cultural understanding 'than at any other period of mission history' (:82). Incarnation means that Jesus took flesh in a specific culture and he needs to take flesh in the cultural mind of recipients of Christian mission. Taylor (1963/2001:14) is certain that the Church is 'incomplete without the insights that the Logos has been preparing for it in Africa'. Understanding another faith always yields new insights into Christianity (:16). He also believed that the mission churches were still guilty of wholesale importation of imported Western systems of belief and liturgy (:156).<sup>67</sup> If inculturation is 'dead', as I have heard it said, so is mission. My recommendations in Chapter 10 amount essentially to applied inculturation, a missiological endeavour to harmoniously unite faith and culture.

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<sup>67</sup> Quoting Fashole-Luke, 1978:5.

## Chapter 8. The Changing Context

### 8.1 Summary

Concentrated largely in African 'townships' in Cape Town, the isiXhosa and isiSotho speaking communities have been subject to colossal changes to their traditional way of life. These dynamisms include Colonialism and its legacy, Westernization, industrialization, urbanization, Christian mission, and postmodernity with all its complexity. The African sacral world has been profoundly shaken but not torn asunder. The former traditional worldview has seen politics and economics hived off as autonomous parts of society, activities that were formerly part of a unified whole. Religion, as in the West, has tended to become compartmentalised, disengaged from daily life. Despite these changes, African tradition persists, clearly evident in the endeavours of my respondents, including the ongoing attachment to ancestors, animal sacrifice, belief in evil spirits and witches, and the frequent conferring with traditional healers as well as healing churches. But the old pattern of village life has been 'irretrievably smashed' (Taylor 1963/2001:60).

The Xhosa have become more Westernized, desirous of Western education as a conduit to Western goods, but retain traditions such as animal sacrifice, now no longer disguised so as to placate the Western missionary. There has been a dispersion of Clan membership with urbanization and migrant labour to the mines which affects attendance at rituals. The ancestors have lost some authority and influence, appear to have been displaced by 'God' to second place in the religious consciousness of the Christian, while it appears that the Christ figure is substantially discounted.

Some customary features, such as patriarchy and gerontocracy, are being challenged by youth, who are empowered by their own cash in the new cash economy, more single parenting, more assertive females, more cohabitation as opposed to traditional marriage (which places extensive demands on women's autonomies). There is a significant number of Catholic parishioners, in my experience, who are married culturally but not sacramentally. Townships face new infirmities such as depression, helplessness, promiscuity, and exhaustion, largely symptoms of the new industrial context with its pressing demands. Substantial poverty and unemployment make a fertile breeding ground for crime, and many

cannot lead dignified lives because of poor amenities. Taylor feared a loss of communality in a transition to the monstrosity of the intensely private, individualistic world of the postmodern Westerner (:1963/2000:60). Other authors share this view.

The constant exodus from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape puts enormous strains on Cape Town city's infrastructure, and the number of problems that arise in the more complex environment are multiplied, so that traditional healers are in even more demand, as well as healing churches. Observers such as Biko (2019) are disturbed at the new passion for material goods. Mainline Christian churches are dominated by female attendance. Religion is especially important to the Black African, and many are attracted to charismatic Pentecostal churches which emphasise healing and prosperity.

## 8.2 The Context of Change

The context of any mission plan is constituted by the personal or communal experience of the people, their culture, their social location, and the factor of social change (Bevans 1992/2003:5-7). This chapter surveys the forces of change operating within the Xhosa communities, and indeed of Africa. The whole African continent has been subject to colossal changes to its traditional way of life. The experience of slavery, colonialism, Christian and Islamic mission, Westernization, and perhaps what is too little acknowledged, the whole system of industrialization, which even without the radical political challenges, exerts huge pressures for change on the whole of society. Biko (2019:103) sums up this fact by observing that 'African societies are transforming at a dizzying pace'. Shorter (2003; in Bevans (ed.) 2012:103) avers:

In contemporary Africa, the scale and rapidity of cultural interaction has been aggravated by urbanization, population mobility, and the global ecumene, the latter being sustained by a relentless cultural bombardment from the electronic media, a "*cumulative colonization*" of Africa by the first world (my underlining).

However, the encounters in the cities display 'cultures that retain their essential identity', despite increased diversity. Urban dwellers, especially the youth, seem overwhelmed by the television culture of Europe and America, 'but are in practice creating a culture that has many continuities with tradition' (Shorter 2003:105). The author refers to the resilience, solidarity

and social creativity of Africans, and despite the economic misery, 'live in happiness and dignity despite the poverty and austerity of their surroundings, and their population continue to grow in number' (:105). My observation is that this gladness in the context of often severe hardship is especially evident in church services, where the present moment overwhelms the experience of ongoing adversity, making for exuberant worship.

The racist viewpoints of philosophers such as Kant and Hegel (Makumba 2007:40) aided the shaping of colonialist philosophies and the changes they wrought. The so-called Berlin conference in 1885 apportioned Africa and allocated countries, with European-defined borders, to the colonisers (Kiaziku 2009:21). Colonialism deliberately set out to weaken the control of chiefs, by inducing males into the colonial economy, especially as mine labour, and as a pliant workforce for the growing industrial centres. Compulsory taxes in towns and cities forced men into the cash economy and made them dependent on the institution of their own oppression (Kiernan 1995:116). Africans were accused of laziness and indolence and needed to be taught the dignity of labour, by the colonists and missionaries, with the latter seen as furthering British interests (Villa-Vicencio 1995:59). The overall result was to undermine the political, social, and moral foundations of African society. Missionaries were accused of destroying African culture and of trying to impart the norms of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, as if these values had universal validity (:65). Some missionaries tended to be uncompromising, paternalistic, and condescending.

The 1800's saw the Xhosa squeezed between the South African Boers in the North, the British in the South, Portuguese slave traders in the Northeast, and eventually the Eastward expanding White farmers (Kiernan 1995:74). There was also internal social upheaval resulting from aggressive warfare conducted by the African chief Shaka and his Zulus, and various militant offshoots. This great convulsion and dispersion were called the *Mfecane*, or *Difaqane* (:74). De Gruchy (1995:57) identifies the Eighth Frontier War (1850-1851) between the Xhosa and the white settlers, as well as the subsequent mass killing of cattle by the Xhosa and destruction of grain, as the end of Xhosa independence. Their political structures were broken up, some missionaries proscribed the Xhosa culture, and land and livestock were depleted. The cattle-killing was seen as a type of 'national sacrifice in reaction to the hunger, oppression and alienation of a proud people devastated by colonial exploitation and expropriation' (De

Gruchy 1995). Missionary success drew heavily on the collapse of traditional social structures of African society. Mission also undermined the authority of chiefs and tribal cohesion. Together with forced migrations, attacks from other chieftains, and general disruptions, as well as starvation (many thousands dying of famine), the episode placed the missionaries there 'to assist with the transition to a new order' (:63). Kiernan (1995:57) concurs that the Eighth- Frontier war and the cattle killing marked the end of Xhosa independence.

Mtuzze (2003:107) believes the Xhosa resisted to the bitter end, but after the cattle killing tragedy and some hundred years of war with colonizers and soldiers, a wearied people became more prone to Western culture and Christianity. Large numbers sought work in the colony. Many of the starving joined the mission stations and overt resistance to mission fell away, especially on the part of the subdued chiefs (Pauw 1975:23). He describes the progress of Christian mission from weakness, despondency, and danger to a status of 'aggressive and triumphant' (:23), as suffering people sought help from the missions. The notion of tribe and chiefdom lost much significance (:47). Villa-Vicencio (1995:57) writes that some 30 000 Xhosa surrendered to the 'colonists, offering their labour in return for sustenance'. Some attribute this tragedy to desperation, religious fervour, and as noted above, a reaction to hunger, oppression, colonial exploitation and expropriation (:57).

Location of mission hospitals, schools, and other services outside of existing tribal structures also served to undermine African Tradition. The movement of the Xhosa to the South-West because of segmentation and the multiplication of successive independent chieftains, and the warfare conducted by the Zulu, led the Xhosa into contact with the White settlers (Kiernan 1995:74). Ancestral land was for the use of agriculture, there were special burial places for revered ancestors, and kraals constituted holy ground, protected by ancestors (Mtuzze 2003:9). To be deprived of land was to lose ancestral blessings and protection. Dispossession of land was a major blow to religion, culture and daily life. Forced to move, the Xhosa feared the anger of the ancestors. Loss of land also meant loss of cattle, wealth, agriculture, and hunting grounds (Villa-Vicencio 1995:60). The school system, usually based on one of the European countries, also contributed to the destruction of African culture (Biko 2019:76).

*Ecclesia in Africa* (1995:30) discerns three phases of Christian mission in Africa. The first saw the evangelization of Egypt and North Africa. The second focussed on the Continent in the



15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The third saw an extraordinary missionary effort begun in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. To which may be added the rapid formation of AICs from the late eighteenth hundreds onwards, particularly in South Africa. In 1882, the first AIC was formed, and many followed, as Africans broke away from mainline churches and themselves experienced break-aways in their new-found churches, by ambitious congregants wanting to be pastors themselves (Pauw 1975:25). There is a type of continuum (from pure ATR to pure Western Christianity) of African church types, with the Zionists more traditionally Xhosa at one end, and the orthodox churches at the other end. Bate notes that 'African Independent Churches have taken over many of the social functions of the tribal system' (1994:193). Many of the AICs follow a Pentecostal model, with the Holy Spirit as the superlative agent within these churches. The missionary efforts of the African converts to Christianity accounted for much of the extraordinary growth in Christianity in South Africa.

Villa-Vicencio (in Prozesky and De Gruchy, eds., 1995:65) blames the systematic destruction of African culture and political cohesion on missionary work. Paternalism and condescension characterised the Western missionaries' approach (:65). Many viewed African culture as inferior. Kiernan (Prozesky and De Gruchy 1995:75) also observes that a new religion is attractive when there is a serious disruption of society. For this reason, in the early stages of mission, 'only a handful of refugees, outcasts and the discontented of African societies went over to Christianity' (:75). Mission also achieved results by teaching literacy and other subjects, as Africans saw this as a path to access Western technology. Kraft (2003:422) believes that Africans are learning to want material prosperity, Western style houses, further education, and schooling. To varying degrees then, whilst Christianity was accepted for advantages such as literacy, and material gain, there was not an accompanying serious spiritual conviction. Pauw (1975:326) detects an almost desperate desire for education, and this still is in place today, as Africans seek to benefit from the Western economic system to access the offerings of formerly Western, but now global technology.

Biko (2019:81) reminds us of the huge change in political structures, such as the loss of accountability, and many legitimised customs developed over thousands of years. The creation of new foreign formal institutions (such as parliaments and judiciaries) pushed the informal institutions (traditional systems of government) underground. The latter could not

legitimately participate in government, thus the ‘incentive to comply with the new foreign rules was removed’ and accounts for the ‘subversive culture of rule-flouting’ (:91), and the high incidence of corruption. This is surely an accurate insight into the huge change in the political scenario, of a society where the masses are more traditional than the political elite and who have made their own accommodations to the new order. The violence following the imprisonment of former president Jacob Zuma in July 2021, testifies to the informal institutions’ rejection of legitimate government and the culture of rule-flouting.

The introduction of schools, literacy, books, Bibles, all facilitate change. The so-called ‘School people’ amongst the Xhosa embraced many changes brought about by the West, including Western education, as an entry to the compelling new technologies, whilst the ‘Reds’ are Xhosa who deliberately reject European ways and consciously retain their African traditions. Red refers to the red-coloured ochre the traditional Xhosa apply to their faces. Reds adhere to patriarchal clan identity and clan exogamy (Pauw 1975:42). For the African convert, resources for combatting evil continue to be important (Kraft 2003:394). Luzbetak (2002:350) observes that what is learnt early in life tends to persist. Parents and grandparents effectively inculcate Xhosa customs to their children, because of which the dual religious system arises. These traditions survive even advanced levels of Western education, and even African university professors, schooled in the Western educational system, have been known to retain old customs. The Cape Times newspaper records an example of an African lawyer who felt bewitched by a Sangoma allegedly brought to court by the judge<sup>68</sup>. When mission addresses felt needs, cultural change is accomplished (:355), and the missionary needs to address these felt needs. Christian mission by Europeans did not adequately address felt needs, hence the rapid rise of AICs, which provide what the Western missionaries have neglected. He avers that one does not cease to be African in order to become a Christian (:370).

There is pressure not to ‘desert’ rural homesteads to migrate to an urban centre. A scattered homestead may be a sign of ancestral displeasure (Pauw 1975:318). Sipuka (2000:170) confidently claims that the custom of sacrifice is still deeply entrenched among the modern

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<sup>68</sup> Cape Times daily newspaper, Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022: “Judge’s sangoma at Meyiwa trial”. Goitsemanang Tlhabye.

Xhosa, even among residents in upmarket urban settings. He opines that 20 years later (since his thesis, not much has changed in regard to the ancestor belief system (2020:1). He notes how the death of a famous singer, Brenda Fassie, was honoured with the sacrifice of several livestock (2000:171). Thabo Mbeki (a former State President) was similarly honoured by sacrifices on his return to his home village in December 1998. Noted above is the recourse to the aid of the ancestors by Cyril Ramaphosa, the current State President of South Africa (2022), to save the African National Congress party, struggling with many 'foreign influences', as well as the funeral of Nelson Mandela, which followed African custom.

The practice of Sacrifice among the Xhosa, and indeed among all Africans, has remained constant in spite of the discouraging influence of colonization, Christianisation and modernisation (Sipuka 2000:2).

Some Xhosa rituals have ceased, such as rain-making and seasonal sacrifices and military activities (Sipuka 2000:176). Some rituals are omitted, some confused and merged, probably reflecting ignorance and forgetfulness over generations (:177). *Imbeleko* (involving infant babies), has also been called a 'dinner' instead of a sacrifice. Many Africans continue with unadulterated traditional sacrifices whilst in principle, as a Christian, consciously or mostly unconsciously confess Christ's absolute sacrifice (:178). Urban dwellers may seek convenient times for sacrifices, including deferring rituals to the Christmas holidays, when many Xhosa journey to the country to perform various rites. December has been described as '*inyanga yemicimbi*', the month of rituals (Sipuka 2000:181). The absence of sufficient lineage members to perpetuate a common sense of belonging, and a kraal (the revered area for sacrifice) has reduced the frequency of sacrifices (:183).

Constraints such as the absence of a kraal, the absence of correct kinship, urban settings where there is a need to transport an animal to the suburb, affect the extent of sacrifices (:183). As far as Sipuka is concerned, the missionary ban of the ancestor cult merely drove it underground (:185). The reduced number of lineage members in one place has forced families to extend invitations to clan members, friends, neighbours, churches, work colleagues and other associations (:192). In the absence of necessary kin (to perform a ritual) in cities, individuals communicate directly with ancestors, even without formal rituals (:193). The belief in the ubiquity of ancestors helps establish the new residence as a place fit for sacrifice. The importance of kinship is more evident at funerals, death, and the unveiling of tombstones

(Pauw 1975:319). Pauw averred that the 'degree of persistence (of Xhosa culture) is more than might be expected' (:331). This-worldly salvation is still the norm in the sense that rituals are for often for petitionary motives (:333). Some in urban settings reserve a 'holy place' in their garden to communicate with ancestors.

There has been a general loss of authority in towns, where chiefs do not rule, and an accompanying loss of the authority of ancestors (Nürnberg 2007:206). There appears to be limited awareness or memory of famous ancestors of the past. The extended family has been replaced by the nuclear family (Pauw 1975:317). Legitimate elders are not present to officiate at rituals. There is an increase in single parent families. Many children do not know their famous clan ancestors. Female ancestors have also become more relevant. Patrilineal kinship remains important but there is a narrowing of the effective kinship network (:319). To some extent, respect has been transferred to Christian churches and their leaders.

The word *idinala* (from the English dinner) has become a euphemism for a sacrificial meal, and it is partly a camouflage to conceal the activity from the Christian church (Sipuka 2000:195). In this respect Sipuka agrees with Pauw (1975:177) that 'dinners' are camouflaged rituals. Both agree that Christianity prepares the Xhosa Christian for the future (the afterlife), whilst African Tradition provides for daily needs for protection, blessings, and well-being. This may explain the belief that when there are more important issues (current problems, existential crises) it is better to pray in isiXhosa, whilst for less important matters (the distant, eschatological future, the Kingdom of Heaven), English can be used. Dinners have tended to become a synthesis of ATR and Christianity (Sipuka 2000:197). Xhosa people apprehend that it is cheaper and less involved to practice Christianity compared to the demands of ATR, with all its implications. There may be no money to afford a required ritual.

Some signs of secularism are in evidence with specialists in fields such as economics discussing national budgets, and exchange rates, and also signs of more 'rational' belief systems, but there is still a substantial belief in magic (Pauw 1975:314), referred to by others as dynamistic forces. Beyond 1975, there is still a robust belief in the ancestral traditions, evil spirits and traditional healers are still an essential part of the context of daily living, both in the rural and urban areas. Thus, the new worldview is no longer in tandem with religion, with the economic

and political realms largely disconnected from the overall view of reality. Many parishioners are familiar with the Rand exchange rate and Moody's credit rating system of countries!

The separation of religion and government, or politics, formerly part of one whole cultural system, is clear from Nelson Mandela's address in June 1997, when he separates these two systems, but does not separate political integrity from spiritual integrity. Politicians have spiritual responsibilities and religions have political responsibilities. The transformation of society 'requires the greatest possible cooperation between religious and political bodies'. Social and religious objectives cannot be achieved in isolation, and they are held in critical tension 'with common commitments'. Both are partners in building society (Mayson 2010:149<sup>69</sup>) My respondents did not display the same integration of religion and politics as evident from these senior politicians. At a more ideological level, 'Southern Africa is the meeting place between two giant ideologies- capitalism and Marxism-Leninism' (Zwane 1983:11). The country's financial governance as evident in the Reserve Bank policies are distinctly Western and capitalistic, whilst the trade unions and the Economic Freedom Front political party are noticeably socialist. The collapse of the Russian communist system has not unduly perturbed many African leaders, who are not impressed with the capitalist legacy of colonialism. The 2008 economic collapse following the end of excessive property speculation in the USA and Britain, renewed interest in alternative economic systems.

As traditional society changes, the correspondence between worldview and religion is eroded, and with secularism, religion becomes more compartmentalised, separate from the rest of society (Kraft 2003:54). Religion and relationships and family recede in importance and modern culture and the economic sector gain in importance. People have come to accept specialists in economics and politics, divorced from the former worldview where all segments of society were one whole (Pauw 1975:314). Changes have been coming more rapidly than can be assimilated, leading to culture shock, fragmentation, and disorientation as society seeks to find new equilibrium. Urbanization tends to lead to depersonalization and cultural disorganization. Brown (2005:94, in Resane 2020:6) notes how this, as well as forcing the Xhosa, Zulu and other Black cultures to speak English: 'caused Zulu, Xhosa and other African

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<sup>69</sup> Referring to *Phakamani* magazine of ANC Commission of Religious Affairs, Johannesburg, April 2004; 7.

people to experience psychological stress while their culture was under constant attack. The African response was that crime, alcohol abuse and lawlessness rose to frightening levels due to anomie and normlessness'. Personalist societies teach people to conform, and individualist societies teach people to make up their own minds (Kraft 2003:57). Luzbetak (2002:318) observes loss of sense of belonging and solidarity, less law and order, less cooperation and kinship and less sense of common interests. His model perceives a sense of isolation, greater self-centredness, loss of warmth and loss of tribal and community bonding. These can be accompanied by increased incidence of alcohol abuse, mental illness, overcrowding, delinquency and vigilante justice. Biko (2019:137) blames the 'blind emulation' of the Anglo-Saxon convention of the separation of state and church for accelerating the moral decline in society and for the unjust social order in Africa.

Rice (2015:4,12) notes that while patriarchy and gerontocracy remain the two pillars of tradition in the rural area of her studies, possession of cash has more recently empowered youth to avoid traditional patrilineal and kinship structures and customs. There are fewer marriages, many households of single parents of both genders and more co-habitation in the townships (:14). Many of the rural women in her survey saw Christian marriage as more loving and cooperative as against forced marriage, physical 'discipline' and alcohol (:41). Alcohol is an integral part of social life in the rural area (:161), and there is not less consumption of alcohol in the towns and cities. These observations are applicable to township living as well. In general, the Xhosa live in a type of diaspora, even in the country, assailed by powerful forces of change, which have done violence to the original culture. Schools have been become sites of violence at times, where it is not unusual for learners to come to school with knives, drugs and alcohol, and discipline is seriously lacking. Perhaps an indication that Christianity has a weak hold on isiXhosa-speaking Black children is the lack of commitment of youth (and by implication, of parents), to attend catechism classes provided by Catholic churches in the Black townships. The Western model of catechising is proving inadequate, but while Coloured and White churches seem to have a somewhat greater Sunday Mass attendance (20% versus 4,6% for the townships), most of these young people who complete their three-year confirmation programme no longer attend Mass after being confirmed, another sign of a failure to impart a life-altering relationship with Jesus Christ.

To become a Christian involves a deep change in worldview, values, and allegiances. At the deep level, this amounts to a paradigm shift (Kraft 1996/2003:11). The pure Gospel proposes Kingdom principles, such as freedom from absolute ownership of property, servant leadership, and other distinctly non-worldly values, whilst Xhosa embrace many of the new technologies of Western culture, in contrast to the otherworldliness of Christianity. Harries (2013:1) argues convincingly that the material offerings of the new culture are highly attractive to Africans and is one motivation for converting to Christianity. Many Western Christians have moved from a Christian paradigm to a secular one, a pattern exerting influence also over the Xhosa community. Worldview is at the deep level of culture; the core around which culture is integrated. The Gospel's task is to change people at the deepest level possible, to engage with profound values, to challenge these in proposing alternatives, such as faith by justification rather than by circumcision and the law, which the Jews were wedded to (Kraft 1996/2003:36). The worldview of our African Catholic parishioners has involved a paradigm change, where God has displaced ancestors as the prime source of sacred power, but ancestors remain a powerful constituent of the adjusted world map, more so than Christ.

Culture is a force of habit, a coping mechanism, a strategy for survival (:37, 38); it expresses ideas and concepts which underlie human behaviour. Because of this, and its resistance to change, there is a very high degree of predictability even within a small sample (Kraft 1996/2003:39). The sample of my respondents did exhibit significantly similar answers to questions, indicating a general coherence of worldview. Culture provides continuity from one generation to another, regarding the past as a source of wisdom. However, today the notion of culture is more fluid and can even be narrowed down to the same understanding of an aspect of reality which two people share.

Youth, in particular, is introduced to alternative assumptions and values within the Western schooling system (Kraft 1996/2003:57). Personalist societies such as African Tradition teach people to conform, whilst individualistic societies, such as the West, condition people to make up their own minds (Kraft 1996/2003:58). Changes to African society have been happening more rapidly than can be assimilated by all parts of the culture, causing culture shock (:126) and erosion of values such as the authority of the elders. Surface changes, such as dress and technology happen relatively quickly. Strong social controls, such as taboos, resist change

(:389). With the Western schooling system, boys and girls coming together, compared to their separation in the traditional way of life.

Change always takes place in the mind of the individual, but opinion leaders, high prestige persons, older men, leaders and 'significant others' can facilitate change (:160). The missionary, is of course, an agent of change. In a large complex culture change is more difficult. In the Western culture, change is often regarded as progress, but technological advancement is clearly not the same as moral advancement. In a homogenous culture change is restricted where the different components of the culture are closely integrated (:390). The movement from rural to urban areas facilitates change (:391). Barriers to change need to be assessed as well as facilitators of change (:396). The missionary seeks to engage the heart and mind, Christians need to become 'of the mind of Christ' (Luzbetak 1988/2002:301; see 1 Cor. 2:16). This is not apparent amongst our Catholic parishioners. The very substantial authority of the ancestors has not efficaciously dealt with by missionaries. It has been banned or omitted from instructions to converts but retains considerable vigour in the lives of the Xhosa. There is some weakening of the ancestor belief system, more conspicuously amongst the youth, although even here I observe that most of the youth who attend our catechism classes (aged from 9 to 18) have been taught to regularly entreat their ancestors.

Rice (2015:46) detects some narrowing of the gender power balance as the following observations show: the dominant male is being challenged by a more assertive female; more women have money; more women are being treated as ancestors; more women head households in single parent families. There is a growing proportion of young women able to support themselves (:165). Marriage can be prohibitively expensive (:195). It is a norm to have extra-marital affairs, even more acceptable for males (:200). My parishioners have expressed distress at the extent of adultery, usually on the male side. Women express their desire to be free from marital domination and mothers-in-law (:208). There are more births out of wedlock. In traditional society men associate more with men and women with women (Kraft 2003:184) and boys with other boys and girls with girls, whilst today children of both genders attend school together (:217). Rice's observations are meaningful to the town and city dwellers, but Biko (2019:55) contrasts the values in rural areas, 'where moral goods are still



at the apex of society', and cities, 'where natural goods reign supreme'. Natural goods refer to material possessions and moral goods refer to mutual support and lived interdependence.

In the townships, traditional healers are facing new illnesses such as depression, helplessness, promiscuity, and exhaustion (Ramphela 2002:10). Chronic unemployment contributes to a state of hopelessness, and it is clear that the political miracle of 1994 has not been partnered by an economic miracle. The youth of New Crossroads (township in Cape Town) are on the 'bottom deck', and this promotes crime and gangsterism (:7). The researcher notes that a male-dominated ethos permeates all South African values, linked to 'outmoded patriarchal traditional practice' which are detrimental to male/female relationships and have no place in South African society (:10). Although young men have been dislocated and do not feel part of the New South Africa, African customs such as *Imbeleko*, ancestors and circumcision remain important. Rice (2015:123) reports on the emasculating effects of unemployment on young men in the country, which certainly applies to the urban areas as well. Luzbetak notes many painful consequences of urbanization, including depersonalization and cultural disorganization (1988/2002:319).

Rice (2015:60) sees male/female relationships as being more based on intimacy and sex than the former complex uniting of families and clans and arranged marriages. Church sodalities have blossomed, providing for females in particular, a place of fellowship, support and coping with the tensions of township life, a type of sociological function as opposed to a strictly spiritual expression. In the Archdiocese of Cape Town Christian church sodalities also assist the need for belonging, in a differentiated urban setting, and they provide a type of home from home. One of our clergy note that for some they are a welcome escape from abusive husbands (conversation February 2020).

Bate (1995/1997:129) notes how Pentecostal churches promote a haven from the outside world, as members close themselves off from their context, with no attempt to engage with negative social issues. There has been a movement from visiting traditional healers to following charismatic prophets (:147). Admission to a local church does not require special instructions. Bate feels that the over-emphasis on healing in church services makes for an unbalanced theology (:160). However, there is a worldwide resurgence of the ministry of healing (:174). Christ the Healer proved a well-accepted Christological model by the African

churches. Nürnberger (2007:42) observes that even in South Africa, the most modernised and Christianised part of South- Saharan Africa, millions of Black South Africans turn to 'hundreds of thousands' of diviners and healers. Bate (1994) notes that 'African Independent Churches have taken over many of the social functions of the tribal system' (:193). Many converts to AICs aver that it was because they experienced healing that they transferred allegiance to the new church.

ATR embraces healing far more than Catholicism, which fails to provide the healing structures offered by ATR and now AICs (Domingues 2000:12). Some Catholics attend healing services at AICs, or healing churches and traditional healers. ATR is still very much alive and most African Christians entertain these traditions to varying degrees. Bate also refers to the need for healing of politics, economics, science, not just human bodies (:176). There is also the emergence of certain disvalues, such as a culture of violence, a culture of recklessness, a culture of deprivation (:217). Makumba (2007:13) believes that millions of Africans are living at a cultural crossroad and in 'near despair'. Magesa (2004:286) concludes that globalization has profoundly compelled Africa into a liminal position, causing transition with all its uncertainties and stress. Poverty accompanied by dehumanising modes of living, constructs an environment which is conducive to crime and violence. The Cape Town township of Nyanga had the unhappy distinction of having the highest the murder rate in the world. There is substantial *ubuntu*, community in the townships, as well as crime and violence. There are many people who struggle determinedly to make the most for themselves and their families. Perhaps an appropriate Biblical model in these areas is the parable of the darnel (Mt 13:26-30; 36-43). There is much 'wheat' that has been sown, or good citizens, but the enemy (poverty, dehumanised conditions, forces of evil) has sown darnel (criminals, violence, substance abuse, promiscuity) amongst the people living in these areas.

Kiernan (1995:123) observes how Zionist churches (generally more African, attracting more of the poor and illiterate), provide support, community, protection and healing to many workers experiencing radical dislocation and disorientation, having been uprooted from close-knit homogenous communities into a highly varied mix of urban dwellers. He describes Zionists as 'intensely anti-political'. They emphasize diligence, sobriety, frugality and savings (:124). Nürnberger (2007:175) notes how few men there are in the main-line churches, but

the Zion Christian Church, with a membership of 8 million, is packed with men in their prime. They wear uniforms, effect military formations, have the strictest of rules, inspire loyalty and discipline and demand regular financial payments as a condition for membership. Nürnberger (2007:208) claims that mainline churches have become predominantly women's churches. Males, used to dialogue with chiefs, to discussions when resolving issues, want to be involved in decision making and be more participative, and do not want to watch a liturgy conducted by one man and to be part of a silent and submissive audience. In my tally of male attendance of Masses in townships in a selection of parishes in 2010, some 15% to 35% of those attending a service are males. They may also be disapproving of the predominance of women in positions of authority in the church. A priest who has worked in the townships in Cape Town is convinced that there is a high degree of patriarchy amongst the men.

De Gruchy (1995:83) observes that Christianity in South Africa has transformed from a White, European dominated settler religion (with expatriates evangelizing the indigenous population), to a Black majority religion rooted in culture, engaged in a struggle against White domination. There were many breakaways of Black Christians from mainline churches. There were also many secessions from the newly organised Black churches. In 1911 25% of the Black population in South Africa was Christian, and today (2020) the ratio stands at 80%. Many of the new converts were not former members of main line churches but came over from ATR to an AIC, converted by Black Africans who took the message they had learnt to other Africans.

The African Synod (1994:58) emphasized the family as the most important source of evangelization. Family life needs to be rehabilitated, both the Western nuclear family and the now somewhat depleted African extended family. The second African synod (2009:11) appreciated the culture shock affecting age-old foundations of society, referring to an anthropological crisis with the advent of modernity and postmodernity. Devotion to Mary flourishes in Africa (Orobator 2008:93). Veneration of Mary is similar to ancestor veneration (Magesa 2004:262). Africans find it easy to accept Mary as an intercessor or mediatrix (:282). Some of my respondents regard the Rosary as a truly efficacious prayer. Generally, petitionary prayer to Mary as an intercessor, is a popular devotion.

Magesa (:274, 275) spells out the new context facing the independent African countries of material poverty, lack of education, preventable disease, illiteracy, shortage of necessities for

a decent life and HIV/AIDS. Domingues (2000:117) observes that inasmuch as this disease has broken family structures, the epidemic has been destructive of community life and traditional roles, status and relationships. Kiaziku (2009:16) refers to 'increasing poverty, urbanization, international debt, the arms trade, displaced persons, famine, war and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights' as challenges to evangelization. Stinton (2004:250) cites Mugambi (1997:30) who wonders if African religiosity 'marks authentic faith or superstitious despair'. *Ecclesia in Africa* (Post-Synodal Document on Synod in Africa in 1994; 1995:14) also details various contexts of pain in Africa, referring to suffering arising from conflicts, tribalism, racism, greed for power and religious intolerance, whilst the 2011 post-synodal document recommends a specific mission of justice and peace and reconciliation (paragraph 3). Reconciliation is a pre-political necessity. This document situates the Church's task as somewhere between:

immediate engagement in politics - which lies outside the Church's direct competence - and the potential for withdrawal or evasion present in theological speculation which could serve as an escape from historical responsibility (:17).

With remarkable changes in religious beliefs, there have been changes in other components of society since religion permeates all aspects of society. The Xhosa have had a multiplication of relationships superimposed on a once relatively compact, undisturbed society (Mayer 1961:2). There are now some 6 to 7 generations of urban dwellers, but the extent of being able to live out two different realms of culture has been significant, and the so-called dual religious system testifies to this balancing act. Superficial change has been rapid, but at the deep level of worldview and social institutions, there has been much resistance, or rather, ongoing retention of African customs. Pauw (1975:8) observed that there is far less control on a person, the absence of powerful sanctions, and that a person is expected to make the most of their opportunities whilst the traditionalist is expected not to rock the boat for the greater good of the community. In large scale societies relationships are more impersonal, multiple, and transient. Traditional society is closely integrated with fewer subdivisions. There is far less specialization in the economy of a traditional society, narrower fields of choice and fixed rules and statuses. In modern society there are multiple relationships of lesser intensity and duration than in a traditional society. Social roles are not as rigidly defined, and there is

far more subdivision of economic roles and more freedom, as roles are not defined by gender, age, descent, lineage, or social standing (Pauw 1975:8).

Broader factors such as globalization have compelled contemporary Africa into a type of liminal position 'with all the uncertainties associated with this condition' (Magesa 2004:286). Kiernan (1995:123) notes how Zion churches provide support, community, protection, and healing to many migrant workers experiencing radical dislocation and disorientation, uprooted from close-knit homogeneous communities to a highly varied mix of urban dwellers. Nürnberger (2007:188) supports the observations of rapid change, especially in the postmodern world. 'The monster (postmodernity) has been let loose and will never be captured again.' It is a force making for relentless progress (:212). Nürnberger believes that underdevelopment is more a consequence of the failure to embrace modernity than the oppression of the past centuries in the form of colonialism and exploitation (:188). Referring to the Western world in general (2007:242, 243), he contends that 'Competition in a 'free' market has led to discrepancies in productivity, income and life chances between individuals, groups and countries and continents that dwarf those of feudalism'. (My underlining). This is a disturbing observation. It is not surprising then to witness the severe looting and destruction of property in July 2021, partly politically induced, and partly a symptom of a social revolution, of accumulated frustrations with service delivery and absence of dignified standards of living. Thus, modernity has created new problems, calling to mind the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), which places a radical responsibility on the rich to assist the poor. This is indeed a very powerful judgment. 'The 'free market' has led to new forms of dominance and subservience. Vast numbers of people are marginalised altogether (Nürnberger 2007:243). The author observes how personal ambition, selfishness and desire are not seen as morally wrong. Social processes are accelerating.

The safety net of the extended family is breaking down. Statistics of rape, teenage pregnancy and single parent families are on the rise...All dimensions of life such as cultural achievements, sport or sex, have become commercialised. Rampant desire, peer pressure, and the lure of new products and services on the market, the sophistication and power of advertising and entertainment have led to new dependencies. (:243).

Biko (2019:56) expresses disappointment with the new African 'obsession' with material goods. The 'passionate embrace' of material consumption has seen the rise of many 'rudderless' communities concerned only with keeping up with their families, friends and neighbours. 'Africans became defined by how much they had, as opposed to who they were' (:58). Mayson (2010:142), citing Cilliers, observes that the sense of community and belonging is straining under pressures such as globalization and Americanization, leading to individualism, consumerism, and privatization.<sup>70</sup> Tlhagale, discussing various African customs, which are changing, and some which can be adapted to Christianity, concludes that: 'There is no doubt, that the African worldview as it was known, will never be the same again' (Tlhagale 2018:197). The African sacral world has been deeply shaken, but not torn asunder (:226). Forces of postmodernity include loss of faith, uncertainty, meaninglessness, no belief in life after death, fragmentation, powerlessness, ecological problems, economic injustice, and many wars (:226, 227).

Pew research demonstrates a very close inverse relationship between adherence to God and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (as adjusted). The correlation coefficient of this relationship of 34 countries is -0.86, close to a near perfect -1.0. The more economically advanced a country, the lower this measure of religiosity. This correlation was also evident within countries, where higher income groupings showed lower religious adherence ratios than lower income groupings. South Africa, with a GDP of some \$18 000 boasts an 84% adherence ratio, Kenya (\$5 600) a 95% adherence, Sweden (\$58 000) a 9% ratio. The USA 44% ratio was relatively high for its \$68 000 GDP per capita. The UK ratio was 20% against GDP per capita of \$50 000. Statistics were based on 2019 surveys 'across the 34 countries, which span six continents'.<sup>71</sup>

Biko (2019:117ff) quotes various statistics which show the huge exodus from the country to the urban areas. South Africa has the highest degree of urbanization, with almost two-thirds of total population found in urban and peri-urban areas (:118, source South African Institute of Race Relations, no other reference). He also reports a 32.7% informal unemployment rate

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<sup>70</sup> Cilliers, J. Worshipping in the townships. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 132 (November 2008:83).

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/20/the-global-god-divide/> Accessed 30/06/2022.

in South Africa (:120, source International Labour Organization, 2016, press release 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016). This increased sharply with the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. The rural areas possess far more 'solid informal institutions and higher social capital than urban Africa' (Biko 2019:126). He warns against the unsupervised flow from rural to urban areas. Globally, in the first half of this century, 'more people have moved to urban areas than were left in the rural areas...(T)he greatest human migration in the history of the world continues' (Rynkiewicz 2008:39).

A stricter rural/urban classification cites 54% in urban areas in South Africa (Goldie 2006:25; source Stats SA). There has been a massive growth in population in the Western Cape, especially to the Cape Metropolitan Area ('CMA'), comprising the municipalities of Cape Town City, Tygerberg, South Peninsula, Oostenberg, Helderberg, Blaauwberg. The Western Cape is 87% urban (1994). From early beginnings, the CMA population has risen from 159 330 in 1915, to 3 154 238 in 2001, and probably 3.6 million in 2020. The number of Blacks has risen from 10 000 in 1900 to 1 million on 2001 and an estimated 1.6 to 2 million in 2020. The extremely poor Eastern Cape has been the main source of the increase in the Black population in the Western Cape. The Western Cape population is projected to rise from 7.2 million (2020) to 9.4 million (2040), a 30.6% rise, or some 122 000 per annum<sup>72</sup>. For every 100 economically active, there are 45 dependants. As noted in Goldie (2006:26-27), this province had the lowest poverty index of all the provinces, with an 87% urban population, compared with the Eastern Cape urban proportion of 33% urban (1994 statistics). The latter province had the highest poverty index and is the greatest source of immigration to the Western Province (Goldie 2006:26). Another article describes the 'pull factors' of the Western Province as higher employment, better living conditions, better family and household conditions, better retirement conditions<sup>73</sup>. There is little doubt that many African and South American cities are experiencing huge demands on their infrastructures, and Cape Town is no exception.

All of Africa and South America are experiencing record rates of urbanization, placing unbearable strains on cities. Thus, for example, Lima in Peru is seeing large influx into cities,

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<sup>72</sup> Weekend Argus, Saturday July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022: "*Cape population explosion*": Genevieve Serra.

<sup>73</sup> Cape Argus, Monday August 01, 2022, page 1: "*Increase in population despite Covid*" (Mwangi Gitahahu).

land invasions, 'shack' dwellings ('favelas'), unemployment, crime, substance abuse, gangsterism and pressure on the city's services to provide more accommodation, sewerage, housing, electricity, health care, schooling.

Generally, a move from country to city does bring an improvement in the overall standard of living, at the expense of enduring higher levels of crime, a battle for a dignified standard of living in the city areas and finding a residence. The Western Cape has a significantly higher Gross Domestic Product than the Eastern Cape. Before the Industrial Revolution in Europe, it needed 8 out of 10 people to produce enough food for society, and today less than 1 out of 10 is required to fulfil the same function. Advances in science, in particular the ability to extract nitrogen from the atmosphere and produce fertilizers, facilitated the world population growth from 3 billion in the nineteen twenties to the current 8 billion (2023).

This is another reason for the flow from country to city, a process which is mature in Europe. The older townships, Langa, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Old and Lower Crossroads are probably as full as they can get, whilst there is strong growth still in different parts of Khayelitsha, Mfuleni, Blue Downs, Kuils River, and other areas (Goldie 2006:27). Population density in these areas is considerably higher (some 7 000 people per square kilometre in Gugulethu, 1 460 in the CMA, which accounts for 89% of the population in the Archdiocese of Cape Town as a whole, which has an overall average of 115.

The African person can be said to be in diaspora, not only because of reasons attributable to colonialism, urbanization, and industrialization, but because of broader factors, namely globalization and the intermingling of many cultures, leading to loss of identity, of who a person feels they are, and who they are not. There is a complex mixture of local and global elements. Because most South Africans have failed to ground themselves in a broader Pan African identity, 'crippling alternative identities' have arisen and as a result, the country is in a state of identity crisis which seriously threatens its socio-economic progress (Biko 2019:155). Globalization and urbanization are two of the most significant forces shaping the world, which must affect Christian mission (Rynkiewicz 2008:40). Diasporas such as 'Chinatowns' bear testimony to the migrations of people and their search for identity (:40). The various Christian sodalities in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town attract many



parishioners, and these communities provide not only for spiritual needs, but supply a sociological need, namely identity, a sense of belonging.

## Chapter 9. Summary of the Global Context

The discernment of how the image of God has been appropriated by Xhosa Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cape Town demonstrates that within the context of a Christological crisis of global proportions, Christ has been imperfectly proclaimed to the Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town. Also, according to a comprehensive literature review, this has occurred at the national level as well as at the continental level. Pneumatology has also not been satisfactorily disseminated. As noted below, a flawed Western model of mission has undermined the proclamation of the Gospel to Africa as a whole, and in particular, to the Xhosa Catholics in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town. The mission model is blemished, resulting in the failure to instil a life-changing, energising relationship with Christ, a failure which is definitely not unique to Cape Town, but to the Western world as a whole. Even many Catholics loyal to the minimum perquisites of the faith have not truly encountered Christ in a radical sense of encounter, evident in minimal participation in Church activities.

Internationally, there are a number of influential atheists who dispute the existence of God and there is a widespread loss of faith. However, the past thirty years or so have witnessed a type of spiritual revival in the West, manifested in the norm of appropriating an eclectic mixture of worldviews, not only Christianity. Conversely, the Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town emerge as truly God-centred, but not necessarily Christ-centred. There does not appear to be a faith crisis in regard to God, but in relation to Jesus, as well as in relation to the search for healing from churches, a convention, habit, of many of the indigenous people. The Christian God competes with many other worldviews in the postmodern world, as there has been a fragmentation of the one, overarching, dominant Christian narrative in the West into the plurality of hundreds of micro views and fusions of these various creeds. In the African context, Christianity vies with African Traditional Religion (ATR), in particular with the ancestor belief system, and of course, with the influential postmodern dynamisms which challenge all traditional systems of belief.

Mass attendance in the West was at an all-time low before the Covid 19 2020 pandemic, and there was a similar situation with regards to the reception of all sacraments. Christ has been relativized in a maze of counter-attractions and alternatives. These include Buddha and Buddhism, which is particularly focalised in contemporary culture through the figure of the

Dalai Lama (spiritual leader of Tibet), Eastern therapeutic formulae, and various other esoteric formulations that exude a certain allure and mysticism, catering for the real need for transcendence; this is marked however by a type of spirituality centred on believing but not belonging, as well as on an eclectic tendency to seek sacred power from a variety of sources, Christian and otherwise. There is also strong resistance to prescriptive theology, people aspire to be free to employ their free will as they desire, and laws are seen as imperialistic, intrusive.

One fundamental reason for this de-Christianisation has been the failure to inculturate the Gospel into all the realities of Western life, which has marginalised Christianity. Proclamation of the kerygma has focused on the poor, sick and on prisoners, and only more recently broadened to other crucial areas of human existence such as politics, economics, education, sport, science, entertainment, technology and artificial intelligence, as well as on cultures substantially distinct from European society. This truncated missionary model has been proclaimed to the Xhosa Catholics in Cape Town, and at the national level as well, according to a number of scholars, as well as failing to address daily existential areas of concern to those still immersed in African tradition. *Christifideles Laici* (1988:34, a Vatican document on the laity) requires the laity to vanquish the separation of the Gospel from life, in other words, effectively to integrate the Gospel and daily activities, in order for the Church to implement re-evangelization (:33,). The latter, namely evangelization, is the most profound identity proper to the Catholic Church (:33, quoting *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975:10). Again, the poor, sick, and incarcerated categories are limited, and weaken Christianity's contribution to real, broader experiential concerns. We may also ask is it up to the laity to overcome the divorce between faith and culture, surely it is the work of the propagators of the faith?

Moreover, the Enlightenment Era saw the role and position of God largely being displaced by science; humankind concluded that it could survive without God. The relationship of religion to the real world has been seriously undermined and the modern world has 'reduced religion to alienation, to become [a form of] estrangement...to have no impact on life' (Häring, in Häring and Fransen, 1972:26). However, the desacralization of religion which followed Vatican II (1962-1965) freed missionaries to understand more clearly the needs of different populations, such as 'the Africans who want to pray using their five senses' without imposing on them prayers, attitudes and behaviours unique to Whites during Mass (:26). He believes

that the Charismatic Renewal took appropriate advantage of the greater freedom allowed by Vatican II with their response to the Holy Spirit phenomena of the past century and the extraordinary growth of Pentecostal churches (:27). The African style of celebration is charismatic in its own right, independent of the Western charismatic phenomenon.

There has been an over-emphasis on deductive, theoretical theology at the theological, seminary and laity echelons, as well as on other-worldly theology, often disconnected from the realities of daily life, whereas the African person seeks fullness of life in the present moment, to cope with the actualities of daily living. Shorter (1996/1999:17) refers to John Henry Newman (a prominent theologian, d1890), who popularised the distinction between first-order and second-order language. First-order language deals with intuition, imagination, symbols, pictures, while second-order language deals with analysis, explanation, and rationality. The latter draws its rational explanation from the former. African cultural language falls within the first-order forms of expression but evangelization has tended to use abstract second-order language. Shorter (1999:20) believes that the high level of abstraction found in theological language is clearly one of the reasons for the divorce between the Gospel and culture in our time. Catechetics in the Archdiocese of Cape Town has tended towards the more theoretical, cognitive and legalistic dimensions, but has recognized the need be more experientially shaped in its delivery to youth, still however, failing to be truly faith inspiring. Archbishop Wells, former apostolic nuncio to South Africa, Botswana, ESwatini, Namibia and Lesotho, detects a 'chasm between worship and understanding', and while the faithful are regular in attending church (though not in Cape Town), he opines that they do not comprehend what the Church believes and teaches (2023:13). Celebrations may be lively, but I also surmise, with what understanding, do we grasp what we are celebrating? He observes a need for better catechesis, whereas I focus on the more urgent need to inspire faith first, to evangelize, and then to deepen faith with teaching. Otherwise, I concur with the Archbishop that although celebration is habitually animated, there is incomplete faith and understanding of what is being celebrated.

Theology has been defined as faith seeking understanding, but due to its frequent complexity and its divorce from primary symbols it has been rendered incomprehensible to many, resulting in a theology which contributes little to evangelization, delivering instead cerebral

hurdles to faith. What are Christians to make of the hypostatic union, for example? Häring (Häring and Fransen, 1972:48) refers to excessive abstraction in theological studies, wondering about their relevance at the pastoral level. He insists that Christ must first be proclaimed, and then law and a deepening of theology (:46; Häring, in Häring and Fransen, 1972). The Church seems to have been more concerned with ingenious theology and a defence against heresy than with the Good News of love to a waiting world. Catechetical material available in the Archdiocese of Cape Town is substantial, but less so for the Xhosa and Sotho apostolate, due to translation difficulties, and cultural differences, overcome to some extent by the Lumko catechetical offerings. My emphasis in catechetics to Cape Town youth is to guide catechists to impart faith, as this is not accomplished by the parents; faith first, and then knowledge.

One of the main reasons many Catholics left the Catholic Church is because they never experienced a personal encounter with Jesus Christ (see Mallon 2016:45). The Aparecida document referred to by Mallon testifies that Catholics left not for what 'non-Catholics' believe, but for what they live; i.e., not for doctrinal but for vivential reasons, not for dogmatic but for pastoral reasons, not for theological concerns but for methodological reasons (Aparecida 2007:225, see Mallon 46). This applies to the West as well. Vivential refers to learning and development via personal feelings, experience and involvement, rather than formal lecturing and theory, it seeks to grow a person from the inside.<sup>74</sup> There had been inadequate conversion that transformed the lives of the young Catholics who eventually left after confirmation. Mallon suggests that seminary training is at fault, emphasising, as it does, theoretical theology in a hyper-intellectualised environment (:141), and failing to highlight preaching, which is but one short course amongst many other less pastoral focused and more theologically centred studies. Mallon also informs that the informal annual apostasy of confirmation graduates occurs in both North America and Europe. I believe that these observations also apply to the situation in Cape Town and in South Africa as a whole. Mayson is adamant that the importance of Jesus and his relevance has been lost because of the

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<sup>74</sup> -to Facilitate "*Vivential Learning Workshops*"; accessed 30<sup>th</sup> January 2021

fixation on creedal statements instead of on the Jesus of the Gospels, and due to the focus on theology and teaching instead of on relationship (2010:164).

There has been little attempt to adapt the message to local contexts, or cultures and even subcultures such as youth, although catechetics in Cape Town is geared to different age groupings and also towards youth culture. *Catechesi Tradendae* ('CT' 1979:25; Vatican document on *Catechesis in Our Time*) disagreed that formal catechetics rationalised and dried up what is living, vibrant and spontaneous in the kerygma. *CT* (:22) asserted that systematic study should not be abandoned in favour of 'life experience', which I interpret as incorporating local contexts and cultures. However, the persistent experience of an annual exodus from the Church of newly confirmed young adults throughout the Western world tends to corroborate opinion to the contrary. The heart of the person needs to be won, thereafter the appeal to the intellect should enhance the faith, as it seeks deeper understanding. The so-called Penny Catechism or similar dogmatic summaries which some traditionalists favour, are for the converted, not for questioning youth exposed to a wide variety of information available in cyberspace, and to other markedly different contexts, or subcultures. Again, theology, seen as faith seeking understanding, presupposes a rudimentary level of faith, otherwise the understanding transpires to become a mental exercise about a secluded Christ somewhere at the right hand of the Father in a distant cosmic sanctuary. Taylor, in his well acclaimed book on African Christianity, urged inductive, contextual training, evoking personal encounter and sense of presence, as opposed to dogmatic instruction. (1963/2000:xiv). This is even more decisive for Xhosa and Sotho children who have already been primed with African traditions.

This paragraph, reproduced from Chapter 1.2 above, corroborates my research results that the many Catholics, including the Xhosa, have been catechized, but imperfectly evangelized, and that there has been inadequate attention to culture and cultural differences, variance both between different societies and different eras with their own particular contextual and cultural exigencies. We have delivered knowledge, but not inspired faith. The missiological problem is not only how to inspire faith, but how to accomplish this within a distinct culture and era. Schreiter astutely observes that the Church's theological expressions have not been modified and attended to in the wake of cultural change, as a result, 'Christianity has come

close to dying out' (2002:40). This is another way of saying that Christianity has failed to inculturate within its own borders, leading to a radical gap between faith and real life. Faith seeking understanding has encountered dated theologies, not theologically at fault, but unrelated to current circumstances (cultures, subcultures, contexts), unable to explain, motivate and guide the modern and now postmodern laity. Nürnberger makes a similar observation, claiming that Christianity has dogmatized a response to the Gospel which worked in a particular era or situation and imposed this dated response (or formula) to a different situation of need (context) instead of developing a new response (strategy) (2007:52). Mallon also identifies an outmoded catechetical approach that does not relate to the postmodern world (2016:61), focussing on orthodoxy instead of relationship, and on pastoral methodologies which ignore the massive cultural changes over the past 50 years (Mallon 2016:62), repeating the same mistakes year after year, experiencing the same outflow of newly confirmed Catholic youth. Magesa (1973),<sup>75</sup> already some 50 years ago, warned against the indiscriminate use of imported theologies to Africa, and pointed out the need for the divine message to be free of inappropriate and dated cultural wrappings (Okure, van Thiel, eds. 1991:117). These four authors confirm my view that mission, including ongoing evangelization of baptised Catholics, has been incompletely fruitful, partly because it has excluded Christ from many vital areas of human experience, limiting itself largely to the sick, poor and prisoners, and failing to consider why there is poverty, as well as being culturally irrelevant, overly theological and challenged by the Enlightenment era, modernity and postmodernity. From 1891, with a milestone Vatican document about trade unions (*Rerum Novarum*), the subsequent emergence of Catholic Social Teachings has begun to address some of these deficiencies; however, these documents have not been well disseminated nor always understood by clergy, because of their more specialised nature (such as economics). There is no direct application in catechetics to youth to address these issues in Cape Town, which surely could be introduced to the young adult confirmation classes. There are several important gaps in catechetics, notably the theological fields of business or economics, politics, education and other crucial areas of human experience, which could benefit from a concise

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<sup>75</sup> in Okure, Van Thiel, et alii, eds. 1990:112. Source *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 15 (2) April 1973, 110 – 117.

introduction to youth already exposed to new moral dilemmas, which they have encountered in cyberspace and in postmodern culture.

### 9.1 Summary of Mission to Africa

I have made frequent references to literature as a means illustrating that my survey results are reasonably generalizable to sub-Saharan Africa. The growth in Christianity in Africa has been phenomenal but the quality of conversion is patently in dispute by various scholars, and this is also evident from my local sample of participants. Many conversions were achieved by African converts, not missionaries; local converts who took it upon themselves to evangelise their fellow countrymen. Pauw, from substantial research in South Africa, writing in 1975, revealed that despite the efforts of the missionaries, the Xhosa Christians still remained traditional in their basic outlook. More recently, Orobator (2018) is adamant that Christianity and Islam operate as religious systems accompanied by ATR, in other words, as dual religious systems. Even if ATR statistically comprises less than 10% of religious membership in Africa, the two world religions (Islam and Christianity) have grown within 'a field sown with the beliefs and practices of African religion' (:60). The statistic of 90% religious adherence shared by Islam and Christianity in Africa is, therefore, deceptive and overly sanguine. There is much in ATR and Christianity which coheres, and ATR is certainly not all intrinsically incompatible with Christianity, accounting in part for the growth in Christian membership by the indigenous Africans. Orobator (2018) refers to research effected in West Africa which confirmed that ATR is still practised and is on the increase. Magesa (2004), in his research in East Africa, arrives at the same conclusion, and contends that conversions do not take place in a vacuum. Tlhagale (2018:244) and Nürnberger (for example 2007:40) write persuasively that Christianity in South Africa, especially among the AICs, needs to be seriously qualified and even challenged. Taylor (1963/2001:xviii) exposes the erroneous assumption of the missionaries who expected the people to relinquish their faith in favour of a system that they could not comprehend and internalise. Despite the demise of colonialism, Africans have not abandoned Christianity, but have customised it, adapting it to their own culture-specific circumstances (Taylor, 1963/2001:xi). Walls (2017:38) observes convincingly that new Christians do not necessarily abandon their old map of reality, but they modify it, depending on the extent to which the new faith has been inculturated. There is widespread precedent to dual religious belief



systems, elaborated further on below in the chapter on how the God image has been appropriated. These conclusions are well substantiated by my respondents. My parishioners have absorbed African Traditions from their parents and grandparents to a significant extent, while Christianity has provided new sources of sacred power to cope with the challenges of life, both systems flourish. Various Xhosa customs take precedence over Sunday Mass attendance amongst my parishioners, and almost certainly in other parishes.

Pope Paul VI, in an address to SECAM, was overconfident about Africa, maintaining that the 'Church of Christ is well and truly planted in this blessed soil.' (Okure, van Thiel, et al, eds. 1990:33<sup>76</sup>). Authors such as Kiaziku, Mbiti, Magesa and others give heed to the existence of a dual-religious system, where ATR exists alongside Christianity, with the converts utilising the additional resources for sacred power offered by Christianity, unaware of some inherent contradictions between the two systems of belief. This is very apparent amongst my respondents, exhibiting the use of a variety of sources of deemed sacred power other than those offered by Christianity.

To my knowledge, there has been no formal undertaking at the pastoral level in South Africa to reconcile or challenge inconsistencies, apart from some statements from the SACBC, without, however, these being systematically disseminated to the laity. The dual system is not theologically tenable in some important respects, nevertheless it should fruitfully open the path to studied inculturation. The famous liturgical dynamism of the African celebration is no guarantee that the Eurocentric symbols within the mainline Christian churches are being appropriated as they are by Westerners, nor that the Catholic liturgy is efficaciously conveying meaning to the church members. It is also pertinent to note that the commonly dynamic, spirited African celebration does conceal a degree of an incomplete conversion to Christ; it conveys the impression to outside observers that all is well with the faith! This is clear from my experience in the ministry to the Xhosa and Sotho in Cape Town, and the heart of the Catholic faith, the Eucharist, is not well appropriated or understood. It is possible that its

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<sup>76</sup> Address by Pope Paul VI to the inaugural 1969 SECAM, Kampala. (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

complexity and relatively limited scope for lay participation, explains in part, the low Mass attendance by the Xhosa and Sotho in Cape Town.

Mbiti (1969:15) contended that mission has resulted in the tragedy of a very superficial type of Christianity. Imported Christianity has resulted in situations of alienation, a failure to comprehend the local culture as well as the impact of modernity (Nche, Okwuosa, Nwaoga 2016:2). These authors note the existence of a standing Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria on inculturation which allows for experiments in inculturation, and there also list various core cultural areas to be considered for inculturation, such as initiation and marriage, and recommend the study of African Traditional Religion (:3). The authors conclude that inculturation is imperative, but it must be noted that African cultures have changed significantly, and that contemporary Africans are different from the pre-colonial Africans (:5).

Western mission theology was not wrong, but incomplete; it did not deal with heartfelt, local issues such as relationships with family, kin, community, and the troubling anxieties of people with a different worldview (Walls 2017:147), to which I would also add the need for careful engagement with the ancestral worldview and the panorama of a universe replete with spirits and mysterious forces. Also, the Xhosa and Sotho youth in Cape Town need to be enlightened as to the differences between a cultural wedding and a sacramental wedding, as well as eschatology which sets out what transpires after death, in contrast to simply becoming an ancestor. There are a significant number of Xhosa parishioners who are married by custom, but not sacramentally, again, exposing the enduring authority of ATR.

At the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches,<sup>77</sup> a Presbyterian theologian from Malawi (A. Musupole, 1998), questioned the depth of the Gospel among Africans, asking if they have really abandoned traditional religions, as they still consult traditional priests, and still fear witches, demons and spirits. The same issues in the Archdiocese of Cape Town reveal ongoing preoccupation with ATR. Professor Musupole questions the depths of Christianity in Africa, noting ethnicity, patriarchy, corruption, hatred, political manipulation, and other problems. He further asserted that '[t]he Church in Africa, especially the mainline churches,

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<sup>77</sup> Harare, Zimbabwe, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> December 1998; in Owusu-Gyamfi 2020:52.

are being called to embark on a second stage of evangelism and theological indigenization.' (my underlining). This surely applies to the Cape Town Archdiocese as well, one which is Christ centred, and affective in quality, as opposed to theologically driven, legalistic and possibly uninspiring delivery.

Nürnberg (2007:42) also contends that the poverty of evangelization is relevant to most of Africa. It seems reasonable to agree with this conclusion. Again, as in Africa and parts of the Amazon, Christianity did not replace the indigenous primal religion but was accommodated along with local tradition. It is interesting to note that the Bishops of Peru adjudged the Peruvian Amazon as 'initially evangelised' (*Beloved Amazon*, document authored by Pope Francis; QA 2020:78). According to Kichko (2020:7, 8), the New Zealand Māori have assimilated a hybrid form of Christianity, described as unorthodox, with a diminished view of Christ, in part a reaction to imperial dominance underlying Euro-centric mission. The predilection for the Old Testament again suggests that the Christ figure is substantially under-represented. The intuition is that Christ has not been successfully inculturated in these primal religions, and he remains a comparative outsider. The primal religions in these Christianized countries retain much of their vigour. African-Brazilian and African-Caribbean religious routines (Candomble, and Santeria and Vodun respectively) also practice dual religious systems through their informal, unofficial synthesis of rites and customs with Catholicism.

In the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, priests, from experience in the field, conclude that the Catholic laity has been sacramentalized but not evangelised, and even many loyal parishioners lack deep commitment to Christ as the centre of faith and of engagement with the parish and real-life issues. Mass attendance on a Sunday is only 20% for 'Coloureds' and Whites and between 2,5% and 4,6% for Black parishioners within the Archdiocese of Cape Town.

In Chapter 1.2 above, I note how Cardinal Turkson (Roberts 2007:14-15; in Thönissen 2014:596), referring to evangelization, expresses reservation both for Africa and Europe as to the mode of mission. He maintains that Christianity in Europe began on an evangelical base and lost its evangelical thrust. As structures developed, conversion became catechetical, teaching facts and requiring a certain remembering of these facts as a measure of conversion. The Archbishop of Dublin (*The Tablet* 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011:31) averred that the Irish youth were

amongst the most catechised in Europe but the least evangelised, with the Church being obsessed with orthodoxy, a fear characteristic of the Western Church as a whole. (This paragraph is a repetition of the one in Chapter 1.2 above).

Similar to experiences all over the world, most confirmation youth in Cape Town who graduate with the sacrament of confirmation, cease attending Sunday Mass thereafter. There is clearly no life-altering experience of Jesus in this chronic failure of evangelization of youth. There may have been intellectual reception of doctrine, but nothing that has won the passion and zeal of the heart. Catechetics promotes faith seeking a deeper understanding, but we have incorrectly conjectured that there is already a basic faith and relationship with Christ, whose reception in fact has been ambiguous. Presentations to youth have also failed to be delivered at the cultural location of young people. Fransen (Häring, Fransen 1972:61) already in 1972, wondered about the value of admonishing people that if they miss Mass, 'God puts you in jail not for life-time, but for eternity!'

As noted above, Mass attendance amongst the Black parishioners is low. Many African Catholics in Cape Town are not attending Catholic churches or are frequenting other denominations, where there is more participation, hands on healing, testimonies, preaching, personal praying and emphasis on emotional experience. Within both Western and African Catholic cultural groupings, there is evidence of transgression of the Commandments, including the imperative to attend Sunday Mass and to refrain from extra-marital sex by parishioners, and who nevertheless still receive Holy Communion, where the norm is that the sacrament of reconciliation is needed before communicating. This is *not* a pietistic criticism, but serves as an indication of nominalism, of a faith lacking deep, inner conviction, of lacking a real relationship with the Risen Jesus. If there is sufficient faith, believing, then belonging and behaving will follow. Häring, (in Häring and Fransen, 1972:47) insists that we need to win people to faith in Christ first, and then elaborate with theology and law. Christ is not totally obscure in the minds of parishioners, given exposure to devotions such as the Stations of the Cross (albeit usually only during the season of Lent) and the Seven Words presentation on Good Friday, but he does not occupy the dominant post in the minds of many, and is frequently superseded by the term blanket term God, and *de facto*, is seen as less than God. My pastoral experience also illustrates a tendency to see Christ as *Son* of God and therefore

less than God, in line with cultural beliefs that children are of lesser standing than their parents. This applies also to the Western oriented parishioners, though perhaps to a lesser extent.

Tlhagale (2018:244) construes that African Christians in South Africa appear closer in practice to ATR than to Christianity. My observations tend to support this opinion. Further support for this contention arises from observing certain customs. For example, women must stay at home following the death of their husband, and are not expected to attend Sunday Mass, in deference to an existing Xhosa tradition. The period of mourning varies from family to family, and in some cases is six months to one year in duration, rendering the Sunday observance required by the third Commandment of the Decalogue impossible. However, the women are allowed to proceed to work. Attendance at funeral clubs is often seen as more important than the Sunday obligation. After a funeral Mass on a Saturday in some parishes, there is often a significantly reduced attendance at Mass on Sunday. Funerals often attract more attendance than the Sunday Mass. Single, pregnant women are not expected to attend Mass, which appears to be the current cultural norm. As noted elsewhere, many Catholics visit traditional healers, are still steeped in ancestral beliefs, and consult pastors/prophets reputed to have special powers and visit healing churches. However, although I contend that the Christ image is seriously underestimated, Jesus has some foothold with the parishioners, and God, formerly a distant figure in ATR, and seldom consulted, is now a dominant reality. Catholicism has only provided a partial solution to illness and misfortune, and if Western medicine fails, and the Christian God disappoints, cultural solutions are sought, rooted in ATR.

Nürnberg, a theologian with much experience in South Africa, referring to Christian mission, concludes that mission has achieved only partial success (2007:40). Elsewhere he refers to the impact of Christianity as 'ridiculously insignificant after more than one and a half centuries of mission...This seems to be the situation in a great many contexts all over Africa' (:42; my underlining). He perceives ancestors effectively to be on par with Christ in terms of quest for sacred power by African Christians, whereas Christ should emerge as the dominant recipient of prayer and devotion. He believes that the reception of Christianity has been more formal than qualitative, confirming my view of a generally nominal appropriation of Christianity and Christ. Various scholars also draw attention to corruption, conflict, HIV/AIDS and poverty in

Africa and question how this can be compatible with a strong Christian conviction (for example, Taylor 1963/2000:xv). In the Catholic Church, conversion, salvation, has come to be reduced to the avoidance of actual sin, and a knowledge of the Commandments, rather than a decisive, life changing and energising relationship with Jesus, the Universal Lord and Saviour (see Gittins 2012:166). We need to first elicit faith in the Risen Christ, and then follow with church membership and behaviour; a case of believing, belonging and then behaving (see Mallon 2014). Faith in Christ is near an all-time low in the Western world, and generally evolving, and underdeveloped, amongst Cape Town Xhosa parishioners.

My research confirms this broader scenario. There is a dual religious system in operation, where Xhosa Catholics, like many Africans, use the resources of both ATR and Christianity. Mokhaiti (2020:2,3. South African scholar) refers to African Christians 'juxtaposing' Christianity with ATR. He observes that early Christian mission was coercive, accompanied by colonisation, military strength, Western civilization as the norm, cultural scorn, suppression, and dominance, as well as harsh censures for failing to conform to the Western brand of Christianity. Conversion was accepted to obtain benefits, including material ones, and for complying with missionary demands. He contends that with the ensuing passage from beyond pretence, to deeper conversion, the juxtaposing of both systems was a natural progression, the original system was not forgotten. The Catholic Church, with its emphasis on fixed Creeds and dogma, will clearly struggle with a model that is unilaterally selected by the laity, without due theological investigation! Syncretistic combination of ATR and Christianity misrepresent the underlying logic of both systems, as the elements of one religion are expressed through the categories of the other (Hastings 1989:30-35). Orobator lists qualities of African religion which appear to sustain and merge with the other two religions, namely: *ubuntu*, which prioritises inclusivity over exclusivity, community over competition, hospitality over hostility, dialogue over confrontation and respect over domination (Orobator 2018:72). These qualities fit in well with the Christian norm of loving one's neighbour and the principle of solidarity. He also refers to tolerance and mutuality which support religious pluralism and diversity. He argues that Christianity has much to learn from African Religion (:104). The relationship ontology of the Xhosa implicit in *ubuntu*, is evident amongst the Xhosa congregants in Cape Town in the degree of solidarity and cohesion in church celebrations.

Africa is a continent of contrasts; so, for example, Kenya is 80% Christian but is also third highest in the world in terms of corruption, and South Africa, with the same proportion of Christianity, is beset with the same problem. There are many conflicts in Africa, and grave political problems. To what extent has conversion to Christianity or Islam produced nominal adherence to the new faiths? How profound has conversion been? From literature and from the interviews with Black Catholic parishioners in Cape Town, a nuanced view is indicated; mission has achieved much, but there is a degree of nominalism, in part due to a poor understanding of the faith and the Mass, as a result of lack of studied inculturation, and also a partial appropriation of the Christ figure. Scholars such as Magesa (Orobator 2014:31) bemoan the agonisingly slow pace of inculturation and the sacrilegious destruction of time-honoured African customs. The intersection between faith and culture has been only partially explored and understood, and substantially neglected. My interactions with adult parishioners reveal a type of barrier between ATR and Christianity, with the two entertained almost separately, with no vocalization on their part of differences which may occur to them introspectively, if they do acknowledge variances at all.

The Church in Cape Town has become a type of Sunday cult, as in the West. If the Xhosa parishioners seek life to the full, they have been presented with an other-worldly religion that shuns the world, relegating it to a stoic acceptance of life issues in expectation of future heavenly rewards, obscuring the fullness of life which Jesus promises in John 10:10, as well as failing to resolve key anxieties such as the need for healing, coping with evil spirits and ancestors. For these reasons, there is recourse to alternative sources of sacred power, the traditional healers, African rituals, healing churches and pastors who assure congregants of healing, and of positive outcomes to their prayers.

Black male parishioners who attend Sunday services appear at times to have their own church within their sodalities such as the Catholic Men's Union, where meetings may exclude priests not fully conversant with isiXhosa or isiSotho, and funeral ministers decide themselves as to when a church funeral should be provided on the death of a parishioner. There is a strong impression that the men in the sodalities are sometimes separated from the expatriate priest and parish life, and the strong desire to be able to preach, denied in the Catholic Church to laity, is found expression at funeral services at the home of the deceased, and at sodality

meetings. They remain respectful to the parish priest but are not always meaningfully in union with the formal church in some respects.

## 9.2 Summary of the Appropriation of the God Image

The traditional Xhosa view of God was that he was a creator, but very distant from humanity, inspiring trepidation and seldom resorted to as a source of sacred power except in times of national concern such as a drought or war (largely in Hodgson 1982). This Being is described as *Deus otiosus*, a God uninvolved with daily life, concealed and remote and approached usually only by mediators, seldom directly, and then only in extreme circumstances. Thus, there were few rituals involving the African God. All life force flows from God through the ancestors to people, animals, and plants (Crafford 1996:13, in Meiring), and his existence 'makes the whole of existing reality a field of force, a sacred environment which may not be drastically altered'.

Many African scholars disagree that the African God is an Absent God, maintaining he is never far from the African thoughts and life (Han 2013:78). Upkong (1983:187) also contends that God is constantly on the lips of the people, as well as being invoked in desperate situations. This may be a result of Christian mission, a greater awareness of God's presence in all situations. The evidence of the responses of my respondents show that God is now the dominant protagonist in the search for sacred power, evidently an outcome of Christian mission. The respondents in my research revealed a very convincing attentiveness to God as their prime source of sacred power.

The answers to the questions volunteered by the respondents to my questionnaire, as to what encompasses the most important things in life, were broad and un-reflected upon and possibly the spontaneous replies would be different from those preceded by some deliberation. Many of the immediate responses manifested an anthropocentric perspective, and a preoccupation with existential issues, in line with the African concern about life in its fullness in the present moment as opposed to broader and more abstract yearnings for eternal life, the salvation of one's soul, or doing God's will. Thus, worldviews are quite pragmatic, but half of the respondents spontaneously volunteered God as one of their prime



concerns, along with existential issues, although God was usually mentioned subsequently by the others.

My findings confirm the earlier work of Pauw (1975), who concluded that God to the Xhosa Christians is now closer and more accessible and involved in daily affairs, but the Son of God image is vague, neutral (:77). His overall impression is that God is a Unitarian Father God, and that Christ and the Holy Spirit are inadequately linked to the notion of God. Xhosa Christians profess belief in Christ as man and God, Son of God, as well as the Holy Spirit, but the interior associations with these two persons are obscure and there is little conversation between the Xhosa Christians and Christ and the Holy Spirit (:220; see Chapter 4.8 above). Pauw deduces that there is significantly more attention given to God than before in Christian mission. This represents a shift from religion based on magico-religious forces (referred to as dynamistic forces by Nürnberger, 2007, concerned with manipulating dynamistic flows of energy), to being more God-centred (:313). Again, these observations match convincingly with the responses of my sample of parishioners, and priests.

The strong belief in witchcraft, sorcery, and ancestral demands, and the need for counter-measures remains, and also the belief in the ancestor rituals which enable these measures to be taken. Signs of secularism are in evidence, in that the worldview is no longer the same as religion, because the economy and polity have tended to be separated from the general, holistic, religious lens through which the Xhosa see reality (:336). The compelling economic situation in South Africa has made many aware of the economy as a separate entity, not as formerly united within an integral worldview. School children are taught about the effect of the Rand value and the oil price and therefore the local petrol price.

Ngoetjana (2002) discovered that the Sotho term for God, "*Modimo*", adopted by the missionaries as the official nomenclature for God, was replete with cultural meanings and therefore not appropriate as the title for the Christian God. Missionaries to the Xhosa adopted *uThixo* as the term for God, but whether there were any older cultural accoutrements still attached to this term, is not apparent in the replies of my participants. However, respondents to my research questionnaire proffered rich images of God as provider (food, work), protector and rescuer from dangers (fraud, kidnap, robbery, danger), a thwarter of perils, an anchor, 'my everything' (K2), and in general, timeous interventions, and an image of a patient waiting

by God for a prodigal parishioner to convert. He is God who is omnipresent and all powerful, a Father and a parent, a healer, God who gives the blessing of being alive (K3), always assisting with everyday issues and one who answers prayers. He engenders sentiments of respect, gratefulness, love, and praise. He is God who is more powerful than Jesus, according to statements of some parishioners, and he has a *de facto* superiority in the Trinitarian constitution by virtue of the effective marginalisation of Christ as a source of sacred power, and the overlooking of the Holy Spirit. To what extent the more recent focus on the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal type of churches has influenced Xhosa parishioners in Cape Town, is not clear, otherwise the Holy Spirit has also been underrepresented both in the Xhosa experience and the more Western parishes, in catechetics and preaching.

For all the respondents in my survey, God is supreme: 'God is the most important person, and certainly for me it is God who is first, who is our Father and Creator, and then the ancestors will come second' (E3). There was little spontaneous mention of Christ by the respondents. As to a choice between God, Jesus, or ancestors to resolve a problem, the same respondent immediately chose God. This is the typical response of the parishioners and priests. My conclusion is that God has categorically displaced the ancestors from their central location as sources of sacred power, but at the same time, the ancestors continue to command very substantial powers, occupying a parallel world of influence, ostensibly independent of God's sovereignty, able to elicit reverence, fear and cooperation with their perceived demands. The respondents effectively perceive Christ as less than God, unearthing a serious deficiency in the evangelization of this cultural grouping. God is viewed as the prime responder for assistance with daily problems. A parishioner who has recently undergone rites to become a traditional healer (2022) was emphatic that they would never abandon God or their church. Prayer (especially petitionary prayer) is an important category or theme, one of the unvarying means by which respondents objectify their faith in God. I do note elsewhere that two religious workers with substantial experience in a Xhosa parish suggest that the ancestors are more important than God for the parishioners. However, to be true to the responses made to my questions, and the spontaneous manner in speaking of God, I maintain that the ancestors have been supplanted by God as the main source of sacred power. The Western theism and atheism are noticeably absent from my sample, God is real and active, watching over his flock. God is their dominant font of sacred power.

### 9.3 Summary of the Appropriation of The Son of God as a Source of Sacred Power

As noted above, the assumption of the Christ figure within the primal religions has been partial, and there has been a failure to efficaciously incarnate Christ within their cultural milieu. Pauw (1975) grants that God to the Xhosa Christians is now closer and more accessible and involved in daily affairs, but the Son of God remains a relatively vague figure (:77). The essential Christ image is lacking. Although church leaders and members confess the Triune God, there is the 'definite impression that Christ as the Son of God is not prominent in the thoughts of the average member' (:78). This concurs with the answers of my respondents. Also, the rich portrayals of God as provider and protector are demonstrably not matched by similar renderings for Jesus by my respondents. The intimate, loving, tender qualities of the Jesus that is described by the Saints, and evident in the Gospels (possessing the qualities of compassion, healing, patient love, forgiveness), are conspicuously absent. Paul (2 Cor 3:15, 16. 4:3,4) alludes to the hearts of the people of Israel being covered with a veil, which will remain until they turn to Jesus, and that unbelievers' minds are blinded 'by the god of this world'. It seems credible to regard the ancestors as one veil which obscures a fuller appropriation of Christ (see chapter 5.4), and the cultural convention which sees a son generally less than the father reinforces the discounting of the Christ figure.

The transition to the New Testament presentation of God in Jesus appears substantially incomplete. This always needs to be connected to the vital significance of the Easter Mystery, the heart of Catholic devotion. If Jesus is the way, he is the answer to making all things new (Rev 21:5), by a spiritual inner transformation and worldly revolution that is necessary. There was a notable lack of spontaneity amongst my respondents in regard to referring to Christ, whilst God and the ancestors seemed to be more at the plane of immediate spiritual awareness for many. Thus, for example, a mature parishioner stated their three priorities in life as God, the ancestors and their family (K1). Jesus is described more functionally, with some exception, and his Cross and Resurrection are underrated, as is his Suffering Servant role. He is acknowledged when questioned, but his key role as the agent par excellence of God, as God himself, is effectively devalued. The Stations of the Cross observances for six weeks in Lent, and the Good Friday celebration, including the Seven Words service, truly Christ-centred devotions, do not appear to elevate Christ's sacred power status to higher than

the ancestors. However, some youth in catechetical classes in the parish of St Raphael, Khayelitsha, enthusiastically acknowledge Jesus as a source of sacred power (emerging from catechetical discussion, February 2022). The possibility remains that as the youth are drawn more into ancestor rituals, the Christ component will yield to a greater ancestor principle in their lives.

In the actual quest for sacred power, Christ and the Holy Spirit are less utilised than the ancestors and some (for example Hammond-Tooke, 1978; in Sipuka 2000:170) believe that they are unduly revered, approaching a status of deification as opposed to the Catholic norm of honouring saints, venerating Mary and worshipping God alone. (Source: Augustine in *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia* (sic): *dulia*, signifies honouring; *hyperdulia*, signifies venerating, a higher form of honouring, reserved for Mary, mother of God; and *latria*, or worship, is due to God alone; via Google).

Nthamburi argues that because of the emphasis on the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity, Jesus' human life is seen as peripheral (1991/2002:54, 55) and there is over-preoccupation with the spiritual life. This seems to be a valid conclusion in relation to the Catholic parishioners I interviewed, a docetic tendency which favours the divinity of Christ as well as overlooking Jesus as a meaningful, real source of succour to our earthly existence. Nthamburi (:58) contends that Christ cannot be concerned only about our spiritual lives, or risk being irrelevant. He needs to be incarnated into social, political, and economic realms. It is in Christ that we are able to crucify the flesh (Kinoti 1989/2003:64). Magesa (1989/2003:85) asserts that Jesus as a liberator (from economic injustice, neo-colonialism and political oppression) 'is an attempt to present the only Jesus that can be comprehensible and credible among the African rural masses, urban poor and idealistic youth'. We here enter the delicate area of political theology, partly inspired by the Passover/Exodus event in the Bible. In chapter 9.2 above, I volunteer the intuition that Christ has not been successfully inculturated in primal religions, and he remains a comparative outsider. The primal religions in these relatively newly Christianized countries retain much of their vigour.

Chapter 5.1 presents the case for Christ as the essential goal of mission, a crucified Christ who readily refers to the Father, especially in the Gospel of John. The Gospel is not an abstract propositional truth but a living relationship with the living Lord. Christianity is an encounter

with Jesus, as against a compendium of doctrine and rules and prohibitions. Chapter 9.2 summarises the reasons for the failure to incarnate Christ into the Xhosa culture, including emphasis on doctrine as opposed to relationship, on theoretical theology as opposed to pastoral theology, a failure to incarnate Christ into crucial areas of life, and the failure to navigate key areas of the receiving culture, particularly the ancestor belief system, as well as to effectively provide Christian formulas to contend with key existential needs. Humanity has the RIGHT to hear the Good News of Christ (*RM* 8, 44, 46). *RM* (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, a missionary encyclical from Pope John II) was penned to stress the role of Jesus in mission, within the ambit of Trinitarian mission, as well as the uniqueness and absoluteness of Jesus Christ (see Schroeder, Bevans, 2004:331). *Dominus Iesus* (2000:13, Vatican document) insists that we are saved by Christ alone (see Acts 4:12).

It is defensible to conclude from the respondents and literature that the Christ image is significantly overshadowed by other mediators of sacred power, including the blanket title of 'God', the Holy Spirit (pastors of AICs' dominant focus on the Spirit would classify them as peripheral Christians), ancestors, various religious specialists, prophets, pastors themselves (some of whom boast prodigious powers), dynamistic/magical forces, evil spirits, and witchcraft. The Pastoral Statement of the Southern Catholic Bishops' Conference on *Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith* (2006:4) states quite bluntly: 'there is no doubt that ancestral spirits enjoy more recognition than Jesus Christ' among those who embrace both the traditional worldview as well as Christianity (in Knox 2008:240). Jesus as the centre of all reality, who offers an energising and life-altering relationship, is eclipsed by these agents, and needs to attain parity with God and be perceived as superior to all other spiritual dynamisms, who in fact, owe their continued subsistence to Christ, who sustains all things in existence (Hb 1:3b) and is therefore immeasurably more powerful. Communion with Jesus is essential for bearing fruit (*Christifideles Laici* 1988:32).<sup>78</sup> The pastoral statement by the Catholic bishops observes that traditional healers equate ancestors with Christ (Knox 2008:238), and that African Christians resort to traditional means when there is misfortune, when Christianity or Western technology and know-how fail to provide a solution (:236). Many credit the ancestors

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<sup>78</sup> refers to Jn 15:5, 'for cut off from me you can do nothing'; NJB 1985:1778.

with power to heal in a way only God can accomplish. If there is no somatic improvement in the health of a parishioner after the Catholic sacrament of anointing of the sick, Xhosa cultural solutions are pursued. This is also clear from the responses of my sample and from observing these practices among the local parishioners.

The various responses in my survey initially appear to demonstrate a preference for Jesus over the ancestral shades, but this arises as a result of direct interrogation, of asking for an 'a' or 'b' choice, rather than a spontaneous reaction to an existential issue. In the latter case, the ancestors claim more immediate attention than Christ, a case of a dual religious instinct, a reflex reaction revealing the underlying preoccupation with their predecessors. There is, therefore, more dedication of religious effort to the ancestors than to Christ. When questioned, it is clear that Christ in principle is ranked well above the forebears by my parishioners in terms of authority, but *de facto* he is effectively far less utilised in mediating sacred power than the ancestral shades, who are purported to achieve desired outcomes for their progeny. Again, this weakens the Paschal mystery, Jesus, God, on the Cross, rising again, for the salvation of all, including the ancestors. This central impetus is subverted, unwittingly sabotaged, fleeced of its sublime power, redirected essentially to infinitely lesser agents, our forebears, who need to pale in comparison to the Christ Event, but who are in their own lesser order and time, granted a share of sacred power, as are the angels and saints.

Jesus has not taken flesh in the battle of the Xhosa with the world of evil and with ill health, as he does substantively in the Gospels. He has been proclaimed in a flawed manner, not as an answer to the existential concerns of the African people, and the Western model, in my opinion, remains blemished by virtue of the exclusion of Christ from key areas of daily life, accounting also, at least in part, for the radical de-Christianization of the Western world. Again, there is a Christological crisis of global proportions, as well as in the attempted dissemination of the Christ figure to the isiXhosa-speaking parishioners in the Archdiocese of Cape Town. Whilst some parishioners assured me that their trajectory was God, Jesus and the ancestors, Jesus is undermined by both agents and when an event triggers a spiritual response, 'God' and the ancestors seem to slip effortlessly into the religious consciousness of the Xhosa Catholic, ahead of consideration of Christ.

December is a month in which many Catholic Xhosa parishioners settle issues with their ancestors in the Eastern Cape. The considerable weight of time devoted to these ancestral rituals is confirmation of the attention they command. God may be mentioned at the beginning of the ritual, but less frequently, if at all, is Christ mentioned. The Advent/Christmas season for various Xhosa Catholics appears to be distracted by the performance of ancestral rituals by many in the country. New Year's Day is for many parishioners a day at the sea to wash off the 'bad luck' of the preceding year, rather than the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Of course, for most cultures, the first day of January is typically experienced as a secular event. Taylor (1963/2000:xxii) contends that the West has received Christ within its own particular, highly individualised context, but this model has failed to penetrate a highly communal society such as Africa, and is as noted elsewhere, it is an incomplete model as well, and therefore doubly inadequate.

The absence of a concrete, positive image of Christ, undermines Catholic congregants' understanding of the seven sacraments and participation in liturgy, which according to Pope Francis, should impart an encounter with the real presence of Jesus.<sup>79</sup> Liturgy and sacraments are foundational experiences for Catholics, powerful encounters with Christ, who is present and right next to the worshippers. A diminished awareness of Christ results in an indeterminate consciousness of the Lord, which attenuates the effectiveness of encounter with Christ, in the Mass, for example. Without Christ, sacramental efficacy is diminished, and the sacrament is less appreciated. The partial relationship of the parishioners with Christ which I discern from the interviews and literature, dilutes the sacramental foundation of the Church, the need for repentance, and Christ's saving action, as well as the operation of grace and the passage of conversion. These sacraments, instituted by Christ, assist the metanoia which transforms the person profoundly (Häring, in Häring and Fransen, 1972:47). He is confident that proclaiming the Gospel of Christ will 'change the world' (:46).

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<sup>79</sup> General audience address in the library of the Apostolic Palace; 2021 February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021: Vatican Media: via Catholic News Agency February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021: accessed 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

There is transcending grace and energy available in a relationship with the Risen Lord, an energy which has galvanised countless missionaries and disciples to perform far greater works than Jesus did (Jn 14:12):

In truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

The appropriation of the Christ figure amongst many loyal 'western' Catholics in Cape Town, may be somewhat fuller, but also seems lacking in the goal of producing fruit, a lack of a completely life-changing, energising commitment to the Risen Lord and his mission, manifest in minimal participation in parish activities. Western Christians too are prone to consider other sources of deemed sacred power outside of Christianity, such as the Eastern traditions, pursuing in effect a multi-religious system.

#### 9.4 Summary of the Appropriation of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit guarantees the faithful transmission of Jesus Christ, who is the most complete revelation of God to humanity (*Dev.* 5; see Chapter 6.2). Whatever the Holy Spirit effects in people, history, cultures, religions, can only be understood in reference to Christ (*Dominus Iesus* 2000:12). The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from God in Christ; the action of the Holy Spirit is not independent of Christ (:12; my underlining). Whatever the Holy Spirit achieves needs to be seen with reference to Christ, who took flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit (*RM* 29).

The Spirit, from whom mighty works will proceed, is sent by Jesus (footnote 14g to NJB 1985:1777). Jesus is the principle who actuates this accomplishment of great works via the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, a church which under-emphasises the Holy Spirit in its ministry may lessen the experience of the transcendent, the supernatural, and the gifts, dramatic at times, of the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit transcends all African 'vital' forces (Okure 1998), such as the ancestors, deities, and dynamistic forces. Evangelization needs a sound Christological and Pneumatological basis, one which acknowledges the infinitely higher authority of the Holy Spirit and Christ (Okure 1998:23). The free gift of the Spirit precludes the need for elaborate or 'arduous' rituals or specialised training involving ancestors (see Okure 1998:21). Okure sees the new life in Christ in the Holy Spirit as rendering the ancestors



to a role far less than their actual current status denotes (:16); one definitively subordinate to these two members of the Trinity.

Pauw (1975) attributes continual underestimation of the Holy Spirit to 'the continual concern with ancestor spirits' (:225). The Holy Spirit is ranked alongside the ancestors (:301). Many members of the orthodox churches only have a vague consciousness of the Holy Spirit, which is probably true of many Western Catholics as well. Some also view the Holy Spirit as the soul within a person's body. My participants did not confirm this particular deduction, but the Holy Spirit was only referred to when specifically questioned, and there was no spontaneous reference to the Spirit. Ter Haar (2009:32) cites former Archbishop Milingo who demands the right to bring in Africa's own experiences to enrich the whole Church, and to accept direct communion with the spirit world (no specific reference provided).

Respondents clearly identified the Holy Spirit as a member of the Trinity, but rarely vocalised their notion of this member in answering questions. Replies about God generally show God as the dominant agent, Jesus the second, and the Holy Spirit is only mentioned when specifically asked about. The lack of theological correctness is not crucial, but it does expose where the attention of the respondents reside. Although respondents treat Jesus and the Holy Spirit as one with the Father, as noted elsewhere in the section on God, it is the Father God who is seen as the most important of the three. In general, the Holy Spirit was substantially ignored in favour of the blanket title of 'God'. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are underestimated, and the Holy Spirit in the Western worldview is often described as the 'poor relation' of the Trinity, seldom invoked or indeed thought about (see Ter Haar, 2009:22). The Catholic Charismatic movement in Cape Town seems to have a more balanced view of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Father.

Healey and Sybertz (1996/2000:301) observe a strong African faith in the Holy Spirit, and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not just for the clergy. People claim to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. In Cape Town, the Holy Spirit is the agent for commissioning church leaders, new parish council members, catechists, and new additions to ministries. It is worth noting that Catholic laity claim correctly that they too have the gifts of the Spirit and seek to actualise these gifts in ministry. The Xhosa laity in Cape Town, possibly influenced by their Protestant colleagues, have a strong desire to preach and be part of the Church, but there is little opportunity in the

Catholic Church, especially in the Mass, which would satisfy energetic Xhosa parishioners. At times there seem to be two churches in a Xhosa/Sotho parish in Cape Town; the official church with its sacraments, and the second church where Xhosa parishioners participate in church group meetings, funeral meetings, and special celebrations such as the Seven Words, and are able to not only to preach, but to preach in an ecstatic, emotive fashion, mostly alien to the western mode, except in Western charismatic celebrations.

Sipuka (2020:2) observes that Catholics refer to Jesus and God interchangeably, although my respondents focussed on God, *uThixo*, more than on Christ. But there 'is a big gap with regard to the Holy Spirit, there is little reference except in the Catholic Charismatic groups' (:2). As noted above, I agree that the Catholic Charismatic movement in Cape Town, in my experience, retains an appropriate balance between Christ and the Holy Spirit. Tlhagale (2018:240), noting how AICs have developed their own theologies, with a substantial focus on integral healing, makes the following comment as to how Jesus has been side-lined:

The healing churches have simply suppressed the role of Jesus in favour of the Holy Spirit, who symbolises power. Thus both the Holy Spirit and the ancestors are the source of the healing power.

Whilst the Holy Spirit is also underestimated amongst the Xhosa parishioners, this person is the central protagonist of many AICs, where Christ is side-lined by the Holy Spirit. Ter Haar (2009:56) argues that African traditional religions are basically charismatic, spirit oriented, and that African Christians understand that the powers of the Holy Spirit, as apparent in the New Testament and the early Christian communities, are still accessible today.

The South African pastors of AICs are offering healing, blessings, advantages, the Holy Spirit, and his gifts, but ostensibly not Christ as the centre of the faith. 'There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed' (EN 22; Mallon 2016:36). The summit of evangelization is the proclamation of Jesus, 'the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead' who offers salvation to all (EN 33; Mallon :36). AICs are vaunted as models of inculturation, and these 'spirit' churches are said to have filled the void created by the Western missionary by providing meaning to life situations, notably evil and ill health. Yet if they exclude or obscure the Christ figure, they surely cannot comprehensively fill the spiritual and existential vacuum. Anderson admits that there may be some unconscious

weakening of Christology, whereas I contend that there is more than ‘unconscious weakening’; these churches effectively suppress, or exclude the role of Jesus, such that some wonder if they have the right to be titled Christian (see Tlhagale 2018:241, 244). There is also a presumption that the Holy Spirit responds to every request positively, which is not necessarily the case in petitionary prayer, although the Holy Spirit is always given in any prayer (Lk 11:13).

Ngada and Mofokeng, two South African bishops, articulate a theology of African Indigenous Churches in their book on *African Christian Witness* (2001). The ‘Almighty Spirit’ was present ‘healing us long before the missionaries landed on our shores’ (2001:23). In my opinion, the Spirit eclipses Christ in their theological exposition, and confirms my view that the Holy Spirit is the chief protagonist in AICs, to the diminution of the Christ figure. The former Catholic Archbishop Milingo persuaded Catholic parishioners in Zambia that there was no need to covertly seek exorcism from traditional healers, because the Christian Church offered free access to the superlative Spirit, superior to all other spirits (Ter Haar 2009:26).

The Pneumatology of the AICs is said to be closer to the Biblical pattern of dynamic theology of the Holy Spirit (Anderson 1991:7). The West has obscured the role of the Holy Spirit with abstract theology, and due to fears that emotionalism (Mallon 2016:205) may lead to sound religion being overwhelmed by emotional experience, subjectivity and even heresy. Anderson claims that without the Spirit in African Christianity, African Christians would revert to ATR, which is more powerful than the somewhat sterile, rational Christianity imported from the West. Surely these calls for life-filled, love-filled proclamation of the love of God in Christ, unashamedly affective, rich in passionate delivery, a Christ who gives the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, is made present by the same Spirit. Tlhagale, as noted elsewhere, volunteers the opinion that African Christians, in his experience, are closer to ATR than to Christianity (2018:244). He contends that the mission churches should dialogue with the Indigenous Churches and challenge their theologies: ‘the challenge still looms larger after 200 years of missionary activity’ (2018:241).

Okure (1998:18) avers robustly that Christ’s free gift of the Spirit is better than anything the ancestors can advance, and the supremacy of these two must not be in dispute, as well as doubting the need for ‘arduous’ rituals. My respondents do resort to God in pressing

moments during the day, with ejaculatory prayers, as opposed to more formal rituals, but Okure's qualification as to the apparent superiority of ancestor rituals to addressing the Holy Spirit spontaneously, merits attention. She is concerned that African Christians may end up serving two masters (see Mt 6:24). Tlhagale contends that the Catholic church has lost many members, but Nürnberger qualifies this by contending that it has lost less than most because of the apparent tacit acceptance of the ancestor cult by the Catholic Church.

The Xhosa Catholics are genuinely and resolutely God-oriented, but a better application of the Holy Spirit as the one who makes the works of Christ present would be of real benefit, and even facilitate an experiential reality, especially in the sense of gifts of the Spirit such as glossolalia and prophecy. There seems to be the curious situation that the Xhosa Catholics entertain 'God' as the focal point of their faith, while the 'spirit' churches (AICs), converge on the Holy Spirit, but both incorporate the ancestors as a part of their dual and separate allegiance (although the Spirit indirectly vies with ancestors for sacred power in the AICs), and the West, which centred on Christ, has lost him as the dominant agent within a radically de-Christianised Western society, where Jesus is only one alternative amongst other spiritual agents. Christ not only contests with God as the source of sacred power, but with the Holy Spirit, the ancestors, prophets, pastors, some of whose words are regarded as sacrosanct, as well as with traditional healers, the laity, and in the West with good witches, Wiccans, New Age practices, Eastern therapeutic techniques, spirits found within esoteric faiths, crystals and many other objects of curiosity and novelty which somehow evoke the numinous and appeal to the need for transcendence and deeper meaning.

The Church in Cape Town needs to learn from the Charismatic Movement, whose natural affective style of celebration matches the African dynamism. Testimonies of the people to the work of God in their lives are valid expressions of worship. Praying over each other for gifts, healing and coping, and special intentions, is a normal part of the Charismatic Renewal services. Abuses may arise, but these can be corrected, and the risk needs to be taken.

A clear contrast between a praise and worship service and the Mass needs to be appreciated. In fact, all catechizing should clearly distinguish between healings services, Masses, anointing of the sick, Holy Communion and its effects and other pastoral gatherings. As noted above, the Catholic Charismatic renewal in this Archdiocese holds a better balance of the operations

of the Trinitarian members, not in an overtly theological manner, but in its pastoral response to the Holy Spirit phenomena of the past century.

### 9.5 Summary of Other Sources of Sacred Power

This Section identifies the alternate sources of sacred power utilised by the Xhosa parishioners, which from my experience in the field, is applicable to the Sotho culture as well. These sources include the ancestors, traditional healers, healing churches (including the AICs), and pastors and prophets who command particular public attention and esteem. The African cosmogony of dynamistic forces which need to be held in balance, forms a backdrop to the agents who are able to tap into these forces.

For all the respondents in my survey, God is supreme: 'God is the most important person, and certainly for me it is God who is first, who is our Father and Creator, and then the ancestors will come second' (response of a priest; E3). There was little spontaneous mention of Christ by the respondents. As to a choice between God, Jesus, or the ancestors to resolve a problem, this respondent immediately chose God. This is the typical reply of the parishioners and priests. As noted above (9.3), my primary conclusion is that God has categorically displaced the ancestors from their central station, but at the same time, the ancestors continue to command very substantial powers, occupying a parallel world of influence, ostensibly independent of God's sovereignty, able to elicit reverence, fear and cooperation with their perceived demands. The respondents effectively perceive Christ as less than God, unearthing a serious deficiency in the evangelization of indigenous people. Parishioners generally concur with the assessment of a respondent about the ancestors, that they are 'letting you know they are there to protect you, they are alive, they are watching over you' (G13). The reality is that ancestors remain a highly significant source of sacred power to the Xhosa parishioners in Cape Town, and Knox (2008:91) observes a resurgence of the ancestral belief system among former adherents to primal religion as well as by African theologians. There is a sense in which indigenous folk are now more confident to admit their devotion to their forebears. The influential Nelson Mandela (former president of South Africa), on his sick bed, volunteered that he was about to join his ancestors. His funeral rites were celebrated according to Xhosa custom. Animal sacrifice continues, as observed, on behalf of leading figures and celebrities (E.g., Nelson Mandela 2013, Brenda Fassie 1999; see Chapter 3.14), even in upmarket

suburbs. Funerals and thanksgiving celebrations usually include sacrifice to the ancestors and are part of the religious life of my respondents. One respondent (A3), after dreaming that their buried mother said she was cold, had their mother's body exhumed, wrapped in a blanket and reburied. This indeed is a powerful testimony to the ongoing authority of ancestral faith and a robust measure of trepidation. Animal sacrifice amongst my parishioners and respondents is a routine feature solemnising celebrations and rites of passage, but expenses of rituals (for example, to buy a cow), may thwart or at least defer the actual ritual.

Tlhagale too is confident that the ancestors have been dethroned from their position of hegemony in the life of the African Christian (2019:33), and that there are definite cracks in the traditional African worldview, but there is still an ongoing addiction, one could argue enslavement, to mythological traditions. Some see the ancestors as occupying a complementary role, but many see this role as excessive in relation to Christ, and Tlhagale regards the straddling of two belief systems as a 'tragic compromise' (2018:149). The respondents to my questionnaire mostly substantiate this conclusion; their map of reality is God first, and then the ancestors. Tlhagale deems it as 'preposterous' that people believe that there can be two-way communication with the departed relatives, referring to ignorance, gullibility, a 'stubborn' belief in witches and a custom of blaming, of looking for scapegoats and not accepting the need to assume personal responsibility for life's challenges and tribulations.

Christ as judge, mentor and intermediary comes into immediate conflict with the functions of the ancestors, whose names predominate in the religious consciousness of the Christian Xhosa. Nürnberger (2007:49) argues that ancestors were well known when alive, far more intimately than Christ, and therefore Christ cannot be part of the inner circle, 'by any stretch of the imagination'. This familiarity with ancestors is imparted by parents, grandparents and other relatives. Christ is a personal God who seeks first place in this inner circle. Okure cautions:

Until the people see the role of Jesus in the hierarchy of the spirit world, that is, of our ancestors, it will be hard to uproot them completely from their beliefs (Okure 1998:6-7, quoting Milingo 1985:62).

To still depend on ancestral spirits as the 'immediate ground of their being' amounts to a rejection of the Christian's calling to new life in the Spirit (Okure 1998:16), nevertheless,

mission must acknowledge this cultural belief seriously (:23). Okure also entertains the real possibility that ‘the devil can pose as an angel of light’, which raises the need for discernment of spirits (:18). I note again that since the Son of God sustains ‘all things by his powerful command’, the ancestors owe their continued existence to Christ himself (Heb 1:3b).

We need to be taken over totally by Christ (Tlhagale 2018:129). However, he contends that eliminating the ancestral cult would engender a spiritual wilderness. As recommended below, the two views, the ancestor cult, and the Communion of Saints, need to befriend each other, and like friends, be willing to sacrifice to the other but with the wisdom of Christ as the final arbiter.

Life without the brooding presence of the protective spirits is inconceivable. Their absence would bring about a spiritual wilderness. The truth about their existence is embodied in the very collective consciousness of the family, the clan and the wider community (Tlhagale 2019:26).

This highly significant element of local culture cannot be simply ignored, or proscribed, but demands respectful dialogue with Christianity. An appealing solution is to move beyond clan to the universal Communion of Saints as a feasible substitute, expanding the horizons of the ancestors but subjecting them to the supremacy of Christ, for whom all things exist (Col 1:16, 17). Tlhagale refers to the ‘tyranny’ of the spirit world, which ‘overshadows’ Christ, so that the people end up serving two masters, when Christ demands primary allegiance (Mt 6:24, which affirms that no one can be the slave of two masters). Some loyal Catholics have responded to the call to become a traditional healer, involving a complex of rituals, without relinquishing their Christian faith, and other Catholics endorse those who claim to receive a calling from the ancestors to become a traditional healer. This exposes the magnitude to which ATR is still part of the worldview of the Xhosa Catholic. One church member who has undergone training to become a traditional healer, is emphatic in their assertion that they will never abandon God or the church (conversation 2021). They also wear beadings which encompass very specific meanings and sacred power within ATR.

Walls (2017:60), as noted above, skilfully exposes precedents to the hybrid practices of Christianity throughout Western mission territories regulated by the former primal religions. He (2017:38) observes that new Christians do not abandon their old map of reality, but they modify it. Some components are reduced (as has the ancestor belief system in relation to God

in Cape Town), and some are enlarged, for example, the distant God of ATR is now significantly expanded to a dominant role in the new, broader-based worldview, as is the case in Cape Town. He refers to conversion as 'turning what is already there – including one's past-towards Christ' (:38). Christ has been added, but he effectively does not surpass the ancestors, who are now second to 'God'. They are an enduring, highly pertinent existential reality. If the protection offered by previous traditional agents is not apparent in the new worldview, these old defences will continue to be a part of the spiritual resource. Christianity has not effectively replaced the former means of defence against natural and spiritual evils, which are still entertained as an integral part of the overall worldview. Again, this is supported by my analysis of the respondents.

The neglect of the healing ministry is one of the main reasons for the emergence of healing and 'spirit' churches (Anderson 1991:29), as well as the retention of traditional African sources of healing. The Catholic Mass does not demonstrably offer what the new churches offer, namely more participation, healing, deliverance, divine revelation, prophecy, wonders and miracles, wealth, possession by the Holy Spirit and sometimes even palpable gifts of the Spirit. The African Independent Church (AIC) is also a reaction against exclusion from ministerial roles in mission churches, as well as a reaction against excessive clericalism, with the laity wanting to show that they too have gifts of the Spirit and can dispense sacred power. I note elsewhere, in my experience with Xhosa and Sotho adult parishioners, that they seek more involvement, power, self-validation as Christian members. The style of African celebrations fits in well with Pentecostalism, with participatory features such as rhythmic hand clapping, antiphonal participation of people in the sermons, baptism by immersion, all of which flourish in African soil (:27). Other scholars, such as Motlhabi (2008:38, in Resane 2020:7) point out that African Initiated Churches' secession from the mainline churches was not just political and financial. It was also theological and cultural, a reaction to deculturizing, de-Africanizing, and a Western trajectory which overlooked the African worldview.

It does appear to me that the Spirit is seen as a force by AICs that responds positively to every request, which is not the case. The gift of the Spirit is always given, but not every prayer request is granted (see Lk 11:11-13). God is constantly petitioned in what emerges as a very constant prayer life of my parishioners. The Pentecostal churches, incorporating the African



‘spirit’ churches, and the more Western classes, have grown dramatically throughout the former primal religion territories.

The constant exodus of the Xhosa from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape puts enormous strains on Cape Town’s infrastructure, and the number of problems that arise in the more complex urban environment is multiplied, so that traditional healers are in even more demand, as well as the healing churches. These are viewed as valid options by many Catholics, a supplement to daily living. Nürnberger (2007:42) observes that even in South Africa, the most modernised and Christianised part of South-Saharan Africa, millions of Black South Africans turn to ‘hundreds of thousands’ of diviners and healers.

The African Independent Churches (AICs), deemed to be vanguards of African culture, address themes preached in main-line churches which in one survey, include ‘adultery, stealing, drunkenness, pride, jealousy, lying, unbelief, witchcraft, in that order’ (Mijoga 2001:161).<sup>80</sup> It seems that the healing aspects of these church rituals attract primary interest, not the homiletic themes. Healing then is the vital attraction of the AICs, a ministry significantly neglected by the Catholic Church. I also note that the AICs appear to marginalise Christ or focus entirely on the Holy Spirit, therefore they cannot claim to be integral vanguards of inculturation if they do not proclaim the crucified, Risen Christ, nor properly fill the void left by earlier mission, as some claim. We can also ask if the ‘Spirit’ proclaimed by the ‘spirit’ churches is compatible with the Triune understanding. The healing churches petition the Holy Spirit for sacred power, who in this sense competes with traditional healers. Some have described such churches as hospitals, venues for healing. Pastors with reputations for healing or prophetic powers, TV evangelists, and those boasting special abilities, attract attention and African Christians are not slow to search the Internet for religious specialists who undertake to provide special assistance. It is an African cultural convention to pursue healing not only from Western doctors, but also from churches, traditional healers and ancestors.

Other sources of sacred power (religious specialists) include the *igqirha*, or traditional healer, known more generally as the *isangoma* (the Zulu term). They are believed to communicate with ancestors, tap into the ancestral powers and be possessed by them. Tlhagale expresses

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<sup>80</sup> Survey of 299 sermons in Malawi.

considerable disquiet and disbelief about these putative powers, which include discerning the reason for a misfortune such as illness, who is behind the evil, and recommending a solution (from Chapter 2.8, Religious Specialists). *Amagqirha* get their power from the ancestors: 'they say they get it from their ancestors' (G11). Some also believe the ancestors can bestow protection via the traditional healers/doctors, even to the extent of immunity to bullets or poison (G12). Some respondents readily admitted to visiting traditional healers and healing churches. There appears to be anecdotal evidence of people reputedly endowed with the ability to communicate on a real time basis with the departed (such as a John Edward who featured on an Oprah Winfrey special television programme in 2014, purporting to do just that, relaying messages between progeny and forebears). The concern remains as to whether any traditional healer can do just that, and also that malign spirits may intervene as ancestral spirits, 'angels of light', intent on doing harm (see 2 Cor 11:14-15, where Paul acknowledges the ability of Satan or his 'servants' in disguising themselves as benign servants).

Xhosa rituals continue to reveal the profound importance of the ancestral spirits and the need to appease them, honour them, remember them, and petition them. Some young parishioners expressed grave concern at being included in a healing ritual performed by a healer who came to heal their grandparent, which necessitated the children receiving small incisions on their shoulders, and one informed their mother that she would not cooperate in any repetition of any such rituals requiring cutting.

*The ixhwele* is an herbalist who formulates herbal remedies. One respondent credited the herbalist with the power to concoct medicine (*muthi*), which can kill an enemy. There would appear to be a divide between genuine herbalists and those seeking financial rewards. The *igqwirha* is a witch, who can be described as an agent of evil power. My respondents displayed a strong belief in forces of good and evil, and witches retain their status as prime agents of evil, with substantial powers, which can transcend normal scientific dynamisms. Nevertheless, God has the most power over evil spirits and agents of evil (G13). My chapter on invisible beings validates, Biblically and according to various Catholic Church documents, the reality of evil spirits, in contrast to a somewhat sceptical Western worldview. My respondents mostly credited the efficacy of the religious specialists. It seemed that if there was fear of evil, the ancestors commanded the most trepidation. Ter Haar (2009:38) opines

that the religious specialists are generally prominent and well-respected members of the community. Tlhagale (218:130-168) effectively discredits the *isangoma-priest* as a valid and efficacious source of sacred power. These are ordained priests or professed religious brothers or sisters, who purport to successfully combine ATR and Christianity to achieve healing or benefits for African Christians.

A diviner with whom Cumes worked (a white *isangoma* and medical doctor), invoked various names in their rituals, including Jesus, Jehovah and Moses (Cumes 2004:81). This confirms the general impression that for many, Jesus has been relativized; he is one source of power among various other sources. There is a professional body of traditional healers, which sets standards, presents certificates and convenes meetings.

In Africa, spirits and ancestors are a daily reality, constantly intervening, interfering, harming, or helping (Luzbetak 1988/2002:253). The visible and invisible worlds are grasped as two aspects of one and the same reality (Chapter 2.3). Chapter 2 elaborates on the world of invisible beings. The evil beings of the Xhosa are not found in the tradition of Christian theology or demonology but differ in type and alleged appearance. The respondents, including parishioners and priests, share beliefs in a world of invisible beings, predominantly the ancestors, discussed in Chapter 3, but also in evil spirits, angels and other spirits like the spirits of the river, more associated with the *amagqirha* (traditional healers), those with 'white beads' who go down to the river (A6). The universe, from a viewpoint of Christian theology, is indeed the location of invisible beings, a belief which is steadily changing from scornful rejection to cautious acknowledgement, even if this theology has always been a basic tenet of faith (see Chapter 2:10).

A traditional worldview forms a background to the persons interviewed in this thesis, who have been journeying from this philosophical location to one which is more Christian, but a journey that is now also prone to powerful postmodern forces which act to undermine fixed religious systems such as Christianity and traditional religion. The animistic worldview sees all objects as endowed with spirits, while the dynamistic view sees all objects as endowed with a power or life force, energy. Animism is found more in West Africa, and dynamism among Bantu tribes in Southern and East Africa (Nürnberg 2007:22). It is these dynamistic forces, which need to be kept in equilibrium, which are manipulated by the religious specialists,

which some refer to as 'magico-religious forces' (Pauw 1975). Gehman (2005:87, in Resane 2020:11) contends that African religion seeks to secure greater life force from higher beings to enhance well-being and success. This purpose is exposed in the ancestor rituals which my respondents engage in.

Tlhagale describes various objects which in the indigenous cosmos are richly endowed with spiritual meaning (2018:136-137), such as the drum, beads, divining bones, beads, and shrines. These are types of sacramentals used by the traditional healer, and Catholics have their own reserve of religious items that add a sense of the numinous to ceremonies, such as incense. Some Catholic parishioners wear African beads which are accredited with sacred powers.

Christian mission by the missionaries has proved insubstantial and needs to be re-imagined. This thesis hopefully qualifies as an opening to this task, as a source of reference towards fuller integration of Christ, in the words of John the Baptist: 'He must grow greater, I must grow less' (Jn 3:30).

Okure (Orobator 2014:49) argues for a life-centred theology, where the theologian should ask for what purpose they are doing theology, and what exactly is its value for God's people. Theology should be at the service of the Gospel. It was Third World and women scholars who approached theology from the underside of history 'to ask the texts life-related questions' (:39). Again, my research submits the way forward for this fuller integration of faith and culture, and calls for further ground level, practical research.

Walls (1996:35) emphasises that the integration of Christian faith and Greek culture was the work of centuries. Tlhagale (2018:244, 245), writing as a Catholic Archbishop in South Africa, notes that Christianity is 2 000 years old compared to 200 years old existence in Africa, and construes that African worshipping communities, are on the whole, closer to their African Traditional Religion than to Christian belief. This is indeed a telling conclusion. The system of being socialised into traditions of the Xhosa remains. The urgent mission of the Church, after two hundred years of Christian mission, is how to introduce Christ fully into the culture of the African Christians, in a meaningful and respectful way.

This thesis aims at addressing some of the critical cultural issues, and incorporates a transformative motivation, one of imparting the Good News of Jesus in a manner which finds resonance with our African Christians, leading to a deep personal conversion, one which is life-changing and energising, and centred on the Pascal Mystery, the essence of the Christ event.

## 9.6 Summary of Inculturation

Inculturation in one direction involves inserting Christian values into a culture, challenging errant values, purifying mixed value practises and enhancing positive customs. This, of course, is what mission entails. In the other direction, culture enters faith, expressing forms of the faith (those which are legitimately changeable) in indigenous manners, without compromising the essential faith. Inculturation in both directions now appears to be neglected, inertia has manifested itself and the dialogue between Christianity and African culture has been forgotten. If, as some of my colleagues construe, inculturation is dead, then so is mission!

The movement of faith into culture needs to challenge specific traditional values, and in relation to other sources of sacred power, the following summarises what I see as the prime areas of theological controversy in cross-cultural mission to those immersed in the ancestor belief system.

1. As noted above, Tlhagale disputes the alleged ability of traditional healers to have a genuine two-way communication with the ancestors, from which they purport to discern a solution to a particular dilemma, as well as who is responsible for the problem. This is an unexplored area of spirituality and there may be strong opposition to this scepticism (see for example note on John Edward in Chapter 9.5 above).
2. Inherent in this practice of divination, is the assumption that the ancestors can operate independently of God, in a type of parallel sphere of sacred power. Although my respondents acknowledge God as supreme, he seems to be side-lined when dealing with the ancestors and religious specialists, who purport to achieve results seemingly autonomously. Catholic doctrine deems all who have died as definitively in God's hands, without independent powers of their own. In practice, there appears to

be little interior association with God and ancestors when the latter are solicited for their sacred power.

3. The morality of divination arises when the Biblical episode of the witch of En-dor is considered (1 Sm. 28:3-19). Are the Xhosa ancestral rites which call upon ancestors classifiable as immoral or can they be seen as a prayer to the Communion of Saints? If so, how does the traditional healer hear a reply? It may be that some religious specialists err on the side of divination more than others. There appear to be a variety of rituals performed by different families, and some may border on divination. Ancestors are often spontaneously entreated in everyday situations where assistance is sought, as well as God, a habit which is similar to praying to saints, or departed relatives, and therefore doctrinally acceptable.
4. Theologians such as Okure raise the possibility of being deceived by an evil spirit posing as an angel of light (1998:18; see 2 Cor 11:14-15, where this is seen as a distinct possibility). Discernment of spirits is taken very earnestly by the Jesuit order and is an accepted tradition within the Catholic Church.
5. The ability of ancestors to punish and even to kill, is taken very seriously by my respondents. Fear of ancestral punishment emerged as a dominant concern among my respondents, even more so than evil spirits. If the ancestors are in God's hands, can they possess the power and intent to harm their progeny? This requires a studied response, in order to construct an acceptable challenge, appreciating cultural sensitivity, but a challenge, nonetheless.
6. Where dreams are concerned which purport to be genuine communication from an ancestor, is the possibility of a psychological explanation ever entertained? Dream analysis is one feature of Jungian psychology.
7. As noted above, Okure insists that inculturation must be based on sound Christological and Pneumatological bases, and the free gift of the Spirit precludes the needs for 'arduous' rituals. Her inference is that African Christians are complicating life with many rituals, and overlooking valuable and efficacious Christian resources.

8. The devotion to ancestors surmises that there will always be a positive outcome when a ritual is performed. There are no absolute guarantees when it comes to supplicating God, and therefore, since he is actually in control, the outcome of a ritual cannot be assured. Yet the religious specialist needs to afford a solution to their client, as well as, often, the identity of anyone who has been seeking to undermine the client.

There has been commentary on these issues, but no formal, managed programme of challenge, especially of integrating these beliefs with the Communion of Saints theology within the Catholic Church. There has been insufficient dialogue between Christianity and Xhosa culture, and no formal missiological endeavour to negotiate divergences. The deficient way in which the image of God has been appropriated shows that there has clearly been an inadequate synthesis of faith and culture (which is the template describing inculturation), more particularly, how to manage the powerful ancestor belief system, and the need for coping with illness and evil. This incomplete model, the lack of studied inculturation, is the prime reason for the limited success of mission. The quality of conversion has been deficient, and the Christ image is significantly attenuated by ongoing socialisation by parents and family of their offspring into the ancestor cult, which invites more deliberation than Christ. However, the use of vernacular, African music and rhythmic processions stemmed the loss of Christians from main line churches. The AICs are perceived as a model of African inculturation, although the undivided focus on the Holy Spirit by many churches may render them peripheral Christians, detracting from their much-vaunted status as models of the integration of Christian faith and African culture.

Some South African studies of inculturation in South Africa are noted, such as Schimlek (1951:154), Sipuka (2000) and Tlhagale (2018), a number of workshops for which there has been little apparent follow-up; also, sporadic experiments with inculturated Masses in Cape Town, and the emergence of the *isangoma*-priest amongst priests and religious brothers and sisters in South Africa. Missionaries sought to replace African Tradition with Christianity, but because of the failure to deal with the realities of culture, instead accomplished a dual religious system, whereby Christianity is sewn in a field evincing many traditional beliefs. Parishioners I work with and interviewed revealed unremitting and deep involvement with culture, unaware of certain clashes with Christianity. Xhosa funeral ministers who assist in my

parish admit, perhaps slightly discomfited, that they engage in African rituals, adding that the Catholic Church has never spoken against them (conversation December 2021). Sipuka's thesis (2000:260) concludes that 'the survival of the Christian faith depends on it being weaved into the local culture'. He seeks to weave together ancestral sacrifice and the Eucharist in his thesis, noting that past methods have fashioned an adaptation which is at the level of externals, and a deeper, incarnational model of mission is required, to 'indissolubly link the Gospel and culture'. Serious attention needs to be given to his recommendations at the level of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in regard to the blending of ancestral sacrifice rituals with the Eucharistic celebration as sacrifice in the arena of preaching about the Eucharist. Sipuka (:245) seeks to include ancestors in the Eucharistic sacrifice, 'then there would be no need for Xhosa Catholics to be involved in two types of sacrifices, i.e., the ancestral and the Eucharistic sacrifices'.

Magesa (2004) is but one scholar who bemoans the dearth of progress of inculturation in Africa. John Paul II, addressing the Mozambican Bishops (1982), committed the Church, according to the mind of Vatican II, to translating the Gospel into culturally acceptable forms, to make it better understood and lived, without prejudice to the faith and the universal Church. Walls (1996:35) observes astutely that the Greek universe of philosophy, a product of centuries, needed full conversion, it could not be simply abandoned.

The same could apply to the full conversion of the African (Goldie 2006:94). Mission within the Cape Town Archdiocese is some 200 years old. In 1969, Pope Paul VI declared 'You may, and you must have an African Christianity', in an address to the 1969 SECAM<sup>81</sup> in Kampala (Okure, Van Thiel, et al, 1990:145). There is the obvious need to maintain communion with global Catholicism; there are yardsticks for valid inculturation: for example, Schreiter supplies criteria for upholding Christian identity (Schreiter 2002:117-121).

Okure (Orobator 2014:49) argues for a life-centred theology, where the theologian should ask for what purpose they are doing theology, and what is its value for God's people. Theology should be at the service of the Gospel. Ilo agrees we must go to the fields and huts (or African townships, which is accomplished in this thesis) to do African theology, and to observe the

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<sup>81</sup> SECAM: the Symposium of Episcopal conferences of Africa and Madagascar.



independent churches (Orobator 2014:121). In Catholicism, African theology is 'still very generalised, scholastic and essentialised' (:122). He also sees a move from very cognitive methods to a phenomenological engagement, taken from the perspectives of ordinary African Christians and their lived faith experiences, which is a goal and method of this thesis. Schreiter (2018:104; see Irvin and Phan, eds.) records how a group of young African scholars studying in Paris in 1955, questioned the theology they were being taught and the way in which their own cultures were being ignored and even undermined. Richard Rohr refers to Carl Jung who avers that people do not take things seriously until it is given a face.<sup>82</sup> If it is purely conceptual and abstract it may be forgotten. I ask, if Christ is everywhere, sustaining all things in existence (Heb 1:3b), why is he so distant from the consciousness and convictions of most people, and certainly from the worldview of the worshippers in the African townships?

Although I focus on proclamation, preaching, catechising, in order to engender a life changing encounter with Christ, liturgically, 'if rituals are correctly tailored to the local community, meaning and emotion can be conveyed as no other medium can' (Luzbetak 1988:84; see Chupungco 1982, no page reference. My underlining). What 'tailoring' is needed to achieve this meaning? Christianity remains detached from the real life and experiences of Africans in towns, villages, informal settlements, and polities and economies that render Africa a land of coffins (Katongole 2004:204).

Thlagale (2000:49, 52) argues that the worldview of the subjects of mission must be engaged with directly. We cannot simply gloss over witchcraft, spirits, sorcery, and traditional healing and of course, the ancestors. In seeking to challenge the mythical, we must not 'throw out the baby with the bath-water' (:52). The act of banning all that is African Traditional Religion, amounts to just that, in other words, of discarding key aspects of African Religion which are crucial to inculturation. If these key issues are not methodically dialogued with Christianity, they will remain part of the convert's map of reality alongside, and sometimes in opposition to Christian theology, and also to a potentially more meaningful, 'user-friendly' or local Christianity. The Church in Southern Africa has not as yet overcome the barriers between faith and culture (2018:167, 168), and this explains the instinctive resort to African tradition, where

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<sup>82</sup> Podcast on the History of Christ; Google, YouTube; 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Accessed 24/2/2021.

they find support, traditional remedies. He believes that for this reason, the *isangoma*-priest will continue because of the real perceived need of the people.

Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium* in Mallon 2016:147) reminds preachers to avoid answering questions that people are not asking. This seems especially relevant to mission to Africa, which feels its basic existential needs are not provided for in missionary proclamation. The Pope contends that we need an intense desire to speak of Jesus to others (*EG* 2013:264), and we need to become convinced that Jesus is exactly what others need (:265). The 'Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters'. This critical relationship with Jesus was deficient amongst my respondents. One parishioner who is particularly Christ-centred, (information gathered from extensive but informal discussion with me), nevertheless regularly performs ancestor rituals (conversation 2019).

The Vatican document (*Christifideles Laici* 1988:99) also quotes *Gaudium et Spes* (1965:43), which in turn quotes the missionary document *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975:20), to the effect that the 'split between the faith and their daily lives (Christians) deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age'. This split reflects lack of dialogue between faith and culture. Its criticality cannot be over-emphasized.

The topic of inculturation appears to have entered a phase of quietness, fatigue, ignorance, and effectively, operational neglect, after its high academic profile in the second half of the twentieth century. This contrasts with a report on inculturation in the booklet *Leiturgia* (booklet published by the SACBC Department of Liturgy, July 2001/2, Pretoria). It presents a very positive paper on inculturation as well as a record of energetic endeavour, of regional meetings and proposals. This momentum seems to have been exhausted.

I believe my proposals of proclaiming Christ, also using African categories, and merging the Communion of Saints theology with the ancestor belief system are broad, macro recommendations, as opposed to finer, micro proposals, the former which can produce substantial fruit. Today inculturation is less frequently acknowledged, but a lack of appreciation of this vital theological category can only attenuate the success of mission, until it is recovered once more. Inculturation in South Africa calls for constructing a local theology that merges the theology of the communion of saints with the ancestor cult, a Christological

revival; a theology which locates Christ as the chief ancestor and agent within other rites of passage and thereby revitalising practical and pastoral theological training in seminaries. At the more micro level, Sipuka's recommendations should also be definitively adjudicated and implemented, specifically by writing a template for an inculturated text on the Eucharist as a sacrifice compared to ancestor sacrifice, which would surely be of substantial benefit to priests working in African parishes, seeking to explain the sacrificial aspect of the Mass.

### 9.7 Summary of a World full of Invisible Beings

Since the African is deeply concerned with coping with a universe of invisible beings, primarily ancestors and evil spirits, this world is examined as to its nature and relevance to Catholic theology as evident in various Catholic Church documents. The principal reason is to consider what agents of sacred power are being accessed to cope with this world, in comparison with the Christian depository of coping mechanisms seen by the Catholic Church as endowed by the Triune God, as well as to authenticate this world Biblically and theologically. A further goal in exploring this vista is to propose a merger of Xhosa tradition, in particular the ancestor belief system, with the Catholic theology of the Communion of Saints.

The Christian universe is one of invisible beings and forces, comprising guardian angels, angels in heaven (also referred as created spirits), angels at work in our world, the communion of those who are part of the Communion of Saints (not only canonised Saints, but saints, people who are in heaven, and those in purgatory), and Satan and the evil spirits. They are a daily reality, constantly active in our world, for better or for worse. The saints are the ancestors, all humanity that has gone before us. These number an estimated 117 billion<sup>83</sup> either in hell, purgatory, or heaven, with the latter two believed to be in a type of communion with those in this world (see Chapter 3.16). A guardian-angel for each 'believer', is a tenet of Catholic faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 336). Jesus informs that for all 'little ones', 'their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven' (Mt 18:10). This is a broader scope than 'believer', implying as many guardian spirits as there are living people.

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<sup>83</sup> <https://www.prb.org › articles › how-many-people-have-e..>, Internet accessed 20/012022/.

There is ostensibly an abundance of created spirits with the specific task of praying for the moral well-being of their wards.

These form part of the invisible universe, as well as angels sent by God to the world to perform specific tasks. In the 'war' in heaven, Satan draws a 'third of the stars' (angels) to the world (Rev 12:4), which are the fallen angels, demons, or evil spirits. In this Catholic panorama, there is *without doubt* a universe replete with spirits, which contrasts with the generally secular disbelief and scorn attached to belief in such beings, but this spirit-filled universe is nonetheless Biblically attested. Okure (1998:20) confidently asserts that Biblical revelation exposes the existence of spirits 'inimical' to human beings, and the 'importance of the spirits in the African worldview requires that evangelisation takes this belief very seriously' (:23). Pope Francis (2019), in his book *'Rebuking the Devil'*, is convinced that Satan is extensively involved in world affairs, alive and active at personal levels as well as broader levels such as countries, and in my view, even discernible in various ideologies such as the many ideological 'isms', which may well reflect strong diabolic influence in all or some of their expositions. Satanic influence, according to the Pope, is a major cause of armed conflicts in the world, and he seems to view all the evil in the world through the lens of an omnipresent Satan and army of evil spirits, truly a formidable host of 'principalities and ruling forces who are masters of the darkness in this world' (Ep 6:32; NJB 1985:1938).

Chapter 3 enlarges on this universe of invisible beings, and real communion with us of the benign beings in accordance with certain Catholic Church documents and the Bible. This communion between the invisible and visible world forms a basis for writing a theology which would merge the Catholic Doctrine of the Communion of Saints with the ancestor belief system. This is a type of See (understanding world of spirits and their communion with us, understanding the ancestral belief system), Judge (evaluate in the light of Scripture and tradition, and anthropology) and Act (evolve a plan or policy). This culminates in constructing a 'new' local (culture specific) theology which answers questions the indigenous people entertain, and how to dialogue them with Scripture and Tradition, without compromising the faith, as well as being sensitive to deeply held cultural beliefs.

The universe of ATR limits the invisible world to ancestors and evil spirits. The malign spirits of ATR are different in nature from those identified in Catholic demonology, but we can accept

as authentic, with Biblical corroboration, the actuality of a planet filled with concealed spiritual beings. Western theology, according to Walls (2017), incorporates rationalistic stumbling blocks to coping with what the apostle Paul identifies as principalities and powers (these are the 'principalities and the ruling forces who are the masters of the darkness in this world, the spirits of evil...' Ep 6:12. NJB 1985:1938). Western theology has difficulty coping with these invisible agents 'whether in relation to their grip on the universe or to Christ's triumph over them on the cross' (Walls 2017:69). He suggests that Africa, with its knowledge of systemic evil, and where principalities and powers are not foreign concepts, 'may open the way to a more developed theology of evil' (:69). It is worth noting that the Catholic Church has a well-developed ministry of exorcism, which encompasses belief in a variety of evil spirits.

The respondents in my survey expressed belief in a world of spirits, and they described some mysterious and transcendent experiences of this spiritual universe, which cannot be explicated by science. There is genuine openness to the transcendent and the mysterious and to God as protector and provider, and also the ancestors, as well as the potential to accept mysterious and transcendent experiences as a product of invisible, evil entities, as well as benign entities. Some related their experience of such beings as opposed to ancestral manifestations. One participator contended that Satan has a big organisation of 'evil spirits'(B8). There was no exposition of the different type of evil beings from my respondents.

The visible and invisible worlds are grasped as two aspects of one and the same reality in African Tradition. One of the biggest concerns is how to cope with these powers, these forces. If the Christian church does not provide the necessary means, other religious specialists are sought. Pentecostal churches focus on these daily issues, and therefore attract the support of Christian Africans, but their emphasis is more on the Holy Spirit, and ancestor rituals are not usually part of the church services, rather, they are conducted privately. In a sense, the ancestors now also compete with the 'spirit' churches and their understanding of the Holy Spirit (see also Ter Haar, 2009:36). The participants in the research, even the young respondents, were mindful of a universe of benevolent and malign spirits and Satan and demons. There is a robust fear and awareness of evil, some participants more anxious than others, but God and the ancestors dominate their religious consciousness. Whilst the Western

view is often dismissive of angels and demons, the African view appears more realistic and accepting. The Catholic Charismatic movement appears to have a more balanced view of a universe packed with spiritual beings, and of untiring spiritual warfare.

The African universe has people as its centre, and is structured so that life may flow continually, but life is always under threat, from death, illness, barrenness, accidents, droughts, witchcraft, sorcery, spirits, and even the ancestors (Domingues 2000:24). However, as important as this issue is to various theologians, my sample of parishioners and priests did not seem to confirm that the need for protection from evil spirits is the 'biggest felt need of the African' (Healey, Sybertz, 2000:218). Coping with life's struggles, family and offspring issues, crime, ancestors, and the need for employment, commanded the most attention. The fear of evil does not necessarily diminish, the more educated a person is. The socialisation process in ATR is not overcome by Western rationality and suspicion of all that is not observable. This again highlights the dual religious world of many Catholics. There seems to be no questioning as to how communicating with the ancestors gives rise to some irreconcilable theological issues, such as the ability of ancestors to operate independently of God, or to harm their progeny, or to communicate efficaciously with the traditional healers. I expose many Western Christians as effectively subscribing to multi-source religious systems, as noted above (see Chapter 1). The Xhosa are not alone in pursuing more than one source of sacred power.

My experience with Xhosa Christians (for example at funerals) discovered there are some who do believe every illness or misfortune encompasses an enemy who has caused the adversity and who needs to be identified, and which require apposite rituals. As noted above (Chapter 2.7), traditional healers are needed to address the problem, to neutralise the threat. However, there is no unanimous partiality for this model of causation among my participants. My respondents were more circumspect about this theory than Tlhagale, but the possibility was clearly entertained, even if cautiously. There seemed to be more fear of neglecting the ancestors. In cases of affliction, African converts to Christianity find it difficult to ascribe the suffering to God, it is more appealing to ascribe causation to the ancestors (Kiernan 1995:79). They are the agents that assist religious specialists such as diviners or healers in their search for the cause of a misfortune, and who is responsible (Mtuze 2003:75). The dilemma of human

suffering in the African world is strongly influenced by ATR, which prompts adherents to seek cures not only from medical specialists, but from sacred sources as well. The fear of being attacked as a result of an enemy using supernatural means, such as witchcraft, did not emerge strongly from my respondents, but other scholars (such as Tlhagale above), are more assertive about this practice, and their contention needs to be respected at a broader level.

There is substantial evidence from the respondents that the religious specialists do vie (or partner depending on one's assessment of the ritual) for sacred power, in particular its sacraments of healing (such as the anointing of the sick) as well as for sacred power with the Church, and of course, the centrality of Christ, who is not automatically resorted to in times of crisis. Christ and the Catholic Church then vie for attention, which is given to religious specialists, including pastors/prophets who claim to heal, and who interpret the Bible fundamentally or spontaneously. Many Catholics do visit healing churches and traditional healers, as well as attend Mass, for example, a case of Mass in the morning and traditional healer or healing church in the afternoon. I believe it is worth noting again the attraction of the prosperity churches, as well as the fervent expectations of Xhosa Christians that when they pay money to a prophet or traditional healer or healing church, there is a very strong anticipation that their prayer request will be answered. There is a type of commerce, with prayers a commodity offered by mediators of sacred power, in exchange for cash. The more cash contributed, the greater the expected blessing that accrues. There is also a measure of scepticism by some parishioners, as to this prayer/cash correlation, but healers of all categories continue to draw attention of people seeking a resolution to existential issues.

## 9.8 Summary of Research Objectives

My study illuminates the image of God as appropriated by the Xhosa parishioners with a reasonable degree of generalizing capacity to other indigenous cultures and to South Africa as supported by literature review, and even, some argue, to sub-Saharan Africa. Mission has succeeded in locating God as the central source of sacred power, but the image of Christ is undermined, largely through inadequate consideration of the local culture.

The substantial forces of change have relegated the ancestors to second place, according to my study, and the ancestor belief system has weakened slightly but remains a robust force in

the lives of their progeny. Young members have not conclusively transferred attention away from ancestors, and it remains possible that the latter may increase in significance as young people are drawn more into ancestor rituals and themselves become more involved as leaders in ritual practices.

The pursuit of a Christ-centred mission has floundered somewhat, as *de facto*, Christ is seen by many as less than God, and therefore underestimate the Easter Mystery, and fall short of a meaningful, transforming faith relationship with Christ. As noted above, there has been a substantial failure to negotiate with the receiving culture, which has not been integrated convincingly with the centrality of Jesus in Christian mission, and he remains a relative outsider for many, and has tended to be added in as simply another source of sacred power rather than accomplish a dominant role in the faith relationship. This partial acceptance is probably true of many Western Christians as well, and I conclude that there is a Christological crisis of global proportions. The Mass attendance of the predominantly Xhosa and Sotho Catholic parishioners in the African townships in Cape Town is below 5% (compared with 20% for 'Coloureds' and Whites), evidence of the poor success of mission to the local Xhosa and Sotho Catholics.

I have noted various reasons for the qualified success of Christian mission both to Africa and to a substantially de-Christianized West and proffer strategies to address the problems, stratagems that locate culture or context as invaluable aids to evangelization. Both my parishioners and the West resort to a variety of sources of sacred power, the former which are well documented in this thesis.



## Chapter 10: The Way forward:

This final chapter proposes various missiological strategies to cope with the worldview of the Xhosa parishioners, and possibly to a wider range of African Christians.

### 10.1 Coping with the World of Evil Spirits

There is a keen appreciation by parishioners of the reality of evil spirits and the need for protection, as expressed by the participators in my research. Although some scholars proffer this fear of evil spirits as the greatest fear of the African person, my research suggests the ancestors are the dominant concern. However, the fear of evil spirits could be more methodically addressed by the Cape Town clergy, in order to offer efficacious means of coping with this actuality. There are also fears of curses, of enemies using evil agents to hurt their targets, even of suppressed malevolence, of people who employ the services of witches for nefarious purposes. People need to be assured of the absolute superiority of Christ, to whom every knee shall bow (Phi 2:10-11), in other words, who defeats all evil.

Holy water, holy medals, special prayers, the rosary, travel and house blessings, exorcisms, are some means of providing protection, although pastors must resist proffering magical guarantees. The intention is to provide the parishioners with the Christian resources to cope with the world.

The Catholic Church in Southern Africa has forbidden the *isangoma*-diviner practices which blend Christian and African rites, purportedly soliciting both the authority of the ancestors and the sacred power of the Church's rites. This is an unofficial response to the ongoing relevance of African Religion, a type of informal inculturation, which, however, does not comply with criteria for valid inculturation (see Chapter 2.9 above). The SACBC statement on the *isangoma*-priest controversy needs to be discussed in the seminary for the guidance of future priests. Greater awareness of the Church's exorcist resources can provide a sense of being provided for by the Catholic Church in this area of spiritual warfare. The Archdiocese of Cape Town would benefit from workshopping a response to the world of evil spirits. There needs to be a definitive resource to assist parishioners with their fears, not methods which are improvised as the occasion demands. As noted in Chapter 9.7 above, the fear of being attacked as a result of an enemy using supernatural means, such as witchcraft, did not emerge

that strongly from my respondents, but other scholars (such as Tlhagale above), are more assertive about this apparent preoccupation, and their contention needs to be respected at a broader level. We must take these felt needs seriously, and not simply be dismissive.

#### 10.2 Recommended merger of the Ancestor Belief System with the Communion of Saints Theology

This is the most controversial and sensitive of all proposals, as there is serious challenge of the ancestor belief system as set out above in the Chapter 9.6 on Inculturation, where I itemize eight positions that need to be respectfully addressed. Together with the merger of like with like in the Communion of Saints and the Ancestor Belief System, the people are being asked, challenged to accept a lesser degree of power attributed to the ancestors, and effectively to yield to the superiority of the Christ figure. The robust faith in ancestors requires a serious and deliberate response which determines to locate this belief system within the parameters of Catholic theology and the centrality, and pre-eminence of Christ. Planned workshops should seek to consciously broaden the scope of the ancestors to the universal Communion of Saints, using a carefully constructed local theology. The ancestor belief system is an obvious stepping-stone to the broader category of the Communion of Saints. Paul (Acts 17:22ff) uses this stepping-stone approach to lead the Athenians from their 'unknown God' to the Christian God. We can also classify Paul's mission strategy as a See (social and religious analysis, understanding their belief system), Judge (in the light of Scripture and Tradition, contrast of culture and life to Revelation) and Act (demonstrate how Jesus is the unknown God).

An inventory of the essential features of the Ancestors (such as powers, roles, qualities) needs to be juxtaposed against the matching category within the Communion of Saints (including roles as intercessors and agents in the lives of their progeny), in a way which enables the two to enrich each other and to contest each other where there are theological challenges. Chapters 3.15 and 3.16 amplify this proposed merger of anthropology and theology and provide a practical and plausible proposal to grapple with this missiological problem. The Catholic Church believes that Christ in his benevolence offers a supplementary source of

spiritual power, one which serves to reinforce our faith in the afterlife and in the great 'cloud of witnesses' urging us on (see Hebrews 12:1). Those who have died, in Catholic theology, are definitively alive, in disembodied form, whilst their 'bodies' are at sleep. Their knowledge is enhanced by their encounter with the Triune God and are thus valid sources of sacred power to their progeny, who can successfully entreat them, but whose powers to assist relies totally on God.

Since the ancestor cult is so central, we need to deal with this robust cultural specificity realistically and sympathetically. A trajectory that calls for the outright proscription of the ancestor cult is both culturally insensitive and theologically flawed. The ancestral shades need to be dealt with constructively. The methodology of inductive theology starts its reflection with life, culture, context, before studying the Scriptures and Tradition. Commencing then with the Xhosa category of ancestors, we need to harmonise this deep-level aspect of worldview with Christianity, and have the fortitude to challenge and be challenged, with Scriptural and Theological justification, as well as anthropological merit. A type of dialectical to and from interaction between culture and faith is necessary, towards building an inculturated theology. This merger of the invisible agents, and for the Xhosa Catholics, an amplification to a universal perspective, is a step towards a deeper introspection in regard to the various cultic demands, including animal sacrifice. Dialogue between faith and culture describes inculturation.

Vestiges of the Holy Spirit can be said to reside in the ancestral belief system, an obvious prelude to the Communion of Saints theology, and it is surely an occasion to temper an anti-cultural and adversarial trajectory with one of constructive engagement. The Catholic Church requires 'pagan' beliefs to be freed from error (*Evangelii Praecones*, 58, proclaiming the Good News) Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on Promoting Catholic Missions, 1951). This needs to be accomplished at the level of the people, not only in generalized statements.

Healey and Sybertz refer to a homily by Pope John Paul II at the opening Mass of the 1994 African Synod (13<sup>th</sup> April 1994) who stated that the ardent quest for one God through the veneration of the ancestors reflects an intuitive belief that the dead continue to survive, a preparation for belief in the Communion of Saints (Healey and Sybertz 2000:213, 215). Again, late Pope John Paul II spoke positively of the veneration of ancestors, understanding this as a

deep expression of love of life and therefore an intuitive belief that the dead continue to live and remain in real relationship with them, which is surely a preparation for belief in the Communion of Saints. (*Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. *The Church in Africa*, 1995:43). These pronouncements proffer a measure of authoritative precedent to writing a formal merger of the ancestor belief system and the Communion of Saints theologies. At very least, such a narrative could be part of the course in Christology in seminaries.

The citation above (*Evangelii Praecones*, 1951:58), requires a theology of ‘freeing from error’ the indigenous worldview. This is intended in an official declaration on ancestors in a Pastoral Statement on Ancestor Religion and the Christian Faith (Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 11 August 2006, accessible via search engine Google), which requests priests and religious to desist from *ubuNgoma* practices and is concerned with the practise of resorting to ATR by many African Christians, including the habits of consulting traditional healers, appeals to ancestors, spirit possession, divination, magical practices, identifying enemies (referred to as smelling out hostile persons or witches). The *ubuNgoma* practice blends facets of ATR and Christianity in ways which are theologically unsound, syncretic, censured by Catholic Bishops and of non-existent spiritual merit or sacred power according to Catholic theology. The Statement identifies the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as the appropriate means of healing, which comes from God, not the ancestors. It also condemns superstition and irreligion, as well as fortune telling, insists that ancestors are venerated (my underlining), not adored, that there is only one God, through whom healing derives, bans witchcraft and simony (the commercialization of sacred power). The statement insists that ancestors are entirely in God’s hands, acknowledges the potential efficacy of herbs (and therefore herbalists; *ixhwele*), although one respondent in my survey believed that the *ixhwele* could produce medicine to kill an enemy. The ancestors are with God, and we pray for their purification should they be experiencing purgatorial cleansing. To this end I note that our forebears, according to church documents, are in communion with us, even those in purgatory, and the latter can also pray for their progeny on earth, and in this sense, they can intercede on our behalf and do constitute a valid source of sacred power: they can safely be appealed to. Tlhagale (2018:127) regards ancestor veneration as ‘one of the major challenges to evangelisation in Southern Africa today’. The ancestors continue to elicit substantial

reverence admixed with a strong measure of trepidation, *de facto* more deliberation than Christ, who as noted above, is graded as less than God. There was no evidence of consulting *isangoma*-priests amongst my respondents.

Composition of local theologies is not an esoteric exercise, evidenced in Schreiter's book on *Constructing Local Theologies*, now in its tenth printing (1985/2002). Such an exercise for South Africa need not be a huge tome. Bujo (2003) writes a short theology of ancestors as the start of a new Christology and Ecclesiology, including Christological-Eucharistic Ecclesiology (2003:69-105). I have noted eight key areas where ATR needs to be challenged in relation to ancestors (see Chapter 9.6: Summary of Inculturation). Outright condemnation of the ancestor belief system is unlikely to have a material effect. Many Xhosa Catholics are unlikely to have absorbed the statement from the Bishops' Conference, which could form part of a special intervention.

This presentation needs to win the confidence of parishioners, parish priests, catechists, and bishops, who need to promote this as a formal programme for parishes where the Ancestral Belief System is found. There is a major issue at stake, a deep worldview is being scrutinised and tested and contested, so agreement and understanding and contribution of all involved needs to be solicited.

This initiative can be located as a distinct programme of the *Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa 2019*, within the focal area of Evangelization, directed to both adults and youth. It needs to be accepted by the South African Catholic Conference and sponsored by the Conference. It can be viewed as an extraordinary, country-wide intervention, of the nature of the Renew programme of the Nineties in South Africa.

### 10.3 Proclaiming Christ: A Special Pastoral Initiative

We can truly ask: 'Have the Xhosa Catholics come to know Jesus?' This fundamental question can be evocatively addressed to the Western world as well, which in turn can be realistically portrayed as being severely de-Christianised. The Xhosa Catholics have come to know God but not Jesus, in whom there is potential for an energising and life-changing relationship. This is one of the fundamental shortcomings of Christian mission to the Xhosa in Cape Town and from literature review, of much of Africa as well. We are still at a stage of basic evangelization

(or re-evangelization) and sorely need to introduce people to Jesus, to engender a deeper relationship with God in Christ and to preach a crucified and risen Christ. As noted elsewhere, a weak Christology critically undermines the Easter/Paschal mystery, which for the Catholic Church, constitutes the most crucial event in all of salvation history. The quality of conversion to Christ has been deficient, and the Christ image is significantly attenuated by ongoing socialisation by parents and family of their offspring into the ancestor cult, without introducing Christ as the preeminent source of sacred power. The family is a crucial source of tuition and socialisation. As in most cultures, most families generally do not convey Jesus to their young as the most important agent in the Christian way of life, judging from the substantially de-Christianized Western world. As noted elsewhere, Christ's title as *Son* of God demotes him to a lesser status and facilitates discounting him as the source of sacred power, and also permits the ancestors to supersede him.

One of the Bishops' Pastoral Plan's focal areas is evangelization, which avers that faith:

begins with hearing about Jesus and coming to know him personally. This personal relationship with Jesus is fundamental to the pastoral plan, and all other areas flow from it (South African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Pastoral Plan 2019:21).

Again, we need to preach and teach Christ who is supreme in all ways. There are scriptural quotations which demonstrate Christ's absolute supremacy. The Christ Event, summed up in his Cross and Resurrection, needs to be not only preached at Eucharistic celebrations, but taught as a special intervention in the form of a revival, and in general catechesis. This re-evangelization should aim at adults as well, as a special part of a Pastoral Plan initiative, to reach all age groups. In Dt 6:4-9 (also referred to in Mt 22:37, Mk 12:33-34, and Lk 10:27), God sets out his exclusive claim for humanity's prior attention; Yahweh, the only God, to love him with all the heart, with the need to remind children constantly of God (the New Jerusalem Bible reads 'you shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them'; 1985:232) and to promote his inimitability with every opportunity, to maintain a constant mindfulness of God. In Luke 14:26 (Mt 10:37) Jesus effectively claims this exclusive attention for himself ('No one who prefers father or mother (or anyone or anything) to me is worthy of me'), constituting a need for constant reflected consciousness of the Lord. Jesus reminds us that he is always with us (Mt 28:20).

The partial relationship of the parishioners with Christ which I discern from the interviews and literature, also undermines the sacramental foundation of the Church, the need for salvation, the operation of grace and the passage of conversion, and especially the saving action of Christ, notably his Cross and Resurrection, which is actualized in every Eucharist. These sacraments, instituted by Christ, assist the metanoia which transforms the person profoundly (Häring, in Häring and Fransen 1972:47).

Kinoti (in Mugambi and Magesa, (eds); 1989/2003:41) describes an East African Revival which commenced in the early 1930s. This included missionary work by Joe (sic) Church, who preached a very Christ-centred mission. The revival ‘found a Church largely in a state of apostasy but also a church longing for a vision of the real Christ’ (:66). Is this not what the Church in Cape Town needs, and in South Africa? In the Apostolic Constitution, *Veritatis Gaudium*<sup>84</sup> Pope Francis perceives a primary need for the Church to ‘embark upon a new stage of Spirit-filled evangelization’. This must ‘also reflect the different faces of the cultures and the peoples in which it is received and takes root’. Theological disciplines need to be imparted with their relations to other subjects, such as Canon Law, philosophy, and the anthropological sciences (:3). Thönissen (*Grace & Truth* 2021/2:65-89) presents a convincing argument for the primacy of the spiritual over the theological in evangelization, especially in seminaries.

This is possible through an extraordinary intervention in the nature of a revival, similar to the Catholic “*Renew*” programme of the Nineties in South Africa. Mallon discerns a need to start with kerygma, first proclamation, evangelization, as opposed to teaching or catechesis treating of a ‘multitude of doctrines’ (EG 35; Mallon 2016:161). Faith must be inspired first, and then followed by catechizing, which is faith seeking deeper understanding. The Church is unrealistically presuming that there is already a robust measure of faith to be built upon. Again, liturgy and the sacraments must be headed by evangelization, faith and transformation and then produce fruits (CCC 1072; see Mallon 2016:221). Evangelization can be simplified into one word, namely Jesus (Mallon 2016:29; this harmonises with the SACBC statement above from their Pastoral Plan 2019:21).

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<sup>84</sup> Pope Francis 2017:3; accessed via Google 2022/12/01,

So many people have never come to know Jesus personally (:29), as well as being convinced that they are wanting nothing. Jesus needs to be proclaimed anew (:30). The kerygma must be clearly heard, in order to impart an encounter with Jesus, or mission is condemned to sterility (:47; *EN* 6). The Church needs to be ‘called to come out from itself’ or remain sick, ineffective (Mallon 2016:51). *Redemptoris Missio* (*‘RM’* 1990, Pope John Paul II; a Vatican sourced missionary encyclical) encouraged a renewed kerygmatic proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ (Mallon 2016:83). In 2007, the Aparecida Conference, (:548) called for a new Pentecost, adding: ‘we cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings’.

The family, which various sources describe as core decision influencers (for example, the Aparecida Conference 2007: 114, 119), needs to be educated to impart the Christian faith, ideally to inculcate in young children a personal relationship with Jesus as best friend, elder brother, God and saviour, chief ancestor. In Cape Town, families are successfully schooling children in the Xhosa tradition, including the ancestor cult. The parish church catechists usually only begin to meet children for catechetics at about the age of 9, by which stage they have been socialized in the traditions of their indigenous culture. Other cultural groupings will also have experienced substantial formative viewpoints in cyberspace and school. As noted in the Overview above (page x), in Deuteronomy (6:4-7), we are enjoined to proclaim God’s words and ‘*You shall tell them to your children, and keep on telling them*’ at all times (NJB 1985:232; my italics). This is a powerful Biblical injunction.

If children can be correctly evangelised as well, by parents, mission will surely achieve its primary goal and elicit major spiritual and temporal benefits. Evangelization here means establishing a real relationship with Christ, rather than merely the content of faith. Pew research, between 2015 and 2019, reveals that USA youths (13-17), mostly identify with their parents faith, supporting the argument for evangelization by parents<sup>85</sup>. There is an urgent need to coach parents to evangelize their children.

Conversely, anecdotal evidence from interaction with youth in my parish unearths a convincing Christ image. This may be challenged later as the young get more drawn into ancestor rituals, but it is a factor worth acknowledging. The young Xhosa and Sotho males, all

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<sup>85</sup> Zenit News/Mexico City. 05 May 2023. Accessed 6 May 2023. Pew Research Centre.



of whom experience male initiation, with daily instructions from senior men during their period of seclusion, may also receive strong exhortations to keep alive traditional customs, notably ancestor veneration. The adults in my survey, generally appropriated the Christ image in a more secondarily manner.

The frequent Catholic lack of reaction to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species in the tabernacle of Catholic churches, which is truly our holy ground, suggests a limited sense or realisation of the presence of the Risen Jesus, and this is the case amongst the parishioners under review. Jesus is not automatically acknowledged as truly present in the tabernacle, the mystery does not induce general reflectiveness, or immediate or even subsequent attention that this profound presence should logically lead to.

Of obvious relevance is whether Sotho and Zulu Catholics have successfully appropriated the Christ image, and whether deeper evangelization is required. It is probable that the Sotho Catholics in Cape Town observe their faith in a manner comparable to the Xhosa. A short paper on Shona Culture and Traditions illustrates substantial complementarity with Xhosa traditions, lending credence to the generalizing potential of the thesis to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa<sup>86</sup>. (This sentence is repeated from Overview introduction). The experience of the Zulu evangelised by a variety of religious orders, including the Mariannhill mission, may differ. It is also probable that rural Black South Africans will be more imbued with the ancestral cult than their urban contemporaries.

#### 10.4 Proclaiming Christ as Chief Ancestor

Okure's statement of concern is repeated here as to the primacy of Christ, averring that Jesus must be seen in the hierarchy of the world of invisible beings, especially ancestors, before their dominance can be challenged (Okure 1998:6-7, quoting Milingo 1985:62). The scholars, Bujo, Magesa and Nyamiti, are enthusiastic endorsers of presenting Christ as the Proto-Ancestor who fulfils all the ideals of the ancestors and expectations of the African person. Christ needs to be seen as the one who in fact infinitely transcends the authentic ideals of the ancestors, as the one with absolute supremacy, but at the same time eminently accessible at

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<sup>86</sup> Marin theatre Company; [https://www.marintheatre.org/productions/the\\_convert/convert-shona-culture](https://www.marintheatre.org/productions/the_convert/convert-shona-culture)

an intimate level. Some argue that this title undervalues Christ, but it serves as a stepping-stone, a bridge to a fuller understanding of the mystery of Christ. Any anthropological title suffers from the defect of human weakness; for example, the title Jesus as King of Kings could also attract this criticism, as there have been many evil kings. My respondents mostly revealed a major preoccupation with the ancestors, even more than with Christ, accentuating the need to dialogue Christ with the ancestors, to both befriend and command the ancestral spirits. Christ needs to be appropriated as even closer than the most proximate ancestor (Nürnberger 2007:50). Tlhagale imagines the ancestors ‘as if riding on the shoulders of the afflicted and whispering into their ears’ (2018:160, 161), relaying the impression of constant presence, which is certainly my impression with some of my respondents. He sees the need to ‘demythicalise’ (sic) the ancestors, to disengage their association with divinity, to be located at their true level in the Christian hierarchy, to be perceived as well and truly subservient to Christ, which is one goal of my chapter on the ancestors and the communion of saints (Chapter 3:17 – 3:22). God in Christ needs to be the centre of devotion, Christ who is the centre of history. We need to look closer at the prevailing culture, not ignore it. Otherwise, the Bishop is worried that ‘the foundations laid by the missionaries are likely to crumble’ (:240). This is truly an alarming conclusion. For Bujo, Jesus as Proto-Ancestor and source of life ‘could become a veritable ferment for the transformation of a post-ancestral and post-colonial Africa’ (Bujo 1990:84; in Stinton 2004:145; my underlining).

A formal presentation of a well-prepared theological construction of Christ as Proto-Ancestor is recommended, again within the ambit of the Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church, within the particular focal area of “Evangelization”. Again, the authority of the Conference is necessary; the initiative needs to be seen to come from the top. Nürnberger (2007:49) argues that ancestors were well known when alive, far more intimately than Christ, and therefore we cannot hope to integrate Christ as part and head of the inner circle. He is pessimistic as to this Proto-Ancestor strategy. But not all scholars agree with qualification, and I feel it reinforces the prerequisite to introduce Christ as the First Ancestor, rather than endeavouring to proscribe ancestor conventions, as the early missionaries attempted to do. The ancestral belief system survived despite the efforts of some of the missionaries to abolish this perceived idolatry, and it remains a vigorous force in the life of the majority. The merger of communion of Saints with ancestral shades and proclaiming Christ as Proto-Ancestor is also a sign of

respect for beliefs which clearly have vestiges of the Holy Spirit within them. No culture or religion is outside of the Holy Spirit (O' Collins 2018:74), and the missionary encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990:28) insists that the Spirit affects not only individuals, but cultures and religions as well (O' Collins 2018:73). Religious workers who catechise children in the townships report that children today are generally well primed with basic ancestral worldviews. This is confirmed regularly in dialogue with young people in our catechism classes.

Bujo insists that the Proto-Ancestor model passes the scrutiny of Biblical theology and is consistent with Pauline Christology (in Stinton 2004:159), as well as in assisting an understanding of the mysteries of Christ (:160). Comparisons of Christ and the ancestors may result in some confusion, but Jesus and the apostles used analogies and figurative language with the attendant risks. Essentially, this model matches with Schreiter's concept of mapping a local theology, a formal interaction of text (Scripture and Tradition) and context (culture), producing a local (culturally acceptable) solution to a missiological problem (Schreiter 1985/2002:22ff). Fundamentally, the method accords with the See, Judge, and Act method. The contribution to universal theology is an enhanced awareness of the communion of the pilgrim Church with those who have preceded us, and entirely by God's graces, are present to us and praying for us. They present an optional extra, a real and fruitful source of sacred power provided by a generous God, who nevertheless requires foremost consideration. The heroic lives of the canonised Saints and the fully redeemed saints are deemed to proffer special merits and powers of intercession.

The narrative also needs the validation of priests convinced of the potential benefits. There is risk of misunderstanding and an initial suspicion on the part of the laity, in what could be a contentious area of inculturation. Laity are generally comfortable with the current dual religious system and may resent outside interference. Risks need to be engaged with or we can expect to continue with a diluted measure of Christianity, referred to by Okure as an impoverished religion, one which purports to achieve 'an irreconcilable attempt to serve two masters' or a third world theology, as she describes it (1998:18, 21). Jesus and the apostles used many metaphors in their preaching, at the risk of being misunderstood. Experiments with this initiative can reduce the risks and anticipate problems. The Mass is not the only

target of cultural dialogue, but inculturated Christology within catechesis and workshops is also a key area of evangelization.

Luzbetak (1988/2002:81) insists that pastoral problems be resolved with the 'soul of the community'; the people need to be consulted. The construction of a local theology cannot be simply a top-down endeavour, but it needs the input of those for whom the message is to be directed. The template may benefit from experimental interaction with the laity before full-scale implementation. It is a corrective theology, or proclamation, designed to modify the worldview of ancestors, needing the input of theologians, and requires the usual dialectic between text (Scripture and Tradition, theologians) and context (culture, laity), a to and from movement to refine and finalise the model. This does not have to be a voluminous, theologically expressed tome, but a practical model.

The authority of other 'local' sources of sacred power must also be comparatively situated and where necessary, subordinated to Christ. Schreiter (1985/2002:29) warns of cultural romanticism whereby it is assumed that there is no sin or error embedded in a culture. There will be challenges within the cultural worldview, we cannot shy away from this. In a survey of parishioners conducted as part of a global Catholic Church Synod due to be finalized in 2024, one response from an African parishioner was 'We get to practice our culture and rituals without discrimination from the church' (May 2022, comments from parishioners). It is interesting to note that the Pope's Synod on a Synod is a formal attempt to include listening to the laity on a grand scale. This thesis is developed from listening to laity. As noted elsewhere, members of the men's sodality (*Amadodana*, or the Catholic Men's Union), in one of the township parishes, admitted, perhaps slightly discomfited, that they do engage in rituals, adding that the Church has never spoken against them.

#### 10.5 A Christological Programme

Stinton (2004) postulates four broad Christological categories, African in essence, with which to develop inculturated Christological images. These include:

- Jesus as Life-giver (incorporating Healer and Traditional Healer, Master of Initiation).
- Mediator (notably Ancestor, but also priest, prophet and king), (Waruta 1989/2003:41).

- Loved One (Community Member, Family Member, Elder Brother, Mother, Lover, Friend). Affective imagery is conducive to devotion, love, a deep faith relationship.
- Leader (King/Chief, Liberator, Victor).

These Christologies were tested in Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda, with mixed results. For example, laity were concerned that some titles devalue Christ; however, I believe that they are valid and very valuable stepping-stones to constructing a convincing Christ-image, and do not have to harmonise with culture exactly, being special constructs, or local theologies, with appropriate theological conformity to the Christian tradition.

These African categories need to be examined for their utility in teaching and preaching Christ. Christ as Life-giver includes Christ as Healer, and the preoccupation with healing is of major interest to Africans, sought in traditional healers and today also in the AICs. This category needs to be scrutinised and amplified as part of inculturation of catechetics and preaching. Christology taught in African seminaries should include African categories with their constructs (ancestor, healer, master of initiation, chief/leader, liberator). Why are only Euro-centric categories presented? In fact, Christology seems to focus largely on the heresies, with little attempt to open up images such as elder brother, friend, lover, perhaps because they are of a more affective order. Affective images should not be dismissed as sentimental, because they can serve to develop a relationship of love, affection, support, rather than a technical description of what Christ is not (the heresies). Relationship is vital as the foundation, after which theological thoroughness makes more sense. Youth need affective images, such as a pictorial image of Jesus the good Shepherd holding a lamb against his heart or cheek. Walls volunteers that the incarnation of the Word must find its place in the cultural particulars of the people (Walls 2017:69).

Nyamiti (in Mugambi, Magesa (eds.) 1989/2003:22) discusses Sanon's inculturation of Jesus as the Head and Master of initiation (Sanon, 1982), surely a compelling Christology for Xhosa and Sotho Black Africans in Cape Town, for whom male initiation is a normal rite of passage which all young males undergo. All my male respondents were in favour of circumcision and the male initiation programme, although one averred he would have his sons medically circumcised and would carefully determine himself who would do the instructing of his sons when 'in the bush', in other words, during their period of seclusion.

The steady, post-confirmation exodus of youth from the Church demands a re-assessment of Catechetics and its chronic failure in the Archdiocese of Cape Town and elsewhere, including, it seems, the North Americas and Western Europe. Resolute thought needs to be directed to cultural categories that resonate with youth subcultures, as well as other culture-specific categories. According to Bujo (1986/2003:84):

I believe that a truly dynamic Christianity will only be possible in Africa when the foundation of the African's whole life is built on Jesus Christ, conceived in specifically African categories.

Waruta (1989/2003:44) opines that there has been very little effort to establish who Jesus Christ is for Africans, and that 'without a very clear concept of who Jesus is to African Christians, the Church in Africa may be standing on quicksand'. This observation is some twenty years old, and there has been more Christological work volunteered by African scholars, nevertheless, it surely pertains to the Catholic Church in South Africa.

Channels for transmitting African Christologies include catechesis, liturgy, theological institutes including seminaries, synods, and the Bishops conferences (:34, 35). Both grass-roots theology, derived from the pews or huts, as well as systematic or academic theologies are important (:35). Christologies need to be inserted into catechisms as well (:35), possibly in the Lumko publications. They need to be developed for pedagogical purposes. They also need to enter the magisterium teaching of the Church (:35). Hellenistic Christology may have been appropriate for the Graeco-Roman church, 'but needs to be reviewed in the African context with particular reference to the teaching and public ministry of Jesus' (Mugambi, in Mugambi, Magesa, (eds), 1989/2003:142). In the same collection Nthamburi (1989/2003:55), records how Jesus is depicted in Shona as a 'supreme universal ancestor spirit', the intermediary between God and people (:56; see Moyo 1983:97).

The international success of the Alpha programme in initiating a relationship with Christ and becoming involved in parish life, merits special consideration, and needs to become a matter of course in the townships, especially for the young confirmation candidates. Such programmes have begun in Khayelitsha, Cape Town.

## 10.6 Inculturating the Eucharist

Sipuka (2000) penned his thesis on the possibilities of inculturating Xhosa sacrifice to ancestors and the Eucharist as sacrifice, motivated by the desire to celebrate the faith using the cultural forms of the Xhosa people in a theologically correct manner. A new look at this sphere of inculturation is needed. Inculturation needs to present the Eucharist as a sacrifice, and a holy meal, and needs to use first-order language (symbols, pictures, metaphors, myth stories such as the Adam and Eve narrative; my underlining, as opposed to second-order language, technical, scientific, discursive) to describe the Mass and what it means for parishioners, to unlock the imagination of the parishioners. If the Mass is the centre of the Catholic liturgy, it demands determined and critical deliberation, and a correlation to Christ. A narrative text needs to be written as a general reference for pastors serving in African communities on how to describe the Mass and its real benefits, to render the Mass open to broader understanding and improved involvement in the Liturgy. I am aware of parishioners inducted as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, who are commissioned to perform Communion Services, who do not see the need to attend the Sunday Eucharist because they have conducted a Communion service and believe their Sunday obligation has been fulfilled.

Sipuka raised overwhelming attention from his congregants when he described the Eucharist as a sacrifice (2000:1; see also Chapter 1.4 above). There is substantial potential in this type of narrative for opening up the Liturgy to informed participation and a new appreciation of Christ. A model or template needs to be written that correlates Eucharistic sacrifice, the Mass, and Xhosa sacrifice in a way agreed with by theologians and laity, to attain a type of 'imprimatur', theologically acceptable nevertheless imminently pastoral, that can be used by clergy. I believe such a template could prove a very valuable exercise in fostering a basic understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice, as well as of assistance to parish priests preaching/teaching the Xhosa Catholics. Otherwise the Mass is seen as an event dominated by the priest, whereas the narration 'my sacrifice and yours' in the Eucharistic prayer, emphasizes the participation of all present. It is possible that the lack of lay involvement explains in part the low Mass attendance. In other Christian services members can be individually prayed over, pray over others, make improvised prayers, give testimonies, and sometimes preach. Since the Mass actualizes the Easter Mystery, the God's highest revelation

in the key Christ Event, attention needs to be given to explain this sacrament in a culturally acceptable way. According to one priest respondent the second part of the Mass after the liturgy of the Word is poorly understood by the Xhosa and Sotho congregants.

#### 10.7 A Basic Scripture Course

The primacy of Christ needs to be championed in the progress of Biblical revelation towards its fullness in the incarnation and the Christ Event. Taking into account the passion of laity for preaching (notably at funerals, Sodality meetings and services of the 'Seven Words'), a basic one-year course of some 20 to 25 sessions which span the relevant OT and NT passages, with short quotations and explanatory text, a type of Biblical theology locating the importance of the text in the life of the Church (such as the foundation of the Church on Peter), a link between the OT Passover and NT Passover, and the primacy of the Cross and Resurrection. Quotations can be tailored to memorising, to assist the delivery of the preachers. Christological and Ecclesial hermeneutics need to link the texts. The Biblical theology can be viewed as a form of catechesis. Several priests and religious sisters report that the OT is often over-emphasised by Xhosa funeral ministers, at the expense of Resurrection narratives. There is a general preference for the OT according to various literary sources, although my respondents did not unambiguously validate this with their contributions.

Further deepening courses can be offered depending on the interest in additional study. I believe this course should be opened to preachers of other denominations, without proselytism as a covert motive, but to aid a redirection of interpretation towards Christ in both OT and NT, as a challenge to the AICs and pastors, something which Tlhagale calls for (2018:141). I believe such a course would be well received by the 'Western' Catholic population as well.

#### 10.8 Catholic Social Teachings Studies ("CST")

CST represents inculturated theology, beyond the still relevant but timeworn categories of the poor, sick and sometimes the incarcerated, progressing into formerly theologically neglected areas of human experience, and new ones, such as artificial intelligence. Magesa (1989/2003:90) also proffers the social teachings of the Church as one solution to the serious socio-economic problems of today. He also maintains that the goal of transformation of the



face of the earth, lost after the first five centuries of the Church, was 'magisterially' recaptured towards the end of the nineteenth century, presumably referring to the milestone encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Many CST inspired documents have ensued, which has renewed the tradition of incarnating Christ into *all* areas of life. The Protestant term for incarnational theology is 'Public Theology'. A recent book (edited by Agang, S.B., Forster, D.A., Hendriks, H.J.) submits twenty-nine articles on the integration of faith and culture, applying Biblical principles to real life situations. Also, The Aparecida Conference (2007:152) advises that a very useful tool is the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.<sup>87</sup>

CST appears as a short course in the three-year theology course open to the laity, and a course in the Diocesan National Seminary. This contextual discipline assists in closing the divorce between faith and culture, one key to retrieving the relevance of Christ who came to make *all* things new (Rev 21:5), to assert his authority in all walks of life (Mt 28:18; 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me') formerly dominated by inadequate ideologies and according to Pope Francis, considerable diabolic influence, by Satan, who attempts to tempt Jesus by offering him control of all his (Satan's) worldly realms.

Seminarians who have little or no working experience need more immersion in the world of their parishioners, via workshops and a course in Catholic Social Teachings (CST). The Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples contends that priests should gain a detailed knowledge of CST (1989:31), however, I feel this may require specialized knowledge in technical subjects such as economics, bio-sciences and technical disciplines beyond the learning experiences of the priests. I hold that there is justification for specialisation in CST by interested priests, but ideally by lay theologians, persons who are in the world, with first-hand experience of worldly issues, who need to dialogue these with Catholic theology. I submit that the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council in the Archdiocese of Cape Town should search for laity willing to specialize in CST with view to disseminating this resource to the wider lay

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<sup>87</sup> Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church - vatican.va [https://www.vatican.va › justpeace › documents › rc\\_pc...](https://www.vatican.va/justpeace/documents/rc_pc...) 26 May 2006. accessed 2022/01/22

population, and to seminaries as well. Advances in stem cell research, DNA and similar applications represent areas of concern to moral theology, as do other developing theologies (such as in artificial intelligence, ethics on the Internet and social media), and need to be located within the boundaries of Catholic doctrine.

#### 10.9 Inculturation Studies; Missiological Anthropology

A course or lecture series in applied missiological anthropology or sociology is crucial to understanding the cultures of the parishioners, not only of the African cultures but for a broader understanding of the postmodern world as well. The studies of Luzbetak and Kraft on missiological anthropology and Christian witness are highly apposite, and the former's book could be used as a basic reference. Bate (2002) also proffers an imminently practical resource for this purpose and can be used in tandem with Luzbetak. Luzbetak (1988/2002:374) advocates the need for anthropology to appreciate the many contexts of sacred Scriptures and to advance a two-thousand-year-old tradition which comprises both constant truths, and their variable forms; namely their expression in a plurality of forms within the trappings of history. The course needs to explore the relevant cultures, including the youth culture. The emphasis is on practical anthropology, and I believe working through Bate's book (2002) is a pragmatic method of composing and presenting this course and of profiling the various cultures within a diocese. The Catholic Church and other Christian churches have lost many parishioners, as well as the continued experience of losing youth each year after they are confirmed. The Aparecida Conference (2007:477) insists that faith is only properly absorbed when it is related to the receiving people's culture, highlighting the importance of familiarity with the ethnic experience of the receiving society.

Philosophy is now not the only handmaid of theology, but the social sciences play a vital role. There is much to be gained by a new prominence of the social sciences, with options for specialisation in economics for those who are drawn to the dense field of commerce and subjects such as business ethics. Whiteman (2003, in Bevans, ed., 2012:59), contends that in today's context of cultural diversity, the insights from anthropology are even more necessary, because '(C)ultural diversity is heightened, not flattened' in the global village (:59), in other words, knowledge of the new cultures is even more imperative, and boundaries between different cultures and sub-cultures continue to be important and need to be understood. This

author traces the development of the relationship between anthropology and mission. He notes the regrets of missionaries who realised how much they would have benefitted from anthropology before spoiling opportunities and making mistakes in their missionary work (:77).

He also upholds the contention of Eugene Nida (a well-known anthropologist) in conversation, that in the mid-nineties, 'missionaries were more poorly trained today in the area of cross-cultural understanding than any other period of mission history' (Whiteman 2003:82). This assessment is surely still valid today. A circumspect attitude towards the receiving culture, the expectations of an imminent Parousia (cultural study wastes scarce time), the shorter period on average missionaries are spending on mission in a specific mission area (the author does not elaborate on this observation, so it is unclear as to its wider application), and the expectation that anthropology deals with the exotic, not the practical, are reasons for the current lack of missionary enthusiasm for anthropology (:83, 84). Theological anthropology and anthropological theology enable the divine and human to be brought into more conclusive focus (Gittins, 2005; in Bevans (ed.); 2012:135). Cultural analysis examines the meaning and purpose of life inspired not by a competitive spirit but a conviction that the interests of both partners are served (:157). The Gospel is expressed in cultural terms and those who adhere to it uncritically commit idolatry (Smith, W.C. 1987, in Gittins:2005:158). I proffer an example, namely how the uncritical appropriation of the Bible, with its own concealed contexts, could justify patriarchy and slavery as acceptable social institutions from Paul's letters (for example, where Paul advises slaves to be obedient to their masters in Ephesians 6:5-8). This author makes the telling observation that the translation of the Bible into the vernacular did not serve to persuade the indigenous people to think like the West, but they came to have the mind of Christ within their own culture (:78). However, in my sample, I discover clearly that the Christ image is theologically and pastorally faulty and not conducive to producing radical commitment and an energizing dynamism. I have noted elsewhere that this detection applies more widely, and can be generalised to Southern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, with due caution.

Mugambi (in Mugambi, Magesa 1989/2003:142) asserts that Hellenistic Christology may have been apposite for the Graeco-Roman Church, but needs to be reappraised in the

African context with specific reference to the public ministry of Jesus. If Vatican II marked a new era for the Church entering the real world, the Church needs to prepare priests and religious for the *real* world and to register a better balance between theoretical and practical or pastoral theology. We are dealing with embodied people, not disembodied, abstract agents who are experts in philosophy and theology. Parish priests need to be in the world, understand it, but not be of the world. They need to ask why the Church is where it is, and how to better evangelise. At present, we seem to be immovable in our methodology, which is being found genuinely wanting in the pastoral arena. Mass attendance confirms this negative assessment, as well as the many Catholics who only attend Church services long enough to see their children baptised.

There needs to be a resumption of the theory and practice of inculturation, which seems to have lost its former momentum; this especially at the broader level, such as Christology. The alternative is to continue with a situation of partially converted people living out of two religious systems, and not appropriating the full benefits of the Gospel because of lack of dialogue between faith and culture, thereby failing to appeal to the faith imagination. A formal Christological programme, which presents African Christological categories, as noted above, can surely be used by preachers in presenting the Christ image to the Xhosa.

The Catholic Church and other Christian churches have lost many parishioners, as well as the continued experience of losing youth each year after they are confirmed. Again, the Aparecida conference asserts that faith is only adequately lived when it enters deeply into the cultural bedrock of the people. (Aparecida Conference 2007:477). The course programme should include a survey of the postmodern world and its key characteristics, since this is the very cultural 'air' that the Western world inhales.

#### 10.10 Recommendations for the Seminary Programme

This is not a systematic critique of the seminary system in South Africa, but an articulation of aspects of seminary studies which relate critically to Christian mission to the receiving cultures within each cultural zone.

Seminaries need to ensure that Pastoral Theology's status is substantially enhanced, to avoid the danger of producing priests who smell of theologians rather than of the sheep (Pope

Francis calls for priest who can serve the people; See book *With the Smell of the Sheep*, Pope Francis, 2017), priests who understand the practical context of the people they are to serve. Other-worldly (theoretical) theology needs to be balanced by practical theology. Stuart Bate has authored a book entitled *“Foundations of Pastoral Theological and Ministry. Doing research in contextual and practical theology”* (2011: second edition), which qualifies as a resource for a course in pastoral theology. South African Professor Christina Landman points out that Practical Theology is the fastest growing discipline in South African universities (christina-landman practical theology; accessed 2022/01/22). The status of pastoral theology needs to be firmly upheld and not undertaken as a necessary evil to be endured with, as result of lack of awareness of the crucial value of practical theology. My personal seminary experience discerned that theoretical theology was viewed as far more glamorous than practical theology. Some might that argue we are paying the price for this serious imbalance.

There is a danger, in serving the indigenous people, that homilies may tend more to theory and theology rather than a grounding in real life, resulting in disembodied presentations which skirt real life situations and focus on theoretical theology. Knowledge of the context expedites rewarding preaching, where preaching is seen as the interaction of context (real life) and text (Scripture and Tradition), thereby producing a message. Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium* 2013:165) calls for the kerygma to be preached with love, joy, and liveliness ‘which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical’. The six-month internship required of all Catholic seminarians in South Africa is a practical step towards the much-needed integration of theory and practice. Mallon (2016:141) challenges the ‘hyper-intellectualised environment’ of Catholic seminaries which fail to highlight preaching. Thönissen (2021/22) critiques the emphasis on theology in seminaries at the expense of spirituality. In a thesis (2014), he refers to the ‘dense academics’ of seminaries, of cramming in new information. He lobbies for the precedence of spirituality over academics (:66), whereas I have focussed on cultural relevance, and real-life issues and the essential need for a robust faith. We acknowledge the possibility that evangelization has suffered because seminarians themselves have been inadequately evangelized and trained to convert. Thönissen’s insight into the need for the focus on deepening spirituality needs careful consideration, applying both to seminarians and to laity.

Missiology appears to be seen as intellectually less appealing and underrated in seminaries and is sometimes omitted in the curriculum. This glaring (careless?) omission may occur even though the Church regards itself as missionary by its very nature! The missionary document *Ad Gentes* (1965:16), calls for attention to culture and appreciation of the culture of the homeland of the seminarians. Contextual or inculturational theology, which is inductive by nature, starting with the context or culture rather than with Scripture and Tradition, sometimes appears in courses on missiology, but is assigned a low priority. Missiology should embrace the mechanics of the 'See, Judge, Act' method, and the similar Pastoral Circle methodology, tools which promote the understanding of evangelization as the 'unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man's (sic) concrete life, both personal and spiritual' (*EN* 29). The methodology of inculturation needs to be taught. Mission should address 'different situations constantly being realised' (:29), by commencing with the real-life context first, and Scripture and Tradition second. This is the heart of inductive theology.

The Aparecida Conference (2007:323) offers this counsel:

At the same time, the seminary must offer a serious and deep intellectual formation in the field of philosophy, the human sciences, and especially in theology and missiology, so that the future priest learns to proclaim the faith in all its integrity, faithful to the magisterium of the Church, with critical attention, alert to the cultural context of our time and the major currents of thought and behavior (sic) that he will have to evangelize. (my underlining).

A course in missiological anthropology, which highlights the uniqueness of the receiving culture, is strongly recommended. Chapter 10.7 above elaborates on this topic. The social sciences also need be seen the handmaid of theology, not only philosophy. This could be part of the missiology programme but ideally should qualify as a course on its own. It should incorporate the study of Christological models relevant to Africa (Christ as ancestor, healer, chief, master of initiation), or these local Christologies should be inserted into the Christology curriculum. These are vitally important categories and should not be overlooked. At very least, they will prepare future pastors in understanding the context of their ministry. The model of Christ the Chief Ancestor should be fully explored in this course or in missiology. What is viewed as too threatening at the broader national level can surely be comfortably

inserted into the seminary study programme. Lecturers at seminaries should share their lecture notes to enhance their presentations, as it seems to me the missiology lecture notes are freshly initiated each time a new lecturer is appointed, which also diminishes continuity.

In as far as homiletics involves interacting theology with real life, the anthropological character of the receiving culture needs to be effectively understood to sway the heart of the people. Otherwise, newly trained priests are liable to preach more on theology than on real life, and end up skirting the existential needs of their flock, as well as overlooking their unique experiences as a society of people sharing a common culture.

Many influential works stress attention to culture and its relationship to Christianity, the needs of local parishioners which are not addressed by Euro-centric mission, and that mission is not tied exclusively to one nation or culture, and that inculturation enriches the universal Church (*Ad Gentes*, 1965, missionary encyclical from Vatican; Walls 2017:105; *Gaudium et Spes*, a Vatican II document on *The Church in the Modern World*, 1965). God's communication is not only in the form of Neo-Scholasticism (Schreiter 2018:197).

A course in African Traditional Religion should be offered, ideally a comparative module contrasting it with Christian theology. Short talks by indigenous Christians on various rituals may serve to integrate theory with practice, to provide insight as to the current expressions of ATR, adapted as contemporary practices of inherited customs. A letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue<sup>88</sup> (1988) endorses the need to understand traditional religions. Cardinal Arinze, the author of this letter, required all seminaries, ecclesiastical institutes and houses of religious formation in Africa to implement this recommendation. They have issued guidelines for such a course<sup>89</sup>.

The 2019 Pastoral Plan of the Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference could be usefully workshopped by seminarians, ahead of their emergence from a somewhat monastic, isolated world, and their entry into the real world. The SACBC challenging of *isangoma*-priests needs

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<sup>88</sup> Letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican City, to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (Rome, 25 March 1988). President of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). 25<sup>th</sup> March 1988. In Okure, van Thiel et alii, eds.1990.

<sup>89</sup> A GUIDE FOR TEACHING: African tradition Religion; Islam; Interreligious Dialogue. 2004.

to be part of Seminary education, a highly pertinent topic for future priests, as well as their pronouncements on ancestors. In the working document of the Synod on Synodality (2023), *IL* (2023:59, 21) asserts that seminarians need to be instructed in 'synodal style and mentality'. Future priests are clearly being directed to collaborative ministry, and greater openness to the laity.

#### 10.11 New Theology: A Challenge to Theologians

The interaction of primal religion (such as African Traditional Religion), and Africa's current context with the Christian faith, could produce a veritable treasure of new theology, setting out to answer the questions of the newer Christians. African students should be encouraged to explore these areas and be part of the process of new theologising, as well as inculturating the faith. Africa has become the new Christian heartland, with major implications for future theology. There is a need to identify indigenous students with proficiency in one or more African languages (and French, as much theology is written in French) to study culture and mission to doctoral level, scholars immersed in both the local worldview and the Christian worldview. Sarpong (1975, in Okure, Van Thiel, et alii, eds. 1990:110), some 50 years ago, called for such scholars to 'evolve a completely (genuine) African Christian theology'.

Walls calls for a reorientation of theology to Christian mission, to serve the needs of evangelization, not for academic pursuit (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011:209). The Enlightenment worldview that has shaped Western theology for several centuries is inadequate for Christian mission today (Bediako in Burrows, Gornik and McLean, eds. 2011:224). 'Disciplined, scholarly theology must now venture where the informal theologians have led...' (Walls, 2008:3). We need theologians *and* parishioners to inculturate the Gospel. Several generations of secular ideology have diminished the ability of Western scholars to manage the diversity, resilience and enthusiasm of religion in the non-Western world (Walls 1996/2002:150). Mission studies need to interact with the complexities of the Southern continents (:151). The world of learning is also a mission field, calling for 'the traditional attributes of devotion, perseverance, and sacrifice' (1996/2002:152). On the African theologian, Kwame Bediako (d2008; from Ghana), Walls (2017:154) writes:



He did more than anyone else to persuade mainstream Western theologians and mainstream Western theological institutions that African theology was not an exotic minority specialization but an essential component in a developing global discourse.

Bediako drew attention to informal, implicit theology culled from the people (Walls 2017:153). This thesis draws from the experiences of ordinary Xhosa Catholic.

These rites of passage, confirmation in the Western tradition, and Male Initiation in the Xhosa tradition, have the potential to be understood in terms of Catholic Christianity where confirmation is the sacrament through which a young Catholic becomes an adult in their faith. The idea that these two rituals convey similar meaning could open dialogue between practitioners of ATR and Catholicism to explore recognition of and participation in both rituals. These are the type of challenges that can be addressed by specialized African theologians.

As noted above (chapter 9.1), the Xhosa and Sotho youth in Cape Town need to be enlightened as to the differences between a cultural wedding and a sacramental wedding, as well as eschatology which sets out what transpires after death, as opposed to simply becoming an ancestor. This should be part of catechetics as well.

APPENDIX I: INVENTORY OF BASIC PROPOSALS (For the development of Catholic Missionary Theology and Action)

**A. Papers/narratives to be written.**

1. Merger of Communion of Saints theology with Ancestor Belief System, to highlight similarities, differences, challenges, in a respectful way. To be used as a programme of say 8 lectures. Paper to be approved by SACBC. Input from laity as well. As a special intervention, as with the Renew programme of the Nineties in South Africa.
2. A paper introducing Christ as the Chief Ancestor, also to be used as a steppingstone, a means of inculturation, of Christ taking flesh in the African culture. As special intervention. To be presented as a faith instruction. Also to be used as part of Christology course in seminaries.
3. Text to locate Christ in other African categories, such as Master of Initiation, Healer, Chief, as a special intervention, and input for seminaries.
4. Text for use in preaching and catechizing which contrasts Eucharist as sacrifice with Xhosa sacrifice. Establish a type of template which all priests can use. Refer to Bishop Sipuka.
5. Prepare notes for Scripture Course for laity, with Christological and ecclesial bias.
6. Notes which show clearly differences between a Mass, Communion Service, Praise and Worship Service, Healing Service, other services at AICs, spirit churches, prosperity churches. An aid to being aware of differences and able to explain them to parishioners, in order that they may appreciate the real differences between these services, and their efficacy.
7. Establish a procedure for deliverance rituals; advertise Catholic resources for dealing with evil. Advertise availability of diocesan exorcist.
8. For future theologians, deep studies which dialogue culture with faith.
9. Prepare a course in African Religion. There is a special guide from the Vatican on this topic.

10. Prepare a programme for Missiological Anthropology, stressing the practical side, profiling the basic cultural groupings in the Diocese.
11. Prepare a programme for a Catholic healing service. Refer to booklet issued by Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Prayers for Healing*. September 14, 2000.
12. Outline a plan for a Christian Revival.
13. Compile as working document to be used by lecturers in missiology.
14. Construct a curriculum to tutor families to evangelize their children, possibly part of the required baptism programme which parents are required to attend before their offspring are baptized. I also present this recommendation below (B. 5:354)

## **B. Extraordinary Interventions by South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC).**

The SACBC needs to examine the possibility of a series of bold, extraordinary interventions of the nature of the Renew Programme of the early nineteen nineties in Southern Africa as a whole.

1. This would include a presentation to laity immersed in African Tradition, a teaching which seeks to merge the Communion of Saints Theology with the Ancestor Belief System. This should derive from a manageable paper prepared for use by priests. The challenges presented by this are noted in my thesis and need to be respectfully and tactfully presented.
2. Another bold intervention is contemplated which presents Christ as the Proto Ancestor, to laity but also as an input to catechesis. Again, a lengthy document is not envisaged. It should also be part of a seminary curriculum in Christology or Missiology.
3. A third intermediation is the proclamation of Christ using African categories, of a manageable length (Healer, Chief, Liberator, Master of Initiation). This too should feature in the seminary curriculum.
4. A further challenge, less controversial than the first three proposals, is to present a narrative which describes the Eucharist as sacrifice, drawing on the experience of Bishop Sipuka. This can be used by priests in teaching and preaching. This is envisaged as a succinct document which can be used as a template by priests, not an extensive thesis.
5. A very useful intervention is to develop a family programme which enables parents to evangelize their children and grandchildren, noting how assiduously and effectively Black Christians are handing down African custom to their progeny, whilst other cultural groupings appear to provide minimal faith and knowledge input to children. A plan for the Family Desk. (See Appendix, A. 14:353 above).
6. A basic Scripture course of one year in duration will surely be well received by all laity, one with a strong Christological and ecclesial hermeneutic. Other denominations can be invited to these presentations, without a covert motive of conversion, but to centre Biblical interpretation on Christ, as well as the Holy Spirit, who nonetheless ensures the

fullness of revelation in Christ, the Son of God. The need to challenge AICs on their marginalization of the Christ figure, as noted in my thesis, is another reason for inviting other denominations. The other denominations can be alerted to the ecclesial 'bias' of the curriculum!

7. A Spirit-filled programme of re-evangelization, an enthusiastic proclamation of the basic kerygma and Jesus, one which coheres with today's ways and customs, relevant to our current context. This surely is a challenge arising from the 2019 SACBC Pastoral Plan.
8. Via the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council to discover willing laity to specialise in CST, with the purpose of disseminating CST to laity and to seminaries.

### **C. Seminary**

1. Mandatory course in African Traditional Religion with a comparative perspective. Include theology of Communion of Saints in contrast to Ancestor Belief system. Say 12 lectures, assisted by short presentations of the nature and manner of key rituals by indigenous laity. There is a special Vatican guide available which can be consulted in compiling the course.
2. Course in Missiological Anthropology. Include SACBC critique of isangoma-priest. Emphasis on practical anthropology. Book by Stuart Bate and Luzbetak as basic sources; profile basic cultural groupings in Diocese. Say 12 lectures.
3. Compulsory Missiology course. To include African Christology, Christ as Chief Ancestor, Master of Initiation, Chief, Liberator/Saviour. Lectures to share each other's notes, to move to a well-defined curriculum, as opposed to starting from scratch each time a new lecturer is appointed. (It appears that such is the improvised nature of this course in the National Seminary). Theory and practice of inculturation. See, Judge, Act methodology; the Pastoral Circle. This technique could also be covered in the Pastoral Theology Course.
4. Study the template which contrasts the Eucharist as sacrifice with African sacrifice, with view of latter being a stepping-stone to fuller appreciation of the Eucharist.
5. Mandatory course in Pastoral Theology (see Stuart Bates' booklet).
6. Know how to distinguish between various church services as in A6 above.
7. Study the Catholic resources which cope with evil.
8. Introduction to CST.
9. Introduction to the SACBC Pastoral Plan, 2019, and to Synod on Synodality (2023/24).
10. Exposure to the Alpha programme and its introduction to the African community. Such a programme has already been implemented in Khayelitsha, utilizing Xhosa mentors.

#### **D. Other Bodies**

1. Liaise with national catechetics coordinator on matters of culture (youth culture included) to be considered in instruction books, as well as need to instil faith, not only to impart knowledge.
2. There is a compelling argument for an introduction to CST in the youth catechetical programme. Consider integrating nationally provided catechetical material with some CST issues such as business, politics, biology (e.g. in vitro fertilization), ethics on the Internet, artificial intelligence; a basic introduction should be sufficient. Catechetical material should therefore include basic CST teachings, to bring faith into vital categories of human living for young adults as well. Future Lumko publications should also include such material.
3. The coordinating body can also examine a programme which exhorts and directs parents to evangelize their children, flowing from the baptism instructions which parents are required to attend before their children are baptized. It is well suited to compiling such a schedule, possibly as part of the more general baptism instruction.
4. Liaise with AIC representatives, if possible, on Christ-centred evangelization. Discuss mutual sharing in Bible studies and theological courses.
5. Via the Archdiocesan and Diocesan Pastoral Councils in South Africa, to discover willing laity to specialise in CST, with the purpose of disseminating CST to laity, and to seminaries. Expand mission to all of lived reality.
6. Liaise with Alpha programme coordinators.
7. Possible liaison with family and clan members whose men are undergoing adult initiation for priest to visit Catholic initiates. A colleague of mine with experience in Kenya attests

that Catholic priests were allowed to celebrate Mass for Masai initiates during their seclusion.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Conversation with Fr G. Mawa, Apostle of Jesus order, 10/07/2023.



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## Approval Notification - Full Committee Reviewed Protocol for Rev Pierre Goldie



14 April 2021

Rev Pierre Goldie (218069806)  
School of Rel Phil & Classics  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Goldie,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00002345/2021

**Project title:** A Critical Discernment of the Image of God amongst the Urban isiXhosa-speaking Parishioners within the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town in relation to other sources of Sacred Power, in a context of ongoing change.

**Degree:** PhD

### Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 31 March 2021 to our letter of 03 March 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year until 14 April 2021

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully



.....  
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/dd

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
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Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587  
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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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