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Understanding and Dealing With Ancestral Practices in Botswana

Stanley P. Chikwekwe
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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH ANCESTRAL PRACTICES IN BOTSWANA

by

Stanley P. M. Chikwekwe

Adviser: Bruce L. Bauer

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

D.Min. Dissertation

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Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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Problem

Ancestral and other traditional practices continue to trouble the Seventh-day Adventist Church in several parts of the world. It is not uncommon for believers to seek ancestors' mediation whenever they are faced with problems. Most church members deny that ancestral and other traditional practices exist within the church, whereas others do not want to discuss the issue of traditional practices because of fear of being labeled superstitious. The denial is due to the way the church has handled ancestral practices in the past. Because most members do not know what to do when problems come, they revert to ancestral practices.

Method

This study discussed ancestral practices and how they relate to culture. It also addressed contextualization and explored ways of replacing traditional practices with biblically accepted functional substitutes. The materials used were gathered through personal interviews and from several libraries in North America and in Botswana.

Conclusions

Contrary to past hopes, problems related to ancestral and other traditional practices will not disappear by themselves because these practices satisfy psychological as well as spiritual needs among those who practice them. The church should openly discuss these issues and become aggressive in finding Christian replacements for these practices. Members should become involved in this process.

If proper principles of contextualization are followed, it is possible to find meaningful replacements which are biblically acceptable. The process of arriving at appropriate Christian functional substitutes should center around Scripture and dependence upon the Holy Spirit for guidance. It is after appropriate functional substitutes have been found that the church can effectively help people who are affected by ancestral and other traditional practices.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH ANCESTRAL PRACTICES IN BOTSWANA

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

To properly introduce the paper, the chapter is divided in two sections. The first presents the traditional parts of the introduction while the second introduces the land of Botswana.

Introduction to the Dissertation

This part of the introduction addresses the purpose, justification, description, and delimitations of the dissertation. Further, it defines the terms, discusses the obstacles encountered, and the methodology followed during research.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation was to develop a program to understand and deal with the problem of ancestral practices among Adventist Christians in Botswana.

Justification for the Dissertation

It is not uncommon for committed Christians to consult ancestors during times of distress, sickness, or death. My first shock came more than fifteen years ago when a dependable Seventh-day Adventist elder consulted a spirit medium to find out the cause of his child's death. This experience shook the faith of many church members in the area.

Even more surprising was that many church members rationalized the action of the elder as necessary due to the circumstances surrounding his child's death.

Recently, a church leader was said to have discreetly sought the prayers of ancestors to help him deal with problems he was facing. In addition, church members who have not given in to ancestral worship have been victims of various threats from non-Christian family members. As demonstrated in this paper, the problem of ancestral practices is deeply rooted among many Africans and affects all classes of people.

Furthermore, as a result of the closeness between African cultures and ancestral practices, it is important that meanings and significance of traditional practices be discovered. In addition it is necessary to develop Christian functional substitutes for these practices in order to help Christians avoid reversion to the traditional practices.

A study such as this was necessary to determine to what extent ancestral problems affect the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This study enhanced my understanding of the situation, and this dissertation allows me to suggest ways to improve the church's handling of members who engage in ancestral practices and to design appropriate functional substitutes for these. In addition, insights gained maybe applied to other African cultural issues.

Description of the Dissertation

Most of the resources used in this project came from the libraries of Andrews University, Notre Dame University, Waterford Township, and other libraries around North America and Botswana. Chapter 2 describes the issues involved in ancestral

worship. Chapter 3 looks at the reactions of Christian churches toward ancestral practices and then shows some results of those reactions, including the rise of African independent churches. Chapter 4 looks at the origin and concept of contextualization. Chapter 5 suggests some biblical substitutes for ancestral practices. Chapter 6 gives a brief summary, a conclusion, and then recommendations of caring for new converts and finding dynamic functional substitutes for ancestral practices.

Delimitations of the Dissertation

The problem of ancestral practice is not confined to Botswana. It is a problem affecting the whole of Africa. However this dissertation limits itself to issues of ancestral practices in Botswana and selected parts of southern Africa, even though the principles of the issue and the solutions thereof may be applicable elsewhere in Africa.

In addition, the issue of ancestor worship is a broad subject, all of which could not be covered in this dissertation. The issues discussed in the dissertation were selected on the basis of need and relevance to the area under consideration. Many more issues remain to be explored.

Definitions of Terms

Ancestral practices: All practices related to ancestors including worship, and veneration.

Modimo: The name attributed to the almighty God.

Badimo: Title designating ancestors and other spirits.

Batswana: Plural form for the people of Botswana (singular form is *Motswana*). The terms *Tswanas* and *the Tswana people* are used interchangeably with Batswana.

Bantu: African peoples who occupy parts of east, central and southern Africa.

Obstacles

Most of the obstacles encountered in this research occurred while I was on my research field trip in Botswana. First, I had to obtain a permit from the office of the state president, something I was not aware of until I got to Botswana. This proved to be a difficult and frustrating task. I finally discovered an Adventist Church member who worked for the office of the president and was willing to assist me in securing the permit. Once the permit was finally secured, I was faced with the problem of transportation to the locations for research and interviews.

Another problem was that most people were not willing to admit their involvement or encounters with ancestral practices. However, once the people were assured that the information gathered was not to be used against them, and that their names would not be revealed, they became more open to discuss ancestral practices and its effects on the community.

Distance between designated places of interviews was another obstacle. This called for delays due to transport problems. Finally, some people I had interviews with did not meet their appointments on time, causing delays or even cancellation of interviews.

Methodology

Once the proposal was accepted, a review of literature was conducted. Further, a research field trip to Botswana was undertaken. During the field trip both informal and formal interviews were conducted. Informal interviews served to determine the relevance and direction of the project, while the formal interviews gathered data. Out of the thirty people scheduled for interviews, twenty-five were actually interviewed, providing more than 300 responses.

About Botswana

Botswana is a landlocked country located in the southern part of Africa, about 360 kilometers north of Johannesburg. Its size is 581,730 square kilometers (224,606 square miles), slightly smaller than the state of Texas, 691,201 square kilometers (266,874 square miles).[1] It is surrounded by Zambia to the north, Zimbabwe to the north east, Namibia to the west, and South Africa to the south. Due to its development in the last twenty years, Botswana has become a conference center in southern Africa, hosting business as well as religious conferences.

Land and Climate

Botswana comprises a large plateau with an average altitude of 1,010 meters (3300 feet) above sea level. It is hilly in the east and mostly flat in the rest of the nation. The east part of the nation is the most fertile and is residence to about 80 percent of the

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[1]*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1995 international ed., s. v. "Botswana."

population. Some parts in the north have light forests while the central and the southwest parts of the country are covered by the Kalahari desert, the second largest in Africa, only second to the Sahara.[1] The country has a dry subtropical climate. The weather is hot in summer with temperature ranging between 86 and 94 degrees Fahrenheit (30 and 34 degrees Celsius). Winters are quite cold with temperatures falling below freezing at night.[2] January is the hottest month with temperatures reaching 94 degrees Fahrenheit (34 degrees Celsius) while July is the coldest month with temperatures of up to 33 degrees Fahrenheit (0.5 degrees Celsius).[3]

People

The projected 1995 population of Botswana was 1,528,000, with a 3.5 percent annual growth.[4] The people groups of Botswana include 94 percent Bantu, 3.4 percent San (Bushmen), and 2.6 percent others. The Bantu people comprise eight major tribes: the Tswana, Kalanga, Yeyi, Herero, Ndebele, Shona, Lozi-Subiya, and Pedis.[5] Among these Bantu groups, the Tswana tribe--which includes many different groups with slightly varying cultures--is the largest.

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[1]*The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s. v. "Botswana."

[2]Ibid.

[3]Jason Lure, *Enchantment of the World: Botswana* (Chicago: Children Press, 1994), 10-11.

[4]Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 126.

[5]Ibid.

Economic Development

Botswana has one of the most rapidly growing economies in Africa with per capita income of $3200. The country was considered very poor before independence in 1966, but has since been developing fast. Botswana's chief exports are diamonds, beef, hides and skins, textiles and other mineral products.[1] In 1995 the country had an estimated 15,000 kilometers (9300 miles) of roads, most of them being paved recently.[2] The estimated number of airports in 1995 was 81,[3] with 3 major ones serving several urban areas including the capital, Gaborone, Francistown, and Maun.

Education and Health

In 1995 the literacy rate for males was 80.5 percent, and women at 59.9 percent. For the total population the rate of literacy is about 70 percent with most children age 15 and above being able to read and write. On the other hand, health continues to be a challenge. In 1996 life expectancy for men was 44.94 years, 47.11 years for women, and 46.01 for the country. The Infant mortality rate is 54.2 for every 1000 infants.[4]

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[1] *The Encyclopedia Americana.*

[2] Ibid.

[3] *CIA World Factbook,* 1993 ed., s. v. "Botswana."

[4] Ibid.

Religion

There are four major religions in Botswana. These include, Christianity, tribal religions, the Bahai faith, and Islam.[1]

Christianity

Christians (Protestants, Catholics, and Independent Church members) comprise 62 percent of the population in Botswana. Among the Christians, 47.7 percent are active in their churches, while 52.3 percent are nominal. The Tswana group has more Christians than any other group in Botswana because they were "the first Bantu people in Africa to respond to the gospel."[2] Several of their tribes were converted in the nineteenth century through the work of the London Missionary society.

Tribal Religions

Among the population of Botswana, 37 percent practice tribal religions. Some Christian groups also engage in these practices. The majority of the San, Yeyi, and Mbukushu people practice tribal religions.[3]

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[1]Johnstone, 126.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

Other Religions

Adherents of the Bahai faith and Islam make up 1 percent of the population in Botswana and are growing rapidly.[1] The majority of the population who practices these religions is of Indian and Middle Eastern descent. However, a few indigenous people are becoming attracted to the Bahai faith and to Islam.

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[1]Ibid.

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS VIEWS AND ANCESTRAL PRACTICES

Ancestral practices are very much a part of daily life in Botswana. In this chapter the beliefs of the Batswana are explored and their ancestral practices described.

Religious Views of the Batswana

This section considers how traditional and ancestral beliefs and practices relate to culture. It also analyzes the concept of God among the Batswana.

Ancestral Practices and Culture

The issue of ancestral practices should not be looked at in isolation from life and culture in general. In African traditional settings, these practices facilitate the understanding and interpretation of life. Ancestral practices provide meaning and answers to the complex issues of life. When death or other social and community problems occur, explanations are sought, and usually answers are obtained from ancestors or within the realm of the ancestral spirit world. The ancestral practices not only permeate all areas of life, but are also deeply rooted among many African people groups. They affect the rich, the poor, the educated, and the uneducated alike.[1] Batswana are also

[1]Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 13.

affected by this problem. As a result, people are always looking for the best ways of keeping the ancestors happy so that the ancestors might provide the people with answers and protection.

It is impossible to systematically separate traditional African religion and culture from everyday life. Kwesi Dickson points this out:

> In African society culture and religion are not easily separated. Religion is a regular accompaniment in a person's life: the chief's role, the relations between members of a society, morality, the stages in a person's life (birth, puberty and marriage, and death), the practice of medicine, architecture, warfare, traditional education, etc.: all these areas are not dissociated from religion in African society.[1]

In traditional African society, religion determines who and what a person is, what he or she does, and when and how it is done. Religion permeates every activity of life. There is, therefore, a close relationship between culture and traditional ancestral practices, which are a form of religious worship.

Like in Judaism and Islam, it is in fact not surprising to discover that African life and culture revolve around worship because of the notion that God has a hand in everything that happens.[2] Mbiti sums it up well by saying,

> Because traditional religions permeate all departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination

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[1]Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 47.

[2]Ibid., 56.

room at school, or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.[1]

The Concept of God among Batswana

In order to understand further how closely related Tswana culture is to ancestral practices, it is important to understand the concept of God and to find out how it affects people's worship and lifestyles. In addition, the place of the ancestors and living human beings must be taken into account.

Modimo

Among traditional Batswana the High God[2] is known as *modimo*. *Modimo* is generally perceived as good and caring for his people.[3] He is believed to watch every act and can be angered by wrong or unacceptable behaviors and practices, even though he is considered distant. In some ways *modimo* is similar to the Christian God.

Some historians of Tswana culture suggest that even though the characteristics of *modimo* and the Christian God seem similar, traditional Batswana did not know about the Christian God. Setiloane suggests that before the coming of Christians, *modimo* did not

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[1]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 2.

[2]The term "High God" is used to distinguish the ancestors, who are known as gods, from the one (and often considered distant) God who may not be as close as the ancestors.

[3]M. F. C. Bourdillon, ed., *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, 2 vols. (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1977), 148.

carry the meaning of the Christian God.[1] He further suggests that the idea of calling the Christian God *modimo* came from the influence of early Tswana interpreters who, "after hearing concerning God in the Dutch language, said that their name for him was 'morimo' [sic]."[2] Later the missionary Robert Moffat strengthened the concept by referring to the Christian God as *modimo*.[3]

However, other evidence seems to suggest that the concept of referring to God as *modimo* existed long before the missionaries came. Mooka says that even though Batswana had not known about Christianity before the coming of missionaries, they knew God (*modimo*).[4] He further indicates that the name *modimo* comes from *dimola*, which means "to be first to do something."[5] Traditional Batswana also believe that this *modimo* lives at a far distance, hence the title *modimo wa go dimelela* (God who lives in a distant place). Many Batswana agree that *modimo* is indeed the same as God and that *modimo* was known before the coming of missionaries to Botswana. They argue that Christianity did not bring any new knowledge about *modimo*, but only confirmed what had always

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[1]Gabriel M. Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Balkema, 1976), 77.

[2]Ibid., 78.

[3]Ibid.

[4]M. G. K. Mooka, Deputy Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs, Botswana, interview by author, March 3, 1995.

[5]Ibid.

been known about him that he is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. The name, *modimo*, itself suggests that God is the originator of everything.[1]

Personal names of God

The Tswana people use a variety of names to address *modimo*; these reflect the concept of God in relation to the peoples' social and spiritual lifestyles. Beyond that, the names depict the place and impact of God among Batswana, and the awe with which people view him. In addition, most of the names used portray the idea that people are uncomfortable to mention God by name, possibly due to fear of consequences associated with vain use of the name, *modimo*, hence the choice to use indirect personal names. Some of the names employed are:

1. *Mothatayotlhe* means "Almighty" and implies fear.
2. *Tintibane* is used for God especially in connection with initiation ceremonies.
3. *Gagoumakwe* means "the unmentionable one."
4. *Mogodimodimo* means "the one who is the highest of the high" or "most high."
5. *Ramasedi* shows God as the "provider of light" or "one who shows the way."
6. *Mmabaledi* implies "caretaker or protector."
7. *Rara* means "father."
8. *Raetsho* means "our father."
9. *Mmopi* means "creator."[2]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

Attributes and praise names

In addition to the names of God, several other designations are used in Botswana to show praise to God and to indicate his attributes. Some of the attributes and praise names used are:

1. *Modimo mongwe fela,* which stands for "God is one."

2. *Mogodimodimo,* which means "God is Supreme."

3. *Mogologolo wa metlha,* which refers to "one who originates from antiquity."

4. *Modimo wa borraetsho,* which is interpreted "God of our fathers."

5. *Mong wa lobopo,* which means "Owner of all" or "Owner of the universe."[1]

6. *Modimo oo sa bonweng,* which refers to the "invisible or intangible God."

7. *Modimo ke motlhodi;* which means "God is the source of all things."

8. *Modimo ke mothusi,* means "God is helper or enabler."

9. *Modimo ke lesedi,* which stands for "God is light."[2]

The above concepts of the High God applied before and after the coming of the missionaries. In fact, most missionaries based the names and attributes of the Christian God on the already-existing traditional names and attributes.[3] The use of existing names for God was done in order to facilitate the people's adaption to the concepts of God and understanding of God.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ipeleng Chikwekwe, Motswana student at Southwestern Michigan College, Dowagiac, MI, interview by author, Berrien Springs, March 3, 1995.

[3]Setiloane, 77.

Badimo

Related to *modimo*, the High God, are *badimo*, the ancestors. They are believed to be the intermediaries who intercede and petition on behalf of the people, while the *kgosi* (chief) as leader, provides the link between the ancestors and the people.[1] As Comaroff and Comaroff rightly point out, the ancestors are "the domesticated dead of the settlement."[2] However, for the dead ancestors to be domesticated, they have to be living in some way, and their influence is believed to be manifested in many ways upon the living.

Comaroff and Comaroff further suggest that death converts "the animating essence (*moya*, 'breath') of a person into *-dimo*,[3] a penetrating superhuman power."[4] *Badimo* are also acknowledged as lesser gods who are involved in the daily activities of the living.[5] Ncube rightly points out that it is believed that "without the mediation of the ancestors, people are vulnerable to evil forces and acts of misfortune. Therefore traditional religious beliefs and practices revolve on a daily basis around the ancestors."[6]

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[1]Bourdillon, 148.

[2]Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 153.

[3]Comaroff and Comaroff suggest that *dimo* comes from the word *dima*, which means "to penetrate" or "to pervade with power" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 154).

[4]Ibid., 154.

[5]Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), 50.

[6]Zebron M. Ncube, "Ancestral Beliefs and Practices: A Program for Developing Christian Faith Among Adventists in Zimbabwe" (D.Min. dissertation, Andrews

Veneration of Ancestors

The issue of ancestral practices has been the subject of debate among scholars. Many African scholars continue to argue over whether Africans merely show respect to the ancestors or worship them. The role of ancestors is to facilitate a connection between the High God and people. However, it is also evident that people go beyond mere respect because they worship the ancestors as if they were the High God. They pray to them, sacrifice to them, and ask them for protection. Whether this is a misinterpretation on the part of the people still does not change the fact that people worship ancestors.[1]

For example: A lady who was interviewed was honest enough to admit that she felt she had no choice but to seek ancestral intervention. She said that she had tried everything she knew, including churches, to try to rid herself of what she suspected was her late husband's spirit, but she had failed.[2]

Duties of Ancestors

Ancestors play a major role in the lives of many African societies. They connect, protect, punish, curse, and bless.

Ancestors are believed to be connecting agents between the living and the dead. They also connect between the physical and the spiritual world. Above all, they provide

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University, 1988), 27.

[1]For examples, see Ncube, 33, 34.

[2]Z, non-Adventist, interview by author, Botswana, April 20, 1995.

a mediatory role and a communication network between man and the High God who may not be approached directly except in serious circumstances or imminent danger.

Ancestors go beyond the role of communication agents, they also protect from evil spirits and evil in general. For this reason they are called upon in times of trouble. The living dead are actively protecting the living because:

> they know and have interest in what is going on in the family. When they appear . . . they are recognized by name . . . ; they enquire about family affairs, and may even warn of impending danger. . . . They are guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities.[1]

Ancestors can also punish. If the living dead are offended by having their instructions ignored or if they were not given an honorable departure, they may inflict pain or revenge.[2] This may be in the form of withholding or withdrawing the protective powers or by ceasing their mediatory role with God on behalf of the offending party. If the offending community chooses to continue being impertinent, the ancestors can bring a curse upon the family, clan, or the whole community. The curse may either be permanent or temporary. In the latter case, it can be removed through ritual.

On the other hand, ancestors are believed to have power to bless. For instance, they can bestow fertility upon women so that they may be able to have children; they may bless the men to be more reproductive. They may give abundant rain for the season, which usually is a sign that the land might bring forth a good harvest if the community

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[1]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83.

[2]Ibid.

continues to appease the gods. Other times their blessing may be in the form of withholding catastrophes. These blessings may require prayer, offering, or sacrifice.[1]

Names and Ancestors

African names either carry a meaning or are given for a reason. They may commemorate an experience or be given in memory of a late ancestor. Several African names portray the belief that life does not end with death, but instead, the dead come back to be reborn in families.[2] The idea that life does not end with death has caused many scholars to wrongly conclude that Africans believe in re-incarnation.[3] Several African names also symbolize the importance of belonging and community.[4]

Tswana names not only depict experience or commemorate the dead, they may also be used to praise and give thanks. A few examples of thanks and praise names are, *Kealeboga,* meaning "I am thankful"; *Ipeleng,* meaning "rejoice"; *Boitumelo,* meaning "happiness"; *Onkabetse,* meaning "He has given me"; *Keneilwe* or *Kefilwe,* meaning "I have been given"; *Keitumetse,* meaning "I am thankful"; *Gaolatlhe,* meaning "He does not forget or neglect [his people]"; *Oarabile,* meaning "He has answered my prayer"; *Onkgopotse,* meaning "He has remembered me"; *Itumeleng,* meaning "Be joyful"; *Galaletasang,* meaning "Praise [God]."

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[1]Eugene Hillman, *Toward an African Christianity* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1993), 62.

[2]John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 25.

[3]Geoffrey E. Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon, 1974), 84-87.

[4]Hillman, 13.

Motho

At the center of all the traditional practices is *motho*, the human being. It is therefore imperative to discuss the concept of man. The Sotho people (a closely related group to the Tswana people) believe that human beings are "composed of two elements: the corporeal body (*'mele*) or flesh (*nama*), and the incorporeal spirit (*moea*, which also means wind) or shadow (*seriti*)."[1] The Pedis (an even more closely related group to the Tswanas) talk about a person in tripartite terms : "body" (*mmele*), soul (*moya*), and spirit (*seriti*).[2] While the body is disposed of through death and burial, the spirit and the soul are believed to continue living in the spirit realm.

In many African societies, especially among Bantu, "force" and "being" are inseparable.[3] To "be" is to have "force." A person may have a physical body, but that does not make him or her human. What makes a person human is that his or her being has the ability to grow and to be strengthened in itself.[4] This concept is based upon the belief that God has endowed human beings with the ability to get strength from within the body, hence the natural growth which takes place. Further, the concept of being strengthened in oneself denotes power. This is the reason many people get involved in the practice of witchcraft.

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[1]W. D. Hammond Tooke, ed., *The Bantu Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1974), 326.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Tempels, 34.

[4]Ibid., 38.

Man and Community

In African society, a person does not stand alone. He or she is an integral part of the community.[1] Mbiti puts it correctly when he says, "The deep sense of kinship, with all it implies, has been one of the strongest forces in traditional life."[2] He further says the African affirms "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[3] In traditional African life, the individual does not and cannot exist except corporately: "He is simply part of the whole."[4] In African society persons are defined in terms of their standing and belonging to society even though they are considered to have individual qualities and faculties.[5]

Ancestral Practices Described

The concepts of God, the gods, man, and community become the most important determinants of the people's worldview and explain why they lean heavily on ancestors for help.

The events described in this section may not in themselves be ancestral practices, but are activities in which ancestral practices are usually manifested. These include rites of passage from birth to death; veneration of ancestors; rituals, sacrifices, and offerings;

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[1]Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe, Kenya: Kesho, 1989), 51.

[2]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 104.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., 108.

[5]Ray, 132.

intermediaries between human beings and the gods; and finally, the impact of curses and blessings of the ancestors upon the community.

Rites of Passage

In order to fully understand ancestral practices, it is important to understand the concept of time and eschatology among Africans because time is closely related to the cycle of the rites of passage. Mbiti suggests that Africans view the past as more important than the future because the past is full of deities worth remembering. He further says that the people are preoccupied with the present because that is what concerns them. The future is almost nonexistent.[1] Ray concurs with Mbiti by saying, "Unlike Western religious thought, speculation about meaning of human existence does not project forward to a distant and transcendent future; it projects back upon itself to the present, in cyclical fashion to the all important now."[2] With the exception of a few African people groups, eschatology is a foreign concept. Time is cyclical and does not seem to end.

Time begins with birth, goes on to adolescence, puberty, and the passage into adulthood. During adulthood people are expected to marry, to bear children, to grow old, to die, and then pass on into the world of spirits, where they will continue to connect with and influence the living.[3] This implies that death only changes people from a physical to a spiritual form and they continue to exist even after death. Wendland observes that:

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[1]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 22.

[2]Ray, 141.

[3]Ibid., 24.

"family life carries on an existence even after death. The deceased simply becomes one of the 'living dead,' and is still an important part of the community. If anything, he becomes a more important factor in guiding family affairs as well as tribal affairs."[1] Thus ancestor worship connects the dead with the living and has an important role in the daily life of most African societies.[2]

Zahan calls tradition, the medium through which active communication between the "dead and the living takes place, a vast network of communications between the two worlds . . . the world of the dead and of the living . . . . The living 'feel' the wills and prescriptions of the ancestors; they divine them by a kind of intuition which does not seem to be based on any consciously perceived sign."[3]

From pregnancy, through the birth of a child, until death, certain rites are performed as a way of enabling a person to move from one stage of life to another.

Pregnancy

Expectant mothers become very important members of the family and society at large because African societies place great importance on children. It is common among Batswana for the mother to come and stay with her expecting daughter during the whole pregnancy. It is also not uncommon for members of the immediate community to assist

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[1]E. H. Wendland, *Of Other Gods and Other Spirits* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1977), 16.

[2]Ray, 140.

[3]Dominique Zahan, *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 48.

the pregnant woman with daily chores.[1] This is to make sure that the expectant mother eats well and gets enough rest in order not to jeopardize the baby.

Expectant mothers have a restricted diet during the period of pregnancy. This restriction may be for health reasons, but also because of the belief that eating certain food might invoke misfortune on the baby.[2]

Batswana, like many African peoples, believe that children are a gift from God (*modimo*) or from the ancestors (*badimo*), while inability to bear children is usually attributed to displeasure of *modimo* or *badimo*.[3] The name *Mpho ya Modimo* (gift from God) is very common among Batswana and serves as an acknowledgment of the child as a gift. The birth of a child is believed to strengthen the village, hence the giving of names like *Oatile*, which means "it has increased" (referring to the village) or *Oagile*, meaning "it is firmly built."[4]

When a couple has no children, problems in the family usually arise. Even though there may be no way of knowing who is to blame in such situations, the blame is usually placed upon the woman. As a remedy, men may try to have children with other women to prove that they are not at fault. This may also be a way of avoiding the ridicule that comes with not having children.[5]

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[1]Chikwekwe, interview.

[2]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 111.

[3]Setiloane, 34.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., 110.

At times, couples who have no children seek answers from diviners, especially when foul play is suspected. Usually someone is blamed as the cause of the misfortune of not having children. If it is a known person, that person is brought and asked to undo the misfortune so that the couple may have children. Sometimes the act of undoing the misfortune of not having children is done publicly so that the person might not repeat the act due to embarrassment. If ancestors are suspected, a sacrifice is made to reverse the problem.

Acceptance into Adulthood

Children are not considered to have the same qualities of humanness as adults until they have gone through certain rituals and rites of passage into adulthood. For instance, among the Bahurutshe of Botswana, a senior Tswana group, children of a certain age group can still be buried in the house because they are considered harmless. This practice does not happen with adults.[1]

Ray points out: "In Africa, as elsewhere, ritual behavior is a way of communicating with the divine for the purpose of changing the human situation."[2] People believe that rites of passage have intrinsic power to symbolically destroy the old and to create something new.[3]

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[1]Chikwekwe, interview.

[2]Ray, 78.

[3]Ibid., 91.

During the rites of passage, young men start learning adult responsibilities of taking care of their families and their communities. If they are in a pastoral community, they have their own fields from which they grow food to feed their families. If they are in cities, they find jobs to earn money to support their families. Young women, on the other hand, start learning about how to take care for themselves and their homes and other responsibilities that come with womanhood.[1]

Marriage

After adolescents enter adulthood comes marriage. By this time young men and women have been prepared through initiations. Before marriage, virginity, especially among young women, is not only encouraged, but is seriously monitored as preparation for a strong moral ethic and faithfulness to the spouse.

Marriage is one of the most important stages of the life cycle because it forms the basis of continuity of the family and society at large. The importance of marriage renders it a public, social affair that brings two families together, socially as well as spiritually, because marriage is a religious rite in addition to being a rite of passage.[2]

During a marriage ceremony in Tswana traditional society, a medicine person is called to perform protective rituals for the couple.[3] This is to make sure that the couple is protected from witchcraft or angry ancestors (*badimo*) who must be appeased. The

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[1]Ibid., 36.

[2]Ibid., 81.

[3]Chikwekwe, interview.

medicine person begins by protecting the homes of the parents of the prospective couple. This is done either by making the parents drink medicine or by applying medicine around their house.[1] The wedding dress (probably wedding suit, too) is protected through the application of medicines. The cooking place is also protected. This could be an outdoor cooking place in a village hut or a stove in a rich suburban home.

Finally, the marrying couple also has to be protected. Usually, this follows the slaughter of a cow, from which a piece of meat is cut. This meat is roasted, mixed with medicine, and then given to the couple to eat. All the protective and marriage rituals bond the couple forever. If one spouse dies, an "unbonding ritual" has to be performed in order for the surviving party to be free to marry and have a sexual relationship with another person. The "unbonding ritual" may call for the person who needs to be freed from the late spouse's spirit to wash in special herbal medicine, and pronouncing of a blessing upon the person. The blessing pronounced on the person as he or she is being "unbonded" also becomes the fertility rite if the person is still able to bear children.

Death

Africans, like other world communities, accept the fact that even though death is depriving and hurtful, it is at the same time unavoidable.[2] However, death is rarely thought to be natural. In most cases, the cause of death is attributed to witchcraft, angry

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[1]Ibid.

[2]John S. Mbiti, "Eschatology," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, ed. Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingsworth (London: Lutterworth, 1972), 164.

ancestors, evil spirits, or to God himself, especially when it is believed that God is punishing an offender.[1] Even though death is perceived as powerful and inevitable, it does not rob humans of their immortality: they are believed to still exist in other spiritual forms.[2]

Among Africans, death is believed to be defiling, thus necessitating cleansing rituals following it. Various forms of purification rituals neutralize the defiling effect of contact with a corpse.[3]

Since death is the last rite of passage, Africans think it is important to let the deceased depart in full and great honor.[4] It is a common practice to dress the deceased in the best clothes they ever owned, or to buy them good new clothes before burial. Further, Africans believe that failure to give an honorable burial to the departing loved one could result in misfortune or tragedy for the family or society, depending on the status of the deceased in society. Batswana have many rituals through which protective measures are taken to keep away the spirits of the dead.[5]

The house where the dead person will rest before burial is prepared by placing ashes on the windows as a way of deterring evil. During this time of mourning the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]B. A. Pauw, *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975), 101.

[4]Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, 82.

[5]Chikwekwe, interview.

elderly admonish children not to engage in play, which suggests a joyful mood. The playing of radios or television sets is not allowed.[1] When the corpse is brought into the house only adults (mostly women) are allowed to sit and sleep around the deceased. The vehicle that carried the deceased is usually cleansed by washing. In most cases, a cow is killed to provide food for the mourners.

The family of the deceased buys a black burial dress from which pieces are cut to give to male adults to pin on their shirts (usually on their shoulder) while small children are given necklaces made from the dress. The necklaces are not supposed to be removed because removal can cause misfortune. However, if the necklace falls off on its own, no misfortune is expected.[2]

After the dead person has been buried, the family of the deceased calls the traditional doctor to come and perform cleansing rituals. The spouse of the dead person is asked to bathe in cleansing medicine, his or her hair is cut, and he or she is given special food to eat, mixed with medicine. Widows are made to wear black dresses for one year following the death of their husbands. Widowers are also supposed to wear a black piece of cloth, pinned on their shirt or their coat for the same period of time.[3]

During the year of mourning the surviving spouse is not supposed to engage in any sexual contact with another person. If he or she does, it is believed that the partner

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

might die because of the binding and bonding performed by the herbalist or witch doctor during the marriage ceremony.[1] Since the two were bonded together through ritual they could only be unbonded through another ritual, which takes place one year after the spouse's death.

At the end of the year of mourning and cleansing, the traditional doctor is called to unbind and release the bond from the surviving spouse. After that, the surviving spouse is free to wear other colors of clothing and is also free to marry because it is believed that at this time the spirit of the deceased is released from the spouse.[2]

The last thing done to end the period of mourning is the distribution of personal belongings of the dead (*'Go ntsha dikobo)* in the Setswana language. Before the clothes are distributed, they are cleansed by washing and sprinkling with cleansing medicines.[3] It remains at the discretion of the distributing person[4] to decide who receives the clothing. Any undistributed clothes are thrown away. At the end of the mourning period it is not uncommon for a celebration to be held with beer drinking. Usually the whole village is invited to celebrate the end of a sad period. The drinking is accompanied with playing of drums, singing, and dancing.[5]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Setiloane, 69.

[4]In some parts of Botswana the distributing person is the youngest son of the deceased father.

[5]Setiloane, 69, 70.

Rituals, Sacrifices, and Offerings

Sacrifices and offerings play a major role in African worship. Sacrifices, in this paper, refer to worship which involves the killing of animals for presentation to God or ancestors. Offerings, on the other hand, refer to worship which involves presentation of non-meat gifts to God or ancestors. Sacrifices and offerings are types of rituals which connect the living with the dead, the physical world with the spiritual world. "In general, ritual sacrifice accomplishes a two-way transaction between otherwise separate and partially opposed realms: the world of man and the world of gods."[1]

Mbiti suggests four explanations of the purpose and function of sacrifices and offerings. They are used as a gift to the ancestors or God; offerings and sacrifices also secure propitiation. Offerings and sacrifices are for the purpose of communication, and also constitute thank offerings.[2]

Mention of animal sacrifices in Botswana is made among *Bakgatla*.[3] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, during the yearly ceremony before the planting season, the *Bakgatla* sacrificed a black sheep. Divination was carried out to determine the sex of the victim to be sacrificed. If the suggestion was a male victim, the rains were expected to be very heavy. If it was a female victim, the rains were expected to be

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[1]Ray, 78.

[2]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 59.

[3]*Bakgatla* are a Tswana group that has settled in Mochudi area and parts of Moshupa.

gentle.[1] Schapera suggests that a long time ago a young man was sacrificed for rain-making.[2]

Several events require sacrifice. These include: sacrifice to silence or put to rest the dead; sacrifice to appease an angry God or gods; sacrifice to protect the living, and sacrifice for fertility. Suggestion is made that some Tswana groups believe that the spirits of the dead do not directly go to rest until sacrifice has been made to induce them to finally depart to the spirit world.[3]

Parents experiencing mysterious deaths of their children may resort to sacrifice or other forms of ritual appeasement. However, when that fails, they may use forms that may "trick" the spirits believed to be the cause of death so that the spirits may not know exactly what is going on. For instance, in Botswana a woman who had lost all her boys to unexplained deaths decided to give an ugly name to the next boy to deceive the spirits into thinking that she did not love the baby, even though she loved him dearly. She also dressed the boy in girls' clothing.[4] This practice was based on the traditional belief that

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[1]Luc de Heusch, *Sacrifice in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 91.

[2]Isaac Schapera, *Rain Making Rites of Tswana Tribes* (Cambridge: Leiden, 1971), 104.

[3]W. C. Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), 36.

[4]See Willoughby for more details, 78-79. Willoughby indicates that he had a neighbor who survived infant death as a result of this trick. It is not clear whether this practice still exists.

the spirits are blind, though not deaf.[1] If all measures to stop the deaths fail, the family might relocate to another area to avert the deaths. Some people have been known to move across the country in order to move away from the source of the deaths in the family. They settle among people who do not know them, and hopefully among different spirits whom they hope to establish a new relationship with.

Intermediaries between Human Beings and the Gods

Apart from spiritual intermediaries (ancestors), there are also human intermediaries. These include priests, kings/chiefs, medicine men, seers, diviners, rain makers, and elders who perform rituals. These human intermediaries are responsible for conducting worship and overseeing the communities.[2] Another role the human intermediaries play is to make the people feel sheltered from God's all-consuming power, which is too much for an ordinary person.[3]

Whenever sickness, death, or any other misfortune take place in a family, answers are sought to explain the cause of the misfortune. Death is acceptable "as part of the natural rhythm of life; and yet, paradoxically, every human death is thought to have external causes, making it both natural and unnatural."[4] To explain the causes of death,

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[1]Ibid., 78.

[2]Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 62.

[3]Ibid., 63.

[4]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 155.

people are accused of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft.[1] And to counteract these, people consult intermediaries: mediums, witch doctors, and herbalists.

Spirit Mediums

Spirit mediums provide answers and information through wisdom and help from the spirit world.[2] They are considered neutral because they can provoke good as well as evil upon their society. Spirit mediums are merely tools in the hands of people who need answers.[3]

Spirit mediums use different methods of divination to arrive at their answers. Sometimes they use natural divination, which does not involve any symbols. In this case the diviner's mind is connected to the source of the answers. The other type of divination involves the use of symbols such as dice, bones, or horns.

Witch Doctors

Witchcraft is believed to be a diversion of good and sacred power for evil purposes and intentions.[4] Witches share power with other well-intended people like priests and prophets who have access to spirit power. The only difference is that witches use their superior force to inflict pain and ultimately to destroy other members of society.[5]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, 60.

[3]Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 75.

[4]Ray, 151.

[5]Ibid.

As a result of the reckless, selfish, and malicious intents of witches, an African is always in fear of being bewitched. As one African pastor honestly affirmed, "This witchcraft is something within an African, it is very hard for him to get rid of this. Nobody, not even the most educated and sophisticated, is ever fully free from this fear. Protection is always needed."[1]

Africans see the world in terms of "life" or "death." Possessing power means having life. Tempels says that Africans believe that the source of this power is God even though it is also believed that "man can renew his vital force by tapping the strength of other creatures,"[2] hence the idea of witchcraft, and beyond that, the solicitation of ancestors to provide this energy.

Witch doctors in African societies are believed to possess great magical and spiritual powers to neutralize witchcraft, to catch witches, and to heal sick people. In essence, witch doctors in are greater witches who choose to use their power for good rather than to destroy people like the ordinary witches do. A witch doctor is capable of performing hypnotic activities upon his patients. He is also able to display some dramatic and entertaining dancing skills before he deals with a case.[3]

Some witch doctors use mirrors to catch witches. The witch appears in the mirror only to those who may have taken the medicine to enable them to see.[4] After the witch

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[1]Wendland, 22.

[2]Ibid., 33.

[3]Ibid., 34.

[4]Ibid.

has been caught, he is made to drink strong medicine, which is supposed to neutralize his power. If the witch decides to practice witchcraft again after he has been neutralized, he might die. Thus when witch doctors come to cleanse a village, only witches ought to be afraid. The innocent are not affected by the witch doctor's practices.[1] In fact, the innocent are encouraged to support the witch doctor as he/she cleanses the community.

Herbalists

Herbalists mostly rely on herbs for curing people. A herbalist does not necessarily practice magic, even though some herbalists do so. The herbalists (who should not be confused with spirit mediums and diviners) know the importance of ancestral approval, though they are not as close to ancestors as the diviners. Some herbalists rely only on herbs while others combine the practice of herbs with the practices of a witch doctor or spirit medium.[2] The term traditional doctor may apply to both a pure herbalist and to a witch doctor.

Among Batswana, the *Ngaka* (traditional doctor) or the ritual expert is believed to have power to change things and relationships among people. He can also hold the balance of society and be a mediator between the people and the ancestors.[3] There is a clear distinction between witchcraft (*boloi*), which is considered obnoxious to the ancestors, and the work of a witch doctor (*bongaka*). While *boloi* is destructive and

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Tooke, 342.

[3]Comaroff and Comaroff, 156.

disruptive. *bongaka* is considered helpful to society,[1] since a witch doctor usually possesses power to neutralize a witch.

Curses and Blessings

There is a close relationship between curses and blessings. There is also a close relationship between behaviors which call for blessings or curses and the happiness or sadness of ancestors. Certain behaviors and deeds lead to a blessing while others lead to a curse.

Curses

A curse in African society is dreaded and feared. It follows behavior that is considered an affront, unacceptable, and disrespectful to society or ancestors. As a way of bringing order to society, these behaviors may be punished by a curse. Behaviors which could lead to a curse include such things as lack of respect for the elderly and ancestors; disobedience to family, societal rituals, and virtues; or ill-mannered behavior. "Bantu ancestor-spirits . . . are malignant when exasperated by the neglect or disobedience of their descendants, but helpful and protective while honoured and obeyed."[2]

The power to curse rests with people like elders, parents, aunts, and uncles. A curse is supposed to be used only when the order of the family or community is disturbed, even though some people may use it for their own selfish gratifications. However, people

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Willoughby, 87.

who use curses selfishly run the risk of suffering the consequences of their malice. The curse they wanted to place on another person may affect them instead.[1] A curse on another person can only be effective if there is just cause for it.

Placing a curse on someone calls for ritual exercises, which may take the form of a pronouncement or a physical display of certain symbols. Apart from individual curses there are also communal curses.[2]

Curses may manifest themselves during community catastrophes. Remedial action is taken by asking the whole community to make sacrifices to the ancestors. The ritual act performed to reverse the curse brings blessing at the same time. The curses of the dying are feared and are considered most dangerous because it is believed that "when a man is preparing to throw off mortality and clothe himself with spirit-power, his curse . . . is peculiarly potent."[3]

Blessings

While bad deeds may lead to a curse, good deeds may be rewarded with blessings. Such acts as respect to elders, being helpful to the helpless (especially elderly people), doing good deeds, and following all family and community guidelines may warrant blessings. It is common for parents to admonish their children to be kind and do good deeds to people as these warrant long life and blessings. The idea of doing good so that

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[1]Hillman, 57.

[2]Willoughby, 87.

[3]Ibid., 86.

one might get a blessing strengthens the morals of the community. The elders, parents, aunts, and uncles qualify to bless.[1]

Blessings, like curses, may take the form of words or they may be combined with rituals, which would make the ceremony more effectual.[2] There are both private and public blessings, but public blessings are more common and are done in the presence of the community in order to authenticate the blessing. Furthermore, doing the blessing ceremony publicly encourages others to do similar good deeds. The effects of the blessings are manifested through family reproduction, good health, and a good harvest.[3]

This chapter has described the Batswana approach to life, the ancestors and the rituals associated with them. Chapter 3 discusses how Christianity has reacted to ancestral practices and the effects of such reactions.

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[1]Mbiti suggests that for a person to qualify to bless, he or she must be older or have a higher standing in society than the recipient of the blessing. See Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 65.

[2]Hillman, 55.

[3]Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIANITY ENCOUNTERS ANCESTRAL PRACTICES

The people who went to Africa as Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were mostly genuine, loving, and concerned people for the kingdom of God. However, they were children of their own times and lived and thought like people of their times. This chapter explores the way missionaries reacted to ancestral and other traditional practices which they found in Africa. The chapter further considers the results of the way the missionaries and the people reacted toward each other. Finally, the chapter looks at the rise of African independent churches and their attempts to deal with traditional problems.

Missionary Reactions to Ancestral Practices

When the Protestant missionaries arrived in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Africa, they found that Africans were not only different, but had a culture which included the worship of ancestors. Rightly, the missionaries diagnosed the worship of ancestors as unacceptable by biblical standards. However, they failed to notice the cultural needs met by these practices. They likewise did not consider how the needs met by these practices could be given Christian functional substitutes.

Several factors contributed to the missionaries' lack of interest in the development

of Christian substitutes to ancestor worship. These include Reformed theology's teaching of total corruption of human beings *(corruptio totalis)*, which advocated that there was nothing good in humans, and consequently, their cultures. This concept naturally did not appeal to African converts because it meant that they had to abandon their cultures totally.[1] In their haste to rid new African converts of "pagan practices," the missionaries eliminated many other cultural forms which did not contradict biblical principles without even attempting to understand them. Wakatama observes the failure of missionaries to adapt; he also notes that they transported the gospel "to other countries wrapped with cumbersome paraphernalia of Western culture."[2] This resulted in the missionaries looking at other cultures negatively and making Western culture the reference of Christianity.[3] Traditional dress, usually associated with pagan practices, was prohibited; traditional music and instruments, which missionaries always associated with ancestral practices and heathenism, were often not allowed because they were unfamiliar.[4] That there was an obvious clash between missionary and African cultures and worldviews was evidenced by what the missionaries wrote home. Some missionaries in the early twentieth century belonging to the Christian Missionary Society (based in London) wrote: "East Africans are generally savage--sunk in low estate of barbarism, low in intellect and

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[1]M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, 2 vols. (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1971), 1:244.

[2]Pius Wakatama, *Independence for the Third World Church: An African Perspective on Missionary Work* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1976), 13.

[3]Ibid., 14.

[4]Ibid., 14-15.

low in morals. Their names generally are those of animals or of deities, or they bear some grotesque meaning on the face of them causing the owners to blush when a European pronounces the word."[1]

Such a reaction was because of the obvious difference in the way people dressed, carried themselves, associated with one another, and worshiped. This was a problem which Tempels realized as he urged missionaries to study and understand African traditions and customs in order to help Africans to effectively change from their ancestral and traditional practices.[2]

Many early missionaries overlooked or did not comprehend that "it is impossible to understand . . . Africa without understanding its traditional religion,"[3] and, beyond that, its culture, which is part of the African. Even in modern times, the failure to understand African religions and culture may lead to poor communication, "because although superficial customs change over time, the more deep-seated beliefs persist."[4] As Peter Falk says, it is important for missionaries at all times to understand African culture because it affects what Africans do.[5]

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[1]T. O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 139.

[2]Tempels, 23-25.

[3]Richard J. Gehman, "African Religion Lives," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 27 (October 1991): 350-353.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 457.

This may be harsh, seeing that the missionaries in the nineteenth century were not equipped with the anthropological tools to deal with the problems. However, it is important to bring up the issues so that awareness may prevent future mistakes in missionary endeavors.

Missionaries may have paid no attention to the differences in worldviews and how they would affect the missionary approach because Christianity had a conquest attitude. For instance, Roman Catholic priests followed the conquerors and made Christians out of the conquered people, who in most cases had no choice but to accept the Christian religion.[1] Other times the conquering trading companies became agents of the missionaries, even responsible for the training of missionaries for service. For example, the Dutch East India Company formed its own theological seminary to train missionaries.[2]

William Carey, who later became the "father of modern missions," early in his career believed that civilization should accompany Christianity.[3] He described the people of the world as "still in pagan darkness. In many of these countries they have no written language, consequently no Bible, and are led by the most childish customs and traditions. They are in general poor, barbarous, naked pagans, as destitute of civilization

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[1]J. J. Kritzinger, P. G. J. Meiring, and W. A. Saayman, *You Will Be My Witnesses: An Introduction to Methods in Mission* (Pretoria: Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1984), 3.

[2]Ibid.

[3]William Carey, *An Inquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), 62-63.

as they are true religion."[1] What Carey did not realize at the time was that for a person to communicate effectively cross culturally, the communicator must share in the culture of the target people.[2] Without this sharing, they could not comprehend the intended message.[3] Carey later realized the importance of understanding people, as is evidenced by his advice to other missionaries to live among people, to learn the language, and to facilitate understanding.[4]

Missionaries expressed a broad spectrum of reactions to the lifestyles, culture, and religious practices of Africans. These ranged from harsh criticism of the practices and removal of young people from their families and communities when they showed an interest in Christianity, to working to change the people's cultures. These methods were thought to be effective enough to make the undesirable traditional and ancestral practices go away.

Westernize and then Christianize

Many missionaries believed that Westernization, and at times colonization, must be a precursor to Christianization.[5] William Wilberforce, who worked tirelessly for the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Daniel Shaw, *Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and Other Communication Tasks* (Pasadena, CA: Carey, 1988), 4-5.

[3]Ibid.

[4]F. Deaville Walker, *William Carey: Missionary Pioneer and Statesman* (Chicago: Moody, 1925), 123.

[5]See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8-33.

abolition of slavery, affirmed that people needed to be civilized before they were evangelized.[1] David Livingstone, an explorer and missionary also involved in the abolition of slavery, once wrote in his journal, "My desire is to open a path to this district [Central Africa], that civilization, commerce, and Christianity might find their way there."[2] Other missionaries were not apologetic about thinking that they needed to Westernize--which they called civilize--and then later Christianize. Cecil Rhodes, the person responsible for the British takeover of most of Southern Africa, was convinced that taking "civilization" to Africans was a divine calling.[3]

Herbert Kane, a twentieth century author, states that "colonialism . . . was a blessing in disguise in Africa."[4] "The colonial officials, representing as they did the paramount power in the colonies, enjoyed a good deal of personal prestige in society. Some of this prestige rubbed off on the missionary, for they too belonged to the white race." Thus the African had no choice, but to look up to the missionary. "There he was regarded as belonging to a superior race. When the simple, illiterate Africans saw the missionary and all the accoutrements of Western civilization he brought along, they must have felt like the Lyacaonians of Paul's day when they exclaimed, 'The gods have come

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[1]David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 296.

[2]J. E. Chamliss, *Life and Labor of David Livingstone* (Philadelphia: Hubbard, 1875), 311.

[3]Johannes Verkuyl, *Break Down the Walls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 66.

[4]Hebert Kane, *Understanding Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), 219.

down to us in the likeness of men!' (Acts 14:11)." He goes on to say, "The nineteenth-century missionary did not have to *act* like a tin god, he *was* a tin god!"[1]

Considering the close working relationship between colonial authorities and missionaries, "it was easy for the early missionaries to believe that Western civilization and Christian faith were synonymous and that they were agents of that civilization as well as Christianity."[2]

Cultural Insensitivity and Theological Bias: The South African Case

One of the dangers of monoculturalism is that it makes people fail to see their own shortcomings in Christian practice. In most cases there is no introspection to see areas of weakness and cultural bias. What happened in South African is a classic example of cultural and theological bias, easy to notice as Western culture among Whites exists side by side with African culture among Blacks.

From the fifteenth century when the Boer settlers came to South Africa to the twentieth century, the "missionaries systematically destroyed the social structure of African society. After the discovery of gold in 1886 the church found itself located firmly on the side of dominant forces of white supremacy."[3] The church's association

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[1]Ibid., 221.

[2]Max Ward Randall, *Profile for Victory: New Proposals for Missions in Zambia* (Pasadena, CA: Carey, 1970), 81.

[3]Charles Villa-Vicencio, "South Africa: A Church Within the Church," *Christianity and Crisis*, January 9, 1989, 462-464.

with the ruling powers manifested itself both in politics and in theology. As Desmond Tutu wrote, "The White Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa for a long time sought to provide Scriptural justification for the nationalist party policy of apartheid."[1] The DRC taught that apartheid and racism were justified because "the Bible teaches that differences between races are as fundamental as are the unity of humanity, redemption in Christ, and the restoration of unity in him."[2] Verkuyl calls this "pseudo-theology."[3] The bias of White South Africans justifying issues and practices as long as the issues were in their interest not only affected politics, but overflowed into cultural and theological issues. This caused disagreement between South African White and Black people. For instance, among Christians, there was no agreement on how certain theological issues ought to be approached. These theological rifts became so strong that some African Christians decided to form the African independent churches which became popular among Black people in South Africa.[4] These churches are discussed in detail later in the chapter.

The missionary church strongly condemned ancestral practices among Black people as pagan While justifying apartheid and "White ancestral practices" as part of their

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[1]Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 37.

[2]Verkuyl, 106.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Villa-Vicencio, 462-464.

Christian culture.[1] When a death occurred in the family, it was common practice among White South African Christian to hold services in solemn ways. These were followed by long moments of silence.[2] The relatives of the deceased visited the grave sites and placed flowers by the tomb. Upon inquiry of why such practices were done, one person, unconsciously explained that it was important to place flowers upon the deceased's tomb as a show of love, but further went on to say that if the relatives did not visit the tomb or place the flowers, they might experience "bad luck."[3] What Botha called "bad luck" is called a "curse" by many Africans. As can be observed, it is possible that behind the innocent memorial acts, is a deeper theological reason suggesting that even some white South Africans engage in ancestral practices.

The irony, however, is that when Africans do similar practices they are labeled as pagan and un-Christian. Becken, commenting on the double standard, says that "obviously, [White Christians ignored] similar phenomenon in their own community, since they had learned in their studies that 'the ancestor cult is the central feature of African religion, the heart of the African spirit world'."[4] For instance, they were obviously never taught to look at their acts relating to death and mourning as amounting to the appearance of, or being, ancestral practices.

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[1]Hans-Jurgen Becken, "Beware of Ancestor Cult! A Challenge to Missiological Research in South Africa," *Missionalia* 21 (November 1993): 333-339.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Johannes Botha, White Dutch Reformed Church member, interview by author, Pretoria, May 3, 1995.

[4]Becken, 333-339.

Dismissal of Tradition as Psychological Phenomena

One way some missionaries dealt with problems converts faced when learning of Christianity was to deny or dismiss the converts' problems as imaginative or mere psychological phenomena. Sometimes when demon-possessed local people came for help, missionaries did not take the problems seriously because they thought these problems were not real and called them psychological.

Two former missionaries to Zambia and Zimbabwe narrate experiences of being approached to pray for the demon possessed and to help other Christians with problems related to the ancestral cult in that local community. They were excited and saw the opportunity for ministry to the local people. Unfortunately, fellow Adventist missionaries ostracized them and reported them to the leadership at the Eastern Africa Division offices. Some of their fellow missionaries openly suggested that the problems the local people were experiencing were unreal. The missionary leadership told the missionaries who had been praying for local people to stop or face being returned to their homeland.[1]

At one Evangelical mission hospital in Zaire, many Africans lost confidence in some missionaries and stopped going to them for spiritual help because they were disbelieved and laughed at when they sought help for ancestral problems, witchcraft,

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[1]Paul Eagan and Lynne Eagan, former missionaries at Rusangu Adventist Secondary School, Zambia, and Solusi College, Zimbabwe, interview by author, Denver, CO, April 3, 1996.

fears, and other related problems. On the other hand those who were believed and felt secure to tell their stories were more trusting and grew in their Christian faith.[1]

Other General Reactions

In general, the problems of traditional and ancestral practices were not dealt with in ways which brought change in the African Christian converts. Instead, the problems were ignored, hoping that they would naturally go away, but they did not, and they still exist today. The practices were never analyzed or understood, but were categorically condemned and thrown out without being dealt with or providing alternatives for the new believers.[2] The criterion used to judge the practices was the missionary's culture,[3] and thus most missionaries did not see any need to provide Christian functional substitutes for the traditional and ancestral practices. As Ward laments:

> In the name of theological education we have visited on the non-Western world the historic issues and debates of Western Christianity. Yet the *real* theological issues that emerged as Christianity confronted . . . Africa's animism have been answered more by impositions of American lifestyle than by sharing in theological inquiry. In other words, since certain issues are important to us, we assume they ought to be important to every one. And if different issues are "temporarily" important to others, we assume that these will be replaced by the

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[1]Paula M. Warner, "African Healer versus Missionary Physician," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 26 (July 1990): 396-404.

[2]Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 99.

[3]David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 104-105.

> really important issues (ours), once the convert gets his or her lifestyle lined up with ours.[1]

As Nida echoes, "Once we have been convinced that people all over the world are human--that they are people, just as we are, with virtues and follies, insights and limitations and that their way of life has continuity and meaning--then we will begin to look beneath the surface of the actions."[2]

Other ways of dealing with the problem included the idea of sending children of parents who practiced traditional and ancestral religion to mission schools where they were taught Christian principles. The thinking was: "Teach religion in the classroom--at least an hour a day. Reach the children, and you will be able to approach the parents."[3] The problem with this approach was that, first, it was a simplistic solution to a much more complex problem. Second, the interest of Africans in schools was confused with abandonment of ancestral and other traditional practices, which was not the case.[4] When the children went back to their parents' homes, they continued practicing the parents'

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[1]David J. Hesselgrave, *New Horizons in World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 21.

[2]Eugene Nida, *Customs and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 14.

[3]Wendland, 103.

[4]Randall, 85.

ancestral religions.[1] The problems of ancestor practice and other traditional religions did not fade away as expected by the missionaries; they only became more subtle.[2]

Some Results of the Missionary Church's Reaction

The missionary church underestimated the deep-rootedness of ancestral practices, and thus paid little attention to providing Christian functional substitutes to replace ancestral and other traditional practices. These were categorically thrown out and it was hoped that the problems associated with them would fade away with time. There is no evidence to suggest that churches in general made an attempt to deal with ancestral and traditional practices effectively by providing substitutes even though some individual missionaries did.

Reversion to Ancestral Practices

As a result of the missionary churches' not developing effective methods for dealing with ancestral and other traditional issues, throughout Africa today one finds problems of dualism, syncretism and Christians who have completely reverted to traditional ancestral practices. The church in Africa still continues to struggle to find the right biblically accepted functional substitutes to help deal with the problems caused by reversion.

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[1]Wendland, 103.

[2]See C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), 106-111.

Syncretism

Syncretism is the mixing of two religious elements which are intrinsically incapable of mixing; the result is that both lose their individual identity.[1] Nida says, "syncretism . . . involves an accommodation of content, a synthesis of beliefs, and an amalgamation of world views, in such a way as to provide some common basis for constructing a 'new system' or a 'new approach'."[2]

Syncretism comes from the Greek *synkretismos*. Originally, the word had to do with ancient Greeks of Crete coming together to fight their common enemy even though they were fighting among themselves.[3] "The historical and etymological derivation of the Greek word refers to the joining together of quarreling brothers. Syncretism is the attempt to unite together those elements which are incompatible."[4] An example of syncretism comes from my own ministry: A certain woman wanted to be committed to Christianity but also had an idol under her bed which she said helped her to speak to both God and her departed ancestors at the same time. When she was asked why she thought it was necessary to do that as a Christian, she explained that she did not want to offend either God or the ancestors. She was convinced that her safety and protection was only

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[1]Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 144.

[2]Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission* (Pasadena, CA: Carey, 1990), 131.

[3]Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, 271.

[4]Ibid.

secured by appeasing both God and ancestors. Incidents like this are not isolated: they occur every day among Christians.

Dualism

Dualism is the practicing of two different religions side by side without mixing them. It is a display of allegiance to two or more religious systems while keeping them separate and distinct. Schreiter suggests that usually in dual religious systems Christianity and a different practice exist side by side in their entirety. Christianity may be practiced entirely while holding on to some elements of other practices, like those of ancestors.[1]

I witnessed some African Christians who were committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, participated in all of the Adventist rituals, yet also took part in ancestral sacrificial rituals. The two religions were practiced totally independently from each other. Though some mix Christianity and traditional religions, most practice Christianity side by side with traditional religions. They hold on to Christianity as long as there are no problems, but when problems come, when they feel the pressure of life, they go back to their old practices of ancestral worship.[2]

While in Zambia, I was having prayer and Bible studies with a young lady who was married to a businessman. She confessed strong belief in God and participated in all the Christian rituals. However, she also participated in rituals which were believed

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[1]Schreiter, 148-149.

[2]Tempels, 13.

capable of blessing her husband's business. She reported that these sacrifices included prayer to the dead and consultation of medicine men who were believed to know how to make people rich, even though the medicine men themselves were poor.

CompleteAbandonment of Christianity

While syncretism and dualism are the most common forms of reversion to ancestral practices, the other form is complete abandonment of Christianity in favor of ancestral and other traditional practices. Reversion to ancestral practices is a common and troubling problem to the churches. In Botswana, in 1987, a man who was excited by the Advent message believed and was baptized; he left the church a few months later. When he was asked why he left the church he confessed that he did not know how to rid himself of ancestral practices, and that he did not feel worthy to remain in church with those problems.

Complete abandonment of Christianity, like other reversions, occurs as a result of people not knowing what to do when they face difficult times. As a result they go back to where they feel safe and are assured of finding practical solutions.[1] This affects both the educated and uneducated.[2]

It is not uncommon for Christians who are involved in ancestral practices to pressure other Christians into participating. One Christian lady reported being forced by her relatives to join them by washing in medication which was believed to be blessed by

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[1]Ibid., 13.

[2]Wendland, 22.

the ancestors for the purpose of ridding the whole family of a curse caused by ancestral anger. When she resisted, she was threatened with a curse, after which she reluctantly participated, which signaled her complete abandonment of Christianity.[1]

At times families (Adventist and non-Adventist alike) have attempted to force their sons who are pastors to take part in familial cleansing or protective rituals. One Adventist pastor told how his family attempted to make him put raw animal intestines around his neck as a way of protecting himself and his family. He kindly told them that he could not participate because of his convictions, but unfortunately that began a rift between him and his family.[2] Another pastor told how his family repeatedly attempted to make him take part in a bathing ritual as a way of getting rid of a bad spell affecting the family.[3]

Functional substitutes were not provided because "the world religions were regarded as darkness that would disappear before the light of education and the gospel."[4] The church was not prepared for the day when Africans would rebel against the missionary churches by joining African independent churches. When large numbers of people joined the new churches, church leaders were taken by surprise, and most of the

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[1]H, United Congregational Christian Church member, Gaborone, Botswana, interview by author, April, 1995.

[2]S, Seventh-day Adventist pastor, interview by author, Botswana, April 15, 1995.

[3]M, Seventh-day Adventist pastor, interview by author, Botswana, April 15, 1995.

[4]Russell Staples, "Exclusivism, Pluralism, and Global Mission," *Ministry*, November 1992, 10-13.

leaders became discouraged.[1] Today, syncretism, dualism, and total abandonment of Christianity continue while the church watches in amazement.

African Independent Churches

In order to appreciate the need for Christian functional substitutes, which are discussed in chapter 5, it is important to understand the development and characteristics of the African independent churches. Their attempts to provide alternatives to traditional practices must also be taken into account.

African independent churches are probably the greatest indication of protest against established churches. According to Sundkler, they began as a result of failure by missionary churches in "personal relationships, especially pastoral care."[2] The churches are called "independent" because they started in Africa and are led by Africans. Independent churches distinguish themselves from foreign missionary churches even when these have African leadership.[3] Daneel writes that "the term 'independent' refers to their independence in organization, leadership and religious expression from Western-oriented historical . . . or mission churches."[4]

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[1]See Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 60-64.

[2]V. E. W. Hayward, ed., *African Independent Church Movements* (London: Edinburgh House, 1963), 84-94.

[3]J. W. C. Dougall, *Christianity in the African Revolution (* Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1963), 61.

[4]M. L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1987), 17.

The independent church movement has taken upon itself the burden to interpret Western Christianity so that it makes sense in African cultural expression and existential settings.[1] *The Encyclopedia Britannica* describes independent churches as

> a historically new development arising in the interaction between a tribal society and its religion and one of the higher cultures and its major religion, and involving some substantial departures from classical religious traditions of both cultures concerned, in order to find renewal by reworking the rejected traditions into a different religious system.[2]

Other descriptions of independent movements include, "separatists," "sects," and "peripheral movements."[3] Whatever the description, African independent churches started because so many felt that most of their theological and social needs were neglected by mission churches.

Origin and Growth

Daneel informs us that independent churches had their roots as far back as 1700 in the Congo with a woman named Kimpa Vita, who at her baptism was renamed Donna Beatrice. She claimed to have been possessed by a spirit which told her to leave everything she had been doing in order to go and preach the gospel.[4] She proclaimed judgments of God, especially against the Roman Catholic Church, condemning the use of crucifixes and crosses as pagan replacements for idol and ancestral worship. She mixed

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[1]Dougall, 84-94.

[2]*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1974 ed., s.v. "Tribal Religious Movements."

[3]Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 17.

[4]Ibid., 46-47.

her religious proclamation with nationalism, claimed that Christ was Black and had Black disciples, and called for an African to become the new king of Congo.[1] She became a unifying factor for all groups that were dissatisfied religiously and politically, leading to her veneration as a heroine. The Portuguese authorities arrested her for insurrection and sentenced her to die by burning. Her proclamations impacted the themes of several African independent groups. Like Vita, several of the leaders of the independent movements arose in situations of crises.[2]

By 1967 several independent churches had arisen all over Africa with over 5,031 churches with about 6.8 million adherents in thirty-four countries.[3] South Africa alone, which houses most African independent churches , accounted for 3,000 churches by 1976.[4] By 1980 African independent churches made up some 20 percent (about 6 million) of all Christians in South Africa, while traditional religions (the potential evangelism field of independent churches) made up 18 percent (5.3 million people).[5] In 1989 African independent churches accounted for 29 percent of the Black population in

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 43.

[4]Bengt Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.

[5]J. J. Kritzinger, *The South African Context for Mission* (Cape Town: National Book, 1988), 19-20.

South Africa. By 1993, African independent churches' membership claimed over 30-40 percent of the Black population of South Africa.[1]

In South Africa, independent churches continue to outgrow the missionary churches. Between 1970 and 1980, in some areas of South Africa, independent churches grew by 173.8 percent. The Roman Catholic Church grew by 83 percent and the Dutch Reformed Church by 59.9 percent. Other churches grew at the rate of 43.7 percent.[2]

The growth of independent churches is not only confined to South Africa. Several other countries are also experiencing the phenomenal growth of the African independent churches. In Zambia, independent churches account for 8 percent of the population, with an affiliation of 515,000, and an annual growth of 5.6 percent.[3] In Botswana, which is heavily influenced by South Africa, 35 percent of the population belong to independent churches, with an annual growth of 5.7 percent.[4]

Botswana, which has close familial and clan ties to South Africa, has been affected by the South African independent churches. The first mention of independent churches in Botswana is from 1886 among the Batawana people of Ngamiland area.[5] Among the Bangwato, it was hard to establish independent churches because their Chief,

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[1]M. L. Daneel, "African Independent Churches, Pneumatology and Salvation of All Creation," *International Review of Mission* 82 (April 1993): 144.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Johnstone, 595.

[4]Ibid., 126.

[5]Brian Garvey, *Bembaland Church: Religious and Social Change in Southern Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 171-172.

Khama III opposed them, being a strong follower of Livingstone's London Missionary Society.[1] Most of the independent churches in Botswana became strongly established after the Second World War. The Spiritual Healing Church, which was formed by Jacob Motswasele in 1952 in Tati District with a branch at Mahalapye, had a following of 30,000 in 1982.[2] In 1958, St. Faith Holy Church was started by Boammaaruri S. Molotsi. In 1959, Evelyn Koboto started St. Philip's Apostolic Church Mission at Sefare, near Mahalapye.[3] The Zion Christian Church, which in 1995 had a membership of 14,000[4] (Adventist membership in Botswana is about 20,000), originally started in South Africa and is growing rapidly.[5]

Key Characteristics

There may be as many different characteristics as there are independent churches. Therefore this part of the chapter concerns itself only with characteristics common to most churches or are shared by well-established churches, such as the Zion Christian Churches.

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[1]Leny Lagerwerf, *They Pray for You: Independent Churches and Women in Botswana* (Leiden: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1984), 30.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Johnstone, 126.

[5]Lagerwerf, 35.

Probably, one of the least known characteristics of the African independent churches is that most of its founders are simple people, as Uka observes.

> The independent churches . . . have not generally been founded by theologians or even clerics. They are not even the creation of highly educated or the rich, but of concerned laymen or alienated church workers. These new religious movements adopted a traditional African world-view in which human events are seen to be primarily controlled by spiritual forces.[1]

Another strong characteristic of independent churches, and a reason why they attract many Africans, is their unity and togetherness. As contrasted with missionary churches, which have adopted individualism, members of African independent churches demonstrate a closeness which satisfies the need for belonging and sense of community. This also fits with the African worldview. The churches also place a strong emphasis on prayer and healing. They practice baptism and purification rites, with baptism coming after the teaching of the word of God.[2] Other characteristics include emphasis on spiritual healing through prayer.

Specific Churches

An example of African independent churches is the Zionist Church movement, the largest group in Southern Africa. Within the Zionist movement there are several different churches with slightly different characteristics, even though their main philosophies are similar.

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[1]E. M. Uka, *Missionaries Go Home? A Sociological Interpretation of an African Response to Christian Missions: A Study in Sociology of Knowledge* (Bern: Lang, 1989), 156.

[2]Falk, 458.

The Zionist church movement

According to Sundkler,[1] the first ever Black Zionist Church started as a result of rebellion against the social and economic order in which a man by the name of Le Roux led the rebellion "into Zion."[2] Le Roux was against some ministers' using beer, tobacco, and medicines instead of prayer. The movement encouraged speaking in tongues, baptized by immersion, believed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, sang locally composed songs, and danced as they worshiped.[3]

Their name comes from Heb 12:22, which talks about coming to Mount Zion. The Zionist movement bases its belief on the New Testament and claims to carry out what was established by John the Baptist, a main character of the Zion churches.[4] They believe that the Holy Spirit reveals illness and heals the afflicted. Lately some independent churches have started placing emphasis on being born again.[5] They also believe in the Trinity and consider the Father as Creator, Christ as Savior, and the Holy

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[1]Even though Sundkler has written extensively about independent churches, he was skeptical and harsh at first, a position which he later changed. His earlier writings bear some negative biases against the movement (see Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 297, and Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 9).

[2]Sundkler, *Zulu Zion and Some Swazi Zionists*, 43-50.

[3]Ibid., 46-47.

[4]G. B. A. Gerdener, *Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field* (Cape Town: N. G. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1958), 188-206.

[5]Leon Howell, "Seeds of Hope in African Churches," *Christianity and Crisis*, August 6, 1990, 238-239.

Spirit as ever present. Further, they believe in the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.[1]

The Zionist churches do not follow a specific liturgy even though they have dynamic worship with the members participating in the sermon, usually by dancing and singing. Some churches use hymnals while others do not; the common denominator for all is emphasis on reading the Bible.

They further believe in inspiration of the Spirit and that

> all new laws and customs of the church, the innovations and deviations from Western Christianity, are justified by attributing them directly to the inspiration and command of the Holy Spirit. In a sense therefore the spirit legitimates the exodus from the religious house of slavery, the reign of white mission churches. Salvation takes the form of black liberation from foreign institutions where the full benefit of the gifts of the spirit was allegedly withheld from black converts.[2]

The Zionists, who emphasize rituals, view missionary churches and missionaries as ritually unclean and in need of ritual cleansing and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.[3]

Botswana independent churches

In 1995, there were 160 independent churches in Botswana with an affiliation of almost a third of the population.[4] The largest of the independent churches in Botswana is the Zion Christian Church. It is followed by the Spiritual Healing Church, and then by the St. Peter's Apostolic Faith Church. Other churches include St. Faith Holy Church, St.

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[1]Daneel, "African Independent Churches," 144.

[2]Ibid., 147.

[3]Gerdener, 198.

[4]Johnstone, 126-127.

Philip's Apostolic Church, and others.[1] As mentioned earlier, these churches have characteristics similar to those of the Zion Christian Churches.

Attempts to Deal with Traditional Practices

African independent churches have made some contributions to African theology. Even though I may not agree with some of their theology, which mixes Christianity with traditional practices, I agree with Hans-Jurgen Becken that African independent churches have made "us realize the amount of irrelevant theology accumulated in this part of the world [Africa].[2] The independent churches have made us recognize irrelevant theology by rebelling against Christian theology which does not address local needs. Independent churches have also demonstrated that it is possible to deal with ancestral problems in the church without leaving members to choose uninformed means of dealing with the problem --means which may not be fitting to biblical teachings. Some independent churches have attempted to replace diviners and herbalists by insisting that the Holy Spirit deals with the problems in the church. As Daneel observes,

> the prophetic insistence on direct involvement of the Holy Spirit reflects an important departure from traditional divination. For prophetic diagnosis, unlike traditional divination, is not aimed at satisfying the demands of the afflicting spirits. Instead, through revelations inspired by the Christian God, the prophet seeks to take the thought world and experience of the patient seriously and to introduce, at an existentially important level, the healing and salvific power of the Christian God.[3]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Hans-Jurgen Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for Africa* (Durban, South Africa: Lutheran, 1973), 163-173.

[3]Daneel, "African Independent Churches, 150-151.

With their belief that the Holy Spirit heals and protects, "total healing of the person becomes the focal point of the independent churches. The healing sessions are accompanied by speaking in tongues prior to the diagnosis of why the person is afflicted."[1] Before the person is healed, he or she is warned to stay away from the cause of the affliction, whether it is ancestral anger or evil spirits. The prophet claims to rely on the Bible and the Holy Spirit only, even though this may not guarantee that he is genuinely using Christian power.[2]

The independent churches have also reinforced the use of symbols for healing, such as holy water, paper, staffs, and holy cords, symbolizing the power of the Holy Spirit as superior to evil forces.[3] During the stage of applying therapy to the afflicted, the independent church prophet calls upon the Spirit of God to rid the patient of the problem, while the traditional healer calls for sacrifice to ancestral spirits. Some independent churches insist that they dismiss ancestral spirits on biblical grounds and call upon the Holy Spirit to remove the problem.[4]

Baptism follows as more than just affirmation and symbol of the delivered person's death to sin. It is believed that baptism is actual death to sin and a person is supposed to come out of the water cleansed of all evil, including evil spirits, and spirits of ancestors, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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[1]Ibid., 149-150.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 150-151.

[4]Ibid., 151.

The greatest concern mission churches have regarding African independent churches is syncretism, "in which the essential features of the Gospel become blurred."[1] Some independent churches have cast a cloud on the genuineness of their dealings with ancestral worship and other traditional practices. For instance, some Zionist churches in Zimbabwe have adopted what they call "Christian ancestors." These are ancestors who have been prayed for in the name of Jesus; to these, people pray as mediators.[2] They also encourage communication between the living and dead through Christ. J. V. Taylor observes:

> Surely the 'tender bridge' that joins the living and the dead in Christ is prayer. . . . To ask for the prayers of others in this life, and to know that they rely on mine, does not show any lack of faith in the all-sufficiency of God. Then in the same faith let me ask for their prayers still, and offer mine for them, even when death has divided us. . . . If death is what Christians believe it to be, direct address to the deceased should be natural and confident.[3]

As Daneel notes, "the danger that Christ's mediatorship will be usurped is not imaginary. These adapted rites can nurture a dependence on the 'Christian ancestors', which in actual fact will interfere with rather than strengthen with God."[4] This danger cannot be ignored especially if people choose to emulate independent churches. Other dangers include exaltation of leaders to messianism,[5] and sometimes equating the leaders

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[1]Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 26.

[2]*Ibid.*, 274-280.

[3]J. V. Taylor, *Primal Vision-Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (London: S. C. M., 1963), 163.

[4]Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 275.

[5]Falk, 462.

with biblical apostles. The independent churches also have a tendency to do shallow and fragmented biblical exposition. For example, they refer to their church as literal Ethiopia, and Zion.[1]

Such views as listed above are some of the reasons mission churches are concerned that independent churches may not be genuinely Christian. On the other hand, such questionable theology should be all the more reason for the missionary churches to develop contextual biblically acceptable approaches to the problem of ancestral practices. A Christian approach to traditional African problems must be developed so that cultural needs and Christianity may be balanced where possible, and that Christianity by the power of the Holy Spirit may change those areas of culture which are incompatible with the word of God.[2] Further, it is a recognition that even though "redemption is a surgical process which hurts,"[3] surgery must not remove the vital organs crucial to survival. Harmful things should be removed, but the unharmful elements of culture should be left intact.

To summarize: When missionaries encountered traditional African practices, they did not take the time to understand the needs that the traditional practices met. The reactions included wanting to change the local people's lifestyles and thinking, cultural

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[1]J. N. Kudadjie, Review of *Quest for Belonging*, by M. L. Daneel, in *Ecumenical Review* 41 (April 1989): 306-307.

[2]Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel, 1975), 175.

[3]Ibid., 178.

insensitivity, dismissing their problems as psychological phenomena, and simply expecting the traditional problems to go away by sending the children of people who were involved in traditional practices. However, the roots of traditional problems were not dealt with in depth. As a result, new converts reverted to ancestral practices through syncretism and dualism, and sometimes complete abandonment of Christianity. Another result was the rise of African independent churches, which have attempted to deal with traditional problems, albeit at times mixing Christianity with elements of tradition not compatible with the Bible.

Chapter 4 offers some suggested principles to guide the process of contextualization. These suggestions are neither exhaustive nor the only correct ones, but should be considered as the beginning of a search for answers to the problems of traditional beliefs.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Contextualization as a concept has been hotly debated in mission circles in the last thirty years. For example, some have argued that only grape juice may be used for the communion service, regardless of its unavailability in some parts of the world. Others have suggested that an artificial grape drink could function as well, as long as the spirit of the Lord's Supper was observed. The first group feels that the "contextualization" advocated by the second would undermine the meaning of the ceremony. To elucidate the meaning and practice of contextualization, an exploration of the word and the concept is necessary. In addition, the relation of contextualization to culture needs studying. On the basis of this survey, guidelines for applying contextualization are drawn up.

The Word

The word contextualization makes many Christians uncomfortable. It is still begging for acceptance, especially among conservative Christians. The lack of acceptance by conservatives is evidenced by some of the fears they express. Some have said that contextualization opens doors to syncretism and places culture above Scripture.[1]

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[1]Dean S. Gilliland, *The Word Among Us* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 2-3.

It is, therefore, necessary to briefly deal with the origin, the concept behind the word, its definitions, and the difficulties regarding it. Such an investigation might help rest the fears of the discomfort associated with the word.

Origin

The person credited with introducing the word contextualization is Shoki Coe in the early 1970s. Hesselgrave and Rommen inform us that the word first publicly appeared in 1972 in the publication, *Ministry in Context.* Coe was intimately involved in the Theological Educational Fund (TEF), whose purpose under the third mandate was "to help the churches reform the training for the Christian ministry (including the ordained ministry and other forms of Christian leadership in church and world) by providing selective and temporary assistance and consultative services to institutions for theological education and other centers of training."[1] The word contextualizatin came into being in the setting of reforming traditional theological training, which attempted theology in a Western context, to fit new emerging national churches around the world, and to promote relevant teaching and interpretation of Scripture to local situations.[2] The debate on contextualization also concerned itself with the mission of the church, and the need for the church to identify with target people just as Jesus did.[3] The debate "challenged

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[1]David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 28-29.

[2]Ibid.

[3]F. Ross Kinler, "Mission and Context, the Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14 (April 1978): 23-29.

missionaries and younger church leaders to present the gospel and build their churches in ways that are compatible with each cultural setting."[1]

Definitions and Descriptions

Given that the word contextualization is still begging for acceptance, it should not be surprising that there are many definitions. There was no initial agreement regarding the word.[2] Following are some of the definitions/descriptions of the word. Byang Kato says that contextualization means "making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation."[3] Bruce J. Nicholls defines contextualization as "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations."[4] George W. Peters says, "Contextualization properly applied means to discover *the legitimate implications* of the gospel in a given situation. It goes deeper than implication. Application I can make or need not make without doing injustice to the text. Implication is *demanded* by a proper exegesis of the text."[5] While there were disagreements on the

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[1]Ibid., 24.

[2]Hesselgrave and Rommen, 33-34.

[3]Byang Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context, and Religious Syncretism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: Worldwide, 1975), 1217.

[4]Bruce J. Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: Worldwide, 1975), 1218.

[5]George W. Peters, "Issues Confronting Evangelical Missions," in *Evangelical Mission Tomorrow*, ed. Wade T. Coggins and E. L. Frizen, Jr. (Pasadena, CA: Carey, 1977), 169.

definition of the word. Hesselgrave and Rommen affirm that there was agreement "that the new definition [of contextualization] should reveal a sensitivity to context and a fidelity to Scripture."[1]

Shaw affirms that it is important to communicate Christ in ways which are understood by people so that Christ may not be an abstract figure who lived in the past, but someone present in daily lives today.[2] Alan Neely also indicates that proper contextualization should first of all recognize that "Scripture must be understood in the light of Jesus Christ. He is the center to which all revelation points. The Old Testament finds its fulfillment in him, and the New Testament bears witness to him."[4]

Contextualization which does not take Scripture seriously is not contextualization. Contextualization legitimizes Scripture to the local hearer. It takes into consideration such things as geographical location, language, ethnicity, politics, economics, and social systems. It also considers the gender, class, and age of the people, as well as their time frame, sense of identity, religion, values, and history.[4] Contextualization, therefore, becomes "an attempt to communicate the gospel in a way that is faithful to its essence, understandable by those to whom it is presented, and relevant to their lives."[5]

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[1]Ibid., 33.

[2]Shaw, 124.

[4]Ibid.

[4]Alan Neely, *Christian Mission: A Case Study Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 9.

[5]Ibid.

Contextualization also recognizes the dynamism of cultures due to internal and external stimuli.[1]

Biblical contextualization should not be mistaken for a permissive accommodation of cultures (Western and Third World alike) without taking the Bible seriously. The case of Robert de Nobili among the Madurai in southern India is a classic example of extreme accommodation which renders the Bible invalid. De Nobili did well in learning the language and the culture of the people, but he seemingly suggested an approach of merely introducing the Christian God in addition to the local gods, a kind of syncretism.[2] This is not biblical contextualization. Contextualization does not promote a laissez-faire attitude toward Scripture, but encourages diligent searching for biblical principles. At the same time it seeks the best ways to apply relevant meanings to the life of the local people.

Some theologians have been hesitant to embrace the word because it has been misused. For instance, some have used contextualization to promote syncretistic universalism which has no regard for the Bible. This kind of contextualization involves the total inclusion of all aspects of culture, whether or not they are in harmony with Scripture. Kato points out that "not all the so-called African culture is *de facto* culture. So much in the guise of culture is actually idolatry."[3] While admitting that "it is

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[1]Ibid., 8.

[2]Francis X. Clooney, "Robert de Nobili, Adaptation and the Reasonable Interpretation of Religion," *Missiology* 18 (January 1990): 25-35. Also see Neely, 32-40.

[3]Kato, *Theological Pitfalls*, 174.

extremely difficult to differentiate religion from culture: nevertheless, careful discernment is imperative."[1] Kato is not advocating the "Tabula Rasa" method, which advocates the throwing away of all culture, but simply admonishes caution in the process of identifying the aspects of culture which should be kept.

At times contextualization has been used to propagate local theologies which have no regard for the universal contribution of the world wide church. The purpose of contextual theology is not to be exclusivistic, but rather to be locally relevant while referring to the universal church and guidance of Scripture. Bosch warns that contextualization should not "lead to an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and mutually exclusive theologies."[2] This would suggest that the Bible does not have principles which apply universally. True contextualization bows to the culture-transcending nature of Scripture. Bosch further points out: "We therefore--along with affirming the essentially contextual nature of all theology--also have to affirm the universal and context-transcending dimensions of theology."[3]

Even those uncomfortable with the word do not deny the fact that it is important for the hearers to understand the Word of God. The answer to the question of how people can help cross-cultural hearers of the Word of God understand what the communicator intended lies in true biblical contextualization. In this paper,

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Bosch, 427.

[3]Ibid.

contextualization is the application and communication of God's never-changing Word to various peoples in languages and forms they can identify with, while allowing the biblical text to communicate the intended message of God.

The Concept

Even though the word contextualization is new, the concept is not. Dean Gilliland affirms: "God has not been indifferent to the issue of culture. The particular epochs in 'salvation history' took place in a variety of ancient cultures."[1] In the garden of Eden God is portrayed as coming down and physically walking in the garden (Gen 3:8). God chose to come down to fellowship with Adam and Eve.

Several epiphanies in the Bible show God choosing to come in a form people were familiar with. For instance, God and two other visitors appeared to Abraham and acted as human beings on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah. They ate the food prepared for them (Gen 18:1-33). The two angels who went to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah not only looked but acted as human beings (Gen 19:1-29). This is contextualization.

The Israelites were involved in several changing cultural and historical situations which became "the context in which God disclosed himself,"[2] says Glasser. For instance, in the cutting of the covenant, God chose to use terminology and rituals which

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[1]Gilliland, 35.

[2]Ibid.

were used not only in Israel, but by several other cultures all over the Middle East.[1] The cutting of the covenant involved the cutting of animals in pieces (Gen 15: 9-20), which was a pledge to death if the covenant was broken, the covenant breaker's body being cut into pieces just like the animal.[2]

The literary forms and styles that Israel used, such as wisdom literature, were borrowed from the neighbors.[3] Some authors argue that some of the psalms Israel used came from Canaanite psalmody.[4] Others suggest that "parts of Proverbs 22-24 are likely an abridged edition of the Egyptian 'Teaching of Amenemope,'" a view which is "not at all astonishing in view of the international character of the wisdom literature."[5] God has been consistent throughout time, but has adapted the message to suit the people.

In the New Testament, Paul says, "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. To the Jew I became like a Jew, to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law . . ." (1 Cor 9:19-22). This is not to suggest that Paul is saying people may become permissive and ignore supracultural elements of the Bible such as the Ten Commandments. He is talking about presenting himself to people in a guise they can understand. This includes knowing the target group's culture and

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[1]O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 9.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Gilliland, 47.

[4]Ibid., 47-48.

[5]Ibid., 48.

using tact in presenting the gospel. Paul demonstrated his commitment to teaching Scripture to hearers in a way they could understand. That is why he wrote his books in different styles to help local hearers deal with their situations.[1] His major concern was local relevance of the universal gospel.

Gilliland notes that:

> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14). When Jesus came into the world, he became a man, lived in Nazareth and made his living as a carpenter. He became a local boy with a mission to change the whole world. He didn't live in some bland way with people in general and certainly not as an alien to anyone.[2]

To Nicodemus, Christ became the renewer of life (John 3:1-21); to the woman at the well he became the expected one, the Messiah (John 4:1-26); to the Jewish rulers, he became the rejected cornerstone (Isa 28:16; 8:14; Ps 118:22; 1 Pet 2:1-8), and to the woman caught in adultery, he became the Savior and one who forgives sin (John 8:1-11).

Being all things to all people, as Jesus and Paul were, is at the heart of true contextualization. No news is good news unless it is understood by the target people. "The gospel becomes incarnate in the lives of those who embrace it; they live it out as a matter of course."[3] Relevance to people's situations is vital.

Gilliland says that biblical contextualization demands that "all Christians be able to process, reflect upon, and organize biblical truth so that the Book and the truth become

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[1]Ibid., 59.

[2]Ibid., 53.

[3]Morris Inch, *Making the Good News Relevant* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1986), 12.

their own."[1] He continues: "This must be their right and responsibility regardless of education, class, or economic status. It was an absolute of the apostles that they think for themselves and find guidance from the Spirit and the gospel they had learned."[2] In any epoch or generation, "to deny a church the right to reflect, interpret, and apply Scripture to its own life is to withhold the essence of what it is to be 'in Christ'."[3] Roland Allen once said that it was better for a church to make its own mistakes and then later discover the truth, than for someone who does not understand or know their situation well to formulate a theological system for them.[4] A young church that makes a mistake and then later realizes what it has done and corrects itself shows spiritual maturity.

Contextualization and Culture

Most missionaries in the nineteenth century did not pay attention to the cultures of the people they were trying to reach; consequently, they did not seek contextual biblically sound solutions to deal with the traditional problems of the people. In order to be able to apply biblical contextualization, it is important to know the culture and the worldview of the target group. Furthermore, knowing and understanding the target culture enables the missionary to have confidence in himself or herself; confidence which spills over to the local people as they struggle to find biblically acceptable functional substitutes.

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[1]Gilliland, 15.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

Understanding of Culture

One of the most important aspects in the process of contextualization is the understanding of culture. Ralph Winter says it well: "We cannot merely focus on the winning of *individuals*, but must, along with that fundamental effort, unlock the cultural puzzle of the *group* to which an individual belongs, so that a church movement can be planted within which that individual can grow and reach others in his group."[1] Shenk affirms: "The appropriation of the gospel by an ever growing variety of peoples has reinforced the conviction that every people has the right to hear, embrace, and live out the faith in its own cultural idiom."[2] This happens because "people are born and 'reared' into culture."[3]

Some theologians have suggested the concept of a universal Christian culture. The gospel does create a subculture within one's culture when one becomes a Christian; it is assumed that the person does not practice aspects of his or her culture which are incompatible with the gospel. Other than that, there is no such thing as a universal Christian culture. The idea of a "Christian culture" is a Constantine utopia which demanded uniformity rather than diversity among all believers. Thus, to refer to a

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[1]Ralph D. Winter, "Momentum Building in Global Missions," *Journal of Frontier Missions* 7, no. 2 (April 1990): 49-50.

[2]Wilbert R. Shenk, "Encounters with 'Culture' Christianity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18 (January 1994): 8-13.

[3]Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1992), 43.

universal Christian culture is to perpetuate an unbiblical concept of the church.[1] Even the existence of the four Gospels speaks of diversity. Each was contextual to its audience in different situations. The Gospels, well understood, could help us to understand that there is no such a thing as universal theology.[2]

Worldview

Worldview could be defined as the way people perceive reality based on certain assumptions. Hiebert identifies three basic kinds of assumptions in worldviews. *Affective assumptions* influence people's tastes, food, music, art, and their feelings towards other members of their societies. *Cognitive assumptions* influence the mental patterns and help choose the kind of leadership one is comfortable with. *Evaluative assumptions* help guide a person in making evaluations and also help to formulate moral judgments on what the most important areas of one's culture are.[3]

There are several functions of a worldview. A few are listed: "Our worldview *provides us with cognitive* foundations on which to build our systems of explanation, supplying rational justification for belief in these systems." Second, "our worldview *gives us emotional security.*" Third, it "*validates our deepest cultural norms,*" showing which behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable, and undergirding the concepts of sin

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[1]Shenk, 8.

[2]David J. Bosch, "Mission in the 1990s," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14 (October 1990): 149-152.

[3]Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Tools for Missionaries* (Singapore: Haggai Institute, 1978), 46-47.

and righteousness. Fourth, worldview "*integrates our culture*" through the arrangement of ideas, emotions, and values.[1] Finally, worldview helps us to adapt to changes.[2]

Our worldview, therefore, influences how we perceive the world around us. It also influences how we interpret Scriptures. The plurality of worldviews make it hard to communicate Christ effectively. Norman Geisler says it well:

> The Christian accepts as axiomatic that his task is to communicate Christ to the world. That sounds simple enough, but in fact it is very complex. It is complex for at least three reasons: first, there are many views of "Christ"; secondly, there are many ways to "communicate"; and thirdly, there are many "worlds" to which Christ must be communicated.[3]

Guidelines for Contextualization

Because all persons carry personal cultural baggage in their interpretation of events and texts, it is not safe to trust one's own judgments in deciding what is right. While, as Inch notes, "our best insights may at times come from elsewhere," we "still affirm the primacy of Scripture"[4] for determining what to do. Consultation of Scripture is the only safe way to reach the right decisions of contextualization. Scripture must be the

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[1]Ibid., 46-47.

[2]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 56.

[3]Norman L. Geisler, "Some Philosophical Perspectives on Missionary Dialogue," in *Theology and Mission*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 241.

[4]Inch, 34-35.

final judge of culture and its practices. The Lausanne Covenant rightly states that "culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he has fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demoniac."[1] Whatever is contrary to Scripture must be thrown away without negotiation.[2]

The whole human race stands under condemnation, but God has provided a way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ brings "cleansing, forgiveness, and peace with God to all who place their faith in him."[3] Scripture therefore must have the last say when decisions are being made regarding contextualization.

The Scriptures should guide us in the process of discovering God and finding Christian substitutes to traditional practices. The Holy Spirit leads into all truth (John 14:26), making it imperative that every substitute be inspired by him, and that no man become a substitute for the Spirit.[4]

There are several guidelines for contextualization, but those listed could work best in the setting under discussion in this study.

1. Missionaries should translate and teach Scripture in the local language. This shows people that the missionary is concerned about the local people and is willing to

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[1]Bong Rin Ro, *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), 78.

[2]Ibid.

[3]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 361.

[4]C. P. Wagner, *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 15.

understand them. Translation and teaching of Scripture in local languages are key elements in the building of trust and making progress in a missionary setting.[1] Nida observes that "a close examination of successful missionary work inevitably reveals the correspondingly effective manner in which the missionaries were able to identify themselves with the--'to be all things to all men--and to communicate their message in terms which have meaning for the lives of the people."[2]

2. Missionaries must support the biblical teaching of the priesthood of all believers. The people should be involved in the process of interpreting Scripture and in seeking biblically acceptable functional substitutes for their situations.[3]

3. Missionaries must trust the Holy Spirit to work with the local people as he does with the missionaries in the interpreting of Scripture. This could build confidence in the local people, and it would also help in building a positive bond between a missionary and local people.

4. It is acceptable for the local people to make mistakes in their struggle to find the right interpretations and applications for Scripture. It should be their privilege. The missionary and the Holy Spirit will be there to bring balance to the local interpretation.[4]

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[1]Hiebert, *Anthropological Tools for Missionaries*, 8.

[2]Nida, *Message and Mission*, 250.

[3]Hiebert, *Anthropological Tools for Missionaries*, 8.

[4]Ibid.

5. The local interpretation must be compared with how other believers in similar situations elsewhere understand the Scripture. Knowing the historical understanding and interpretation of Scripture provides a check and balance.[1]

6. The missionary and the local people should work together in order to reach true contextual applications of Scripture in a given community. The local people know the culture better than the missionary, and the missionary may be better equipped in Scriptures. The two should complement each other.[2]

7. At times the missionary should make himself a Bible student of the local people: there is no telling the benefits the missionary may gain from such an experience.

8. The missionary must be committed to the life of discipleship. This includes living the life of a converted Christian consistently and being committed to Bible study and prayer.[3]

9. The missionary must show commitment to Scriptures because true contextualization can never happen without commitment to all of Scripture. Selective acceptance of Scripture is not good enough for true contextualization to take place.[4]

10. The person attempting to contextualize must commit to the study of culture and identify with the culture he or she is working in. The person must learn to respect all

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[1]Ibid.

[2]S. Devasagayam Ponraj, *An Introduction to Missionary Anthropology* (Madras: Emerald, 1993), 90.

[3]Ibid., 91.

[4]Ibid.

people as created and loved by God even though they may be practicing traditions contrary to God's Word. The initial contact with that culture must be uncritical in order to facilitate understanding.[1]

11. There must be commitment to the church. This means that the missionary must be an active member of a local church. Contextualization must never be done by renegade members of the church[2].

12. The person must believe and be committed to the gospel commission, which includes caring for the spiritual as well as other needs of the target culture.[3]

13. The missionary must always be willing to listen to the suggestions of local people regarding how certain issues might be dealt with because the Holy Spirit speaks through them too. Further, local people may know the depth and history of traditional issues which might help the Christian community in unlocking the solutions to traditional and ancestral problems.

14. The missionary and the local people should develop a habit of studying and working together to find answers to difficult cultural issues. Studying and working together can enrich both. In addition, cooperation through studying and working together can help both the missionary and the local people to know each other personally.

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[1]Ibid., 92-93.

[2]Ibid., 93-95.

[3]Ibid., 95-96.

There is no one solution to the varied traditional and cultural difficulties that Christians experience. The guidelines given above may be helpful in finding common meaning to Scripture and solutions to some troubling issues. The Bible has the answers to our problems, except we do not always know how to best apply these answers. Relying on the Spirit and Scriptures we can safely design functional substitutes for ancestral practices. These are described in chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

SOME CHRISTIAN SUBSTITUTES FOR ANCESTRAL PRACTICES

Having already considered the appropriateness of contextualizing the gospel message, this chapter attempts to design functional substitutes for ancestral practices. However, before listing and describing these substitutes, certain theoretical and biblical considerations must be made.

Theoretical and Biblical Considerations

This part discusses the key elements necessary for providing Christian alternatives to ancestral practices. It also considers the biblical teachings that should undergird the provision of the Christian alternatives.

Key Elements in Providing Alternatives

The person providing the alternatives must teach biblical truth and be creative and skillful in searching for functional substitutes to replace the ancestral practices.[1] The teaching of Bible truth involves Bible content and Bible principles which should be the

[1]Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur, eds., *The Bible and Theology in Asian Contexts* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 67-68.

constant, never-changing Word of God, yet shown to be relevant to local needs. The methodology used in reaching appropriate dynamic Christian alternatives helps to create the bond between the Bible principles and the incarnation of the Word of God into local terms and needs.[1]

The search for biblical and meaningful alternatives must be a "dynamic process through which the Church continually challenges and/or incorporates-transforms elements of the cultural and social milieu of which it is an integral part in its daily struggle to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ in its life and mission in the world."[2] This means that the church should continue to adapt the biblical principles to changing society in order to be able to address current cultural situations or crises.

Daniel M. Hung, from an area of China where ancestor practice is rampant, once said, "We cannot ask people to give up ancestor worship without providing them with proper substitutes."[3] As earlier indicated, ancestor worship provides security and steadiness in the lives of those who practice it. It is thus necessary to continue providing people coming from ancestral practices the steadiness they need through biblical alternatives. Some converts need to hold on to substitutes for a long time, while for others, substitutes may just be a way of helping their transition from ancestor worship to Christianity. The difference will depend on the depth of involvement in ancestral

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Stephen Knap, "Contextualization and Its Implications," paper presented at the Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, IN, March 5, 1976, 5.

[3]Ro, 202.

practices. It is possible for the converts to understand functional substitutes as magical replacements for their old practice. To avoid this, new converts must be thoroughly taught the ways of God. Learning will happen through constant repetition of the Word of God. Also, repetition is important so that the new converts' allegiance may start shifting from ancestors to Jesus Christ

Biblical Teachings That Undergird the Alternatives

While new converts should be taught the whole of God's message, three doctrinal concepts are especially important to provide a foundation for new life in Christ. These are the supremacy of God, the efficacy of Jesus Christ, and the state of the human being in death.

The Supremacy of God

Probably the most important biblical teaching to provide a foundation for transferring loyalties from the old to the new is the concept of the supremacy of God. That there is a supreme being is not difficult for an ancestor worshiper to accept. People must be taught that God is the Creator of the universe and all that is in it (Gen 2:4). He created the land and the sea (Gen 1:9-10). He is also the originator of the rain and the sun (Matt 5: 45). He is responsible for the harvest in the field (Matt. 9:37-38). He created our first ancestors, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:27).

God is personal, he is concerned about the human race, and he can be talked to even though he is invisible. Even though some might consider talking to an invisible being irrational, people who are coming from ancestral practices have no problem with

this, partly because ancestor worship involves talking to unseen beings, ancestors, and other gods.[1]

The Efficacy of Jesus Christ

The role of Jesus Christ in the reconciliation of man to God takes on pivotal importance as it fills the void once occupied by worshiping ancestors. Jesus Christ claims the role the first Adam was supposed to play before he sinned. Since the first ancestor failed, Jesus Christ became the second ancestor to restore the lost order and to mediate on our behalf with God.[2]

Through his death and resurrection, Christ has earned the right to be the only person through whom to send our petitions to God. And because of his qualifications to represent us to God, "the whole outlook for the future has changed. It is through him that a totally new community is formed."[3] Jesus has now taken over all power over good and evil. Jesus Christ has now become the great advocate for God. He has become the confirmation of the former ways God communicated to man through prophets, creation, providence, and human conscience. He has become the epitome of God's revelation, and thus makes progression from that which was promised from the very beginning to fulfillment in his appearance.[4] Our mediator between the High God and human beings is

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[1]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1989), 49.

[2]Bruce, 73-74.

[3]W. A. Visser't Hooft, *No Other Name* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 96.

[4]Bruce, 45.

not fearful, but is approachable since he is of "one stock with mankind" (Heb 2:11). Those who accept him are sanctified through his efficacious death and resurrection which was once for all and sufficient for all ages.[1] Jesus has become the one "whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through forbearance of God (Rom 3:25, KJV).

Just as the Jewish leaders were in fear of defilement through contact with unclean things, human and material.[2] people from ancestral worship backgrounds are involved in daily purification rituals to rid themselves of the unclean spirits which they constantly fear. To those people who are in fear or bound by magical spells, Jesus breaks the spells which bind them.[3] The Sawis of New Guinea, prior to meeting Jesus Christ, gave a child as a peace offering to a rival tribe. But after their discovery of Jesus Christ, they accepted him as their peace child, given to the whole human race so that there could be harmony among the races.[4]

The old spiritual habits should no longer inhibit Christians who discover the power and broad horizons which Jesus provides as a person becomes regenerated through spiritual birth.[5] Without destroying the beautiful areas of culture, Christ renews, reforms,

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[1]Ibid., 81.

[2]Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 149.

[3]Herman Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 116.

[4]Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale, CA: G/L Publications, 1974), 280-281.

[5]Ibid., 281.

and regenerates. [1] He worked within culture when he was on earth and his understanding of the Jewish culture qualified him to challenge the areas which needed reform and, other times, total abandonment. He "met the people on their own ground, as one who was acquainted with their perplexities."[2] And "his messages of mercy were varied to suit his audience."[3] This made Christ's message precise and powerful enough to affect the hearers, causing many who came in contact with him to experience an everlasting impact on their lives.

The State of the Dead

The new converts from ancestral practices must be taught what happens to people when they die. The Bible teaches that when a person dies the body returns to dust while the spirit goes back to God who created it (Eccl 12:7). The dead person goes into an "unconscious state"[4] and is inactive until the resurrection when Jesus comes the second time. "To the living the grave may be dark and cold, and the period of waiting may seem long and tedious. But not so to the silent sleeper in his quiet rest."[5] This implies that dead people are not capable of existing in other forms, they are in their graves waiting for

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[1]Bavinck, 77.

[2]White, 254.

[3]Ibid., 255.

[4]*Seventh-day Adventist Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald), 348.

[5]J. N. Andrews, *Departing and Being with Christ* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, n.d), 3.

the second coming of Jesus Christ. They have no power to harm or bless the people in the community.

This teaching confronts the ancestor worshiper's concept that dead people are transformed into spiritual beings superior to the human being and continue to exist in that form.[1] The teaching of the state of the dead provides new converts with the understanding that "the dead know nothing" (Eccl 9:5) and thus are not capable of harming or talking to people. Any supposed harm, speech, or sighting of dead people comes from impersonations of the devil (see 1 Sam 28:7-20).

Functional Substitutions in Everyday Life

The suggestions listed below of Christian substitutions for ancestral worship and practices are not exhaustive, but attempt to provide a base for further research to find better ways of countering ancestral practices. These suggestions include what to do during preparation for ploughing, ploughing time, planting season, harvest time, death and mourning, marriage preparation, and power encounters. Finally, the section looks at how to remember and show respect to ancestors without worshiping them.

Preparation for Ploughing and Planting

Prayer for rain marks the beginning of the planting season. Several prayers are made by the rainmaker, who is considered to have power to call rain from heaven by pleading with the ancestors. When people become Christians, it would be important not

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[1]Thomas Blakely, Walter E. A. Van Beek, and Dennis L. Thompson, eds., *Religion in Africa* (London: Currey, 1994), 348-351.

to discontinue prayer for rain. Converts should be taught to dissociate themselves from the thinking that the rainmaker has power to call rain. They should be taught who God is, what he does, and that he is responsible for the rain, sun, moon, and all things. People should be reminded that even when the rainmaker prays, ultimately, God is responsible for the rain because he causes rain to fall upon the righteous as well as the wicked (Matt 5:45).

Instead of discouraging prayer for rain, Christian leaders should organize prayer in church for a day or a week, for how often they feel it necessary. After all, the church leaders who refuse to pray for rain or do not think of doing it are beneficiaries of the rain supposedly prayed for by rainmakers. Daneel encourages Christians to intercede on behalf of people for rain.[1] An example of Christian involvement with civil leaders in praying for rain was that of James Read. An early missionary in Botswana, Read sought permission of the chief to pray for rain. God answered the prayer and there was abundant rain that season.[2] Another time Chief Khama of the Bangwato people in Botswana, who reigned from 1872-1923, decided not to ask the rainmakers to pray for rain, but instead solicited the missionary John McKenzie to pray for rain from God. When he was under pressure from some of his people to call for rainmakers, he asked his people to hold their own ceremony away from the palace if they insisted. He held a Christian prayer service

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[1]Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 234.

[2]Bourdillon, 149.

in his courts, and the service was well attended by both Christians and non-Christians.[1] Christians should take advantage of civic leaders who approve of prayer for rain.

Ploughing Time

When ploughing time comes, Christians should continue with prayer by leading the people to the fields and holding a Christian service for the land. They could use biblical promises like 2 Chr 7:14 and Mal 3:10-11, which promise blessings and healing of the land to believers who humble themselves before God. This should be done while placing emphasis on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Lord of harvest (Luke 10:2) in every sense of the word.

It is believed, especially in the drier areas of Africa, that if ploughing is done without a blessing for rain, the harvest might not be good.[2] It is therefore important for the leaders and members of the church to be sensitive to the psychological as well as the physical needs met by the symbols in ancestral worship. In addition, the church needs to be pro-active in supplying the alternatives to issues like prayer for rain, and assuring the people that their confidence in God is secure, and he is capable of delivering fruit. At the same time, the people must be assured that even if what they are praying for is not given, it does not always mean that there is something wrong with their faith.

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[1]Ibid., 152.

[2]Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 68.

Planting Season

The process of Christian prayer should not stop during the planting season. Pastors and lay members should come together and organize prayers to bless the seeds before they are planted. This ceremony should be done in the fields being planted, as the concept of praying to God in the fields satisfies psychological needs as well as the need for physical, tangible substitutes. The field provides the connection between that which is being prayed for and the God who changes the conditions. This could also be used as an opportunity to physically illustrate a spiritual point that unless a seed dies it has no chance of reproducing. In the same manner, unless a Christian dies to self, and to the old ways, just like the seed, the new life has no chance of bearing any fruit. In 1872, Chief Khama called upon the missionaries and local believers to present the seed before God for blessing. They prayed while glorifying God as the almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth. This encouraged many believers to gain confidence in God as provider.[1]

Harvest Time

In most traditional societies, harvest time is accompanied by celebration. Harvest time ushers in a new time of reflection, communal self-judgment, and celebration, depending on how the harvest turned out. If the harvest is not good, the community, in most cases, will get together and consider the reasons for the poor harvest. Since most traditional societies believe that all things are caused by God, gods, and ancestors, the

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[1]Bourdillon, 153.

diagnosis will almost always call for ways of soothing the anger of the agent responsible for the poor harvest. Prayers and sacrifices are made to improve the conditions for the following season.

When harvest of the first fruits is made, some of the harvest should be brought into the church to show the harvest to the people and to thank God for the harvest. This act of gratitude to God replaces the sacrifice to the spirits who are expected to bring many more years of good harvests as long as the people continue appeasing the spirits. For example, when harvest time came, Chief Khama found occasion to promote the name of God among his people, praising him with "thanksgiving and praise to him who crowneth the year with his goodness."[1] Christians need to openly show the world that God is the one responsible for all the harvest.

Pastors, church leaders, and all Christians must be involved, taking the lead in the community, whether the harvest has been poor or good. They must direct the community by encouraging them to pray to God for rain or harvest. They should also look for God's opportunities when leaders become ready to be influenced by the Spirit of God because when leaders open their hearts to God there is no telling how many of their subjects they might influence. If possible, church leaders should lead the community into the fields to have a prayer festival to God. It is possible and permissible to have a Christian ceremony as an alternative to traditional ceremonies. The most important thing should be that there

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[1]Bourdillon, 153.

be the affirmation of the loving redemptive message of Jesus Christ, and the statement that Christ is powerful enough to usher in good and promising harvests.[1]

A good harvest ushers in a new feeling of celebration which calls for the giving of offerings and thanksgiving to the agent responsible for the harvest. Instead of letting the people perform the traditional rituals for thanksgiving for the new harvest, which include dancing, eating and drinking, and resting from their labor,[2] a simple prayer of thanks to God and a public request for blessings could satisfy the people.

The church leadership could organize a community thanksgiving day when people could come and eat together in moderation while placing emphasis on praising God for providing a good harvest. The leaders could even go further to pray for the preservation of the harvest until the following season.[3]

Death and Mourning

Death rituals are some of the most complicated and psychologically difficult for new converts to deal with because of fear associated with the improper escort of the deceased to their resting place.[4] Rituals by descendants of the deceased are therefore necessary because they qualify the deceased to become an ancestor.[5]

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[1]Nida, *Message and Mission*, 135.

[2]Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 135.

[3]Ibid., 140.

[4]Ro, 38.

[5]Michael G. Whisson and Martin West, eds., *Religion and Social Change in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, South Africa: Philip, 1975), 17-18.

Death rituals are probably the hardest to replace with Christian substitutes. However, attempts to find ways of redirecting the minds of new converts, especially in their transition, to other ways of thinking are necessary in order to strengthen the converts' faith. The minds of the mourners must be redirected to life in Christ through the teaching of the resurrection at the second coming. Life in Christ, therefore, satisfies the continuation of life.

The period of death and mourning is a haunting experience for Christians who have relatives still in ancestral practices. Many Christians find themselves torn between loyalty to Christ and to the family. One way of minimizing conflict with family members is by being supportive of them during the times of death. Support does not have to be participation in practices which are contrary to Scripture. It could be in the form of money or other material needs during the period of mourning. When a Christian refuses to participate in a certain practice, careful explanation should be made to the family of what Christians can or cannot do. If opportunity allows, a Christian could ask to lead the family in a religious service which would emphasize hope in the second coming of Jesus, and the resurrection. At that time a person could explain the love of God and how God exhorts Christians to respect elders. The response of the family will depend on how they see the Christian relative living his or her life.

Churches and Christians in general could take a leading role in funeral services. They could also carry out memorial services at the home of the deceased to show their

concern.[1] Instead of offering gifts and sacrifice to the dead, money or other gifts could be donated to the estate of the deceased. The relatives of the deceased could then be asked what they think the deceased would do with the money if he or she were alive. If the relatives, for instance, feel that the deceased would like to give the gift to one of the relatives, it should be given to that person. If they feel that no one in the family should get the gift, a suggestion could be made that the gift be given to the needy. At memorial time, church members could be encouraged to give to the church or to the needy people of the community. This practice could replace giving of gifts to the deceased.[2]

In Thailand, "some churches, in an effort to build post-funeral tradition, have organized pre-Easter services at grave sites. The pastor of the church has a short worship service with music, Scripture and prayer, after which the individual families go to their ancestors' graves to clean and decorate the site with flowers."[3] Since in most of Africa it is taboo for people to spend time at the graveyard, services could be held at the deceased person's house.

Marriage

Marriage in African tradition is a communal, social, and public affair which brings together two families and the community at large.[4] These families become one,

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[1]Ro, 230.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Parrinder, *Religion in Africa*, 81.

and show great mutual respect and admiration for each other.[1] Preparation for marriage begins from childhood and continues as part of the cycle of life.[2]

Traditional marriages bring the community and the families together in celebration and closeness for a long time. Marriage is followed by the rites of fertility and protection.[3] Traditional marriages in most of Christian Africa have been replaced by church marriages. However, it is not uncommon for couples married in church to complete their wedding vows with rites contrary to the Bible, like having a medium pray for them. They do so out of fear that Christian weddings may not ensure Christian life and happiness.[4]

There is enough evidence to suggest that customary marriages and church marriages are still "uneasy bedfellows" today, [5] contrary to the thought that Christian weddings have cured the ill of practicing rites which are contrary to the Bible. One of the reasons there is still a syncretistic practice of Christian and pagan rites is that in most cases there is no continual follow up of biblical counseling and proclamation of Jesus as

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[1]Michael Gelfund, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1977), 168.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Geoffrey E. Parrinder, *Sex in the World's Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 142-143.

[4]Benezeri Kisembo, Laurenti Magesa, and Aylward Chapman, *African Christian Marriage* (London: Chapman, 1977), 192-195.

[5]Ibid., 192.

Lord by ministers and church members to encourage the couple to look to Jesus for protection and fertility.

Part of the solution would be to emphasize that Christ and the Spirit of God are the only protective agents against the forces of evil.[1] Converts from ancestor practices could understand the importance of the emphasis that Christ and the Spirit are the only protective agents if they see the ministers' and members' sincerity through the regular visits and interaction with the converts.[2] Jesus should also be lifted up as the healer and protector against all disease.[3]

Christians could take the initiative to provide protective prayer for the couple. For instance, a Christian pastor or lay person could visit the couple and offer to talk to them about the protective powers of Jesus Christ against all evil forces. They would then lay hands on the couple, praying and assuring them that the power of God would keep them safe from all trouble. At the same time, explanation that the dead cannot protect should be reiterated.

One Adventist couple required their daughter, an Adventist engaged to marry a pastor, to have a medium pray for her and her prospective husband. The prospective husband resisted the idea and suggested a creative alternative to the problem. He invited another pastor to act as the "medium." On the day of the protective ritual, they brought a

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[1]Daneel, *Quest for Belonging,* 135.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

Bible which was put in a sealed bag. The pastor told the parents of the girl that he was going to perform the rite. He ran in circles around the couple while chanting prayers and praises to God. He did this a few times and then stopped. He pronounced the couple blessed, and the parents of the girl were satisfied and gave their daughter in marriage. Some people hailed this incident as a good alternative, while others rejected it as a replica of the medium's exercise. There was no biblical violation in the performance. The activity satisfied the psychological needs of the parents even though it is doubtful that the parents learned anything from it. It might have been more helpful if the pastor had gone back later to explain to the parents what he had done.

One way of dealing with marriage rites would be to invite the church, or maybe a choir, to sing songs and then present a short play on the power of Jesus. They could show him healing the crippled, casting out demons, blessing people, and resurrecting from the dead. Finally, they could end with an appeal to the parents to allow the marriage to go ahead.

Power Encounters

Africans believe for the most part that "the tangible and visible does not exhaust the realities of the universe--there is always something beyond their grasp, beyond their ken, things uncanny, outside the range of the ordinary."[1] This perception makes it easy for the African to accept Christianity, in which the power of God, which comes by the

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[1]Edwin W. Smith, *The Secret of the African* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1929), 16.

Spirit of God, is displayed.[1] However, "most pastors and people are not filled with the Holy Spirit and so do not have miraculous, supernatural power upon their testimony."[2] John Rice quotes Dwight L. Moody as saying, "It is foolish to try to do the work of God without the power of the God."[3] The encouraging thing about the power of God is that it can be received by asking, and can be renewed by those who may have lost it.[4]

Christ spent hours in prayer to the Father asking for power. It is the reason his words and prayers had power and yielded powerful results.[5] Christ knew that power encounters with principalities were real. The devil attacked him in all areas--physical, mental, and spiritual--but Jesus defeated Satan by using the Word of God (Luke 4:4, 8, 12).[6]

What sets Christianity apart from other religions is that Christianity is more powerful than other religions. It does not just offer alternatives for other practices, but has much more to offer to those who are willing. It offers eternal life. Christianity is able to distinguish what is unnecessary and renews what is renewable in any culture. As

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[1]John R. Rice, *Why Our Churches Do Not Win Souls* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1973), 167.

[2]Ibid., 172.

[3]Ibid., 167.

[4]Ibid., 172.

[5]White, 253-254.

[6]Robert J. Reid, *Gospel of the Kingdom* (New Delhi: Select, 1984), 16.

Bavinck says, "Christian life does not accommodate itself to pagan forms of life, but takes possession of them, and in so doing, renews them."[1]

There must be acknowledgment by both the helper and the person being helped that the spirit world and evil forces are real. Further, both parties should acknowledge that spirit powers are stronger than human powers, and that human beings cannot fight these powers without the help of Jesus Christ. If either is in doubt, nothing might happen.[2] In addition, there must be an awareness that being a part of Jesus Christ will result in power encounters with principalities of darkness. It is important to realize that the devil will marshal his spiritual forces against anyone who is on the side of Jesus Christ. The devil might also use human beings to fight the battle against Christians to distract their attention from himself. Focus should be on the higher powers. Christians need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before they can wage war against the evil forces of darkness. Fresh, frequent filling of and reliance upon the Spirit is needed if we are to stand against the devils.[3]

In addition, Christians need to claim the authority Jesus gave over demonic forces. This calls for the exercise of the power Jesus promised to those who believe over the devil and his demons.[4] In order to effectively exercise power over demons, a

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[1]Jerald D. Gort and others, eds., *Dialogue and Syncretism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 62.

[2]Ponraj, 150-153.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

Christian ought to prepare themselves by prayer and fasting. After a Christian feels confident that he or she is ready, then he or she would go to the afflicted person and explain to the person affected that the purpose of the encounter is to free him or her from the bondage of the evil spirits. Scriptures like, Mark 1:34; Mark 7:26; Matt 9:33; Matt 8:16; and Matt 10:1, 8, which show the power of Jesus over devils could be read in preparation. The Christian would then proceed to pray, sing victorious songs to God and then lay hands on the person to cast out the demons. Effective help for the affected would come by explaining to them the importance of keeping themselves from the cause of the affliction. Close contact ought to be kept with the delivered people so that they may be helped with intermediate challenges until they are able to stand on their own. If possible, they should be included in small groups to keep them encouraged.

New believers could be presented with Scriptures showing Jesus' display of power over nature and evil forces. He could be presented as walking on the water and calming the sea.[1] Christ could be further presented as the Creator of heaven and earth, who is actively involved in controlling all the elements and activities of the universe.[2] The healings of Jesus could be emphasized because they demonstrate the power of Jesus Christ.

Texts such as John 3:14-16 could be used with an explanation that the brass symbolically represents the physical as well as the spiritual healing found in Jesus. Just

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[1]Ro, 102.

[2]Ibid.

as the people who looked at the brass serpent found physical healing and protection, those who look to Jesus for spiritual healing and protection today will find it. Key emphasis should be placed on the power of Jesus over all forces, with the goal of the emphasis being to encourage the converts to develop strong faith. To replace the evil spirits with an active life in Jesus Christ is an effective way of preventing the evil spirits from coming back.

Ancestral Remembrance

The Bible, both New and Old Testaments, records ancestral generations from Adam (Gen 10-11; Matt 1; Luke 3). A lot of respect is shown for ancestors; for instance, when Abraham died, his sons, Isaac and Ishmael took his body and buried him in a cave near Mamre just like he had wanted (Gen 25: 8-10). Joseph carried the bones of his father to Canaan to bury them (Gen 50:5-13). There is, however, no mention of worship of ancestors. De Vaux commenting on the way Israel showed respect to the dead says, "These ceremonies were regarded as a duty which had to be paid to the dead, as an act of piety which was their due (1 Sam 31:12; 2 Sam 21:13-14 . . .). For children, these rites formed part of their duty to their parents enjoined by the decalogue."[1]

Although these rituals may appear to be ancestral practices, they were approved by the same God who forbade the worship of anything but himself (see Exod 20:3-5). "If we understand what 'worship' meant in Israel, then our conclusion that Israel did not

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[1]Roland De Vaux, Ancient Israel: Social Institutions (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 61.

practice ancestor worship is much more conclusive."[1] Israel's focus in worship was on "the will of God, especially as revealed in historical events."[2] Whenever Israel worshiped any other gods, God redirected the Israelites to himself.

If people want to remember the deceased through memorial services, the believer could hold a service to encourage people and help them to look to Jesus and to the resurrection day when we shall be united with our beloved ones. During death memorials, fellowship with non-believing relatives is acceptable as long as the believer does not take part in pagan rituals. The believing relative could use this as an opportunity to share with the relatives the resurrection hope in Jesus Christ.

The use of Psalms for praise to God and the recitation of the Ten Commandments could be used as alternatives where direct praise to the deceased is accustomed.[3] If exchange of gifts is encouraged, a believer could buy gifts like Bibles, hymnals, and other religious materials.[4] In addition, family members could spend time talking about the virtues of the deceased person and encouraging others to emulate him or her. My mother always talked to us about all the heroic things that her father did while he was alive. Other times she shared her parents' family trees. These could be other ways of remembering the ancestors.

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[1]Ro, 29.

[2]G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament against Its Environment* (London: SCM, 1968), 101.

[3]Ro, 303.

[4]Ibid.

Trusting in Jesus at All Costs

As much as possible, it is imperative that Christians provide new converts with Christian functional substitutes to ancestral practices. However, there are times when it is impossible to provide alternatives. At such times, converts should be encouraged to completely trust in Jesus for deliverance. Believers should develop their faith in Jesus to a point where they could say like Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him (Job 13:15)." This is necessary and helpful, especially when new converts face pressure from relatives to participate in ancestral rituals.

The following story happened in a Seventh-day Adventist family. No names are mentioned because the person involved requested anonymity.

> In 1967, I had a strange illness which almost crippled my leg. It all started one morning on my way to school about five miles away. I suddenly felt pain in my left thigh. By the time I reached school, the pain was so severe that I could hardly walk. I did not tell my teacher of my pain. When school ended, I walked home as usual. The last mile of the journey I had to crawl because of the severity of the pain.
>
> My parents were shocked by my illness. They gave me some pain killers and did some first aid on me (hot compresses). The nearest hospital was seven miles away; and since it was already dark, my parents decided to take me to the hospital the following day. That night when I was sleeping an evil spirit spoke to me saying I was going to die in a few days and that my sister would also face the same fate. I recognized the voice that spoke to me as that of our neighbor who was distantly related to us. The reason given for the affliction was that every child in our family was doing well in school while this man's children were not doing so well. There were always rumors about this man's involvement in witchcraft, but I had never believed that to be true.
>
> My father, who was an Adventist at that time, was worried. He consulted one of the deacons of our Church, who advised him to consult Samson, a renowned exorcist and healer. The spirit had threatened that I would die immediately if my parents attempted to take me to the hospital. My father discussed the issue with

> my mother. He panicked and decided to call in Samson, the healer. My mother resisted the idea.
>
> My pious mother had taught us to put our trust in Jesus and not to fear or believe in witchcraft. She came to my bedside and asked me what I thought about letting Samson come to heal me. I replied to her that I did not care as long as I felt better. She explained to me that Samson deals in magic, witchcraft and evil spirits. She further went on to explain to me the Scriptural implications of my decision. In addition, she told me that death was a short sleep and that there is a resurrection of the righteous at the end of time. She asked me if I was ready for the resurrection, which offended me; she nevertheless prayed for me.

The mother of the young man knew that her son's sickness was serious enough to cause death, but she trusted in Jesus even under pressure from her husband, who gave in to the evil spirit's threats. Her faith was rewarded.

Trust in Jesus does not always guarantee healing, but it guarantees resurrection and eternal life in Jesus. There are certain times that trust in Jesus might lead to death, which times a believer might have to choose between being spared from temporal death or losing temporal life in exchange for everlasting life. As Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:25). The cost of giving up one's life is nothing compared to the gain which comes with the temporal loss: eternal life.

Jesus said that the best way of preserving one's life is by losing it. Those who want to protect their lives end up losing them while those who lose their lives for Jesus end up gaining them (Luke 17:32). When people learn to trust in Jesus Christ at all costs, they are investing their lives in a bank where thieves have no access (Matt 6:19-21). The rewards of trusting Jesus Christ are everlasting.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Ancestor and traditional practices are still a deep-rooted problem among Christians in Botswana and in other parts of Africa. The practices affect young and old, poor and rich, the educated and the uneducated. Ancestor issues are closely related to culture; thus most people who become Christians do not know how to separate culture from ancestor and other traditional practices. When some believers face difficulties, such as death, community problems, or other issues requiring answers, they seek the answers from ancestors.

Ancestor practices take many forms including, but not limited to, marriage rites, protective rites, death and burial rituals, prayer and sacrifices, and planting and harvest rituals. When the need for rituals arises, the family or the community comes together to solicit acceptance from the ancestors before the ritual is performed. Sometimes, even church leaders have participated in such practices. For instance, one deacon of a local church advised a member to seek a witch doctor to heal his son.

The Christian church ignored or treated ancestor practices lightly; thus they did not provide alternatives to church members who were coming out of ancestor worship.

Reactions of the missionary church ranged from scoffing at the people who needed deliverance from ancestral practices to complete denial that the people were experiencing ancestral problems. At times the people's problems were ignored while the missionary's agenda, including Westernization of the local people, was promoted. Other times, the missionaries assumed that the local church members would eventually abandon these practices as their culture assimilated the missionary's culture. The children of local members who practiced ancestor practices were sent to mission schools where they were taught doctrines; it was hoped that these children would change. But when they came back to their parents' homes, they continued to practice their parents' religion. All these solutions did not work.

As a result of the church's not finding solutions to the problems of local people, some members completely abandoned the church, while others became involved in dualistic practices, worshiping God when it was convenient, and ancestors when they felt Christianity did not provide the answers. Many other members became involved in syncretistic practices, mixing Christianity and ancestor practices at the same time.

Furthermore, African independent churches developed with the hope of dealing with traditional issues. Many scholars have hailed the rebellion of African independent churches. These churches have attempted to deal with traditional issues by emphasizing healing by the Holy Spirit instead of the witch doctor, and by finding indigenous worship styles. However, some African independent churches have marred the efforts of others because of their mixing of Christian and traditional elements. For example, some

churches have promoted the recognition of dead ancestors as being able to mediate between the living and Christ.

Contextualization becomes necessary in order to strike a balance between Scripture and culture. Even though, contextualization is a new word originating from the 1970s, its concept has its roots in the Bible. For instance, God chose to use the language and symbols which were common in the Middle East to address the Israelites.

Contextualization calls for missionaries to become sensitive to the cultural needs of the people as they apply biblical principles. The concern is to preach a relevant Christ to local people so that Christ might be current in their lives. Paul was committed to this cause of making Christ current to local hearers. Thus his proclamation "I have become all things to all people. . . (1 Cor 9:19-22)." Jesus Christ was committed to making his ministry and teachings relevant as is noticed in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), the woman at the well (John 4:4-26), and the woman who was caught in adultery (John 8:1-11).

In light of the above, it is important to develop guidelines to guide believers in finding Christian substitutes for ancestral practices. This should be done by observing two key elements which guide the proper discovery of alternatives to ancestral practices. These are: the understanding of culture and worldview. At the same time Scripture must guide the process of developing Christian functional substitutes.

The new members must be taught the supremacy of God. God must be presented as the Highest and the most powerful Being. He must be presented as Creator and Sustainer of life. Further, the efficacy of Jesus must be emphasized to new members.

They must be assured that Jesus is all-powerful, dependable, and that his Word is trustworthy and powerful. He is able to silence the evil forces and to protect those who trust him. Finally, the members should be taught that when people die, they are not active. They stay in their graves and wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Whenever possible, functional substitutes must be found to enable the new converts to make a smooth transition from traditional practices to strong faith in Jesus Christ. The membership should also provide Christian protective ceremonies for new converts, and should encourage new members to trust in God.

The church must lead the community in prayer as members prepare for the ploughing season, when they plough, when they plant, and when they harvest. The church should provide Christian substitutes for the rituals which are performed during these times. For instance, the pastor, elder, or any respected church member could lead the community into the fields and have prayer there as they prepare for ploughing. The finding of new substitutes should be dynamic because the needs are changing all the time.

The search for substitutes should always be coupled with an understanding that there are certain times when Christians ought to stand up for Jesus regardless of the consequences of doing that. For it is better to die now than to lose eternal life.

Conclusions

The problems related to ancestor practices will never go away by themselves. If this were true, the problems would have disappeared with the teachings and theologies that the missionary churches have fostered over the years. As long as the psychological

and spiritual needs met by ancestor practices are not addressed by the church, ancestral practices will continue to trouble the church. Through the guidance of Scripture and the help of the Holy Spirit, appropriate Christian substitutes can be developed. Development of suitable biblically accepted functional substitutes is appropriate in order to deal with ancestral problems appropriately. In the past, the church has acted as though the teaching of doctrine alone might resolve traditional issues. But this has proved insufficient by itself. Issues like ancestral practices ought to be approached with specific Christian substitutes.

The following of proper contextual principles and guidelines would help church communities in their attempts to find solutions to their troubling local situations. These guidelines should be reviewed constantly as the needs change while appealing to the universal nature of Scriptures.

It is necessary that local membership at large be included in the formulation of Christian approaches to traditional issues. Experience has proved that pastors and church leaders alone are not always able to solve problems because they are limited in what they can do for the community, and probably are the last people to know about community problems as they occur. The members are much closer to the issues than are pastors and other leaders. Inclusion of members is an asset, not a burden. The theological expertise of a pastor could be combined with the experience of church members in order to arrive at the necessary relevant answers to the specific problems. Besides, members generally stay longer in one place than do pastors and know more about the history of an area than pastors do, especially Adventist pastors who do not stay long in one place.

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teaching, and shepherding in order to identify members with gifts which could help in dealing with ancestor practices. Spiritual gift inventories should be provided to church members so that they can know and become comfortable with gifts to help in nurturing members needing help.

3. Pastors should avoid being looked to as having answers to all the problems. They should teach the members to minister according to the spiritual gifts. The church becomes healthier when members are busy with the Lord's work.

4. Local pastors should bring awareness to church members through sermons and seminars in order to help the members to realize the seriousness of ancestor practices, to promote spiritual growth, and to curb nominalism among members.

Local Field and Conference Leadership

1. Church leaders at Field and Conference level must become more open and stop ignoring the issue of ancestor practices among church members. Open dialogue must be encouraged so that people could share their views, their fears, and possibly their experiences regarding ancestral and other traditional practices. Group discussions should be encouraged during camp meetings and church workshops to solicit ideas of the general membership and also to see how the members are dealing with the troubling traditional issues.

2. Church leaders should be encouraged to adopt the suggested guidelines for contextualization or to find better ones in order to help new converts to rid themselves of all undesirable practices.

3. Church leadership should be made aware of the need for finding substitutes during such times as workers' meetings and committee meetings.

Union and Division Leadership

4. Regional leadership like Divisions, Unions should set up think tanks to draw up dynamic general guidelines generated by Church leadership and local people. This should not take the place of local solutions but should compliment the local solutions.

2. Leaders should understand the difference between praying to ancestors, and mere respect to them before they can come up with the right biblically accepted substitutes, or teach others to find functional substitutes.

World Church Administration

1. Since the problem of ancestor practices is a universal problem, Seventh-day Adventist leadership of the world wide church should build worldwide rapport among members to see how they are dealing with the problem.

2. The worldwide church should monitor how other church organizations worldwide are dealing with ancestral practices, making improvements and adjustments to suit Adventist biblical teaching.

3. The worldwide leadership should allow the world church to know the theological issues different parts of the world are faced with, and how they are dealing with them.

4. Finally, the worldwide church could set up special times of prayer for the church membership in parts of the world were ancestral practices are an issue. Prayer

could focus on asking God to help in the process of discovering functional substitutes and asking God to preserve the converts so that they do not revert to their old practices. The impact of the whole world church praying is unimaginable.

The issue of ancestral practices is just one of the many traditional issues the Seventh-day Adventist world church is faced with. Helping to create functional substitutes for ancestral practices could help to find solutions to many other issues. The principles which will be discovered will apply to many other issues. It is therefore imperative that proper biblically accepted substitutes be found to replace the traditional practices contrary to Scripture.

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