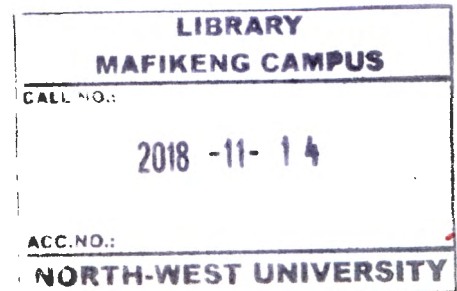


# The cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in the village of Taung, North West Province, South Africa: in light of the missio Dei



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***“God of the mountain, is still God in the valley”***

## DECLARATION

I, **OBAKENG GEORGE THEBE**, hereby declare that this dissertation is written by me and that it is a record of my own research effort. It has not been submitted before in any application for a degree or equivalence. I also declare that all borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged by means of proper referencing and quotation marks.

.....  
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**DATE**

The above declaration is confirmed by:

.....  
**PROF. SAREL JACOBUS VAN DER MERWE**

.....  
**DATE**

## ABSTRACT

The principal objective of this study is to contribute towards a solution to the missiological challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in the village of Taung, in light of the *mission Dei*. This study focuses and/or sheds light on the subject of ancestral beliefs by means of a literature study as well as empirical research. In terms of the empirical research, the respondents were church leaders and ordinary residents of Taung who were selected at random and requested to complete a questionnaire seeking to establish if the cultural practice of ancestral beliefs in their area pose a missiological challenge.

Though the community embraced Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ancestral beliefs are still prevalent. As Amanze (2003:43) has observed, it may be that many Christians, especially members of the African Independent Churches, live a strange life of one-foot rooted in the African traditional beliefs with the other in Christian beliefs and practices.

The study provides a detailed explanation and/or clarification of the concepts of ancestor beliefs. Since time immemorial God has revealed Himself to humanity and continues to welcome everybody, without exception, to participate in the *missio Dei* or to partake in His mission of reconciling Himself to humanity. Given that 1 Timothy 2:5 says “for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”, the question is: Where does this place ancestors and ancestral beliefs? This study seeks to contribute towards addressing the missiological challenge in the village of Taung that emanates from the cultural practice of ancestral beliefs in light of the *missio Dei*.

**Concept clarification:** Cultural, Ancestor, Beliefs, *Missio Dei* and Taung

**Cultural** – The term is derived from the word culture that according to Anagwo (2014:280), is that complex total which comprises knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

**Ancestor** – An ancestor is a predecessor from whom one is descended, generally speak, be it a grandfather or grandmother. In the context of this research, however, an ancestor is the spirit of a deceased predecessor who communicates with and has power over the living descendants. Nürnberger (2007:19) refers to them as “The living dead”.

**Beliefs** – The word beliefs means the values, principles or even attitudes that are attached to a particular concept.

**Missio Dei** – According to Bosch (2011:10), *missio Dei* refers to God's self-revelation as One who loves the world; God's involvement in and with the world; and the nature and activity of God that embraces both the church and the world in which the church is privileged to participate. Bosch (2011:399) further describes *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. He states this was extended to include the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.

Though in agreement with Bosch (2011), Flett (2009:15) adds a further element wherein he defines the *missio Dei* as a Trinitarian theology of mission that begins first with God's being as Father, Son and Spirit. This position retains all the important qualifications as He gives the man a share in His act and in His life.

In addition Wright (2006:23) describes *missio Dei* as God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation, in which God's people are committed to participate at God's invitation and command.

**Taung** – For purposes of this research, Taung refers to a semi-rural village in the Greater Taung Municipality of the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati district of the North West Province in the Republic of South Africa.

## OPSOMMING

Die hoofdoel van hierdie studie is om tot die missiologiese uitdaging by te dra wat die kulturele praktyk van voorvadergeloof in die dorpie Taung, in die lig van die *missio Dei*, stel. Die studie fokus en/of voorsien insig op die onderwerp van voorvadergeloof deur middel van 'n literatuurstudie asook empiriese navorsing. In terme van die empiriese navorsing was die deelnemers kerkleiers en gewone burgers van Taung wat willekeurig gekies en versoek is om 'n vraelys in te vul, ten einde te bepaal of die kulturele praktyk van voorvadergeloof 'n missiologiese uitdaging in hulle area stel.

Alhoewel die gemeenskap Christenskap al in die 19de eeu aangeneem het, is voorvadergeloof steeds 'n algemene verskynsel. Soos Amanze (2003:43) opmerk, mag dit wees dat vele Christene, veral lidmate van die African Independent Churches, met een voet in tradisionele geloof en met die ander in die Christelike geloof leef.

Hierdie studie voorsien 'n deeglike verduideliking en/of beskrywing van die konsepte aan voorvadergeloof verbonde. God openbaar Homself nog van altyd af aan die mensdom en verwelkom steeds almal, sonder uitsondering, om in die *missio Dei* te deel of om by te dra tot Sy plan om Homself met die mensdom te versoen. Gegewe dat 1 Timoteus 2:5 sê "daar is immers net een God, en daar is net een Middelaar tuseen God en die mense, die mens Christus Jesus", is die vraag nou: Waar pas voorvaders en voorvadergeloof dan in? Hierdie studie het ten doel om by te dra tot die aanspreek van die missionale uitdaging in die dorpie Taung wat uit die kulturele praktyk van voorvadergeloof, in terme van die *missio Dei*, voortspruit.

**KONSEPVERKLARING:** Kulturele, Voorvader, Geloof, *Missio Dei* en Taung

**Kulturele** – Die term kom van die woord kultuur wat volgens Anagwo (2014:280), die omvattende konsep bestaande uit kennis, geloof, kuns, morele waardes, wet, gebruike en enige ander bekwaamhede en gewoontes wat mens, as deel van die samelewing, aanleer.

**Voorvader** – 'n Voorvader is die voorganger waarvan mens afstam, of dit nou 'n oupa of ouma is. Binne die konteks van hierdie navorsing verwys voorvader na die gees van die oorlede voorganger wat met nog-lewende afstammelinge kommunikeer of mag oor hulle uitoefen. Nürnberger (2007:19) verwys na hulle as "The living dead" ("die lewende dooies").

**Geloof** – Die woord beskryf die waardes, beginsels of selfs gesindhede aan 'n spesifieke konsep verbonde.

**Missio Dei** – Volgens Bosch (2011:10), verwys *missio Dei* na God se selfopenbaring as Een wat die wêreld liefhet; God se betrokkenheid in en met die wêreld; en die aard en werk van God wat beide die kerk en die wêreld omvou en waaraan die kerk so bevoorreg is om deel te neem. Bosch (2011:399) beskryf *missio Dei* ook as God die Vader wat die Seun stuur, en God die Vader en die Seun wat die Heilige Gees stuur. Daarby voeg hy dat dit ook die Vader, Seun en Heilige Gees is wat die kerk die wêreld instuur.

Flett (2009:15) deel hierdie beskouing met Bosch (2011), maar sluit 'n verdere element in waarvolgens hy die *missio Dei* as 'n drie-enige teologie definieer wat eerstens oor God se aard as Vader, Seun en Gees handel. Hierdie wese behou all die belangrike kwalifikasies, terwyl Hy die mens in Sy werk en lewe laat deel.

Daarmee saam beskryf Wright (2006:23) *missio Dei* as God s se persoonlike plan binne God se geskiedenis van die verlossing van God se skepping, waartoe God se volk op Sy uitnodiging en bevel verplig word.

**Taung** – Taung verwys na 'n semi-plattelandse dorpie van die Groter Taung Munisipaliteit van die Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati-distrik van die Noordwes Provinsie in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

### 1.1.1 BACKGROUND

The first sign of a different religion came to the shores of Southern Africa in 1488. The sign was brought to the Eastern Cape by the Portuguese navigator Bartholomew Dias, according to Chidester (1992:35), who erected a limestone pillar featuring a Christian cross.

A clearer and permanent Christian presence was brought by the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 at the Cape of Good Hope. The Dutch East Indian Company, his employer, established the need for a refreshment station in the Cape in early 1648. Van Riebeeck and his associates introduced the God of the Bible or the religion of Christianity, so to speak, to Africans. A religion that was not necessarily friendly to their way of life.

Around 1816, the London Missionary Society assigned Robert Moffat to South Africa and after spending some time in several locations, he ultimately settled amongst the Batlhaping<sup>1</sup> in Kudumane thereby making Batswana some of the very first indigenous South Africans to encounter missionaries and actually embrace Christianity as religion. Setswana came to be the very first indigenous language into which the Bible was translated, which Berman (2017:1) notes was done by Moffat in 1857.

Around the time that Moffat arrived in Kudumane, tension was already simmering amongst the tribe. Ultimately that tension grew into unrest, which slit the Batlhaping into two. Madise (2010:2) explains that the section of the tribe, under Kgosi Tau Mankuroane - a descendant of Kgosi Phuduhucwana, left Kudumane in 1830 to settle eastward in the area they named after their leader Tau, hence the name Taung.

The tribe also adopted the name Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana, naming themselves after the forefather of Kgosi Tau. At Taung, Batlhaping ba-ga-Phuduhucwana had a brief encounter with Christianity in 1837 with a short visit by Isaac Hughes of the London Missionary Society. Madise (2010:4) notes that they only really began to embrace the religion with the arrival of William Ross in 1839.

Prior to the advent of the New South Africa, South Africa was divided into four provinces of the Cape Province, Natal Province, Free State Province and Transvaal Province. The establishment of the independent states ("homelands"), states created within the state, saw

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<sup>1</sup> One of the 76 tribes of the Batswana

Taung fall under the Bophuthatswana Government. Those independent states ceased to exist after 1994 and nine provinces were introduced, of which one is the North West and where Taung is located.

The semi-rural village of Taung is located in the Dr. Segomotsi Mompoti District Municipality of the North West Province of the Republic of South Africa. The village is approximately two hundred and forty (240) kilometres south-west of the capital city, Mahikeng, on the eastern side of the road linking Mahikeng and Kimberley in the Northern Cape. It is approximately one hundred and thirty (130) kilometres north-east of Kimberley, the capital city of the Northern Cape Province.

The 2011 census of Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) placed the total population of Taung at slightly over eighteen thousand (18 000) people. By virtue of being a semi-rural area and far-flung from big towns and cities, Taung had one of the highest youth unemployment rate, at 61.7%, in the North West Province. The area had a dependency ratio of 60.9% on government grants and had a rather low literacy rate. It was recorded that 16.8 % of the community had no income at all, whilst only 4.2% earned an income of over five thousand Rand (R5 000) per month.

Given the relentless work of missionaries like Robert Moffat in different parts of the country, indigenous Africans warmed up to Christianity and began to embrace it, as evidenced by the translation of the Bible into different African languages. Mbiti (1976:132) makes the observation that although the religion of Christianity condemned African religion as barbaric, demonic and altogether evil, it is in fact that religion that made Africans religiously disposed to Christianity.

### **1.1.2 INTRODUCTION**

Though the Taung community embraced Christianity about two centuries ago, some members of the community continue to ascribe to the culture of ancestral beliefs. The concept ancestor beliefs incorporates veneration and worship for the purposes of this research. Anderson (1991:81) accepts that though there are some communities that venerate their ancestors, they oppose that concept being regarded as ancestor worship.

The concept of ancestor worship is introduced, however, because ancestor rituals have an important social function and also display an undisputable religious character (as explained in chapter 3). In fact, Bae (2007:19) insists that ancestor worship can be deemed as one of the great phenomena of religion and as the most vital religious expression of humanity. It is found wherever traditional culture and beliefs have endured and Taung is no exception.



This could be the reason why the community has held onto their cultural practice of ancestral beliefs, veneration and worship. This is primarily so because before and even after the advent of Western civilisation, indigenous Africans believed in the existence of a supernatural being or supreme being who was so great and awesome that mere mortals could not communicate with Him directly, but only through their deceased ancestors whom they considered spirits and/or the living dead.

Kerr (1989:21) and Mogapi (1991:137) are of the opinion that God has imparted in all men a certain understanding and comprehension of His divinity. Horst (2013:93) is in agreement with both Kerr and Mogapi when he adds that every man has a *sensus divinitatis*, which he describes as a mental faculty with the primary function of producing an idea of or about God. Wright (2006:422) prefers to call it a God-awareness or God-openness that is common to all humanity.

The work of these scholars leads to the conclusion that God, in His infinite wisdom, made it possible for every man to have some sense of who He is and His existence, even if it's only a faint idea. It implies that people do not necessarily need a sermon to be aware of the existence of God (Rom. 1:18-32).

Hence Musingi (2015:94) notes that since time immemorial people all over the world have endeavoured to explain the existence of God and sought to come closer to Him through divinities or spirits, which have determined and fashioned their identity. In so doing, Africans adopted a firm stance over ancestors. To be more precise, Nyirongo (1997:51) states that Africans developed the strong belief that God could not be approached directly, only through intermediaries and consequently also worshipped through them. However, some of these intermediaries were believed to be so powerful that at times they acted without the directive and blessing of the God.

The sentiments expressed by Nyirongo (1997) are echoed and summarised by Mphahlele (2002:143) who states that almost all Africans believed in the existence of a supreme being, who was creator of all things, long before Christianity and Islam were brought to the continent.

Africans also held the view that this very supernatural being was spiritual and could, therefore, only communicate with spiritual or spirit beings. It is for that reason that they believed that only their deceased relatives, who were regarded as spirit beings, could communicate directly with this super-natural being. They, therefore, needed these ancestors to act on their behalf and to intercede for them with the supernatural being.

Vilakazi *et al.* (1986:14) says ancestors are believed to communicate with the living through dreams, which are in turn interpreted by diviners or *sangomas*<sup>2</sup> who claim they have been called to be diviners by the ancestors.

The Batswana call their ancestors *badimo*, while the supernatural being or the supreme being is referred to as *Modimo*. According to Mphahlele (2010:53), there is a profound difference between the words ancestors and gods. Ancestors are *badimo*, whilst gods are *medimo* and the former (ancestors) denotes *batho ba Modimo*<sup>3</sup>.

This then explains why the Batswana deem ancestors to be with or in close proximity with God and as such are in a position to mediate between their living descendants and God.

According to Volz (2008:125), the Batswana believed *Modimo* to be an omnipotent, impersonal creative force comparable with other elements of nature that sustained life in a mysterious fashion. Taking this point further Matjila (2007:11) says that upon death, the Batswana become *badimo* and regarded as agents of God for their clan only. Their function is to ensure good order in terms of social relationships among the living and the fertility and well-being of men, crops and stock.

However, Nyirongo (1997:52) argues that there are different types of spirits ranging from higher deities to ordinary spirits and ancestral spirits. According to him, only good people qualify to be intermediaries. The other important qualification is a long life, children and the youth do not receive the status of ancestor.

The concept of God amongst the Batswana and the Zulu, for example, is very similar. Brown (1982:13) explains that the similarity lies in the fact that the Zulu refer to God as *Inkosi yamaKhos*<sup>4</sup>, which means they affirm that God is above all other spiritual entities and realities - God is as such a Supreme Sovereign being.

In the case of the Batswana, the importance of God or *Modimo* in people's lives was and still is evidenced by numerous proverbs and personal names. Proverbs like *Mo goa Modimo o a o ikgoela*<sup>5</sup> and names like *Obakeng*<sup>6</sup> and *Gaopalelwe*<sup>7</sup> are as prevalent today as it was then.

In other words, because Africans knew about the existence of God, whom they perceived to be a supreme being, and that Christianity taught the same God, it wasn't difficult for Africans to

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<sup>2</sup>Traditional doctor or an enchanter

<sup>3</sup> People of God

<sup>4</sup> King of Kings

<sup>5</sup> He who curses another, invites the same curse

<sup>6</sup> Praise Him

<sup>7</sup> Nothing is impossible to Him



embrace that religion. The question that remains though is whether Christianity has or should impact or change the African's belief in ancestors or whether Africans can continue with the cultural practice of ancestor belief. In other words, is the cultural practice of ancestor belief compatible with Christianity or does Christianity exclude it?

### 1.1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

It was established in an interview with Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane (2017) that the community of Taung hold dear their traditions and customs, deeming it the glue that sustains social cohesion amongst the tribe and gives them their identity. One of those customs is the cultural practice of ancestor belief, which Mankuroane describes as honouring and appreciating one's forefathers for the role they played and are still playing in the lives of their particular families, clan and in society in general.

This raises the question whether the Christianity that was introduced to the community in the 1800s was poorly inculturated to the extent that the belief in ancestors was merely considered a part of cultural belief or whether also part of their religion.

Given the aforementioned scenario, if Christianity was properly inculturated one would have expected that Christians would immerse themselves in the Word of God, search Scripture and transform their culture in a quest to glorify God. Knowing Scripture is to reconnect with God and develop a relationship with Him. Munroe (2010:166) states that the first result of reconnection is a restored relationship with the King-Father. When human beings detach themselves from the heavenly government, they cut themselves off from the source of life and this is why the earth today is filled with such destruction, violence, grief and lost potential.

Notwithstanding, the belief in ancestors continues unabated by virtue of the African belief that ancestors are, as spirits, able to mediate and intercede with God on their behalf. It may also be that many African Christians live a double life, as Bae (2007:42) puts it, because in their view Christianity does not satisfy their deepest needs and fears – sentiment that some members of the Taung community share.

In other words, some Christians still harbour a desire to manipulate God into serving their needs. They want to degrade God into a vending machine into which they put their wishes and out comes what they want, be it a house, money or car. They do not want to depend completely on Him and Him alone; hence, the strong dependence on *sangomas*<sup>8</sup> and ancestors for guaranteed protection and prosperity. The advice of Olagunju (2009:154) herein goes

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<sup>8</sup> Traditional healer/diviner

unheeded: God is not obligated to do anything for man. Man is God's creation and as such whatever God does is by His grace and mercy for He is sovereign in all things.

So if one considers the fact that Christianity was introduced to this community more than two centuries ago and that to date the community still ascribes to the culture of ancestor beliefs, it begs the question of why is it that after embracing Christianity, the culture of the community was not transformed? Was Christianity properly inculturated into the community?

The mushrooming of churches that subscribe to African Traditional Religion (ATRs), which espouses traditional religion and African worldviews continue to influence the life of society in Taung and Africans in general, in spite of modernisation and urbanisation. Those prone to ancestral beliefs tend to at times cite Scripture<sup>9</sup>, referring to the honouring of parents, to justify their position and viewpoint.

Could it be that the poor inculturation of Christianity in the village of Taung has resulted in the community continuing with their cultural practice of ancestral beliefs, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other, thus posing a serious missiological challenge that gives birth to a dichotomy and/or the divided loyalties against which Christians are cautioned in Luke 16:13.

#### **1.1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main research question is: After about two centuries of Christianity in Taung, is the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs a missiological challenge or a true inculturation of Christianity in the village of Taung?

Given the abovementioned, further questions to be addressed are:

- What is the history of Christianity in this community?
- What is ancestral belief?
- What is the view of churches and Christians about ancestor belief in the village of Taung?
- What is the *missio Dei*?
- Is ancestral belief a true inculturation in the African context or syncretism?
- What is a preliminary answer to the missiological challenge?

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<sup>9</sup> Exodus 20:12, Matthew 15:4 and Ephesians 6: 1-3

## **1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1 AIM**

The aim is to understand the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration or worship in Taung and to give missiological guidelines to address this missiological challenge of syncretism or inculturation.

### **1.2.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this research is to:

- study and analyse the history of Christianity in this community;
- critically describe ancestral beliefs;
- study and expound the views of churches and Christians regarding ancestor beliefs in the Taung community;
- expound on the *missio Dei*;
- identify whether ancestral belief is inculturation or syncretism and
- give missiological guidelines to address this missiological challenge of syncretism or inculturation.

## **1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

When churches and Christians follow the missiological guidelines aimed at addressing the challenge of ancestor beliefs, they will wholeheartedly take part in the *missio Dei* and Christianity will be truly inculturated.

## **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Newman (1997:38) defines methodology as the techniques that a particular discipline uses to manipulate data and acquire knowledge. For the purpose of this research, the method of research consisted of both a literature study and an empirical survey.

### **1.4.1 LITERATURE STUDY**

A literature study is geared at contributing towards a clear understanding of the nature and the meaning of the identified problem. Fouche and Delport (2005:123) explain that a researcher can plan a scientifically valid and meaningful way forward once a thorough and relevant literature study on the topic has been conducted.

There is a great deal of literature concerning and around the issues of ancestors and ancestor beliefs and veneration. Mtshayisa (2009:27) found that some African Christians believe in the

existence of ancestors and that they can hear their prayers and worshippers. According to such African Christians, ancestors are mediators between God and the living. Further on, he (Mtshayisa, 2009:76) expounds the view that the Nicene Creed confesses the belief in God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth and all things both visible and invisible. This would make ascribing to ancestral beliefs wrong, since these ancestors did not create man.

Pula (1990:336), however, asserts that the approach to the question of ancestors and ancestor belief has been wrong right from the onset, because the 18<sup>th</sup> century missionaries who exposed this practice to the outside world were out to promote a different programme and religion and, therefore biased. The point Pula is raising here is that white missionaries never bothered to consider the traditions and customs of Africans, but rather dismissed them as savage and barbaric. In other words, Pula (1990:336) subscribes to the notion that Africans were Christianised, but that Christianity was never properly inculturated in the African culture.

On the issue of culture, Mbiti (1977:28) argued that “cultural imperialism must terminate first in order to allow the indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the gospel, on its own terms and without pressure from outside. With humility and gratitude let us borrow and learn from other cultures, but let us not become their cultural slaves”.

Hiebert (2006:377-378) reckons that the differences in culture is the main problem to the missionary task of ministering the gospel to people of different nations. This results in cultural misunderstanding, which in turn leads to poor communication and poor relationships.

On the other hand, the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism held its 1996 conference at Salvador in Brazil and amongst others, the conference focused on the authentic witness within each culture. Thomas (1997:194) notes that the conference resolved “each local church was charged with a God given opportunity to bring to birth new cultural patterns through the transforming power of its creative Lord”.

Igba (2013:131-132) found that Jesus is an exceptional and divine mediator whose scope of mediation is redemptive and as such creates a problem of validation of ancestors as mediators between God and men. Gratz (2016:4) argues that the ancestral worship that is applied in King Williams Town in the Eastern Cape hampers the community in participating in the *missio Dei*. Be that as it may, Bae (2007:20) asserts that ancestor worship in Africa is at the centre of traditional religion and as such poses a daunting challenge to Christianity.

In essence what Igba, Gratz and Bae are saying suggests that the two belief systems are not complimentary, but rather contradictory if both embraced and this leads to syncretism and the watering down of Christianity.



Now apart from the above, this researcher also drew from the work of a number of reputable authors who address issues related to ancestors and ancestor beliefs, either being for or against. Some of those are:

1. The gods of Africa or the God of the Bible (Nyirongo, 1997)
2. The Living God and the living dead (Nünberger, 2007)
3. Religions of South Africa (Chidester, 1992)
4. Christianity and ancestor veneration in Botswana (Amanze, 2003)
5. Some aspects of Batswana traditional beliefs as reflected by an intertextual analysis of Mothoagae's poetry (Matjila, 2007)
6. The encounter between Christianity and African Religion (Mbiti, 1976)
7. Translating ngaka: Robert Moffat rewriting an indigenous healer (Dube, 2014)

Going through this literature and many more, which are not listed here but referenced herein, the researcher noticed the failure to address the issue of the missiological challenge that may arise as a result of the continuation of ancestor beliefs in light of the *missio Dei*, with special reference to Batlhaping ba ga Phuduhucwana/Taung who embraced Christianity about two centuries ago.

#### **1.4.2 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The researcher conducted qualitative and quantitative research into the missiological challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in Taung. Anderson (2002:10) calls this method the blueprint of a research project, i.e. the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data. The study design was exploratory and descriptive so that the researcher could gain crucial insight into the challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, in the community of Taung.

##### **1.4.2.1 POPULATION**

The target population for this study was both church leaders as well as ordinary residents. The latter may as well have been members of different denominations, but church affiliation was not a prerequisite.

The church leaders are the ones entrusted to guide the congregation in the implementation of church policy, but more importantly to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ and invite the community to participate in the *missio Dei*. Three church<sup>10</sup> leaders from different traditions,

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<sup>10</sup> One from African Independent Churches, one from mainline churches and one from apostolic churches.

representing a wide spectrum of churches, were interviewed to get information about their church's position with regards to ancestor beliefs.

Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane, the acting head of the tribal authority that serves as custodian of tradition and culture, was also interviewed on the views of the tribal authority in relation to culture and the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs.

One hundred questionnaires were distributed to ordinary residents to solicit their views on the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, a number considered reasonable enough to sample the views of the community.

#### **1.4.2.2 SAMPLING**

The researcher employed simple random sampling, because according to Kerlinger (1986:110) random sampling is a method of drawing a segment of a population so that each member of the population stands an equal opportunity of being selected. Davies (2007:58) is in agreement, for he states that the notion of random sampling is at the centre of all scientific research, because it affords every member of the population an equal status of being included in the sample.

#### **1.4.2.3 MEASURING TOOL**

For purposes of this study, a survey was conducted. Data was collected by means of both a questionnaire and interviews.

#### **1.4.2.4 PROCEDURE**

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Tribal Authority in respect of ordinary residents and from church leaders in respect of members of their congregations. A consent form was designed by the researcher and every participant was required to sign one. All participants were told that they could at any time withdraw from the survey, whether it be the questionnaire or the interview.

### **1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher adhered to the ethical policy of the North-West University, by doing proper referencing and acknowledging all sources. The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University for the empirical research and adhered to it.

During the execution of this research, the principle of confidentiality was observed and all information acquired confidentially was dealt with as such. Babbie (1995:450) is of the view that the strongest concern in the protection of the interest and well-being of participants is the protection of their identity.

The researcher respected each respondent's right to privacy by ensuring that the questionnaire is completed in private and the information it contained is kept private.

## **1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION**

The possible chapters of this research are the following:

- Chapter 1 - Research proposal/Introduction
- Chapter 2 - History of Christianity in the village
- Chapter 3 - Ancestor beliefs and/or veneration
- Chapter 4 - Views of Churches and Christians on ancestor beliefs.
- Chapter 5 - What is the *missio Dei*?
- Chapter 6 - Ancestor beliefs, inculturation or syncretism?
- Chapter 7 - Summary, findings and recommendations

## CHAPTER 2 HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE VILLAGEINTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter it has been indicated that the majority of the residents of Taung, the subjects of this research, are Batlhaping-ba-ga-Phuduhucwana. Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane is at present the acting head of the tribal council on behalf of his elder brother's son, Kgosi Tshepo Mankuroane, who is still completing his studies. The tribal council is the custodian of the land, the traditions and culture of the tribe.

In order to establish or understand the missiological challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor belief and/or veneration in this community, it is important to make the effort to trace where and when this community first encountered and/or embraced Christianity as a religion.

### 2.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TRIBE

Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana, as it shall be seen in this chapter, have a very rich undocumented history. From time immemorial, their history has been passed along orally from generation to generation. Not much is known or recorded about this tribe or Taung, save for the much publicised Taung heritage site. Much of that publication is focused on the site itself and less on the history of the community. Manyane and Darmas (2015:161) note that in 1924 Professor Raymond Dart discovered a fossilised skull of a child, which at that time was presumed to be of a child who lived 2.5 million years ago. The meeting of the World Heritage Committee of August 2003 decided to include the Taung skull fossil site as an extension of South Africa's cradle of humankind.

According to Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane (2017), in the beginning there was no a tribe called Batlhaping. There was only one big tribe called Barolong, under Kgosi Molehabangwe. Kgosi Molehabangwe had two sons, namely Tau and Tawana.

Explaining the importance of Barolong's totem, Mankuroane (2017) narrates the very interesting story that as this tribe (Barolong) was just wandering without a definite place to stay, hunger and thirst began to set in. He goes on to say, thirst was so arduous to them so much so that locating water or water source became their foremost priority.

In their wandering, one of them spotted "Tholo" (Kudu) that they deemed an indication of water in the vicinity, which they indeed they found in the form of a fountain and since then they have used Tholo as their totem, believing that had it not been for it, they would have died of thirst.

It is very crucial to note that in terms of Setswana cultural norms and traditions, all male children of a monarch are regarded as *dikgosi* in their own right, even though only one may rule at a



particular time. Both Tau and Tawana were *dikgosi* in their own right, having been born into the royal family.

According to Mankuroane (2017), like in any other family, a dispute arose in the 1800s between the two royal brothers Tau and Tawana that ultimately led to smouldering tension between the two and by extension amongst the whole tribe. The said tension escalated into unrest amongst tribe members, causing the once peace-loving and peaceful tribe to split into two.

Mankuroane (2017) says as a result of the split, the part of the tribe led by Tau moved eastwards from Kudumane and found refuge and shelter around the shores of the Vaal River. Their staple food became *digwere* (edible roots) and *Tlhapi* (fish), upon which they then called themselves Batlhaping, in honour of the fish they resolutely believed saved them from inevitable starvation.

Mankuroane's narrative supports Madise's (2010:2) assertion that due to the section of the tribe under Kgosi Tau Mankuroane, a descendant of Kgosi Phuduhucwana, left Kudumane eastward to settle in 1830 in the area that they named after their leader Tau. They also adopted the name of their great forefather, calling themselves Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana.

Currently, the tribe is led by the youthful Kgosi Tshepo Mankuroane, assisted by his *rangwane*<sup>11</sup> Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane.

### **2.3 BATLHAPING'S CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS**

Though this is not the crux of this research, the researcher found it important to have a look and gain an understanding of the customs and traditions of this tribe. The interview with Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane revealed that not only are the customs and traditions of this tribe regarded as solid, but are actually considered the glue that sustains social cohesion amongst the tribe and gives them their identity.

Mankuroane's view is completely in line with Van der Walt (2008:477) who contends that tradition should not be tampered with in a traditional African society. It is a bond that holds the society united and as such members of that particular society do not risk straying from that fixed tradition. This can be seen in that the existing order, according to which they position themselves, is sustained by various myths and rituals.

Amongst others, Kgosi referred to the very issue of ancestor belief that to him means honouring and appreciating forefathers for the role they played in the lives of their particular families, clan and in society in general.

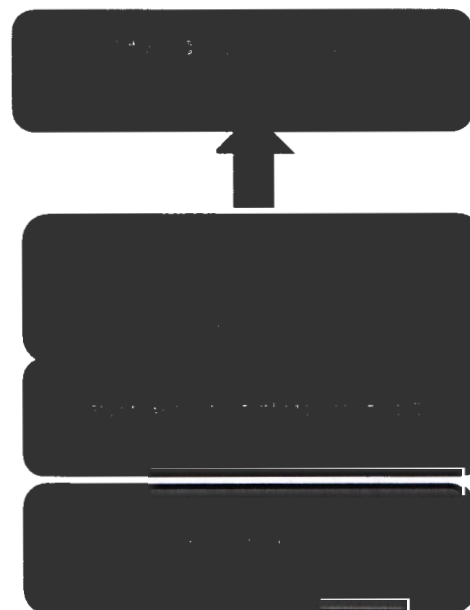
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<sup>11</sup> His late father's younger brother.

He emphasises that culturally the Batswana in general have a high regard for their parents and adults in general, hence their belief that a Motswana child is raised by a village and not necessarily by the biological parents only. According to him, such honour and respect continue even beyond the grave. This view is in line with Nürnberger's (2007:10) assertion that Africans believe that while the life energy of the deceased persons collapses, their authority is enhanced and with it their power.

Mankuroane's explanation corresponds to that of Igba (2013:27) who states that within the African worldview, the existence of God as the highest deity and the existence of ancestors are not debateable, but rather regarded as a given.

In other words, the prevalent cultural understanding of the African cosmological framework is that God who is transcendent is far removed from humanity, but followed by ancestors who mediate between Him and men. This view can best be graphically depicted as follows:



Human intermediaries are usually traditional doctors, *sangomas* and ritualists who are held in high esteem in most African communities. In fact, Turaki (1997:54) insists that some people still frequent the homes of these intermediaries to enquire about a range of aspects of their lives, their destiny as well as the welfare of the families and clans.

Back to the issue of culture, now Cant *et al.* (2006:56) propounds that culture is not a narrow outlook of society's activities, but rather it encompasses all those activities that embody the behaviour of a particular society – the way they talk, their appearance and their general social patterns. Walters (2010:38) views culture as a collective encoding or indoctrination of the mind,

which then characterises members of one category of society from the members of another category.

The conversation with Kgosi Mankuroane makes it crystal clear that this tribe is loyal to their traditions and want to uphold them at all costs. This gives rise to a missiological challenge upon enquiring whether their belief system is flexible enough to cast away the traditions and customs that may be in conflict with the Word of God, and whether they had succeeded as Christians to transform their culture or just syncretising?

Mankuroane (2017) firmly believes that customs and traditions are the cornerstone and identity of every tribe. He considers taking away their traditions and customs equal to erasing their past or even worse as taking away their soul and their identity.

He was elaborate in his explanation that some customs like *Bogwera* and *Bojale*<sup>12</sup> are age-old traditions that cannot be changed, because the tribal authority and by extension the tribe believe that it is through this custom that the youth of the tribe are taught the customs and culture of the tribe. Even more importantly, it is through the process of initiation that the youth learn their future roles as men and women to ensure an orderly society in which respect prevails.

On this very subject of initiation, Kgosi spoke with pride of how this practice or system relates to the status of men in particular in society. This is so in that *Mophato*<sup>13</sup> would always be led by a prince and before leaving for initiation, they would gather in the royal kraal where the reigning *Kgosi* would give that *Mophato* a name. Every young man would then carry that name, as a symbol or status in society, until his death. Naming *mophato* is a way of classifying age groups, but not necessarily their roles in society. In all likelihood *mophato* would then be made up of young men or women of the same age group.

Kgosi Mankuroane similarly attaches importance to the cultural practice of ancestor belief, which he deems as simple as respecting one's parents when they are still alive. He believes that the practice is not and should not be equated to worship.

Mankuroane (2017) explains that in these traditional practices, be it initiation or ancestor veneration, *ngaka* (a traditional doctor) would play a prominent role and defined *ngaka* as a simple herbalist, while a *sangoma* is a foreign concept to the Batswana and part of Zulu and Xhosa culture.

Mankuroane's assertion is completely in line with Dube (2014:159) who contends that

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<sup>12</sup> Male and female circumcision

<sup>13</sup> An initiation regiment or battalion

“the Batswana indigenous healer-doctors are often categorised into two: dingaka tsa dinaka and dingaka tse ditshotsha. The category of dingaka tse ditshotsha consisted of indigenous healers who had extensive knowledge of healing herbs for various ailments. However they did not use any form of divinity...the sangomas, initially prominent among the Nguni-Venda-Shona cultural groups are spirit mediums who use dreams, visions, dance and trance to diagnose the health of an individual.”

Mhlophe (2013:100) records that a *sangoma* is a person called by ancestors to be a diviner and falls within the category that includes witchdoctors and spiritual healers. In agreement with Mhlophe, Grantz (2016:iii) notes that many people use the terms *sangoma* and witchdoctor interchangeably, although the former is considered more compassionate and the latter more destructive.

## **2.4 THE TRIBE AND CHRISTIANITY**

The previous chapter established that the first sign of Christianity was brought to South Africa by Bartholomew Dias in 1488, when he planted a limestone pillar bearing a cross in the Eastern Cape.

The establishment of a refreshment station in the Cape, by Jan van Riebeeck, saw the influx of missionaries in South Africa. Since Christianity as a religion was mainly brought to Batlhaping by the London Missionary Society, it is perhaps important to provide a bit of a background on how the journey to this tribe started.

According to church history, as recorded by Cairns (1996:322-323), The Church of England came into being following a discord between King Henry VIII of England and the Roman Catholic Pope in Rome around 1530. This disagreement arose from Henry's insistence on breaking the rules of the church and divorcing Catherine of Aragon, simply because she did not bear him a male child to succeed him as King of England.

Following this fallout between the King and the Pope and at the insistence of King Henry, the parliament of England passed into law the act of supremacy in 1534, thereby effectively taking the authority of the Church in England from the Pope and investing it in the King.

In other words, the King was now both the head of the state and of the church.

However, in 1795 some English clerics became disgruntled at the manner in which the monarch sought to run the church. According to Paas (2016:338), one of the sources of opposition these clerics had against the king and the church was the whole question of condoning slavery, which they regarded as inhumane.



These disgruntled clerics grouped themselves into what was later to be known as the missionary society, during the time of enlightenment. Amongst others, Bosch (2011:270-271) describes it as a period of reasoning, in which that generation enjoyed the possibility of travelling the world and discovering new territories. It was at that time that missionaries were very influential (Cairns, 1996:402) against the slave trade.

Haile (1951:1) relates that these clerics' desire to escape the frustration of their environment led to the formation of the mission to the "heathen land". It is important to note that heathen land did not only refer to Africa, but also Asia.

In fact, Cairns (1996:410) records that a number of missionary societies, including the Baptist missionary society, were formed around 1792 with the sole objective of sending out missionaries and hence, the establishment of the London Missionary Society (LMS) that Johnson (1976:44) indicates was founded by men who were learned, rich and members of the upper class of society. Given their circumstances they still chose to serve the Lord and would wake up in the morning to go for prayers and read the Bible.

Vidler (1971:34) notes that because of their strong conviction against the slave trade, missionaries were then thought of as revolutionaries. They, however, denied that label in thought and deed. Woodberry and Shah (2004:55) also observe that missionaries and their supporters were the main lobbyists for the immediate abolition of slavery and other forced labour in the colonies. They furthermore opposed the tendency of European settlers to expropriate land.

So in South Africa, to be more specific, Briggs and Wing (1970:13) notes that the LMS started working in Cape Town in 1799, with the arrival of Dr. Johannes Theodorus van den Kemp (army doctor) and Johannes Jacobus Kichere (a minister of the Reformed Church of Holland), both from Netherlands. There was also John Edmonds and William Edwards from England.

The London Missionary Society assigned one of its missionaries, Robert Moffat, to South Africa around 1818 and after going to several places, ultimately settled in Kudumane. It must be noted that at the time of Moffat's arrival in Kudumane the tribe had not yet split into two. It was in their encounter with him that the tribe slowly began to warm up towards this "new religion" and slowly began to convert and embrace Christianity. It can be assumed that it was from that embracing that Moffat managed to translate the Bible into Setswana.

Now apart from having contact with Christianity through Moffat in Kudumane, further and direct contact with Christianity for Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana occurred around 1837 when they were already at present-day Taung. It followed a stay by Isaac Hughes of the London

Missionary Society, who cut his visit short due to the resistance of the tribe and reluctance to accept Christianity easily.

Following the departure of Hughes, the London Missionary Society deployed William Ross. Madise (2010:3) records that Ross was patient with Batlhaping ba ga Phuduhucwana, which earned him success and favour with the tribe. It was John Brown who came in 1868, however, who managed to establish a permanent mission station in Taung. In fact, the mission house was built right beside the Kgotla<sup>14</sup>.

Mankuroane (2017) confirmed the narrative of Madise (2010) that the sole reason for building Brown's mission house next to the royal kraal was to protect him against any possible attack from the "unconverted". It should be remembered that this was a time of instability amongst the Batswana and other tribes, occasioned by tribal wars.

It is apparent from the aforementioned that Batlhaping ba ga Phuduhucwana started converting individually to Christianity over two centuries ago, considering the time they availed land to Brown to establish permanent a mission station in Taung and even build a mission house next to their symbol of authority.

Since then and over the years, the Christian religion has grown in that part of the world. Today there is a sizeable number of churches in Taung, reflecting Christianity is indeed the main religion in the area. Though the researcher did not manage to take count of the churches themselves, from interaction with Kgosi and the ordinary residents it was established that apart from the mainline churches, the Zion Christian Church which is one of the African Instituted Churches (AIC) enjoy the most support, followed by the charismatic churches.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhutswana have a very rich undocumented history that they used to pass orally from one generation to the next. Mankuroane (2017) emphasises adherence to culture and tradition, because it explains the identity and sets the tribe apart from other tribes, like the Zulus and Xhosas.

The one thing that Mankuroane very strongly opposes is the use of *sangomas* in any traditional function, be it a royal function or ancestor veneration. The concept of *bosangoma* is foreign to the Batswana as a whole, as it resides with both the Xhosas and the Zulus.

What came out very clearly in this chapter is that Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana, in the village of Taung in the North West Province of South Africa, embraced Christianity more than

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<sup>14</sup> Royal kraal or Chief's court

two centuries ago and it is still evident to this day in the sizeable number of different denominations in the area that include mainline churches, African initiated churches and the apostolic church.

It was also ascertained from the traditional leadership that the community hold dear their traditions, customs and culture which includes the issue of ancestor beliefs. At the same time, the community also still holds on to Christianity.

The following chapter critically unpacks the concept of ancestor belief and/or veneration and worship.



## CHAPTER 3. ANCESTOR BELIEFS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter centred on the history of the community: how they came to be known as Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana and how they came to settle in present-day Taung. An interview with Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane confirmed Madise's (2010) narrative that Christianity was introduced to the community approximately two centuries ago, following the arrival of John Brown in Taung in 1868. It also became evident in the previous chapter that irrespective of Christianity the community still subscribes to their traditional and cultural practices.

It shall be seen later in this chapter that ancestor belief as a practice is in most cases accompanied by the ritual of *mpho ya badimo* and the concept of ancestor veneration is introduced in reference to that ritual. Given the fact that some African theologians and scholars, like Pobee (1979) and Kabasele (1991), hold a view that advocates Jesus Christ as an ancestor, the concept of ancestral worship is introduced in this chapter. The point is that if Jesus Christ is equated to ancestors and He is worshipped by those who believe in Him, it stands to reason that those who believe in ancestors also worship them.

In fact, Bae (2007:19) insists that ancestor worship can be deemed as one of the great phenomena of religion and as the most vital religious expression of humanity. It can be found wherever traditional culture and beliefs have endured. Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana in the village of Taung are, therefore, no exception.

This chapter focuses on seeking answers to questions like who are the ancestors, what is the meaning of the concepts of ancestor belief, veneration and worship and what do they entail.

### 3.2 THE HISTORY OF AFRICANS

From time immemorial indigenous Africans have had a belief system that governs their everyday life. They have always believed that life cannot just be lived in a vacuum and there needs to be a structural order. Long before the advent of Western civilisation, they sought a higher or more powerful source to help them in time of need and to enforce order in society.

It would be naïve to disregard that Africans indeed had an existence and a history that precedes the advent of Western civilisation or the arrival of the white man in Africa. According to Brown (1985:5), prior to and during colonisation many Westerners concluded that Africa is an uncivilised place, devoid of men or women of significant knowledge. In fact, they considered the majority of Africans as pagans and heathens who practice magic and petty superstitions.



In other words, there was an assertion and/or contention that Africans had no history to boast of and that to them only the present mattered, which was of no consequential value. Van der Walt (2001:67) notes that unlike the West who were concerned with the past, the present and the future, Africans emphasised the past.

African religion or history is based on oral traditions, which means that the basic values and way of life are passed down from the elders to the younger generation. These traditions are so entrenched in communities that they form their worldview and are passed on through stories, tales and myths and enforced by ancestors.

Perhaps that is the reason Parsons (2006:668), in line with Brown, quoted the 1970 statement of the founding father of the Republic of Botswana, the late Sir Seretse Khama, as saying: "We should write our own history books because a nation without a past is a lost nation and a people without a past is a people without a soul."

Like the rest of the world or other continents, indigenous Africans had a unique history just like other peoples of the world, a history that related how they lived and how their day-to-day lives were governed. The focus here is on ancestor beliefs and not on African Traditional Religion or culture as a whole, although it is interwoven and closely related to all other components.

### **3.3 WHAT IS ANCESTOR BELIEFS**

Jebadu (2007:250) explains that the word ancestor is derived from the Latin verb *antecedere*, which means to *go before* or the Latin noun *antecessor*, which means *somebody who goes before*. To put it in simpler terms, Amanze (2003:43) says the word ancestor is generally used to signify the dead predecessors of a family, clan or tribe. In other words, ancestors are viewed as preserving their role in the affairs or matters that concern their kin-group and only their kin-group. A Mandela, therefore, cannot be an ancestor to Mangope's family or vice versa.

So within their history, indigenous Africans had a religion in which everything and every activity was interpenetrated by a spirit. Chidester (1992:12) maintains that historically ancestor religion functioned as a powerful force of traditionalism, maintaining lifestyles and social relations linked with the past. Turaki (1997:54) concurs with Chidester by stating that the spirit world defined the African worldview and life. Extremely powerful, hidden and unexplainable spirits governed and controlled everyone and everything.

It is on the basis of that belief that they embraced what is now commonly known as the African Traditional Religion or ATR. Muyingi (2015:89) holds the view that ATR is an indigenous religion of Africans, one that has been handed down from generation to generation by the fore-

bearers of the present generation of Africans. It is not an antiquated religion, but fully intact and still practised by some Africans today.

The above is further elaboration on the view expressed by Okolo (1978:55) that African identity relies on ATR and finds its legitimacy in myths and rituals.

Accordingly, the ATR espouses that the human being consists of two prominent parts, namely the invisible, immortal soul and the visible body. They believe that after death, the visible body is interred as per Genesis 3:19: "till you return to the ground from out of it you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you shall return." The immortal soul of the elderly and those perceived as important departs to the land of the spirits and after certain funeral rites, is transformed into an ancestor who is then held in high regard.

Those very spirits form the cornerstone of their religion. Nyirongo (1997:52) argues that different types of spirits exist, ranging from higher deities to ordinary spirits and ancestral spirits. According to him, only good people qualify as intermediaries. The other important qualification is a long life, children and the youth cannot receive the status of ancestors. The point raised here by Nyirongo (1997:52) is echoed by Reed and Mtukwa (2010:149) who state that for one to qualify as an ancestor, one must have been a person of exemplary morality; a good role model to the family, clan or community; and had to have been married and had children who will be descendants.

Ancestors can be men or women, though more often than not male ancestors are more prominent because patrilineal is the most popular system of family and social integration in most traditional African communities. It is worth noting that a minority of communities are matrilineal, where women ancestors are prominent, an example of which is Balobedu ba-ga Modjadji in the Limpopo Province here in South Africa. According to Mohale (2014:6), Balobedu who came into being in the seventeenth century are ruled by women. In fact, Modjadji is believed to be the only traditional ruling queen in Southern Africa.

Pula (1990:336) contends that from the onset the wrong approach was taken to the issue of ancestors. He blames the bias of the missionaries who were seeking to promote their own programme and religion. The point that Pula is raising here is that white missionaries never bothered to consider the traditions and customs of Africans, but rather dismissed them as savage. In other words, Pula subscribes to the notion that Christianity was never properly inculturated with Africans.

Contrary to what Pula believes, however, Berman (2017:5-6) blames the confusion on the part of Africans (the Batswana in particular) and not missionaries. According to Berman, this confusion was occasioned by Africans' lack of a proper understanding of the concept of the God

of the Bible in relation to their own concept of God (Berman, 2017:5-6). This issue of blame, however, falls outside the scope of this research.

### **3.4 FUNCTIONS OF ANCESTORS**

Bae (2007:26) is of the view that the function or functions of the ancestors is closely intertwined with their identity. They serve as the representatives of the social law and tradition and are understood to uphold peace, harmony and order within their societies. They are, therefore, benefactors of the welfare of the obedient in society and a source of punishment to whoever creates havoc and disharmony in society.

Bae's (2007) assertion is in line with Triebel (2002:188) who insists that the existence of ancestors is an unquestioned reality in Africa, since they wield influence over their descendants – whether it be for the good or the bad. This is perhaps best explained in Amanze's (2003:44) definition of ancestor that to many Africans death is not the end of all, just a transitional state from the physical to the spiritual.

Yet Triebel (2002:189) continues to expound on their status as representatives of the law by indicating that they would punish those who disobey their orders. Occurrences of misfortune, illness or even death would in most cases be ascribed to the anger of the ancestors.

Given the fact that Africans or ATR speaks of a supreme being, another function of the ancestors is to mediate between their living relatives and the supreme-being. In terms of that African belief system, the supreme-being is removed or is distant from creation and as a result has no direct dealings with humanity. Amanze (2003:45) puts it plainly by saying ancestors are part of a chain of intercessors whose ultimate objective or function is to intercede on behalf of mankind.

Bae (2007:31) contends that at times ancestors are viewed as senior elders of the family, clan or even of the tribe since those practising ancestor beliefs believe that ancestors are their guarantee of a good life. Maybe that is why Reed and Mtukwa (2010:150) note that ancestors are also guardians of morality in the family, clan or tribe. They do so by forcing calamities onto members of the community who behave disorderly and bless those that please them.

### **3.5 WHAT IS ANCESTOR VENERATION**

According to Triebel (2002:190), the veneration of ancestors means that they are accorded serious and total respect. The place where the dead are buried is feared and regarded as sacred. As a result of the whole burial site being regarded as sacred, no one is allowed to

cultivate the ground and neither is cattle allowed to graze there. Not even the bushes that grow in that area are allowed to be cut.

Triebel (2002:189) makes the further point that the existence of the ancestors is wholly dependent on the living. He goes on to state categorically that without the living the ancestor is nothing. This is the reason Africans wish to have children, particularly male children, to ensure that there is someone who will perform the ancestral veneration and preserve him or her from becoming a non-being.

Nürnberg (2007:25) concurs with the point raised by Triebel, for he continues to argue that it is imperative in any traditionalist culture that the status of the deceased in the community must be respected and upheld. Ancestors depend on the recognition of their offspring for their continued authority and belonging. Fact is if they are no longer respected as superiors by their descendants, then they are lost and cease to exist.

A great deal of this respect or honour emanates from the African belief that their ancestors, as spirit beings, are in close contact with the supernatural being<sup>15</sup> and as such that in itself demands good behaviour from them. According to Setiloane (1976:65), ancestors would then reward with good health and prosperity those who treated them with respect and obedience, but punish with sickness, economic loss or some mishap those who neglected or offended them.

Dwane (1989:107) is in complete agreement with Setiloane and adds that in the Xhosa culture ancestral spirits are curators of all human values associated with *Ubuntu*. When these are violated, a breach of fellowship occurs between the world of the living and that of the departed. This may result in the ancestral spirits turning their backs on their descendants and thereby withholding their protection.

The point raised by both Setiloane and Dwane, in relation to the powers of the ancestors and how they dispense them, is echoed by Jebadu (2007:260) who states that ancestors have power over the living in that they can guarantee protection and in the same vein can also impose sanctions. They have the capacity to demonstrate their displeasure by inflicting disaster, be it in the form of sickness, sudden death or even crop failure.

It is no surprise then that Nürnberg (2007:25) holds the view that it is a sacred duty to uphold the hierarchical order of respecting ancestors, because it is the infrastructure of communal life. This is important, because if they are not remembered and respected by their descendants, they are lost, vanish or simply cease to exist.

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<sup>15</sup> *Modimo/God*



Setiloane, Dwane and Jebadu speak eloquently about the powers vested in the ancestors and how they are dispensed, as already mentioned and yet a critical contradiction is noted here. Jebadu (2007:261) seems to have his wires crossed for now he states that the ancestors derive their power from Christ. The point he is making is that if we are to believe that ancestors are in heaven with Christ (the communion of saints), then they shouldn't be seen as having power independent of Christ.

This is a very important contradiction in that it illuminates two very crucial points that are worth mentioning. Firstly, Jebadu (2007) is clearly saying that ancestors in themselves do not have any power (the communion of saints) and they are utterly dependent on Christ to act. In other words, they cannot bless or curse anybody for they simply do not have such powers. Secondly, the contradiction speaks to an assertion cited earlier by Triebel (2002:189) and Nürnberger (2007:25) that ancestors wholly depend on their living relatives for their existence. If they are not venerated, they simply cease to exist.

The question that arises, but will not be addressed here (they are resolved in chapter six), is if all powers are vested in Christ, who is the Son of God, why then is it still important to access those powers through the ancestors? If ancestors have no powers and are totally dependent on Christ, why is it important to seek them out to mediate between the living and the living God?

Some Africans, however, continue to venerate ancestors and Mulaa (2014:347) is of the view that this problem may have been inflated by Western missionaries who, in their eagerness to introduce and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, conveniently and completely disregarded all facets of African culture. It resulted in a deliberate and concerted effort to erode African culture, based on the fallacy that Western beliefs and value systems are superior.

Mulaa's view is in support of Meiring (1996:16) who asserts that the actions of missionaries just drove the veneration of ancestors underground, to continue in secret, because the church had not provided an alternative.

So in an endeavour to side-step the anger of ancestors and in a quest to live an uneventful and fruitful life, Africans continue to venerate their ancestors and pass on this tradition from generation to generation. This veneration is at times not only limited to a simply show of respect, but is also accompanied by rituals.

Kritzinger and Saayman (1994:59) also believe that the unwavering support and commitment to ancestral veneration of many Christians in Africa and in Asia are caused by the perception of Christian missionaries as a symbol of former injustice, meted out to them by their colonial past. Muyingi (2015:92) concurs and argues that since the colonial era, Africans have lived with a degraded social identity as a result of the negative opinion of ATR held by missionaries and

colonisers, branding ATR as magic, sorcery and animism. They rejected African culture in its totality, without acknowledging its positive aspects.

If the aforementioned views are correct, then it would to some extent explain the resistance of some Africans to abandon their identity and ancestral veneration – not wishing to be seen as inferior by other people. For example, in countries like Mozambique and Angola the colonial masters focused more on introducing Portuguese to the indigenous masses, turning them into Portuguese, than on ensuring that Christianity is properly inculturated. Matos (2009:159) notes that this trend was facilitated by the large volume of Portuguese who migrated to these countries because of restrictive labour markets in Portugal.

In fact, Chidester (1992:13) avers that even in South Africa the adherence to ancestor belief was a particular tactic of resistance to displacement and domination. This means that the practice was seen as a force for social cohesion and a way of holding on to tribal and ethnic identity.

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and some orthodox churches also add to the concept of ancestral veneration. Jebadu (2007:247) argues that in terms of the doctrine of the church and the Apostle's Creed, Christians ought to belief in the communion of saints and those saints refers to holy men and women who have been recognised by the church through a process of canonisation, the devoted on earth, in purgatory and those in heaven.

The Apostle's<sup>16</sup> Creed reads as follows, with Jebadu's emphasis in bold:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

Creator of heaven and earth

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

And born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died and was buried,

he descended to hell

The third day he rose again from the dead.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/apostles-creed>

He ascended to heaven  
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The holy Catholic Church,

**The communion of saints**

The resurrection of the body,

And the life everlasting. Amen

Jebadu's (2007) assertion would thus mean that there is nothing wrong with ancestral veneration as it forms or should form part of the Christian practice. Lawlor (1967:41) cites part of article 12 of the Roman Catholic's communion of saints in support:

"For the Communion of Saints, as everyone knows, is nothing but the mutual communication of help, expiation, prayers, blessings among all the faithful, whether they have already attained the heavenly home or are detained in the purgatorial fire or are yet exiles here on earth, all enjoy the common franchise whereof Christ is the head and the constitution is love."

According to Prudlo (2015:89), canonisation is a process of the Roman Catholic Church that started in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, through which a deceased member is declared a saint. It is this very process through which the church allows for public veneration of its deceased members who have been canonised in terms of the code of canon law, which the church promulgated in 1917.

Nyirongo (1997:53) confirms that some authors of a Catholic background note similarities between the African's belief in intermediaries to that recognised and accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.

In a nutshell, veneration of ancestors includes but is not limited to honouring burial sites and performing elaborate rituals (which will be discussed under 3.7).

### **3.6 WHAT IS ANCESTOR WORSHIP**

The act of worship is explained as either to pray to or deify<sup>17</sup>. Taking it a bit further, it could be said that worship is being subject and obedient to the being worshipped. Subjection in the

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<sup>17</sup> To view as God or to make God

sense that the worshipper should always seek to do and honour the will of the worshipped. This is a bit different from veneration in that veneration only speaks of honouring and admiring, whilst worship takes it a somewhat further. Worship goes hand in hand with blessing and dependency.

Some African scholars (Dwane, 1989; Mphahlele, 2010) dismiss the notion of ancestor worship from their Afrocentric perspective. They assert that the term or concept was coined by early anthropologists and missionaries. These scholars even consider the term ancestor as foreign to African thought. In fact, Mbiti (2008:75-85) refers to them as the living dead.

However, a traditionalist like Mafori Charles Mphahlele is a staunch supporter of ancestral veneration and the author of "African traditional religious and cultural practices" seems to contradict himself. Initially Mphahlele (2010:51), like the aforementioned African scholars, is opposed to the terminology of ancestor worship because he deems it misleading. Misleading, for it implies that the ancestors take the place of God and this is not true.

In fact, Mphahlele (2010:58) is emphatic that Africans *phasa*<sup>18</sup> ancestors and do not pray or worship them, since that is exclusively done for or to God. This view is in total support of Dwane (1989:111) who observes that ancestors are human and not divine and as such it would be quite surprising if the Xhosas were to pay them the same homage that is proper and fitting for God.

Given the views of both Dwane and Mphahlele, it is also interesting to note the opposition to worship as expressed by Mbiti (2008:8). He considers it an undeniable fact that dead relatives occupy a crucial role in African religion, but it is wrong to interpret traditional religion simply in terms of worshipping ancestors. He calls it blasphemous to ascribe acts of family relationship as worship, because Africans themselves know full well that they are not worshipping their dead relatives.

Shorter (1983:199) is also vehemently opposed to the notion that ancestor veneration be equated to ancestor worship. He states that where the spirits are venerated and named in prayers, they are not necessarily evoked as the ones to whom worship is directed. They are no more than liturgical companions of the worshippers, for they all pray together in solidarity to the creator.

The foregoing seems to make it crystal clear that Mphahlele, Dwane, Mbiti and Shorter are all opposed to the notion that equates ancestor veneration to ancestor worship. What becomes interesting here is that further on Mphahlele (2010:55) contradicts himself when he addresses

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<sup>18</sup> Venerate or reverence



the issue of *direto*<sup>19</sup>. He says that during the process of the ceremony of *direto*, the one participating therein prays to ancestors by linking his praise-name to those of his great grandfather. In other words, as he or she kneels down to pray to the ancestors and starts calling them one by one, from the recently departed to the long-ago departed.

Nürnberg (2007:33) observes that ancestors do not necessarily speak on behalf of the supreme-being, for they themselves are the authorities with whom one relates. As such they (ancestors) are the original authors of messages, blessings and punishments and are also the final recipients of whatever gifts and prayers are offered.

In support of the aforementioned, Kim (2015:133) explains that whenever evil or misfortune befall a family or clan (be it the result of witchcraft, punishment or a curse from the ancestors), the concerned family or clan offers prayers of thanksgiving, petition, restitution and atonement by means of libation and sacrifice to the ancestors. This they do in the belief that ancestors have influence in their lives, be it for the better or for the worse.

The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2016) defines prayer as “an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought”. Similarly the Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2017) defines prayer as “a spoken or unspoken address to God, a deity or a saint. It may express praise, thanksgiving, confession, or a request for something such as help or somebody’s well-being”. The apostle Paul<sup>20</sup> refers, in Philippians 4:6, to it as telling God what one needs. Louw (2000:429) reckons that prayer is a point of intimacy between God and the believer.

Given these definitions, Mphahlele (2010) is holding the stick at the wrong end, because regardless of how much he attempts to justify his terminology, the fact of the matter is that simple English cannot equate prayer to simple veneration or even belief and neither can the terms be used interchangeably.

It would only make sense if the term prayer was used interchangeably with the term worship, as he rightly points out (2010:137) that Africans worship ceaselessly and make sacrifices and offerings to their ancestors to appease and propitiate them. This usually takes place during ceremonies and rituals.

Vilakazi *et al.* (1986:11) are also very clear on the subject of ancestor worship. According to them, the most important religion of the Zulus is centred on ancestor worship. They call ancestors spiritual beings who are responsible for the living, by either bringing them luck or misfortune.

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<sup>19</sup> Praise-names

<sup>20</sup> Paul was addressing doctrinal issues with the Philippian church and encouraging them to stay faithful to the gospel.

The issue of ancestral worship is further cemented by another reference to a prayer. According to Chidester (1992:11), the ritual leader offers supplications and prayers to the ancestors at the cattle enclosure during the healing ritual. It is important to note that Chidester makes reference to prayer. This reference is in no way unique, since Mbiti (2008:64) also touches on it. He says there are societies (African) that offer prayers through the intermediary of the spirits, forefathers and the living dead.

Triebel (2002:191) also has knowledge of prayer being offered to ancestors. He, however, notes that in the context of ancestors, the prayers consist neither of praises and glory to the evoked nor thanksgiving, but simply informing them of the challenges of everyday life.

Pula (1990:334) also attests to the existence of prayers amongst the Basotho. He explains that the supreme God is believed to be inaccessible, so the Basotho do not go to Him for their daily needs and rather opt for the spirits of the dead, *balimo o mocha rapela oa khale*<sup>21</sup>.

Jabulani Nxumalo, author of "Christ and ancestors in the African world: a pastoral consideration", further fuels the prevailing contradictions. Nxumalo (1980:10) calls the ancestors superior to and greater than men, but not equal to God for they are seen as just mediators. In the same breath, he turns around and asserts that it is clear that the Zulu and Basotho do not pray to their ancestors in the same way they pray to God. They pray to both the ancestors and to God, it is the method that differs and not the act. This is because even though they accept that ancestors are superior to them, they recognise that they are lower than God. The Basotho thus place *Molimo*<sup>22</sup> above *balimo*<sup>23</sup>.

Now there is no way in which prayer can be divorced from worship, neither can it be relegated to simple veneration – simple veneration as only honouring the predecessors. Prayer in itself is worship and Matjila (2007:11) makes the observation that generally the ancestral worship of Africans is based on the belief that the living and the dead can mutually influence each other. The influence, which the living has on the ancestors, forms the foundation of all rites connected to the ancestral spirits.

The argument that ancestors are not worshipped, but venerated, should be put to rest by the ample proof that prayers are indeed offered to them. Balz (1995:8) is quite adamant on this score. He asserts that the attitude of the venerators is equally important, since they feel that they depend on the ancestors who they regard as the guarantors of their lives. They not only expect life, but also fullness of life from the ancestors and from no one else.

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<sup>21</sup> Meaning ancestors, as new gods, pray to the old God who has been in existence forever. Simply put, ancestors intercede on their behalf.

<sup>22</sup> God

<sup>23</sup> Ancestors

It is very clear that what Balz is saying is that ancestral worshippers turned to their ancestors in their belief that God is too aloof and distant. In other words, they expect from their ancestors what Christians expect from God (namely blessings, guidance and protection). This emanates from his assertion that worshippers expect life and fullness of life from ancestors and from no one else, which means that ancestors give and sustain life (Balz, 1995:8).

### **3.7 RITUALS OF VENERATION AND WORSHIP**

The English Oxford Living Dictionary (2016) defines the word ritual as a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order. Mulaa (2014:348) argues that the ritualising process improves the maintenance and appreciation of values. He adds that rituals are deeply entrenched in the African traditional religion.

This aspect is raised by Anderson (2010:41) who points out that rituals provide a context for celebrating success and healing hurt and grief. Rituals can only be effective if they are carefully planned, meticulously honest and very particular to the moment. He goes on to say that rituals articulate what cannot be captured in words, they turn the invisible into the visible. Shabangu (2004:163) is of the view that a ritual "is a means of communicating something of religious significance through word, symbol and action".

Ancestral worship entails elaborate rituals that in most cases are done or led by a traditional doctor, *sangoma* or head of a particular family that intends to offer a sacrifice. Chidester (1992:11) explains that during the healing ritual the ritual leader offers supplications and prayers at the cattle enclosure, followed by passing around the specially brewed beer and by spilling it out towards the centre of the cattle enclosure as an offering to the ancestors. Mbiti (2008:25) indicates that the act of pouring out beer or giving portions of food to the living-dead of the family is a sign of communion, fellowship and remembrance for there is a supernatural tie that binds the living dead and their surviving relatives.

Mbiti is thus alluding to an act of appeasing ancestors who have been offended somehow or to thank them for a gift or blessing.

This point is taken further by Triebel (2002:191) who observes that besides beer and fruit, animals like goats or chicken are usually used in the offerings. He goes on to say that it is important that the offered animal bears no blemish and is only one colour. After slaughtering, the intestines such as the heart, kidneys, the liver and the blood are offered to the ancestors, whilst the remaining carcass is prepared as a common meal for all those concerned.

Dwane (1989:108) says in Xhosa culture an ox is sacrificed to restore a broken relationship between the living and the departed. He explains that the roaring and bellowing of the sacrificial



ox serve as indication that the offering has been accepted on the other side. Apparently that sound in itself is a source of great joy and thanksgiving to those who are performing the ritual.

Still on the issue of rituals and sacrifices, Jebadu (2007:258) is of the view that rituals associated with ancestral veneration and worship should be respected. He equates the importance of offering food to the ancestors to the sacrifices that were offered to God in Old Testament times, arguing that the food is not eaten by the ancestors physically in the same manner that God did not. The essence, according to him, of the practice is its symbolic value (Jebadu, 2007:258).

According to Mulaa (2014:354), these rituals can and should be understood from several perspectives and that it is a social process, since it is a product of society. It arises out of a specific need, for example, the need for structure or social order. More importantly it enhances relationships, which increase bonds through given beliefs and values. On the same topic, Reed and Mtukwa (2010:150) make the rather interesting observation that the ancestral influence of one particular ancestor does not last forever. It is only felt immediately after his death and slowly vanishes with the passage of time, when he is forgotten.

From the wide literature presented, it seems that ancestor veneration and worship are still prevalent in African communities and that the two concepts are used interchangeably to achieve the same goal. More often than not, ancestor veneration and worship is justified by the Christian practice of worshipping Jesus Christ. They then think of Jesus Christ as an ancestor.

### **3.8 ANCESTORS AND JESUS CHRIST**

Supporters of ancestral veneration and worship tend to draw a parallel line to the devotion to angels and saints in Christianity. They often base their argument on the fact that Jesus Christ was born to Mary, a Jew. They further postulate that since Jesus died, it is proper and fitting for the Jews to pray to God through Him. They are basically equating and/or relegating Jesus Christ to the status of ancestor (Reed & Mtukwa, 2010:155).

The idea of Jesus Christ being an ancestor has been muted by a number of prominent African theologians in the last three decades, theologians of both the Protestant and Catholic persuasion. In fact in 1979 John Pobee, a Catholic Ghanaian (1979:52), said "our approach would be to look on Jesus as the great and greatest ancestor – in Akan language Nana". This view is supported by Kabasele (1991:117), a Catholic from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who wrote that Jesus Christ is suited to the class of ancestor, because he is a mixture of all mediations. By His mediation, He accomplishes in Himself the words and deeds of an ancestor.

The quest to further justify this position, Pula (1990:339) observes, leads to the assertion that it is not surprising that the two Old Testament leading "ancestors" Elijah and Moses talked to Jesus at His transfiguration (Mark 9:2), which was meant to foreshadow the life after death in glorification.

Reed and Mtukwa (2010:162) are two of the advocates of this particular stance and are of the opinion that there is great value in this specific attempt to understand Jesus as a supreme ancestor. They maintain that there is indeed a parallel and a match between the person and work of Christ and the person and the work of the ancestor: they both lived, they both died and are now mediators between God and the living (Reed & Mtukwa, 2010:162).

Reed is supported by Clark (2010:154) who argues that as a saviour ancestor, Jesus is performing all the tasks He is traditionally understood to perform. His influence and significance are relativized. Jesus is one among a group of ancestors both saviour and hero who in diverse ways model the exemplary life or the life worthy of emulating

This view of Jesus Christ as an ancestor is further motivated by Jebadu (2002:248) who is of the opinion that ancestral veneration should be incorporated into the Christian faith. His argument is that the church<sup>24</sup> teaches in essence that the communion of saints is the church itself consisting of the tripartite members of the faithful on earth, those in purgatory and those in heaven with Jesus Christ as its head. He promotes the understanding that ancestors, as part of the triumphant church in heaven, must be venerated with angels and Christ since they are with Christ in heaven.

The argument of Jesus Christ being an ancestor doesn't hold water if we are to go by the definition of ancestor of Mphahlele (2010:55). According to his definition, ancestors are always males who lived their lives fully and honourably and died of old age. This definition or description does not fit Jesus Christ at all. Bear in mind, Jesus Christ was crucified when He was just 33 years old. Secondly and most importantly, as Sawyerr (1968:93) observes, contrary to the ancestral dead of Africans, Jesus Christ was once dead but now lives.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, it is crucial to note that for an ancestor to be an ancestor there has to be a blood relationship with his descendants. In other words, Nelson Mandela cannot be an ancestor to the descendants of Frederick Willem de Klerk or to those of Lucas Mangope simply because there is no blood relationship. Amanze (2003:43) further clarifies this point by stating that generally the word ancestor signifies the dead predecessors of a family, clan or tribe. In other words, ancestors are seen as preserving their role in the affairs or matters that concern their kin-group and only their kin-group.

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<sup>24</sup>Roman Catholic Church and orthodox churches



However, this issue is brought into the right perspective by Triebel (2002:194) who says what happened to Jesus Christ according to the creed<sup>25</sup>, is undeniably in line with the African understanding of what happens to the dead. In addition, Schwarz (1979:172) draws a very clear line of distinction between the African view and the Christian view by stating categorically that the Biblical witnesses did not comprehend death as just a transitional stage with a subsequent continuation similar to the life here on earth, as in the case of ancestors, but as a rapture and a dimensional borderline beyond which there is something totally different from what is occurring here on earth.

The proponents of this argument that Jesus Christ is an ancestor or part of ancestor belief conveniently forget that though Jesus Christ died on the cross, He rose from the dead. The analogy that could come into play here is that reference to former presidents Nelson Mandela and Ronald Reagan, Princess Diana and Mother Theresa, revered as they were, is today prefixed with "the late", which is not the case with Jesus Christ who died more than two thousand years ago. The stark contrast here is that He is alive and it would be a monumental error to use the prefix "the late" when referring to the living.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

Based on the literature study, it can be concluded that the African culture and/or practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship is alive and well. Even though the advocates and practitioners of ancestor belief would like the whole world and particularly the Christian community to understand and accept that it is simply respecting and remembering their predecessors, the foregoing literature has refuted such a claim beyond a reasonable doubt.

The issue of ancestral belief, veneration and worship in African society and the importance they attach to it is clear. So passionate are they about it that they even seek to include Jesus Christ in that fold.

It is crucial to note that advocates, followers and protagonists of ancestral veneration and worship do not only differ with each other on some important aspects, but even contradict themselves on those very aspects. For example, Jebadu (2002) first explains the powers that these ancestors have and how they are applied then turns around and totally discredits those powers, indicating that they reside with Christ.

Secondly, in the debate about ancestor worship Mphahlele (2010), a self-confessed traditionalist, comes out strongly against the notion of ancestral worship. He dismisses it as a

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<sup>25</sup>"Crucified, died, buried and descended into the realm of the dead"



thought created by the missionaries. Then he makes an about-turn and refers to ancestors being prayed to and that Africans worshipped them ceaselessly.

Given the elaborate rituals associated with the practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship, it also became evident that the practice falls squarely under the category of idolatry. This would suggest that any individual, family or community that venerate or worship ancestors is guilty of idolatry and goes against Exodus 20:3: "You must not have any other god but me. After freeing His chosen nation from Egypt and knowing what they were exposed to in that land, God gave them commandments on how they were to relate to Him.

Wright (2006:143) insists that when people worship creation (human beings) and not the Creator, everything becomes complicated and the end product is disorder. The disorder is occasioned by the fact that in true worship God is placed in the centre, whilst in ancestor worship the needs of men are central.

It is also crystal clear from the above discussion that ancestors inasmuch as they do not have their own powers, they don't exist on their own. Over and over again the point is made that they are completely dependent on their living relatives for their existence. In fact, the literature shows that if they are not venerated, they would cease to exist. They remain important in the lives of Africans, however, who still believe them to be intermediaries.

## **CHAPTER 4 VIEWS OF CHURCHES & CHRISTIANS ON ANCESTOR BELIEFS, VENERATION AND WORSHIP.**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous two chapters provide a detailed description of the tribe or community of Taung, their history as a community and how they embraced Christianity around two centuries ago. They unpack the concept of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship, drawing from a number of renowned scholars and authors to explain these concepts and what they entail. The literature study substantiates the existence of the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship. This study demonstrates the very thin line of differentiation between ancestor veneration and worship and that the concepts are at times used interchangeably. This can be seen in how those who claim to only venerate tend to pray and offer sacrifices to ancestors and depend on them for their well-being.

Chapter two reveals the strong defence of traditions, customs and culture by the traditional leadership of Batlhaping ba-ga-Phuduhucwana. Now in this chapter the focus shifts to the views of the traditional leadership, the community as well as the church leaders, who are the custodians of the gospel, on the issue of ancestors.

### **4.2 THE POSITION OF THE TRIBAL AUTHORITY CONCERNING ANCESTORS**

The tribal authority, through the voice of Mankuroane (2017), sees nothing wrong with ancestor belief and veneration and indeed considers it part of customs and traditions. The point that Kgosi Mankuroane emphasises though is that as a tribal authority they cannot force anyone to venerate or worship ancestors and in the same vein they cannot stop them from doing so either.

Mankuroane (2017) concedes that ancestors visit their descendants through visions and dreams and the response to these visitations and/or instructions solely depends on the descendant's faith. He personally and as tribal leader believes that ancestors have a crucial place in society and its well-being, just like in the days of his forefathers.

He goes on to state that rituals associated with ancestors merely serve to show appreciation and to seek guidance and protection. According to him, the show of respect and the communication children have with their parents and the guidance and protection their parents rendered to them in childhood do not cease upon the death of the parents. Mankuroane's (2017) view resonates with Nümberger's (2007) and Mbiti's (2008) reference to the "the living dead" who still cares for their children.

Mankuroane's (2017) strong objection to the use of a *sangoma* in traditional rituals is recorded earlier under sub-heading 2.3.

#### 4.3 VIEWS OF CHURCH LEADERS

Though humanity is holding steadfastly to their traditions and culture, the Bible has countless stories through which God the creator sought to reconcile Himself to man. God's plan of seeking reconciliation with humanity ultimately led to Him sending His (John 3:16) only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him may not perish.

Now Jesus Christ taught the message of reconciliation for three years and was then nailed to the cross as a ransom for humanity. Upon His resurrection, as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples. Inasmuch as this great commission is meant for every believer, it wouldn't be totally amiss to assume that the crux of the matter is on the shoulders of those who call themselves men of God.

Given the missiological challenge of Christianity – the desire to transform society and to bring it to the fullness of the knowledge of God in the face of the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship - it is important to note the perspective of religious leaders here in Taung. These church leaders comprise a randomly selected member from the AICs, one from mainline churches and one from apostolic churches. They were selected to generally represent a spectrum of religious belief and doctrines.

Hammer<sup>26</sup> (2017) finds it difficult to comprehend what the fuss is about ancestors, for even Jesus Christ acknowledged ancestors, citing the narrative of Zacchaeus the tax collector and Jesus Christ recorded in Luke 19.

Luke narrates how Zacchaeus met Jesus Christ and how he hosted him at his home. Hammer's (2017) justification that Jesus Christ accepts and acknowledges ancestors is verse 9: "Jesus responded, Salvation has come to this home today for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham." According to Hammer (2017), there is a reason Abraham is mentioned as an ancestor.

Hammer (2017) believes that ancestors protect and give strength to the living, citing the configuration of Jesus Christ in the book of Matthew 17:3: "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking to Him." To him there is no better illustration that Jesus Christ believed in ancestors, for both Moses and Elijah had long passed on before His coming to

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<sup>26</sup> Reverend Moagiemang Hammer of the Free African Methodist Church – mainline church

earth. However, to Maibi<sup>27</sup> (2017) the configuration has nothing to do with ancestors and only signifies the glory of the almighty God.

Hammer (2017) is adamant that as long as certain churches or people have a problem with ancestors, it is a resounding confirmation that Christianity is not yet Africanised. His point is that God is an all-powerful God who doesn't make mistakes. God cannot create the Batswana, give them customs and traditions and then turn around and call what He gave them evil. He contends that being ashamed or abandoning those customs and traditions is tantamount to being ashamed of God Himself, for He is the one who created those customs and traditions. Hammer (2017) deems practicing those traditions and customs as in fact glorifying God, the Creator of everything.

Nku<sup>28</sup> (2017) explains that although he is not mandated to express the official<sup>29</sup> position of the church on this matter, he personally considers ancestors a big part of the identity of Africans. Should he oppose ancestor veneration and worship, it would be like denying oneself. Nku<sup>30</sup> (2017) comes out strongly against Christians who he claims speak with forked tongues – condemning ancestor veneration on the one hand and yet pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who by all counts are ancestors.

However, Van der Walt (2008:478) asserts that tradition should never be related to the divine will and should never be a stumbling block to new trends and/or developments. What was good in the past can be preserved for the future, but should not in any way be considered holy or normative.

Hammer's and Nku's (2017) stances seem to resonate with Mugambi (1995:77) who says the introduction of Christianity made it a bit difficult for Africans to readily accept Christianity. He avers that what missionaries did in Africa taught people in churches to despise and look down on their culture, history and knowledge. It raises the question to Nku (2017) of how can Jesus the Son of God, who created Africans in His own image, allow such dehumanisation.

On the issue of veneration and worship, Hammer (2017) believes that there is nothing wrong in venerating ancestors. He only opposes the participation of *sangomas* during the veneration of ancestors. Maibi (2017) does not see anything wrong in ancestor veneration either, but he does not consider rituals necessary to remember forefathers and give them credit for their contribution to a descendant's life. In other words, he doesn't see any other role ancestors could play in his life, either to protect him or to bless him.

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<sup>27</sup> Pastor Moeti Maibi of Revival Ministry – charismatic

<sup>28</sup> Reverend Gaorapelwe Nku of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) - AIC

<sup>29</sup> Officials in Moria are the only ones mandated to speak on behalf of the church

<sup>30</sup> Reverend Gaorapelwe Nku of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) - AIC





Though these men of the cloth agree on veneration, there seems to be a bit of contradiction in that Hammer (2017) believes in having a ritual *Mpho ya badimo*- a semi-festive ritual where a family or clan gathers together in honour of their ancestors. It is semi-festive in that a cattle or goat is slaughtered and traditional beer is brewed. The blood of the animal, some food and beer are poured on the ground as an offering or sacrifice to the ancestors. The remaining food is then feasted on by attendees.

Hammer (2017) is adamant that even white people have not distanced themselves from their cultural practice, in spite of professing to be Christians. Here he compares the ritual of pouring of beer to the ground with the lifting of glasses in a toast, asserting that the two practices serve the same purpose. Nku (2017) indicates that he performs the ritual on a yearly basis, having inherited the practice from his parents.

Whilst in agreement with ancestor veneration, Maibi (2017) is completely opposed to the ritual of *mpho ya badimo*. What is also of interest here is that Hammer also opposes the ritual being classified as ancestor worship or even involving a *sangoma* or herbalist in the ritual, because he considers the ritual as thanking God for His blessings.

In terms of the official position of their churches with regards to ancestor veneration/worship, Hammer is adamant that his position is in line with the position of the church and would never preach an anti-ancestors message, given that he believes in them. Maibi is dismissive in this regard, stating that since he believes only in Christ he cannot waste his time preaching a message which is anti-ancestors - all that is necessary to him is to glorify God.

The Roman Catholic Church released a booklet which addresses the matter of ancestor veneration/worship. Resolution 2.5.2 of the 2006 Bishops Conference<sup>31</sup> states categorically:

“We notice with a measure of concern that many African Christians, during difficult moments in their lives, resort to practices of the traditional religion: the intervention of ancestral spirits, engagement of spirit-mediums, spirit-possession, consulting diviners about lost items and about the future, magical practices and identifying one’s enemies, etc.

Fear of the spirit world has become intensified instead of the love of the ever-merciful God definitively revealed by Christ through His death and resurrection. What is even more disturbing is the fact that some priests and the religious have resorted to becoming diviner-healers. It against this unsettling background that we, the Bishop’s, have decided to issue this pastoral statement in order to present anew the teaching of the Catholic Church and to renounce those

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<sup>31</sup> Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference

aspects of culture that contradicts the message of the Gospel, perpetuate fear in human hearts and undermine the centrality of Christ in our Christian faith.”

This statement or resolution makes it crystal clear that the Roman Catholic Church is taking a stance against the practice of ancestor veneration and worship.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF CHURCH LEADERS**

In as much as they are from different denominations, the views of the three pastors in relation to the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship vary and what is interesting is their unwillingness to preach against the practice.

Only two of the three are closer in terms of their beliefs. Hammer (2017) and Nku (2017) ascribe to ancestor veneration and concede that some members of their congregations may be venerating their ancestors. They don't find anything wrong with it and, therefore, do not feel the need to preach against the practice. Although Maibi (2017) is vehemently opposed to the idea, he doesn't see a need to preach against it. According to him, his time spent on the pulpit is to glorify the living God.

So it is evident from the above that church leaders, even those who do not subscribe to the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship, do not discourage let alone condemn the practice from the pulpit.

#### **4.5 VIEWS OF ORDINARY RESIDENTS/CHRISTIANS**

The views of ordinary residents and/or Christians were sought by means of a questionnaire, which was designed to capture the views of the community. A hundred (100) questionnaires were randomly distributed and collected from the respondents. A number of the questionnaires were given out at randomly identified houses, while others were given out at the tribal office.

The purpose of sourcing demographic information was primarily to ascertain who are more prone to the practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship and their socio-economic status. The feedback leads the researcher to the conclusion that the matter of the socio-economic status in relation to ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship could be revisited in a different study to verify in which part of society this cultural practice is prevalent. Is it amongst the less educated compared to the educated or amongst the poor compared to the affluent and the rich?

Analysis of the questionnaires reflected that some respondents preferred to skip certain questions and since this was not an interview, their reasons were not investigated – especially



since all interviewees and those completing the questionnaire were informed that they were under no obligation to participate in the study.

**4.5.1 IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF RESPONDENTS**

The purpose here is to verify the age difference of respondents, which is important for providing a clear indication that a wide spectrum of respondents were covered.

**4.5.1.1 AGE OF RESPONDENTS**

TABLE 1: AGE

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
21-30	6	6%
31-40	16	16%
41-50	23	23%
51-60	36	36%
Above 60	19	19%
TOTAL	100	100%

This table indicates the majority of the respondents as middle aged (41-60) at 59%, followed by the youth (21-40) at 22%.

**4.5.1.2 GENDER OF RESPONDENTS**

TABLE 2: GENDER

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Male	34	34%
Female	66	66%
TOTAL	100	100%

The majority of respondents are women, which may be ascribed to a greater number of women remaining at home while the men search for employment.

**4.5.1.3 MARITAL STATUS**

TABLE 3: MARITAL STATUS

MARITAL STATUS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Married	57	57%
Single	31	31%
Divorced	3	3%
Widowed	6	6%
Separated	1	1%
Live together	2	2%
TOTAL	100	100%

The greatest response came from married people, followed by those who are single.

**4.5.1.4 HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

TABLE 4: HIGEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

GRADE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
None	0	0%
1-7	17	17%
8-12	58	58%
Tertiary	25	25%
TOTAL	100	100%

The majority of the respondents are literate and it can, therefore, safely be assumed that they understood the questionnaire.

**4.5.2 LIVING CONDITIONS**

This section depicts the living conditions of the community, examined to gauge the lives of those who are exposed to this missiological challenge of Christianity and ancestor beliefs.

**4.5.2.1 HOUSING**

TABLE 5: HOUSING

TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Traditional hut	9	9%
Mokhukhu	2	2%
Brick house	89	89%
TOTAL	100	100%

The majority live in houses built of bricks. It must be noted that these are not modern-day face bricks, but simple cement bricks that are plastered.

**4.5.2.2 WATER**

TABLE 6: MAIN SOURCE OF WATER

SOURCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Own piped water	85	85%
Public tap	12	12%
Borehole	3	3%
Dam/River	0	0%
TOTAL	100	100%

The majority have access to clean tap water, i.e. municipality provided tap water.

4.5.2.3 TOILET FACILITY

TABLE 7: TYPE OF TOILET FACILITY

TOILET FACILITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Flush toilet	86	86%
Pit latrine	14	14%
No facility	0	0%
TOTAL	100	100%

Unsurprising, given 4.5.2.2 and 4.5.2.1, the majority of residents use proper ablution facilities.

4.5.2.4 NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING IN THE HOUSE

TABLE 8: NUMBER OF INHABITANTS

NUMBER OF INHABITANTS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
1	2	2%
2	6	6%
3	11	11%
4	13	13%
5	28	28%
6	22	22%
7	11	11%
8	7	7%
TOTAL	100	100%

Over 60% of respondents live in a household of more than 5 members. This does not necessarily indicate dense population, since the numbers have not been analysed against the number of rooms.

4.5.2.5 NUMBER OF ROOMS

TABLE 9: NUMBER OF ROOMS

NUMBER OF ROOMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
1	0	0%
2	3	3%
3	13	13%
4	21	21%
5	32	32%
6	15	15%
7	11	11%
8	5	5%
TOTAL	100	100%

Again over 60% live in big houses, which may well be in relation to the number of people per household.

4.5.2.6 APPLIANCES

TABLE 10: APPLIANCES

APPLIANCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Radio	98	98%

Telephone	38	38%
Cell phone	87	87%
Refrigerator	81	81%
Computer	33	33%
Car	48	48%
Electricity	89	89%
<b>TOTAL</b>		

Almost all respondents are exposed to modern appliances. This may be attributed to the free Eskom connections made after 1994, as part of the government's reconstruction and development programme. Electricity supply has made it easier for people to own appliances, like refrigerators.

#### 4.5.2.7 SOCIAL GRANTS

TABLE 11: TYPE OF GRANT

GRANT	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Child support	31	31%
Disability grant	7	7%
Foster care grant	17	17%
Old age	23	23%
Did not answer	22	22%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

A sizeable number of respondents receive grants, which doesn't mean that households solely depend on such grants. This may just be an indication that in a particular household, one of its members receives a particular grant. It may also be assumed that none of the 22% who failed



to respond to this question receive any grants in their household. According to the 2011 census of Stats SA, the youth unemployment rate stood at over 60% and so did the dependency on social grants. The website of South Africa Social Security Agency (2017) reveals the child support grant as R380, disability grant as R1 600, foster care grant as R920, old-age pension as R1 600, whilst citizens 75 years and older receive an extra R20 per month.

#### 4.5.2.8 ESTIMATED MONTHLY INCOME

TABLE 12: HOUSEHOLD MONTHLY INCOME

AMOUNT	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
R1 000-R5000	46	46%
R5 000-R10 000	27	27%
R10 000-R15 000	14	14%
R15 000-R20 000	8	8%
R20 000 +	5	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The above table depicts financial status and reflects that the majority of respondents (46%) have an income of less than R5 000 per month, which is mainly made up of government grants.

#### 4.5.3 DO YOU BELIEF IN THE EXISTENCE OF ANCESTORS?

TABLE 13: ANCESTOR BELIEFS

BELIEF	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Yes	74	74%
No	23	23%
Did not answer	3	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The cultural practice of ancestor belief is still prevalent in this community.

4.5.3.1 WHO HAS MORE INFLUENCE OVER YOUR LIFE OR WHO DO YOU RELY ON?

TABLE 14: INFLUENCE

INFLUENCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Ancestors	68	68%
God of the Bible	32	32%
Did not answer	2	2%
TOTAL	100	100%

Ancestors still have influence over the majority of the respondents.

4.5.3.2 HOW OFTEN DO YOU GO TO CHURCH?

TABLE 15: CHURCH ATTENDANCE

CHURCH ATTENDANCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Every Sunday	53	53%
Once a month	11	11%
Twice a month	13	13%
Thrice a month	23	23%
Never	0	0%
TOTAL	100	100%

Even though the majority continues to believe in ancestors and still turn to ancestors in the face of challenges, the above table reflects that the majority are Christians who attend church regularly.



4.5.3.3 DOES THE CHURCH ADDRESS ISSUES OF ANCESTOR BELIEF?

TABLE 16: CHURCH ADDRESS ANCESTOR BELIEF

CHURCH ADDRESSES ANCESTOR BELIEF	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Yes	7	7%
No	87	87%
Did not answer	6	6%
TOTAL	100	100%

The majority of churches are silent on this matter.

4.5.3.4 HOW OFTEN DO YOU VENERATE ANCESTORS?

TABLE 17: FREQUENCY OF ANCESTOR VENERATION

FREQUENCY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Once in six months	0	0%
Once every year	71	71%
Once every second year	2	2%
Once in five years	0	0%
Did not answer the question	27	27%
TOTAL	100	100%

The above makes it evident that the majority of respondents who venerate ancestors do so on a yearly basis. It is interesting to note that 27% of the respondents chose not to answer this question. Reasons for that were not sought, since all respondents were informed of their right to stop the interview at any given time. The researcher, however, deduced that the possible reason could be that those residents do not subscribe to the belief in ancestors.

#### 4.5.3.5 CAN ONE BE A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN AND BELIEVE IN ANCESTORS?

TABLE 18: COMMITMENT

COMMITMENT	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Yes	74	74%
No	26	26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The above table clearly reflects the existing dualism.

#### 4.5.3.6 SHOULD ANCESTOR BELIEF BE ABANDONED?

TABLE 19: ABANDON ANCESTOR BELIEF

ABANDON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Yes	23	23%
No	71	71%
Did not answer the question	6	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority are still so attached to the practice that they do not feel it should be abandoned. The issue of cultural identity crops up here. As already mentioned, Van der Walt (2008:477) asserts that in a traditional African society tradition cannot be tampered with for it is a bond that unites society. It is Mankuroane (2017) belief that culture and tradition are deemed the glue that sustains social cohesion and gives the tribe its identity.

### 4.6 ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF THE COMMUNITY

A single line of thought can be drawn from the views of church leaders, right through to those of ordinary residents and/or Christians. This line of thought brings to the fore the community's adherence to their traditional and cultural beliefs. Tables 4.5.3, 4.5.3.1 and 4.5.3.2 reflect how

the majority of the respondents believe, trust, depend on and venerate ancestors and at the same time claim to be Christian.

This is very much in line with the observation of Bae (2007:35) that although some scholars refute the fact that ancestor worship is a religion, since it does not have a founder or creed, it is indeed a religion from an anthropological perspective.

The respondents confirm and in correspondence to the church leaders that the church is not addressing the challenge of ancestor belief, veneration and worship in any way (as per table 4.5.3.3). This could be attributed to the fact that two of the three church leaders interviewed believe in ancestors themselves and, therefore, see nothing wrong with this practice. It is also interesting that the only church leader (Pentecostal) who professed to be anti-ancestors did not consider it necessary to address this issue from the pulpit. His silence could rightly be misconstrued as endorsement.

This is very much in line with Amanze (2003:57) who observes that many Africans who claim to be Christian still offer sacrifices to the ancestors, because some AIC uphold the notion that ancestors act as intermediaries with God.

Given table 4.5.3.5 and 4.5.3.6, it can be safely assumed that the failure to address this missiological challenge from the pulpit has engrained respondents' belief that one can be a committed Christian and also believe in the ancestors and that this cultural practice should not be abandoned, for in essence there is no opposition to it.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

The traditional leadership of Batlhaping ba-ga Phuhucwana, the custodians of traditions and culture, upholds the practice of ancestor beliefs and so does the majority of Christian leadership, custodians of the gospel.

Both the traditional leadership and the majority of church leaders (2 out of 3) hold strongly to the belief that there is nothing wrong with the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs and veneration. Given this scenario, it is not surprising that the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship remains prevalent in this community even amongst self-proclaimed Christians.

The fact that the majority of churches do not oppose this belief systems speaks directly to Nürnberger's (2007:135) assertion that it is quite unfortunate that the AIC have sought to revive the notion of sacrifices for the ancestors.

Reservations about Christianity being clouded by Western culture, to the detriment of African culture, was and remains a bone of contention. Being negative to Christianity on that basis



alone is both counter-productive and self-defeating. When the early church was grappling with similar challenges regarding the relationship between gentiles and Jews and the Jews then sought to lay sole claim to the gospel, the apostle Paul addresses the matter in his letter to the church in Galatia. Paul dispels the notion that the gospel is the sole property of any particular nation, as reflected in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This implies that white or black culture does not matter, for in Christ we are but one people. The apostle Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, behold all things are new."

It is quite evident from the views of the traditional leadership, the church leadership and members of the community that the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship in the village of Taung will not dissipate anytime soon. It is a practice that is so deeply entrenched in the minds of society that as Bae (2007:37) notes it serves as a social function and religious phenomenon that comprises an essential base for the prolongation of social structures through families and clans.

## CHAPTER 5 THE MISSIO DEI

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The central objective of this study is to establish if there is a missiological challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in light of the *missio Dei*. To this end a number of issues have been established and proven, based on a literature study and empirical research. Chief amongst those is that even though some scholars deny it, there exists a culture practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship amongst Africans, even if it may vary in degree from community to community.

It is recognised that Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana first encountered Christianity and embraced it as a religion more than two centuries ago and that they still hold dear to their traditions, customs and culture including the issue of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship.

The previous chapters have dealt with the tradition of the community and what ancestor beliefs entails but not much has been said about Christianity. There is a need to look into the way in which God reconciles or seeks to reconcile Himself with humanity, a process called the *missio Dei*. This chapter seeks to address the *missio Dei*. This concept is unpacked and in the process the researcher zooms in on what Christians, as participants in the *missio Dei*, need to be doing to ensure that they fulfil its purpose or intended goal. Bookman (1994:158) is of the view that the children of God are under the scriptural obligation to see themselves as vehicles of God's glory.

### 5.1 WHAT IS THE MISSIO DEI?

Flowing from the above discussion, it is clear that the aim of the missionaries in coming to Africa was to spread the gospel as per Matthew 28:19-20. They believed that this commission obliged the church to do mission work and since the church was failing to do so, they formed missionary societies. According to Lovetta (1899:3), the establishment of missionary societies was heralded by the conviction of clerics that it was sinful of them to live in a corrupt world without transforming it. This served as motivation for launching a campaign with the sole objective of winning the world for Jesus Christ.

Bosch (2011:336) demonstrates agreement with Lovetta by arguing that voluntarism became the mission model at that time, since people were not responding as a church but as individuals.

Jele (2014:47) notes that the importance of forming missionary societies can be traced back to the conviction of clerics and Christians of that time that since God had favoured and blessed them, they too need to pass on those blessings and by going to the heathen land and sharing the gospel was also to share those blessings.

It is imperative to first gain an understanding of the concept *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* is Latin for *the mission of God*. According to Bosch (2011:10), *missio Dei* refers to God's self-revelation as one who loves the world. It includes God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and all activities of God's embracement of both the church and the world and in which the church is privileged to participate.

Bosch (2011:399) records that after the first world war, missiologists began to recognise developments both in biblical and systematic theology. He goes on to note that Karl Barth was the first theologian in 1932 at the Brandenburg conference, to plainly articulate that mission is in fact the activity of God and not of the church. This articulation of Barth was only conceptualised years later.

Richebächer (2003:589) concurs with Bosch that it was only at the International Missionary Council held in Willingen in Germany in July 1952 that the term *missio Dei* was conceived as a concept that describes the wider implications of the salvific work of God for the Kingdom.

Taking the point further, Bosch (2011:399) defines *missio Dei* as the classical doctrine of God the Father sending the Son and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world to reconcile the world with Him.

Flett (2009:15) adds another element in that he defines the *missio Dei* as a Trinitarian theology of mission that begins first with God's being as Father, Son and Spirit. This position retains all important qualifications as He gives man a share in His act and in His life.

In other words, *missio Dei* is the mission and/or plan of God to reconcile humanity and creation with God.

## **5.2 GOD THE FATHER**

Bosch (2011) defines the *missio Dei* by referring to God, which may raise the question who is God? Christians believe that the Bible in its totality is the inspired Word of God. From the reformed tradition, in fact, the Bible is accepted as reliable and authoritative.

Given the aforementioned, the Bible teaches that God is a super-natural being who created everything both visible and invisible. A strong exception here is that unlike the God of African

Traditional Religion, this God is not aloof and, as Thompson (2006:53) rightly points out, it was God's wish from the beginning to be known by His creation and to have a relationship and/or fellowship with His creation.

The view expressed by Thompson (2006) supports that of Erickson (2001:42) who argues that because humankind is fallible and finite and God is infinite, we cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us, unless He manifests Himself to humans in such a manner that they can know and fellowship with Him. Meaning that there is no way that God can be distant or aloof from His creation for it is His wish to be known and reconciled to humanity.

Now back to the Bible, Exodus 3:14 records that when God was in conversation with Moses at the burning bush, as He was to send him to Egypt to free the Israelites, Moses enquired as to what he should say when the Israelites asked His name? God told Moses to say He is "I am who I am". Centuries later at the Island of Patmos that same God told the apostle John, as recorded in Revelation 22:13, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last".

Now if one is to rely on the definition of *missio Dei* given by Bosch (2011:399), wherein the initiator of the *missio Dei* is God the Father who is creator of all things both visible and invisible, it would then suggest that to obtain a better understanding of the concept of *missio Dei*, then one needs to fully understand it from the perspective of creation.

### **5.2.1 CREATION**

The creation narrative reported in the book of Genesis concludes with the triune God creating man in His likeness (Genesis 1:26-27), also referred as the *imago Dei*. Erickson (2001:520-527) lists the three basic interpretations of the *imago Dei* as the substantive, the functional and the relational. He adds that in terms of the substantive interpretation there are certain qualities in mankind that reflects who God is, which are morality and affection. Wright (2006:421) concurs in regard to moral consciousness and aptitude for relationship, but takes it even further by stating that the image of God is not necessarily what we have but what we are. To him to be human is to be the image of God.

The intended purpose of man's creation was for him to take dominion of and live in perfect harmony with all creation, by living in communion with God and having a personal relationship with God. Erickson (2013:470) explains it as knowing, loving and obeying God as well as living in peace with other humans. Human dominion over creation is, according to Wright (2006:427), an application of kingship that mirrors God's own kingship. Averbek (2015:234) puts it more profoundly in stating that "it is not like we look like God physically, but that we are physical beings who stand within the material creation as God's stewards. We stand before God to

serve as His authoritative representatives on this earth in His image and His likeness. We have been put in charge and made responsible for how things go here”.

God's desire was and still is that His creation should worship Him and that is ably put by Wright (2006:207) when he says God's aim to bless the nations is tied with humanity's commitment to obedience, there is no blessing for ourselves or for others without faith and obedience.

Genesis 2:8 records that man was placed in the Garden of Eden, where he lived in harmony and had constant fellowship with God without any mediator.

### **5.2.2 THE FALL OF MAN**

Genesis 2 and 3 relate God's instruction that man may eat of every tree in the garden except the tree that stood in the centre of the garden, called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said to man (Gen. 2:17) “for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die”. Satan, disguised himself as a shrewd serpent, planted doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve and assured them that they would not die by disobeying God.

Under persuasion of the serpent man did indeed disobey God and as a result the perfect life of a perfect human being was brought to an abrupt end. Eating the fruit of the forbidden tree made the first man subject to corruption, condemned to lose his life shamefully to decay and death. This happened because, as Wright (2010:40) puts it, we are alienated from God by rebuffing and snubbing His goodness and authority.

The consequences of sin has a far-reaching adverse impact upon our relationship with God, the rest of creation and the self (Erickson, 2001:201). It can be said that sin created a wedge between God and man, between the creator and His creation and between humans, as well as humans and creation. According to Hill and Walton (2009:23), every part of human nature was negatively affected by sin and passed down to every generation.

This is further alluded to by Coetzee (1995:30) when he described that with and through the fall, Satan came to stand as an illegitimate force between God as the Almighty King and God's creation, as it has been deformed through sin. The creation and especially man as a fallen image of God do not recognise God anymore as God and consequently do not acknowledge Him as King anymore.

In other words, sin took man away from the presence and fellowship with God. Because God is a loving God, however, he couldn't allow His creation to be destroyed. God did not give up on Adam and Eve, even though they had violated His heart and derailed His plan for them.



Regardless of their disobedience and sin, Genesis 3:1-21 describes how God reached out to them and covered their nakedness.

It is important to note that in terms of Scripture (Genesis 3:8) man hid from God, because of disobedience and sin, and it was God who initiated contact with man again. Though sin had created a wedge between man and God, according to Wright (2010:40), this did not deter God from pursuing him with incredible love and compassion. This was because, as Waltke (2007:254) puts it, God had created man in His image that he may rule as vice-regent over all things on earth and for man to worship Him and to be accountable to Him and have a close relationship.

This act of love of God towards man is manifested in the book of Genesis and in the whole history of revelation. His action to seek man (who had hid from Him) did not end with Adam and Eve, but continued to their descendants even to this day.

We read in Genesis 12 that God called Abram and changed his name to Abraham as symbol of the covenant He made with him. In that covenant God ordered Abraham to leave his country and people and go to the land the Lord would show him, where the Lord would make him the father of nations. The Bible records that Abraham, through his descendants, would be the father of the chosen people of Israel and a blessing to other nations (Gen. 12:3).

Taber's (1983:233) considers the main reason God called Abraham and entered into a covenant with him was for Abraham and his descendants to serve as testimony of God's restorative purpose for all humanity. In other words, God would reveal Himself to other nations through Abraham's descendants.

According to Kritzinger (2007:29), during the Old Testament period, God's plan was intimately connected to the life and behaviour of His chosen people. When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, God revealed Himself to the Egyptians by using Moses to free them.

Another example worth noting and mentioning is where He used His people in the persons of Hananiah<sup>32</sup>, Mishael<sup>33</sup> and Azariah<sup>34</sup> to reveal Himself to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. This He did by saving these three from a burning furnace and in doing so they overcame the Babylonian culture of worshipping false gods. It is of critical importance to note that these three men had such a close personal relationship with God that they totally yielded to Him and were even prepared to die rather than worship the false god of King Nebuchadnezzar.

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<sup>32</sup>Shadrach

<sup>33</sup> Meshach

<sup>34</sup> Abed-Nego



Even though time and time again the Israelites sinned against Him, God never abandoned His plan to reconcile humanity to Himself. He continued to reveal Himself to humanity in an effort to re-establish the relationship He had with it before the fall. Perhaps that is why the apostle Paul reminds us in Hebrews 1:1 that in the past God spoke to our forefathers through prophets regularly and in various ways.

Fact is God is still speaking to man today through His Word, the Bible, and through those He has called as His servants. Wright (2006:51) says the whole Bible delivers to us the account of God's mission through God's people, in the engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. Wright 2006:52 adds that the Bible is our authority, it supplies or delivers God's commands and teaches us right from wrong.

### **5.3 THE REDEEMER – JESUS CHRIST**

In line with the *missio Dei* and following countless attempts by God to restore His relationship with man, He decided to send His only-begotten Son. The Gospel, according to John 3:16, records that the sole purpose of Jesus' birth was to restore the Kingdom of God and that "whomsoever believes in Him, may not perish but have an everlasting life". In other words that the relationship between God and all of creation has been restored and whoever believes in Jesus Christ may have eternal life. Through His Gospel or the good news, Jesus Christ was to be the Redeemer of humanity from sin. He was to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. Erickson (2013:552) puts it more plainly when he says God is not an enemy to sinners nor does He hate them.

He was teaching humanity to go back to the basics and seek a close relationship with God. Perhaps the apostle Paul puts it in it the right perspective (Acts 17:28) when he says it is in God that we live and move and have our being, i.e. God is in His creation and close to everyone. He is not trapped in His creation, being transcendent and in absolute control, but close and personal.

According to Hurd (2016:74):

"If Adam had finished his course of perfect obedience, he would have been justified...so Christ our second surety was not justified till He had done the work the Father had appointed for Him, and the Father's commandments through all His trials and then in His resurrection He was justified."

The justification, Hurd (2016) is referring to, is the means through which mankind's relationship with God was restored. It is that justification which, according to Broocks (2002:64), made Jesus the *Kurios* – the absolute authority. Erickson (2013:744) explains that the death of Christ

also brought an end the antagonism and estrangement that existed between God and humanity - our hostility toward God was removed.

This is so in that in the Old Testament time, a lamb without blemish was sacrificed to atone for the sins of the Israelites. Jesus Christ preached the message of salvation for three years, healing the sick and raising the dead, and then like a true sacrificial lamb without blemish – for He was without sin - was crucified to atone for the sins of all mankind. The apostle Paul sums it up this way in 2 Corinthians 5: 21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Erickson (2013:750) puts it more profoundly as follows:

“Christ’s death is a beautiful demonstration of God’s love and thus a powerful incentive to us to abandon our hostility towards God and respond in repentance and faith to the offer of grace. But it is effective as a demonstration of love precisely because we were lost and God cared enough about our condition to offer us His Son as a sacrifice”.

Christ was nailed to the cross and His blood shed to atone for our sins. He went down to the grave and rose triumphantly over death and satan after three days. It, therefore, makes sense to recognise and accept that the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ was part of the *missio Dei* and the fulfilment of God promise of reconciling man to Himself. Jesus Christ defeated death and all evil powers (Col. 2:14-15), through that act, in fact He shamed them publicly.

After His resurrection, the disciples exhibited total obedience and worship to Him by going to Galilee as He had directed. He then commissioned them in Matthew 28:19-20 to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”.

This is the essence of what *missio Dei*: Jesus Christ, who is part of the trinity, sees Himself as part of the plan of God. It is of critical importance to note that in His commissioning or the sending of the disciples as participants in the *missio Dei*, Jesus Christ also gave them the assurance that He would be with them in fulfilling this calling.

Jesus Christ was not distant, in other words, He actually went with His disciples to ensure that the *missio Dei* come to pass. Luke furthermore records that Jesus Christ did not only send His disciples, but also promised to empower them: “But you shall receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

## 5.4 THE HOLY SPIRIT

Earlier on Bosch (2011:399) was quoted as defining the classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as: God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. Scripture attests to this in John 3:16, where it is written that God the Father so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son, and in John 12:44-45, where Jesus Christ confirmed to His followers that indeed He has been sent by the Father.

In Luke 24:49 Jesus is quoted as saying “behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”. It is the Holy Spirit that was to equip the believers with the necessary and important gifts to fearlessly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as per His commission in Matthew 28:19, and perform the miracles that Jesus Christ had according to John 14:12. It is the Holy Spirit that dwells in us that enables us to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Acts 2:1-4 indeed records that on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon His disciples as they were gathered in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit took control of everyone and they began speaking in other tongues, so that each one heard them speak in his own language. Scripture records that Peter was the first to boldly stand up and speak to the crowd that had gathered there.

Bear in mind that earlier on Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18) had told this very Peter that the revelation he received (that Jesus Christ is the Son of living God) is the rock upon which He will build His Church. So in essence, the ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming down of the Holy Spirit served to pave the way for the establishment of the church.

In simpler terms and in line with Bosch’s (2011:399) definition of the *missio Dei*: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit (Trinity) were now together with the church, continuing the work that Jesus Christ had come to do - to spread the message of salvation and redemption. As already mentioned, the Holy Spirit that dwells in us empowers us to take part in the *missio Dei*.

## 5.5 THE CHURCH

According to Louw and Nida (2006), the word church is derived from the Greek word *Ekklesia* and means an assembly or company of people or the called out. Roberts (1972:28) adds that the word church comes from the Greek adjective *Kuriakos*, which means “that which is the Lord’s”.

Flowing from the aforementioned, it wouldn’t be far-fetched to then suggest that the church is a special community or gathering of people who are brought together for a specific purpose of



spreading the message of salvation and reconciliation. In fact, Goheen (2011:191) is of the view that the church is called to be a witness of redemption in the midst of the world and for the sake of the world, called that it may invite and summon others to share in the covenant blessings gained from participating in the *missio Dei*.

According to Goodall (1953:241), the missionary obligation of the church comes from the love of God in His active relationship with men. The very existence of the church springs from God's love, manifested in Him sending His Son. The church, by participating in the *missio Dei*, carry out the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21) to the ends of the earth, to all nations until the end of age.

Given the above, it is not surprising that Muller (2008:56) asserts that church and mission are not two independent concepts (as expressed by the possibility of a "missionless" church and/or a "churchless" mission), they are inseparable parts of the one Gospel of the triune God calling the church as the body of Christ to "one hope, one faith in obedience to the one Lord" (Eph. 4:4-5). This calling is the invitation to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Now let's revert a bit to where it all started. It is widely believed that an indication of what was later to become a church started after Peter received the revelation of who Jesus truly was. The Gospel according to Matthew records that this occurred in Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus enquired from His disciples about who the people say He is and Peter answered Jesus that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus prophesied in Matthew 16:18: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Jesus Christ acknowledged Peter's confession of faith, which would later be the basis or through which all believers would be joined together in Christ (Eph. 2:20-21). This confession of faith is the catalyst of the great commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, wherein Jesus Christ instructs His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations.

It is safe to assume that the commission was a directive to make disciples. According to Muller (2008:55), the church is derived from mission and would seem to be the making of disciples. Therefore, mission cannot be incidental to the life of the church and mission cannot be reduced to conversion aimed at enlarging church membership only. Wright (2010:24) puts it this way: "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church, the church was made for mission – God's mission."



The disciples of Jesus Christ heeded His commission and or directive to make disciples. It is common knowledge that the effective preaching of the word of God or witnessing of Jesus Christ started after they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) or to be more precise, on the day of the Pentecost. It should be recollected that after the ascension of Jesus Christ and prior the day of the Pentecost, the disciples were gathered on their own as recorded in Acts 2:1.

## **5.6 PARTAKING IN THE MISSIO DEI**

It is very clear that right from the onset, right from the time of creation as recorded in the creation account<sup>36</sup>, God's wish was to be in contact and fellowship with man. It is also crystal clear that the primary purpose of God creating man in His image was, as Waltke (2007:254) puts it, to be God's proxies over all things on earth.

It also becomes clear that right from the fall of man, God adopted a plan of reconciling man to Himself and this He did and continues to do by revealing Himself to man. His compassionate love for His creation is evident throughout the Old Testament, how He time and time again showed mercy to His chosen nation of Israel.

Through His Son Jesus Christ, God invited and is still inviting the church to participate in the *missio Dei*. By participating in the *missio Dei*; by proclaiming the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ; by being in fellowship with Him and one another; by being of service to others, as exemplified by His Son; and by worshipping Him, He may be revealed and known to others.

Haney (2003:181) explains that the *missio Dei* is primarily centred around seven key components of the Christian mission: *dikaioma* (justice), *martyria* (witness), *didache* (teaching), *kerugma* (proclamation), *koinonia* (fellowship), *diakonia* (service) and *leiturgia* (worship).

The church, as the body of Christ and its individual members, will make God known to others if they fully embrace these components. For purposes of this discussion, the focus is placed on the latter four.

### **5.6.1 KERYGMA – PROCLAMATION**

According to Dluhy (2013:70), *kerygma* is the shortened form of the verb "to *kerygma*" meaning to transmit a message by word of mouth. The main reason Jesus Christ established a church was to ensure that the Gospel is spread to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20), because it is only through the Gospel that man can be reconciled with God. Literally what is meant here is that the believers of Jesus Christ should go into the world and proclaim the message of salvation, hope and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

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<sup>36</sup>Book of Genesis

In agreement with the aforementioned, the apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 10:13-18) of this need to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ that those who accept it may be saved. Being saved means being reconciled with the Lord and to live in a close relationship with Him. In verses 14 and 15 he says: "How then shall they call on Him (the Lord) in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"

According to Muller (2008:58), the public proclamation is heard credibly only where there is a Gospel-formed community to manifest it visibly. As a household of God, the community of faith does not exist for itself but for God's mission. In other words, it is the responsibility of every one who calls himself or herself a Christian to ensure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is spread in obedience to the great commission of Mathews 28:19-20. Bosch (2011:10) takes the matter further by stating that the proclamation of salvation is inviting others to become living members of Christ's earthly community.

The importance of spreading this message or proclaiming the salvation of Jesus Christ cannot be emphasised enough, because receiving and accepting that message of hope and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and personal saviour is reconnecting with God.

Perhaps that is why Horton (2009:20) puts it more plainly:

"The gospel makes us stand erect, looking up to God in faith and out to the world and our neighbours in love and service. Not every piece of news can do that, but the gospel can. Only the radical news concerning Jesus Christ can distract us from all the trivial pursuits and transform us from the inside out."

Reconciliation with God, the result of hearing and accepting the proclaimed message, is in itself the fulfilment of the *missio Dei*. It can, therefore, be safely deduced from above that the intended purpose of proclamation is to expand the body of Christ and to be in fellowship with the brethren.

### 5.6.2 KOINONIA - FELLOWSHIP

Kariatlis (2012:55) indicates that *koinonia* is variously translated as partnership, communion and fellowship, taking its root meaning from *koinoneo*<sup>36</sup>. The apostle Paul defines a church as a

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<sup>36</sup>κοινωνέω [*koinoneo* /koy-no·neh·o/] v. From 2844; TDNT 3:797; TDNTA 447; GK 3125; Eight occurrences; AV translates as "be partaker" five times, "communicate" twice and "distribute" once. **1** to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made a partner. **2** to enter into fellowship, join one's self to an associate, make one's self a sharer or partner. (██████████, )

body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:27, meaning every part is essential to the proper functioning of the body. It is in essence fellowship.

The fellowship, as defined by the apostle Paul in the preceding paragraph, is of outmost importance. The apostle John, in his first letter (1 John 1:3, 7), also stresses the importance of fellowship. In verse 3 he says “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may also have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”. He adds in verse 7 that “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”. The walk in the light that Paul is referring to here is the walk with God.

Matthew 18:20 records Jesus Christ saying that “whenever two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them”. No doubt, this statement in no uncertain terms denotes the importance that Jesus attached to fellowship.

Maybe the most relevant and profound statement that Jesus Christ ever made in relation to the importance of fellowship is found in John 13: 34-35: “I give you a new commandment love one another just like I have loved you.” It could be said that Christ designed a church as a movement that will bring His believers together to fellowship, for in essence man was created to be in fellowship with each other and more importantly with God.

### **5.6.3 DIAKONIA – SERVICE**

According to Chung (2014:302), the Biblical notion of *diakonia* articulates the mandate of service and love of neighbour. In addition, Haddad (2014:276) cites Nordstokke as defining *diakonia* as active Christian love for the neighbour. No doubt this is also in line with John 13:34-35. This is service that imitates the ministry of Jesus Christ and according to Kritzing and Saayman (1994:37), the service that Christians render to others should not be limited to charity.

Dube (2007:37) concurs with Kritzing and Saayman (1994) in that he points out that Jesus Christ was not just acting out of charity, but that His compassion had a transformational dimension.

It would then be fair to say that the church must cater for all different needs of people through its programmes, including any structural imbalances in society that more often than not leads to injustice, poverty and oppression. Without this Christian service, Christianity and/or God's presence can easily be doubted and thought to be irrelevant.

Perhaps that is why Nel (2005:73) calls *diakonia* a desirable part of the identity and goal of the local church, in giving our lives we find life. Within the local church it should be clear that life becomes fruitful when you share it with others.

The fact that *diakonia* is an integral part of the church is taken up by Knoetze (2009:51-52) who explains as follows:

"When the link between mission and diaconia is lost, the approach become one-dimensional, and not true to the *missio Dei* ... both terms mission and diaconia are essential elements of the church. Without either one of them, the church will no longer be true to its source, the Triune God Himself."

Matthew 14:15-21 tells us that when Jesus Christ realised that the multitudes were hungry, He disregarded the advice of His disciples to send them away and instead sought a way of providing for them. He used the five loaves and two fish to feed the multitudes gathered there to hear Him speak. Jesus Christ was evidently rather eclectic in choosing this evangelistic strategy. He was well aware of the pressing needs of His audience and that not all circumstances necessitated an altar call. At times messages are better understood through action rather than just words. A church or ministry that responds to the needs of others, both materially and spiritually, raises the credibility of the church and as such of Christianity as a faith.

Taber (1983:239) is of the view that if the Gospel is not flexible enough to address each dimension of the human condition, then it is not big enough and relevant enough to take away the sin of the world. This church thus has to be concerned with the totality of a human being, for even Heldt (2004:166) says that proclamation of mission alone, separate from any social apprehension, may be perceived as a distortion, a trimmed version of the true gospel, a mockery and travesty of the good news, lacking significance for the real problems of real people living in the real world.

These views indicate the importance of approaching the Gospel holistically to ensure that it makes sense and speaks to the conditions in which human beings live. Wright (2006:322) adds his voice to the debate by stating that caring for the needs of the poor is another essential priority of the community and its evangelistic attractiveness.

#### **5.6.4 LEITURGIA – WORSHIP**

Erickson (2001:349) describes worship as a process in which all focus is given to God. There are a number of facets of worshipping God and that includes but is not limited to *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *kerugma*. Worship is a vehicle through which people or to be more specific –



Christians - acknowledge the greatness, awesomeness and goodness of God, in every area of their lives.

One can also say that worship is a celebration and expression of gratitude to God, which is done through song and service to others. Though this can be done by an individual, it has more impact or appeal if it is done in church as a corporate body (*koinonia*). Worship is, therefore, a service that we owe God; it is not a favour to Him, but because He deserves it by virtue of who He is. Muller (2008:61) suggests that both in the Old and in the New Testament worship came across as the glue that holds God's people together and also energise them towards God's high calling in Christ Jesus.

It can be safely concluded from the above that worshipping God is one of the central characteristics of a church. Vorster (2007:262) underscores this by stating that worship can operate as a generating station, where energy for social change and transformation can be created. Christians can be the exporters of this energy to the parts of society where people still live in despair, gloom and hopelessness.

So in a nutshell, *missio Dei* is the mission of God that originated from God Himself through which He seeks to reconcile with humanity. This mission has been evident since time immemorial. It is shown clearly in the Bible how, through His chosen nation, He sought to reveal Himself to humanity. The apex of this mission was when He sent His only-begotten Son (John 3:16) to atone for the sins of man.

Even today, God is still inviting humanity to take part in His mission.

## **5.7 CULTURE CHALLENGES CHRISTIANITY**

Given this broad narrative of the *missio Dei* and how God is inviting humanity to participate therein, the question then arises as to why some cultures remain intact even when they are contrary to the Word of God.

Van der Walt (2001:27) is of the view that Christians or those who perceive themselves as Christians need to understand that there is nothing like part-time or full-time Christians. He believes that as a Christian, one is either a full-time servant of the Lord or not a Christian at all. Serving two masters is in itself a serious contradiction (Matt. 6:24 and Lk. 16:13).

In other words, Van der Walt (2001:27) suggesting that holding on or equating culture with Christianity is completely and wholly unacceptable.

Contrary to the afore-mentioned Bible texts, some scholars have over the years presented their theories on the possible reason for Africans still holding on to their culture. Some believe that



even though Africans and the Batswana in particular had received missionaries and the Gospel, they had their own preconceived ideas of who God is to their lives. Setiloane (1976:121) observes that the impression that the missionaries were putting forth was to remake or reinvent the Batswana into civilised people and developing them according to the standards and suppositions of the West. Mankuroane (2017) confirmed that though Christianity was good, the bad about it was that Africans were expected to abandon their culture and traditions that according to him, is their (Africans') identity.

Given Mankuroane's (2017) stance on culture and the interpretation of Walters (2010:38) that culture as a collective encoding or indoctrination of the mind, which characterises members of one category of society from the members of another category, it is understandable that those who still hold dear to their culture think (rightly or wrongly) that they are protecting their identity.

Berman (2017:5-6) seems to think that the afore-said is not necessarily true. He does agree with the notion that Africans or the Batswana, in this instance, had their own preconceived ideas of God, he identified the translation of the Bible as a possible source of confusion. According to Berman (2017:5-6), it may have been difficult for the target audience of the first Setswana Bible (Moffat 1857) to harmonise their long-held knowledge of *Modimo* (God) with the God of the Bible. Berman (2017) notes that study Bibles could have helped a great deal then and now, but methodological conventions made footnotes offensive then. Berman (2017) strongly believes that footnotes and/or concise explanations could have assisted in bridging the gap between the two concepts of *Modimo*.

Berman (2017:5-6) is implying here that there should have been comparative notes that explained that the God that Africans knew then was the same God of the Bible and that what was skew in the whole equation was their own understanding. The ignorance or resentment of Africans could also be attributed, as Bosch (2011:298-301) observes, to the perception at the time that because of scientific and technological advances, the Christian West had the right to impose its views on others. Their middle-class ideals and values clouded the tenets of Christianity.

Berman's (2017) assertion corresponds to Waliggo's (1998:111) observation:

"The Christian missionaries who came to evangelize Africa in the nineteenth century presented a limited and defective Christology. They came with ready-made questions and answers. They came with Christology developed in Europe throughout the centuries. It was a highly conditioned Christology, made to respond to specific situations and peoples. They did not pause for a moment to ask: What is Jesus Christ for you Africans? What do your African religion and cultures say about the Jesus Christ of faith?"

Similarly, Tutu (1995:151) reckons that in doing so almost everything that was African was destroyed in order for converts to become imitators or duplicates of their missionaries. In agreement with Tutu (1995), Kim (2015:27) suggests that missionaries continued in their work under the assumption that Western culture is supreme to all cultures. In fact they believed that God in His providence had chosen Western nations, because of the uncommon qualities, to be the standard-bearers of His cause.

These sentiments are echoed by Stinton (2004:44) who suggests that the other major challenge that came with the introduction of Christianity was the prohibition or banning of so many cultural practices and values. The greatest complaint amongst Africans was also the way in which some missionaries collaborated with colonialists to deprive them of their heritage and land.

The perception of some missionaries that indigenous Africans were barbaric compounded the situation, in that missionaries imparted more of their culture with the Gospel that they spread and as a result compromised the Gospel. Goheen (2011:208) notes that “western culture is neither Christian nor neutral. To the degree that the Christian church has embraced either of these illusions, it is not equipped for a missionary encounter with the idolatrous beliefs of our culture”.

Bosch's (2011) sentiments are echoed by Kim (2015:27) when he explains that “mission leaders believed for example that Africans were inferior and could not produce their own church leadership. As in the case of typical parents, missionaries believed that they needed to protect their children, think on their behalf and guide them gradually into maturity”.

All of the afore-said created a barrier in the minds of Africans, who then sought to wrongly equate Christianity with colonialism. As Shorter (1983:33) puts it, the African was particularly offended when missionaries equated his ancestor veneration with devil-worship, since the men he venerated were his own relatives whose personal worth and integrity he knew. Perhaps that is why Partain (1986:37) notes that both Christians and non-Christians considered Christianity a foreign religion. It is the reason than when faced with serious calamities like famine and death, Africans were quick to resort to their traditional rites and beliefs. Partain (1986:39) continues that “from the beginning of the African theology movement, it has been suggested that Christian doctrine can be revived, revised and given a new prominence from within the African context”.

However and almost in response to the afore-said, Van der Walt (2008:480) cautions as follows:

“Traditionalism or conservatism is the attitude or tendency of adhering rigidly to the past old ideas or practices and to resist change. It implies closed, with no appreciation for the good to be found in the new and the present. Our standpoint must be that the past was not always necessarily correct because our elders and fore-fathers were not perfect beings and we have to

explore new avenues and have courage do to away with ways which cannot stand the test of time. We should be open-minded enough to realise and to accept the good things or virtues of the present age. Neither the past nor the present is absolutely good or absolutely bad. Both should be judged by the infallible yardstick – that is the word of God.”

The above makes it safe to assume that Van der Walt (2008) is suggesting (correctly so) that one of the major problems was Africans’ association of the Gospel with the Western culture of those who were presenting it to them. Hence, it was easy to equate missionaries with colonisers.

## 5.8 SUMMARY

This chapter make it clear that the *missio Dei* is the mission of God, which started right from the fall of man, a mission of reconciling Himself to fallen man. It also describes how God continuously revealed Himself to other nations of the world through His chosen people of Israel.

The creation account reminds us that humanity was created in *imago Dei*, to be God's representatives and ambassadors in the world by taking dominion over all of His creation and that through the temptation of the devil's promise that man could become *sicut Deus*<sup>37</sup>, man disobeyed God and fell into sin.

God revealing Himself is God's invitation to humanity to participate in His mission by proclaiming His Gospel; being in fellowship with Him and with one another; being of service to each other; and also by worshipping Him and Him alone.

Van der Walt (2008:352) says that failure to heed God's invitation is behaving in the likeness of Adam and Eve who after falling into sin, pretended not to have heard God's call. In fact, the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20-23 that man has wilfully refused to hear the call of God and wilfully suppresses knowledge about God. Perhaps this is the real reason some people are still clinging to their cultural practice of ancestor veneration and worship.

This chapter also notes that the presentation of Christianity, from the time of missionaries, has been clouded with perceptions that it is a foreign religion and even worse a religion adorned and decorated with Western culture to the detriment of African culture.

This may be why Mbiti (2008:4) notes:

“Traditional religions are not universal, they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. Traditional religions have no missionaries to

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<sup>37</sup> Be like God (Gen. 3:4)

propagate them, and one individual does not preach his religion to another. Similarly there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. Therefore a person has to be born in a particular society in order to assimilate the religious system of the society to which he belongs."

The *missio Dei* and Biblical evidence suggest the contrary (cf. Gen. 12:1; Matt. 8:21-22; John 3:3; Rom. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 4:4-5 and many more).

## **CHAPTER 6. ANCESTOR BELIEFS, VENERATION AND WORSHIP - INCULTURATION OR SYNCRETISM?**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapters have shown, by means of a literature study and empirical research, how Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana in the village of Taung in the North West Province still hold dear their cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship. The adherence to this cultural practice has given rise to the missiological challenge of determining what it is and how to address it.

Diaz-Rico and Weed (2002:232) define culture as follows:

"The explicit and implicit patterns for living, the dynamic system of commonly agreed upon symbols and meanings, knowledge, belief, art, traditions and habits that are shared and make up the total way of life of a people, as negotiated by individuals in the process of constructing a personal identity."

Bear in mind that Batlhaping embraced Christianity as a religion over two centuries ago.

The question that remains and which is central to this chapter is whether ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship is a true inculturation or syncretism?

### **6.2 INCULTURATION**

In terms of Christianity, inculturation (Anagwo, 2014:282) would refer to the basic and dynamic principle of governing the Christian missionary outreach to the people of the world who are not yet evangelised or among whose culture the Gospel message is not yet firmly entrenched or rooted. However, Bosch (2011:458-459) notes that inculturation presupposes the disintegration of various cultures where Christian mission penetrates or is presented, because where disintegration does not take place mission has limited chance of success.

Shorter (2010:53) deems inculturation as an inseparable attribute of evangelisation, which is the instituting of God's reign on earth and the attainment of His project for humanity.

In the same vein, Ignatius (1980:249) defines inculturation as "the integration of the Christian experience into the culture of other people in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates that culture so as to create a new unity". Coertze (2005:12) puts it a little different in



that he contends that inculturation is an attempt to translate and/or transfer a Christian faith into a specific culture and for the purpose of this study, it is an African culture.

In simpler terms, this means bringing something different to the way of life or belief system of a particular person, people or society and making them to accept it. To be more precise and relevant to this research, inculturation asserts that Christianity or the Gospel must take root or entrench itself in every culture and that the church must be embodied in every new culture in such a way that the culture remains intact, but that part of the culture that is not in line with the Word of God is replaced with the new.

Van der Walt (2008:480) stresses that this should be the point of departure simply because we need to be open-minded enough to realise that our forebears were not necessarily perfect and that though there were good things in the past, there was also the bad. Neither the past nor the present is absolutely good or absolutely bad. Both should be measured and tested against the Word of God.

However, staunch supporters of African traditional religion have a somewhat different perspective. Mbiti (1969:191) is of the view that inasmuch as Christianity was introduced to Africans, Africa has not as yet internalised Christianity. This point is echoed by Jebadu (2007:264) when he insists that

"it is this Christianity which has been inculturated in Europe which is now being presented in Africa as *the* Christianity. At the present time it is desirable to strip it of all its too uniquely western aspects, to make it a distinction between the Christian religion and the form in which it is presented."

This whole challenge, it may be argued was caused by the negative attitude of missionaries towards African traditions and culture, which to a great extent resulted in their failure to inculturate the Gospel.

Hammer (2017) is in agreement with Mbiti (1969) that the issue of inculturation simply suggests that nations need to understand Jesus Christ and His Gospel within their own traditions. According to him, it does not in any way mean that one has to abandon his or her traditions and customs or to be white in order to serve Christ. He argues that if that was to be the case, then people would be estranged from their own culture and may lose their identity (Hammer, 2017).

Given the views of Ignatius (1980:249), Shorter (2010:53) and Anagwo (2014:282) the opposite seems to hold true in that the culture must be receptive to the Gospel and not the other way round. Bosch (2011:466) in fact suggests that the Gospel should direct culture, transforming it and making it so as to bring about new creation. The new creation is supposed to transform the

old. Even the apostle Paul admonishes in Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The parallel status of the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship with Christianity in Taung suggests that from the onset Christianity was not properly inculturated in the community. This is in line with Jebadu's (2007:266) definition of inculturation as an expression of the process by which the church or Christianity, in this instance, is accommodated in a particular culture or custom.

It speaks of a need for the conversion or transformation of culture that in Taung is the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship. In agreement with the above, Bae (2007:193) emphasises that transformation of culture should take into consideration the inadequacies and weaknesses of the fallen human nature. The fallen nature and the broken reality of human culture, traditions and customs can be transformed and a new worldview can be established, wherein they can be aligned with the redemptive revelation of Jesus Christ and Christianity without totally dumping the culture.

In other words, in Taung the mission should have focused on changing or transforming the cosmology of individuals and the community in general by means of undiluted Gospel. The community ought to have been made to understand that God's invitation for them to participate in the *missio Dei* is not different from His invitation to Abram, as recorded in Genesis 12:1: "...leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family and go to the land that I will show you". The community should have been cautioned that embracing the invitation of God or Christianity, they would have to forego certain those parts of their culture that was not in line with the will of God.

It would be in line with the apostle Paul's (2 Cor. 5:17) insistence that accepting Christ's or God's invitation of reconciliation means becoming a new creation. Bae (2007:196) notes that accepting Christianity should be a process by which the church and the Gospel in particular is incarnated in the various facets of culture to transform it completely that it may be in line with the God's Word.

When the Galatian believers were exposed to false teachings and sought to embrace more of the Jewish laws, the apostle Paul cautioned them (Galatians 3) to focus on Christ alone as author and finisher of their faith. So for Christianity to prevail, hard choices must be made.

Hence, Jesus Christ explaining that "no servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Lk. 16:13).



### 6.3 SYNCRETISM

Bae (2007:199) asserts that any inculturation runs the risk of syncretism. According to Wright (2010:153), syncretism is mixing the intended or expected worship of the living God of the Bible with all kinds of loves and loyalties. The worship of idols or ancestors, as is the case of this research, simultaneously with God of the Bible is syncretism.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) defines syncretism as the intermingling of one belief system with another, particularly in religious or philosophical fields. The Merriam Webster Dictionary (2016) denotes syncretism as the combination of different forms of belief and practice or the fusion of two or more originally different inflectional forms. After wandering the wilderness for 40 years and having encountered different tribes and nations on their way to Canaan, God cautioned the Israelites not to serve foreign gods in the promised land. Their leader, Joshua, reminded them that "if you abandon the Lord and serve other gods, He will turn against you and destroy you even though He has been so good to you" (Josh. 25:20).

It means that embracing two conflicting or parallel belief systems and believing that both can work. No doubt syncretism is fertile ground for divided loyalties to grow and blossom. So the earlier cited argument of some scholars (Chapter 3) justifying and/or equating Jesus Christ with ancestors has been noted as giving credence to the reality of ancestors worship. The assumption is that if Jesus Christ is worshipped as Redeemer and Lord (1 Thess. 5:23) and also equated with ancestors, then they too are worshipped. Now this raises the theological question of whether ancestor worship is a form of idolatry?

Bae (2007:161) is of the view that though the term idolatry is determined by perspective, in essence what it means is that it is a form of worship, admiration or veneration of images or material objects that serve as symbolic demonstration of the deities. Wright (2006:171) puts it more plainly:

"Having alienated ourselves from the living God our Creator, we have a tendency to worship whatever makes us tremble with awe as we feel our tiny insignificance in comparison with the great magnitudes that surrounds us. We seek to placate and ward off whatever makes us vulnerable and afraid."

Bae's (2007) and Wright's (2006) assertions need to be seen in terms of God's exhortation of "you should not have any gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). Wright (2006:164) warns that "idolatry dethrones God and enthrones creation. Idolatry is an attempt to limit, reduce and control God by refusing His authority, constraining or manipulating His power to act, having Him available to serve our interests".

Stott (1967:23) also cautions that monotheism remains a crucial foundation for mission, for it is on this basis that God desires all humanity to be saved and to come to the knowledge that indeed there is only one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). Hirsch and Hirsch (2011:35) not only consider Jesus Christ the only mediator between God the Father and humanity, but also the prism through which God can and must be understood.

Wright (2006:161) puts it more profoundly by stating that “there is only one rightful occupant of the category of deity, and that is the Lord God of the Biblical revelation, Creator and Ruler of the universe. Beside Him there is no other legitimate claim to deity”. Wright (2006:163) adds that “God alone is uncreated, self-existent, non-contingent. God’s being depends on nothing else outside God’s own self. All other reality, by contrast, is created by God and therefore is dependent on God for existence and sustenance”.

In other words, it is knowledge (that there is only one God) that breeds loyalty and the understanding that there is no other choice except to accept Christianity completely. Erickson (2013:343) adamantly asserts that the Biblical lessons on creation completely disallow any notion of dualism. The Creator is unique, He is the only one who has brought reality into being.

Some members of Taung community still cling to their traditional practices, even though this community in general embraced Christianity about two centuries ago. O’Donovan (1995:255) theorises that the reason some Africans continue to practice syncretism is that cultural rejuvenation in Africa has caused them to rediscover their cultural history. Since culture and religion are closely related, not only in Africa but worldwide, it has led to the continuation of traditional practices. This issue is even further compounded by their emotional concerns for the wellbeing of their relatives who died prior to the Gospel coming to their area.

The major setback of the Christian missionaries in their evangelisation project with Africans was that they assumed that the latter were totally bereft of any form of spirituality or religion and, therefore, needed to be filled with the Good News of the Gospel. Tutu (1995:151) thus contends that in doing so almost everything that was African was destroyed in order to help converts to become imitators or duplicates of their missionaries. What Tutu is referring to here is similar to results of colonialism in countries like Mozambique and Angola, where indigenous people were forced to adopt the language of their colonial masters – Portuguese.

The outcome of this assumption was that even those Africans who embraced Christianity did not entirely give up their tradition, instead they continued to embrace both religions and lived in spiritual ambivalence. It must be noted that since inculturation is a process, the situation is not

stagnate but progressive. The question of how far this process has gone into complete inculturation, will warrant another and different research study.

O'Donovan (1995:254) holds the view that in most cases people who come from a non-Christian background tend to be lured into simply mixing Christianity with their inherited belief system. Be that as it may, it is abundantly clear that people and or communities who profess to be Christians and yet continue in their traditional belief system of venerating and worshipping their ancestors by seeking prosperity, health, guidance and protection from them, are undoubtedly practising syncretism and cannot claim to be total participants of the *missio Dei*.

Service to God almighty cannot be mixed with culture or a cultural practice that is contrary to His Word and wishes. After freeing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, God wanted the Israelites to understand that in embracing Him as their Lord they needed to abdicate certain behaviours and cultures that are foreign to Him. He wanted them to come to the full knowledge of who He is and to actually embrace His reconciliatory plan. So He said to them:

"According to the doings of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, you shall not do and according to the doings of the land of Canaan where I am bringing you, you shall not do nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgements and keep My ordinances to walk in them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgements, which if a man does, he shall live by them. I am the Lord." (Lev. 18:3-5)

The afore-mentioned text indicates that inasmuch as the Israelites were from an idol-infested country, they had come to another and God was warning them not to be absorbed in that culture. God demands from all humanity that He and He alone be worshipped. Hence, He commands His chosen nation not to be bogged-down by cultures that do not seek to glorify Him, irrespective of their circumstances. This is important to note for Magesa (2014:163) postulates that in most cases when Africans are faced with a crisis, they tend to revert to their traditional customs for a solution. On the issue of the Israelites being cautioned not to imitate the Canaanites, Hammer's (2017) view is that such a caution cannot be applicable to the Batswana, because the Canaanites did not God at all. They only worshipped their idols, with God completely excluded, whereas the Batswana still worship God within their tradition and cultural that emanates from the same God.

Hammer's (1017) argument does not hold water, however, for God demands to be worshipped alone, so combining Him and ancestors does not make it right. King Saul of Israel was an anointed King of God's chosen people and when he was gripped with fear, he sought help from a source other than God and through his own choice, God left him.



1 Samuel 28:4-19 narrates the very interesting story of King Saul in dire straits. By that time the prophet Samuel was dead and Saul's arch-enemies, the Philistines, were camping at Shunem ready for battle with the Israelites. The Bible records that out of fear Saul sought the voice of the Lord, but He did not respond.

Out of sheer desperation and in direct contravention of the Word of the Lord (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-11), he resorted to consulting a celebrated medium at the nearby Endor under cover of darkness. There he requested the medium to call forth Samuel and it is recorded that Samuel indeed appeared.

Nümberger (2007:82) notes that the most important lesson of this text is that instead of opening up a new future for Saul, the encounter with the dead prophet drew him back for the dead. Samuel could only repeat the curse that he pronounced. Consulting or seeking the advice of the dead perpetuates and empowers the past.

It may well be that this text could be understood as proof that cross-cultural links between the Christian Gospel and other cultures are as old as the Gospel itself, but the truth is reference to this story does not serve to justify or accept Saul's course of action, but rather to indicate that God cannot be subjected to spirits and that was evidenced by God deserting Saul and him losing the battle.

According to Carson (1994:103), this chapter (1 Sam. 28) does not in any way, shape or form endorse mediums (ancestor worship) and their trade. Nümberger (2007:59) has two reasons for this: "(a) Israelites were privileged to have an exclusive, direct and personal relationship with Yahweh and (b) the Old Testament faith was exceptionally realistic concerning the pervasiveness of sin and the finality of death."

It can be deduced from the above that ancestor veneration and worship is or is equivalent to worshipping idols (Erickson 2013), as it encourages dualism and Wright (2006:164) warns us that "idolatry dethrones God and enthrones creation. Idolatry is an attempt to limit, reduce and control God by refusing His authority, constraining or manipulating His power to act, having Him available to serve our interests".

#### **6.4 SUMMARY**

Based on the literature study, it has become evident that Christianity as a religion was not properly infused with African customs and traditions to bring about total and complete conversion and transformation. Bae (2007:206) contends that if inculturation is not properly executed, it can easily lead to syncretism and/or religious pluralism. This could be said to be the case with the community of Taung, for the previous chapters showed that some members of

Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana still cling to their cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship, giving credence to syncretism. This is because, as already indicated, Wright (2006:161) explains “there is only one rightful occupant of the category of deity, and that is the Lord God of the Biblical revelation, Creator and Ruler of the universe. Beside Him there is no other legitimate claim to deity”.

Bae (2007) and Wright (2006) point to the inevitable conclusion that any respect, dependency, appreciation or veneration (due to God) shown to an entity, ideology or person other than God constitutes a form of idolatry. Bae (2007:163) takes it even further by suggesting that attributing divine characteristics and seeking divine favour from a person (alive or dead) is idolatry and that is in direct opposition to the Word of God.

The Bible is unequivocal that God and only God is worthy of worship, as stated in Psalm 29:2, because worship denotes the highest honour given either in thought or deed. So the justification of non-conversion by some Africans, who continue to seek the aid of ancestors, must change so as to locate their trust in God alone.

## **CHAPTER 7. SUMMARY, FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

The primary object of this research was to establish if there indeed exists a missiological challenge among Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana in Taung occasioned by them holding on to the cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship on the one hand and Christianity on the other. The secondly objective, which is equally important, was to suggest possible ways of addressing that challenge.

The researcher is quick to acknowledge that not all members of that community subscribe to this cultural practice and that in itself reflects that some progress has been made towards total adherence to Christianity. Measuring that progress would require further research.

Previous chapters have indeed established the existence of the said challenge. This chapter, therefore, seeks to present a summary of the research as well as offer possible proposals to address the missiological challenge.

### **7.2 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS**

#### **7.2.1 Chapter 1**

This chapter served as the introduction to the research. It presented the reasons why this particular research was undertaken and how the whole research was to unfold.

#### **7.2.2 Chapter 2**

Through a literature study and interview (Kgosi Lehatshe Mankuroane, 2017), it was established that in spite of embracing Christianity as a religion over two centuries ago, Batlhaping ba ga Phuduhucwana in the village of Taung still hold dear their traditions, customs and culture which includes the practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship.

Nünberger (2007b:62) cautions against being too traditionalistic. He asserts that the Christian community ought to differ fundamentally from the traditional community, for the simple reason that the traditional community is firmly based on submission to authority, whilst the Christian community is based on freedom and responsibility. Nünberger (2007b:62) goes on to say that in Christ we become sons and daughters of God rather than submissive, fearful, obedient slaves and children (Gal. 3:23; 4:7)

The traditional African cosmological framework, as illustrated in chapter 2, is made up of a hierarchy that depicts God followed by ancestors, human intermediaries and lastly by humanity.

Now within such a framework it becomes extremely difficult, if not totally impossible, to place Jesus Christ in the same category as ancestors and then effectively move Him back into the realm of the transcendent God. The point is once He is presented in the same category as ancestors, the cosmological framework designates Him a subordinate place and thereby strip Jesus of His divinity and challenge the concept of the Trinity.

The Bible in the book of Hebrews 1:3-4 records:

“Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

Expounding further on the inconsistency related to comparing Jesus Christ with the ancestors, Nürnberger (2007:95-96) shows that the difference between Christ and the African ancestors that encroaches on their comparison does not lie only in ontologically conceived difference, but also in what they actually stand for and what they can do for us. Among a list of differences that Nürnberger (2007) alludes to, is the limitation of the scope of ancestral authority, supervision and influence. The most important, according to him, is illuminated in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that Christ became “sin for us”, was crucified and rose into new life so that we may become righteous by virtue of His death and resurrection.

Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:14) hold the view that equating Jesus Christ to ancestors is to compromise and disregard His divinity, for an ancestor cannot be God and still be human at the same time. So any argument that seeks to equate Him with ancestors is unwise.

### **7.2.3 Chapter 3**

In this chapter it became evident that from time immemorial, Africans or the Batswana in this instance have long held believed in a supreme being who lives in close proximity to their ancestors or the living dead as some prefer to call them. The African Traditional Religion introduced a concept and or belief system that God the Creator or the Supreme-being is so aloof and distant that mere mortals cannot communicate with Him directly, but through their deceased relatives who are referred to as the living dead.

It cannot be factually correct to agree or even assume that God is indeed a distant God who is removed from His own creation. An example is the way the Zulus relate to God or grasp the concept of God. According to Brown (1982:14), the Zulus use the name *ugugabadele* in reference to God. It is a name that best expresses their idea of God's immanence. In the same vein, Vilakazi *et al.* (1986:16) state that the Zulu ancestral spirits are not all-knowing, hence the

need for them to be told of the needs of the community, clan or family. If the ancestors are perceived to have brought their descendants some unmerited suffering, an elder of the clan or family goes into the cattle kraal and tells the ancestors that they are behaving foolishly. It is for that reason that the Zulus call their ancestors *izithutha*<sup>38</sup>.

In an attempt to equate Jesus Christ with ancestors, Jebadu (2007) makes a very interesting observation that ancestors on their own do not have powers, but their powers are vested in Jesus Christ. He makes a further astonishing admission that if these ancestors are not venerated, they cease to exist. This in essence means that ancestors are dependent on the living and not the living dependent on the ancestors. It is the very tragedy of idolatry that man being created by God to serve Him, choose to rather create his own gods to serve him. Wright (2006:188) puts it more plainly that the mission of God is to restore creation to its former glory and original purpose and as such He battles against all forms of idolatry and calls us to join Him in that conflict.

Wright (2006:163) adds that "God alone is uncreated, self- existent, non-contingent. God's being depends on nothing else outside God's own self. All other reality, by contrast, is created by God and therefore is dependent on God for existence and sustenance".

In other words, it is the knowledge (that there is only one God) that cultivates loyalty and the understanding that there is no other choice but to take part in the *missio Dei* or face the consequence of disregarding God.

Erickson (2013:343) is emphatic that the Biblical lessons on creation completely disallow any notion of dualism. The Creator is unique, He is the only one who has brought reality into being.

#### **7.2.4 Chapter 4**

This chapter dealt with the views of church leaders and Christians on the issue of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship. It was in this chapter that existence of a missiological challenge in that part of the world became crystal clear, which is that the majority of respondents confess to be Christians and yet continue to hold dear their cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship. The majority of church leaders interviewed saw nothing wrong with the issue of ancestor veneration, though they deny that they are being worshipped.

Like in chapter 3 where Jesus Christ was likened to an ancestor, here Jesus was said to have never been in opposition to ancestors but rather recognised them. Another point made which is

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<sup>38</sup> Fools



very interesting and almost validates the claim of Jesus recognising ancestors, is the whole narrative that when Christians pray, they pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and by extension venerate ancestors.

From chapter 4 we learned that since the fall of man, God's mission is and always has been to reconcile with man. It was also proven that throughout the ages, God has revealed Himself to humanity as the only true God and has invited everyone without exception to participate in the *missio Dei*. In that participation, He is both revealed and worshipped as the only true God.

Nyirongo (1997:43) defines true worship as bequeathing and/or granting our hearts to Christ, our Redeemer, and serving Him authentically in every area of our lives. In other words, humanity has to live in total obedience to God. Worship and devotion should be directed to God and can only be acceptable to Him through His Son Jesus Christ – not ancestors (John 14:14, Rom. 1:8, 7:25; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15). Worshipping God is to serve Him with all our bodies, hearts and minds, to offer ourselves completely to God as the Setswana hymn says “Setlhabelo saka ke nna ka sebele<sup>39</sup>”.

### 7.2.5 Chapter 5

This chapter centred around the *missio Dei*. It was found that the mission of God, of reconciling Himself with humanity, started just after the fall. Since then God has been revealing Himself to man, with the sole purpose of reconnecting with him as it was at creation.

Bosch (2011:10) explains that *missio Dei* refers to God's self-revelation as one who loves the world; God's involvement in and with the world; the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, in which the church is privileged to participate. Bosch (2011:399) further describes *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. He says this was expanded to include Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.

God is still inviting all of humanity, through the gospel of salvation, to reconcile with Him. This invitation means that humanity has to forsake all that is not of God, including the practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship and embrace Him as the only true God. Waltke (2007:106) profoundly states that when we disobey God and instead seek Him to change His mind about the clear precepts of Scripture, He may appear to change His mind, but we will be under judgement.

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<sup>39</sup> I present myself as sacrifice

The point Waltke (2007) is making is that worshipping ancestors and other idols may continue as though it is unnoticed by God, people may in fact even prosper as though the practice is good or paying off, but in the end God's judgement will reign.

### **7.2.6 Chapter 6**

The difference between inculturation and syncretism was the central focus of this chapter. Various views concerning Christianity reflected that it was never properly inculturated in Africa, possibly partly due to missionaries' failure to learn about or observe African culture before imposing Christianity. The point is that had they made the effort to understand African culture, they would have contextualised it and enabled African Christians to begin the process of converting or transforming, having gained the requisite knowledge. Africans instead felt obliged to defend their culture, because of a lack of knowledge – knowledge that Christianity and colonialism were two different things, though they were both brought by white settlers.

Africans' failure to fully understand Christianity in its proper context resulted in Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana embracing Christianity, on the one hand, whilst still having a firm grip on their cultural practice of ancestor belief, veneration and worship. This is in fact the crux of the missiological challenge.

## **7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the adverse findings of this research, namely that syncretism occasioned by a lack of proper inculturation of the Christian faith or Gospel and that there is indeed a missiological challenge amongst Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana in the village of Taung, the researcher offers the following recommendations on how the church could contribute towards addressing this challenge.

### **7.3.1 Cooperate (Church) Prayer**

Gratz (2016:77) defines prayer as "a crucial catalyst to help those who are trapped in ancestral worship, to set them free and to have them believe in God alone".

When the Israelites sought the restoration of the Lord, after they had deviated from His commandments possibly in the same way that some Africans still do by venerating and worshipping ancestors, God provided them with a way of obtaining the restoration they were seeking. Similarly, the way recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:14 still stands. God states that "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land".

This denotes the importance that God attaches to cooperate prayer. He says that if whoever has deviated from His will humble themselves and seek His face, He will forgive. It is also worth making the point here that God is faithful and just (Num. 23:19). There are many texts in the Bible wherein God appeals to humanity to seek Him (Deut. 4:29; 1 Kgs. 22:5; Is. 55:6; Jer. 33:3; Amos 5:14; Matt. 7:7; Heb. 11:6, etc.).

It is quite interesting that there is a reward in seeking Him. Jesus Christ said “but seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). The apostle James urges in James 5:16 to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The **prayer** of a righteous man is powerful and effective”.

Indeed prayer is and should be seen as the all-important tool for the church and Christians in general to participate effectively in the *missio Dei* and to address the missiological challenge occasioned by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship.

### **7.3.2 Proclamation of the Gospel**

As a point of departure, Christians should accept that ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship in its present form is syncretism and must, therefore, unashamedly accept that the practice is wrong and rather seek to transform it by omitting whatever is in conflict with God's Word. There is no harm in remembering and talking fondly about the dead, in the same way as if they were still alive, but not venerating and worshipping them or expecting anything from them - be it a blessing or a curse.

All who profess to be Christians, need to reflect on their perception of their faith and begin to explore why they have no impact on society. Ren (2011:131) cautions that Christians should be careful not to display an arrogant, self-righteous and self-serving attitude when proclaiming the Word. Pastors must reconsider their holiness (not preaching against ancestors) and why it is that they seem to antagonise sinners and people of other faiths, whilst the holiness of their Master Jesus Christ was the complete opposite. Opposite, in that the holiness of Jesus Christ seemed to antagonise the religious people and had sinners flocking to Him.

Putting it more profoundly, Hirsh and Hirsh (2011:46) explain that in socialising with these sinners Jesus Christ was demonstrating that holiness cannot be attained through separation from the unclean, which reflects that salvation is meant to be shared. The understanding here is that in life some messages are communicated more effectively through action and not only by the spoken word. Hence, the advice of Gcheen (2011:191) that “the church is called to be an agent or instrument of redemption in the midst of the world and for the sake of the world, chosen so that it might invite others into the covenant blessing it experiences”.

Christians need to embrace the Larson's (1989:4) suggestion that Bible-based Christians must be equipped to offer cynical seekers an objectively valid response to life's questions. We must be ready to present the assertions of Jesus divinity and His sufficiency as our Saviour and Lord. This statement goes to the heart of the apostle Peter's message in 1 Peter 3: 15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

Larson (1989:6) cautions that some people assume that it is out of place to criticise another person's religious beliefs and yet Christians need to ask themselves whether it is better to smile and say nothing, as people follow self-proclaimed messiahs to a false paradise or even worse. Christians need to understand that dismantling and eradicating the myth and false religious beliefs and worshipping of idols, be they ancestors or whatever, is not only the work of Biblical apologetics but is also a labour of love. Igba (2013:111) puts it profoundly when he asserts that "the need for Christology to be undergirded by very solid biblically consistent basis cannot be overemphasised. Just as a faulty foundational basis remains a threat to the building, a faulty Christological basis remains a harbinger of heresies and errors".

So those who profess to be men of God and called into leading ministries have a responsibility to ensure that what they preach is nothing but pure unadulterated Gospel. Christians in general and especially those who carry mantles of leadership must boldly and courageously follow the example of the apostle Paul in his bold declaration in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Imitate me just as I imitate Christ." Paul goes on to explain why in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For if I preach the gospel I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me, Yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"

For his part Wright (2010:61) suggests that when we go around affirming and testifying that Jesus is Lord, Christ and mediator, it is not because of some arrogant claim. It is simply an acceptance of the testimony of both the Old and the New Testaments about the one true God.

The Bible that we as Christians profess, acknowledge and confess as the Word of God tells us that we are both the salt and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). In other words, it is our primary responsibility to enlighten the world. Wright (2010:236) calls the world we live in both corrupt and dark and as such the salt and light both have to be missional and confrontational: missional in that they are used for a purpose, but also confrontational in that they challenge decay and darkness and transform both.

In essence it means that pulpits of different denominations must be used effectively to preach unadulterated Gospel without fear or favour. The position adopted by some pastors of being against the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship and yet at the same

time not discouraging the practice from the pulpit is not helpful. If something is wrong and one turns a blind eye and almost refuse to condemn it, one is by extension an accomplice and equally guilty as the wrongdoers (1 Cor. 9:16-17).

### **7.3.3 Minimise segregation**

One of the most critical concepts that Christians across denominations should strive to grasp and fully understand is that they are the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). Though compartmentalised into different denominations, they ought to be united in Christ and united in sending a strong message that seeks to address the missiological challenge.

Personal experience has taught that the majority of church leaders, especially those in the charismatic churches, tend to preach more about their churches than the pure Gospel. They have a tendency or ill-conceived belief that true salvation can only be found in their particular church. This is misleading to say the least, for the source of all salvation is Christ and only Christ. Ren (2011:18) observes that the spiritual divides among Christians have developed mental obstinacy, fanned the fires of mutual disapproval and dislike even when reasons behind those attitudes have faded.

Church leaders, ministers and pastors must desist from engaging in the politics of church (this church being better than that church or church A being more holy than church B). Ren (2011:214) emphasises that Christian churches must unite to block the decline of Christianity, protect Christians and restore the path of spiritual growth. Indeed, church leaders ought to imitate the apostle Paul whose primary focus was preaching the Gospel. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:2 that “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”.

### **7.3.4 Fellowship**

The majority of Christians, especially members of the charismatic churches, tend to be a bit aloof and in most cases cage themselves into the “us and them” syndrome. When the apostle Paul cautioned that Christians should not conform to this world, he was not suggesting that they should isolate themselves. In fact, Nürnberger (2007:253) suggests that “we have to proclaim and live out the gospel of God’s unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable into his fellowship, an acceptance that liberates, transforms and empowers. In other words, transformation is a consequence of acceptance and not its prerequisite”.



For Christianity to have the serious and desired impact on every society, Christians must fellowship and socialise with “unbelievers” as well as pseudo-Christians<sup>40</sup>. This socialising must be optimised by ensuring that the seed of the Word of God is planted. It is essential, for Nürnberger (2007b:60) notes that where a communicative gap disconnects Christ from potential believers, it will be filled with more immediate powers, i.e. with living and deceased superiors. He further notes that a Christ who is not present is not relevant, a Christ who is not relevant is not present. In other words, Jesus Christ must be seen in the deeds and words of Christians and shown to be sufficient.

Ren (2011:89) puts it more plainly when he says that Christians who do not care for others are guilty of or committing a sin of omission. Equally those who harm others are also guilty of the sin of negligence.

In that interaction, fellowship or socialising Christians need to espouse incorruptible characters. For even Wright (2010:236) warns that moral integrity is the cornerstone to Christian uniqueness, which in turn is crucial to Christian mission in public. Integrity means that there is no contradiction between our private and public life, between what we profess and what we actually practice.

It suggests that Christians or the church ought to be missional in their approach. A missional church would be a church that subscribes to all characteristics of the *missio Dei*. The primary focus would not only be limited to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also to ensure that as an entity or as the body of Christ (as Paul describes it) it is able to espouse the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

Goheen (2011:191-196) makes an interesting observation in that for the church to be termed missional, it has to subscribe to four basic points: it participates in God’s mission, it continues the mission of the Old Testament Israel, it continues the Kingdom mission of Jesus Christ and lastly, it continues the witness of the early church.

### **7.3.5 Being of service**

Goheen (2011: 212) makes a very profound statement when he says inasmuch as it is important to preach the Gospel to unbelievers, it is equally important that the same Gospel is authenticated by deeds of mercy and justice that are in essence powerful witnessing of the truth of the Gospel. Christians ought to exhibit that if God is trusted completely and unconditionally, then ancestors are rendered useless and, therefore, unneeded. This is so profound, for even

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<sup>40</sup> Researcher's own term to classify Christians who still venerate and worship ancestors.

the Bible in James 2:26 states: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

The church, which is the body of Christ, must strive to always exhibit the compassion of Jesus Christ by getting involved in the affairs of the community that has the potential to change the perspective of the community in relation to the church itself, but more importantly in relation to the Gospel. Goheen (2011:212) notes that through this involvement, society or the community will cease to see the church as alien and/or a group of people meeting for their own selfish purposes, but rather as a welcome presence in their midst to bring blessings to them.

### **7.3.6 Knowledge of Scripture**

Lastly, the researcher recommends and appeals to church leaders to develop a hunger and thirst for the knowledge of Scripture. This hunger can be enhanced by proper theological training.

The researcher fully understands the narrative of the apostolic churches that God qualifies those He calls and that the Holy Spirit illuminates text, but that does not replace nor substitute the importance of theological training. Brunsdon and Knoetze (2014:275) postulate that theological training is not aimed at only producing professional and theologically educated clergy, but also about producing spiritual leaders that are equipped to prepare God's people for works of service that the body of Christ may be edified.

The training of leaders does not take away the responsibility of every Christian to also study Scripture to prevent being misled. The knowledge of Scripture is important for enculturating the Gospel into culture.

The Holy Spirit will certainly produce pioneers who will take it upon themselves to lead their congregations and charter a way out of the world of idolatry and ancestor beliefs. In fact, Goheen (2011:214) is of the view that to live out the demanding missionary encounter in the world the church needs amongst others leaders who carry and personify a missional vision and are able to equip others to follow them.

It is the humble view of this researcher that these recommendations, if embraced, may offer some answers or solutions to the missiological challenge not only facing Batlhaping ba-ga Phuduhucwana in the village of Taung in the North West Province of South Africa, but all communities where the practice of ancestor beliefs, veneration and worship still has roots.

***1 Timothy 2:5 “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”***

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# ANNEXURES

## 8.1 INFORMED CONSENT

### Dear participant

You are kindly invited to take part in a research project (Master's dissertation) entitled: **The cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in the village of Taung (North West Province – South Africa): In light of the *missio Dei*.**

### Researcher

Obakeng George Thebe (16074505)  
Mafikeng  
083 5938 558

### Purpose

The aim is to contribute towards addressing a missiological challenge posed by the cultural practice of ancestor beliefs in Taung, in spite of two centuries of Christianity in that area.

The objective of this research is to:

- study and analyse the history of Christianity in this community;
- critically describe ancestral beliefs;
- study and expound the views of churches and Christians with regards to ancestor beliefs;
- expound on the *missio Dei*;
- identify whether ancestral belief is inculturation or syncretism; and
- give missiological guidelines to address this missiological challenge of syncretism or inculturation.

### Participation in this study will involve the following

Scheduled interviews with residents in the Taung area will be held. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire.



### **Risks and Discomforts**

No risks or discomforts are associated with this project.

### **Confidentiality**

Participants will have a choice of remaining anonymous, in which case the study will just refer to “respondents”. Information obtained via the research will be used for research purposes only. The research results will be presented in the format of a thesis that will be submitted to the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, for examination and most probably some of the findings will be published in an accredited academic journal.

### **Withdrawal without Prejudice**

Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any given moment in time.

### **Costs or Payments**

There will be no costs involved for taking part in this research study. No participant will receive any payment to participate in this research project.

### **Questions**

Participants may contact Prof. S.J. van der Merwe ([sarel.vandermerwe@nwu.ac.za](mailto:sarel.vandermerwe@nwu.ac.za) cell 083 310 0372) with questions concerning this research study. Prof. S.J. vd Merwe acts as the supervisor for this research project.

### **Agreement**

This agreement states that you have read and received a copy of this informed consent. Your signature below indicates that you understand the parameters of your participation and agree to take part in this research study.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 8.2 THE CULTURAL PRACTICE OF ANCESTOR BELIEFS IN LIGHT OF THE MISSIO DEI

### QUESTIONS – MINISTERS (interview)

1. How long have you been in the ministry?
2. How long have you been pastoring here in Taung?
3. Do you believe in ancestral beliefs?
4. What is the view of the church in relation to the missiological challenge posed by the continuation of ancestor beliefs in light of the *missio Dei*?
5. Given the position of the church, do you ever preach against or for ancestor beliefs?
6. In your view, is it possible to be a good Christian and ancestor believer?
7. In your opinion, why are your members still believing in ancestors?
8. Do you have an idea of who of your members are more prone to ancestral beliefs (the have's or have not)?
9. Is ancestral belief an African inculturation or syncretism?
10. How would you or the community respond at the suggestion that you/they abandon ancestor beliefs?
11. What can the church do to address this missiological challenge?

### 8.3 QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire												
Please fill in all the details and tick the boxes where necessary												
Name: (Optional)												
Gender:												
Marital Status:	Married		Never Married		Divorced		Widowed		Separated		Live In	
Age in years	21-30		31-40		41-50		51-60		61 & above			
Highest level of Education	None		Gr 1-7			Gr 8-12		Tertiary Level				
The type of house you live in	Traditional hut				Mokhukhu				Brick house			
Source of drinking water	Own Piped Water					Public Tap		Borehole			Dam/River	
What kind of toilet facilities do you have	Flush Toilet						Pit latrine			No Facility		
Do you have any of the following												
Tick off ONLY in the relevant field below												
Electricity												
Radio												
Telephone [landline]												
Cell phone												
Refrigerator												
Computer												
A car(s)												
Does anyone in the household receive any social grant?							Yes			No		

**If yes, what kind of grant?**

Tick off **ONLY** in the relevant field below

Child grant	Y e s		No		Applied	
Disability grant	Y e s		No		Applied	
Foster care	Y e s		No		Applied	
Old age pension	Y e s		No		Applied	
How many people in the household?	Adults				Children	
How many rooms in your household?						
How many are employed?						
Estimated monthly income?	1. R1 000-R5 000 2. R5 000-R 10 000 3. R10 000-R15 000 4. R15 000-R20 000 5. R20 000 +					
Do you believe in ancestors?	Y e s		No		Not sure	
Who has more influence on your life?						
1. Ancestors 2. God of the Bible						
How often do you go to church?						
1. Every Sunday 2. Once a month 3. Twice a month 4. Thrice a month						

5. Never
Does your church address issues of ancestor beliefs? 1. Yes 2. No
Did your parents honour ancestors? If yes, how often? 1. Once every six months 2. Once every year 3. Once every second year 4. Once five years
Is ancestor belief inculturation? 1. Yes 2. No
Can one be a fully committed Christian and ancestor believer? 1. Yes 2. No
Would you agree to a suggestion that you abandon ancestor belief? 1. Yes 2. No