

# **Influence of ancestral worship on participation in the missio Dei in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape**

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## PREFACE

It may come as no surprise that in a traditionalist society such as that of the amaXhosa, upon which this study is based, ancestral worship plays a pivotal role. A people group steeped in culture and tradition, the amaXhosa carry a proud heritage stemming from centuries past. The Xhosa people have tremendous respect for their parents, grandparents, and forebears and one can easily understand why ancestral worship would be an important part of family life as well as life in community. Such respect for one's ancestors carries on even into the afterlife, as will be reflected from the research gathered. The area in question is King William's Town in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, where the researcher of this study was born and continues to live.

The dissertation will attempt to explain the concept of "ancestral worship" with specific focus on who the "ancestors" in question are, and to come to terms with the meaning of "worship" – which is often a grey area. Many ancestral worshippers walk two roads (syncretism), attempting to honour God but simultaneously paying homage to their ancestors. The explanation of these matters will be followed by a fuller rendering of the term "missio Dei", and the focus then shifts to how ancestral worship influences participation in the missio Dei. The study draws to a conclusion by seeking ways in which the church can establish a paradigm for addressing the *influence of ancestral worship on participation in the missio Dei in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape*.

The researcher is indebted to the individuals who offered their insights and experiences into this topic through interviews and correspondence. Most interviewees were students from Dumisani Theological Institute in King William's Town where the researcher is employed as a lecturer. But gratitude is also expressed for the invaluable contributions made by local pastors and missionaries who are regularly in touch with this very topic. The continued guidance from start to finish by the supervisor for this study, Prof. Sarel van der Merwe, has been tremendous and is duly acknowledged and appreciated. Support from work colleagues was encouraging and also from friends who have been in prayer for this work. Appreciation is also expressed to the researcher's local church, and to North-West University for its financial contribution towards this endeavour. In particular, the researcher thanks his wife and children who have stood by him throughout this project, up until this final document. Heartfelt thanks is expressed to all these role players. May we continue to participate in the missio Dei, and may more be added to this number, for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to discover the influence that ancestral worship has on participation in the *missio Dei*, specifically among the Xhosa people in King William's Town. To assist in the research, a number of students at Dumisani Theological Institute were interviewed, as well as other individuals affected by the phenomenon, including pastors and missionaries who are facing and attempting to deal with ancestral worship in the context at hand. This took the form of qualitative research in which such men and women were interviewed to saturation level. Along with this qualitative research, a literature study was also conducted.

Furthermore the research will try to demonstrate the hold that ancestral worship has on many of the local people, for example, the time that is needed to fulfil rituals and practices, the pressure from community members on those who would want to depart from such practice, and the effects of syncretism as men and women attempt to follow two paths.

The research will attempt to show not only how influential this phenomenon is but also how complicated it can be. When one refers to ancestor worship, there seems to be a degree of ambiguity over the understanding thereof – one man's worship may be another's veneration, or honour, or reverence, or respect. The understanding of the term and practice of worship are unpacked to a fuller extent. The same will apply to that of ancestor, where there also seems to be a lack of clarity concerning the term and its practice. Perhaps this research will clear up such misunderstandings to a certain measure and also encourage further research into the matter of ancestral worship.

A clear understanding of the *missio Dei*, or mission of God, is also necessary. The research will attempt to show that people are invited to participate in the *missio Dei*, yet ancestral worship may well influence such participation. Once these matters have been addressed, the research will seek to discover a paradigm for the church to address the influence of ancestral worship on participation in the *missio Dei*.

The following key words need particular attention, and for the sake of initial clarity each concept is briefly defined here:

“Ancestors”

These are men and women who are our predecessors – the people from whom we have descended, our forebears. They are our grandparents, great grandparents, and so on. “Almost all groups of traditional African people have very important beliefs about their relationships to the spirits of their ancestors”, states O'Donovan (1995:4). In the African context, ancestors are

regarded as the “living-dead”. Despite being deceased, there is continued communication between the living and the dead, as if the dead were still alive, hence ancestors being the living-dead.

#### “Ancestral Worship”

The worship of the dead, or even consulting the dead, is broadly regarded as ancestral worship. This is sometimes referred to as ancestor veneration or ancestor reverence. There is often a fine line between *worshipping* ancestors and the *veneration* thereof – some scholars (Mhlophe 2013:118; Nürnberger 2007:111) seem to use the terms interchangeably. Afrika Mhlophe (2013:118) provides insightful detail on this concept. Some may worship familial ancestors while others worship saints.

#### “Contextualisation”

This is the process of placing a word or idea in a particular context. For example, to contextualize the biblical message in any given context would be to integrate it within that context. Paul Hiebert’s work (1987) on critical contextualisation is a worthwhile study on this concept.<sup>1</sup> Bosch (1991:421) argues that “the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it”. That is an example of contextualisation.

#### “Missio Dei”

This concept refers to the *mission of God*. Mission is often perceived as *man’s* efforts or strategies, but the *missio Dei* brings one back to the mission of God – “our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God” (Wright 2006:23).

#### “Sangoma”

A “sangoma” is a person who has been called by the ancestors to be a diviner. “The category of diviners includes witchdoctors, spiritual healers and sangomas...supposedly responsible for good fortune” (Mhlophe, 2013:100). Sangomas are said to be “possessed by spirits and operate through them” (Light, 2012:104). People will consult sangomas in order to communicate with ancestors. Many refer to sangomas and witchdoctors synonymously. However, some see the former being more benevolent and the latter being more harmful.

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<sup>1</sup> Hiebert (1987:104-112)

<sup>2</sup> Bosch (1991:389ff.)

## “Syncretism”

Syncretism is the blending of one belief system with another, particularly in religious or philosophical fields. But one can also mix “the supposed worship of the living God of the Bible with all kinds of other loves and loyalties” (Wright 2010:153). The worship of idols and the simultaneous worship of the living God is syncretism.

## “Witchcraft”<sup>3</sup>

This concept involves witches, sorcerers or diviners who call on evil powers or spirits to perform magic acts or to cast a spell on people. Witchcraft is usually sought for malevolent means. Witchcraft is thought to be hereditary, or it can be desired and one can then be trained to be a witch.

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<sup>3</sup> Steyne (1990:118-119)

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing poog om die invloed wat voorvaderaanbidding op die deelname aan die missio Dei het te ontdek, spesifiek onder die Xhosa mense in King William's Town. Om te help met die navorsing is daar met 'n aantal van die studente by Dumisani Teologiese Instituut onderhoude gevoer, asook met ander individue wat geraak word deur die verskynsel, insluitend pastore en sendelinge wat poog om met voorvaderaanbidding in hulle gegewe konteks te handel. Hierdie navorsing maak deel uit van die kwalitatiewe navorsing waar daar met genoemde mans en vrouens onderhoude gevoer is totdat 'n versadigingspunt bereik is. Saam met hierdie kwalitatiewe navorsing, is daar ook 'n literatuurstudie gedoen.

Verder sal die navorsing probeer aantoon watter houvas voorvaderaanbidding op baie van die plaaslike mense het. Voorbeelde hiervan is die tyd wat nodig is om rituele en praktyke te vervul, die druk van lede van die gemeenskap op dié wat probeer afstand doen van bogenoemde praktyke, en die gevolge van sinkretisme wanneer mans en vroue probeer om twee weë te volg.

Hierdie navorsing sal nie alleen aantoon hoe invloedryk hierdie verskynsel is nie, maar ook hoe ingewikkeld dit kan wees. Wanneer daar gepraat word van voorouer aanbidding, kom dit voor of daar 'n gebrek aan duidelikheid is oor die begrip. Wat die een persoon beskryf as aanbidding sal die volgende persoon eerder beskryf as verering, of eer, of eerbied of respek toon. Die begrip van die term en praktyk van aanbidding sal ontleed word om 'n voller begrip daarvan te kry. Dieselfde sal gedoen word met die begrip "voorouers", aangesien dit blyk of daar ook 'n gebrek aan duidelikheid oor dié term en sy praktyk is. Hierdie navorsing mag dalk hierdie misverstande tot 'n sekere mate opklaar sodat verdere navorsing in die gebied van voorvaderaanbidding aangemoedig kan word.

'n Duidelike begrip van die missio Dei, of missie van God, is ook nodig. Die navorsing sal poog om te wys hoe mense genooi is om deel te neem aan die missio Dei en hoe die voorvaderaanbidding hierdie deelname sal beïnvloed. Wanneer hierdie sake aangespreek is, sal die navorsing poog om 'n paradigma vir die kerk te ontwikkel en die invloed van voorvaderaanbidding op die deelname aan die missio Dei te bespreek.

Die volgende woorde benodig besondere aandag. Ter wille van duidelikheid sal elkeen van die konsepte kortliks gedefinieer word:

"Voorouers"

Hierdie is manne en vroue wat ons voorgangers is - die mense van wie ons afstam, ons voorouers. Hulle is ons grootouers ens. "Almost all groups of traditional African people have very

important beliefs about their relationships to the spirits of their ancestors”, so sê O'Donovan (1995:4). Binne die Afrika-konteks, word die voorouers beskou as die "living-dead". Ondanks die feit dat hulle reeds oorlede is, is daar voortgaande kommunikasie tussen die lewendes en die dooies asof die dooies steeds lewendig is. Daarom word die voorouers beskou as die “living-dead”.

#### "Vooroueraanbidding"

Die aanbidding of selfs oorlegpleging met dié wat reeds dood is, word in die algemeen beskou as voorvaderlike aanbidding. Daar word ook soms na hierdie aanbidding of oorlegpleging verwys as voorouerverering of eerbied vir die voorouers. Daar is dikwels 'n fyn lyn tussen die aanbidding van voorvaders en die verering daarvan - sommige geleerdes (Mhlophe 2013:118; Nürnberger 2007:111) gebruik die terme afwisselend. Afrika Mhlophe (2013:118) bied insiggewende besonderhede oor hierdie konsep. Sommige mag die voorvaders in die familie aanbid terwyl ander die heiliges aanbid.

#### "Kontekstualisering"

Dit is die proses wat gevolg word om 'n woord of 'n idee binne 'n bepaalde konteks te plaas. Om die Bybelse boodskap byvoorbeeld in enige gegewe konteks te kontekstualiseer sou beteken dat die boodskap binne daardie spesifieke konteks geïntegreer moet word. Paul Hiebert (1987) se werk oor kritieke kontekstualisering bied waardevolle inligting oor hierdie konsep. Bosch (1991: 421) voer aan dat “the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it”. Dit is 'n voorbeeld van kontekstualisering.

#### "Missio Dei"

Hierdie konsep verwys na die *sending van God*. Sending word dikwels beskou as pogings en strategieë van die mens, maar die *missio Dei* bring mens terug na die sending van God - “our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God” (Wright 2006:23).

#### "Sangoma"

'n "Sangoma" is 'n persoon wat deur die voorouers geroep is om 'n waarsêer te wees. “The category of diviners includes witchdoctors, spiritual healers and sangomas...supposedly responsible for good fortune” (Mhlophe, 2013:100). Daar word gesê dat Sangomas “are possessed by spirits and operate through them” (Light, 2012:104). Mense sal sangomas raadpleeg om met die voorouers te kommunikeer. Baie verwys na sangomas en toordokters as sinonieme, maar sommige sien eersgenoemde as meer welwillend en laasgenoemde as meer skadelik.

## "Sinkretisme"

Sinkretisme is die vermenging van een geloof stelsel met 'n ander, veral op godsdienstige of filosofiese vlak. Maar 'n mens kan ook "the supposed worship of the living God of the Bible with all kinds of other loves and loyalties" (Wright 2010:153) meng. Die aanbidding van afgode en die gelyktydige aanbidding van die lewende God word sinkretisme genoem.

## "Heksery"

Hierdie konsep behels hekse, towenaars of waarsêers wat hulleself op die bose magte of geeste beroep om towerkunste te verrig of om 'n vloek op mense te plaas. Heksery word gewoonlik vir kwaadwillige doeleindes beoefen. Heksery is oorefflik, maar die persoon wat begeer om dit te beoefen kan ook opgelei word om 'n heks te word.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Title

The title for this research focuses on an undeniable phenomenon in the society in which I live, that of *ancestral worship*. I live in King William's Town, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, an area predominately populated by a people group known as the amaXhosa. This people group is a fairly closely-knit society steeped in rich customs, traditions and culture with emphasis placed more on the group than on the individual. In spite of years of mission and in spite of widespread Christianity, many people worship their ancestors. It seems as if there is no conflict between ancestor worship and worshipping the God of the Bible. The question is whether this is compatible with the teachings of the Bible and whether it is a hindrance to fully partake in the *missio Dei*. A deeper understanding of ancestral worship is necessary in order to answer the question whether ancestral worship is a hindrance to the proper participation in the *missio Dei*, or not.

## 1.2 Background and Problem Statement

### 1.2.1 Background

Ancestral worship is not exclusive to Africa<sup>4</sup>, but it is certainly deeply rooted in the Eastern Cape, where I have grown up. I have been interested in the mission of God since my early twenties and my wife and I have always tried to lead missional lives – being participants in the *missio Dei*. We have been on short-term mission trips in Africa and Asia and we have also been involved in our local church and community. We endeavour to maintain a missional mindset.

Having grown up in King William's Town, particularly as a farmer's son, I learned to speak the language of the local Xhosa people and I have been broadly aware of the customs and culture of the amaXhosa. Ancestral worship has been passed down through the centuries and for many here it is simply a way of life. In this vein, the research seeks to discover the meaning of ancestral worship, the practices involved therein, and the reasons why this form of worship is so influential. Does ancestral worship truly influence participation in the *missio Dei*?

I recently completed a Degree in Theology through North-West University, followed by the BTh Honours course, and my knowledge and understanding of Missiology has been broadened through such study. As a lecturer training students who have grown up in this context – and who will continue to be exposed to the same – I hope to learn from them as well as from others in the

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<sup>4</sup> Steyne (1990: 79ff.) and Vosloo (n.d.:7ff.)

community in which I live and with the results from the research, attempt to make a difference where necessary.

The importance of this study is to come to terms with the impact of ancestral worship on society and to establish reasons for its seemingly overwhelming influence. Even though I have grown up in this community, I still do not fully realize the extent of ancestral worship amongst some of the people here. I want to research the context thoroughly and thereby attempt to understand my friends and neighbours better. There are churches that do not hesitate to “encourage their members to consult the dead” (Mhlophe, 2013:225). So to worship both God and the ancestors seems acceptable. We as lecturers and students at Dumisani Theological Institute can undoubtedly benefit from this research and thereby be equipped to face the challenges of ancestral worship more effectively in our community. If God calls us to worship him alone, can ancestral worship still stand? If “Christians” continue to worship their ancestors, does this not influence their participation in the *missio Dei*? Such questions will be answered as the results of the research are unpacked below.

### **1.2.2 Problem Statement**

The theme of this study investigates how this practice influences people’s participation in the *missio Dei* and attempts to discover the reasons why ancestral worship has such an influence on the people in this community. According to Nürnberger (2007:14), one reason for ancestral worship’s tremendous influence is the apparent authority given to ancestors: “ancestors are deemed ‘real’ because their existential impact on the living is pervasive and decisive. Their reality is not located in their vitality, however, but in their authority”. Most Xhosa people in King William’s Town are aware of the phenomenon of ancestral worship, but the danger thereof and particularly its effects on the local people may be misinterpreted. Has God not called us to worship him alone? Worshipping God and our ancestors – is that not syncretism? Vernon Light did a similar study in the area of Port Elizabeth, also in the Eastern Cape. However, his focus was on “a model of discipleship for evangelical churches in Africa” (Light, 2012:383-388). In his research, Light (2012:389) found that the ongoing practice of ancestral worship, syncretism, and the general lack of spiritual growth in the Eastern Cape are mainly due to what he termed “faulty discipleship”. Light (2012:383) listed a number of principles that could be used in “producing mature, dynamic Christians in Africa resistant to syncretism”, particularly amongst followers of African Traditional Religion (ATR). His fairly comprehensive model includes matters such as a high view of Scripture, Christian identity as opposed to that of other cultures, how the gospel relates to all areas of life, and addressing syncretism. I fully agree with the suggestions made by Light. Syncretism is not acceptable before God – we cannot worship God *and* worship our ancestors. Light focuses on a wide range of issues within ATR, but the aim in this dissertation considers ancestral worship’s

influence on participation in the missio Dei in King William's Town. Light's model covers a broader spectrum as such, while the research here has a narrower scope. The research will show that change comes from God being at the centre of one's life (Romans 12) and, therefore, one can resist the pattern of this world, in this case ancestral worship. Man is able to participate fully in the missio Dei when the focus is on God alone.

The research here aims to build on what others such as Ferdinando (1999, particularly chapter 14), Nürnberger (2007) and O'Donovan (1995) have presented concerning the unwillingness of, or the challenges for people, to abandon the practice of ancestral worship, factors which influence participation in the missio Dei.

Questions arising from this situation:

- 1.2.2.1 What is ancestral worship as understood in the context of King William's Town?
- 1.2.2.2 How does ancestral worship affect the King William's Town community?
- 1.2.2.3 What is the missio Dei and how does it address the issue of ancestral worship?
- 1.2.2.4 To what extent does ancestral worship influence people's participation in the missio Dei?
- 1.2.2.5 What are some of the reasons why people in the King William's Town community are so influenced by ancestral worship?
- 1.2.2.6 Can we establish a paradigm for the church to deal with ancestral worship in the King William's Town area?

These questions will form the overall outline of the research and the overarching question remains: *How does ancestral worship influence participation in the missio Dei in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape?*

### **1.3 Preliminary Literature Study**

The most helpful sources at the preliminary stage were the works of the following authors, some of whom have had experience in the African context and who have a clear understanding of participation in the missio Dei:

1. Light (*Transforming the Church in Africa*, 2012),
2. Ferdinando (*The Triumph of Christ in African Perspective*, 1999),
3. Mhlophe (*Christianity and the Veneration of Ancestors*, 2013),
4. Nürnberger (*The Living God and the Living Dead*, 2007),
5. O'Donovan (*Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, 1995), and
6. van der Walt (*Understanding and Rebuilding Africa*, 2003).

This literature gives a view of the bigger picture, but the focus here centres on the Eastern Cape area, particularly King William's Town. Also the focus of this study centres on the overwhelming influence of ancestral worship on the people in this community, and how that influence impacts participation in the missio Dei. Interviewing men and women who have been affected by ancestral

worship would reflect such reasons. None of the sources listed have covered specifically this particular research of how ancestral worship influences participation in the missio Dei in King William's Town.

## **1.4 Research Problem Statement and Objectives**

### **1.4.1 Aim**

The aim of this research is to make a literary study of ancestral worship and its influence on participation in the missio Dei. Together with the literary study will be a qualitative empirical study of the same in King William's Town, drawing on the experience of local men and women who are involved in or faced with this phenomenon. The results will also assist in developing a preliminary paradigm to address the matter of ancestral worship.

### **1.4.2 Objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are to study:

- 1.4.2.1** what ancestral worship is;
- 1.4.2.2** the effect of ancestral worship on the King William's Town community;
- 1.4.2.3** what is the missio Dei and how does it address ancestral worship;
- 1.4.2.4** the extent to which ancestral worship influences participation in the missio Dei;
- 1.4.2.5** why people in King William's Town are so influenced by ancestral worship;
- 1.4.2.6** a possible paradigm for the church to address ancestral worship in King William's Town.

## **1.4 Central Theoretical Argument**

The central theoretical argument for this study is that ancestral worship is practised in King William's Town and this practice stifles participation in the missio Dei. When the church follows the preliminary paradigm to address the practice, it will begin to transform the resistance to participation in the missio Dei.

## **1.5 Research Design / Methodology**

This theological and empirical study is taken from the perspective of the Reformed tradition. The following methods are used to answer the various research questions posed:

- In order to understand the meaning and practice of ancestral worship, a literary analysis will be undertaken. The writings of Mhlophe, Sanneh, and Steyne, among others, are analysed. Particular emphasis will be placed on what Scripture teaches about ancestral worship; the approach will be taken from a revelation historical understanding of Scripture.

- In order to study the effect of ancestral worship on the King William's Town community, a literary analysis will be undertaken – the works of Light and Mhlophe will prove invaluable in this endeavour – but also qualitative empirical research too, drawing on the knowledge and experience of local men and women. These men and women will be chosen randomly from the Dumisani Theological Institute student body, from pastors and church members in King William's Town, and also confessing ancestral worshippers. Consultation with these folk would be up to saturation level.<sup>5</sup>
- In order to study how the Bible addresses the issue of ancestral worship, it would be necessary to carry out a study of certain pericopes (e.g. Deuteronomy 18: 9-13; 1 Samuel 28; Isaiah 8: 19-22), along with all relevant works, e.g. Ferdinando and Wright.
- In order to study how ancestral worship influences participation in the *missio Dei*, qualitative research will be carried out along with a similar literary study as above with the view of also studying the possibility of syncretism in the King William's Town context. The writings of Hesselgrave, Steyne, and Wright will be useful here.
- In order to discover the reasons why people in the King William's Town community are so influenced by ancestral worship, a literary study and qualitative study will be carried out in order to pay attention to all aspects of this phenomenon. It would be crucial to attempt to establish the level of ancestral worship's influence. A quantitative study would probably prove inconclusive as people may cover up their involvement in ancestral worship. One would want to discover the level of influence that ancestral worship has on the local community and why people struggle to escape its influence in their lives. Just how deep has its impact been and how difficult would it prove to abandon the practice?

In order for the church to address ancestral worship, a paradigm needs to be established wherein this can take place. This will be done through biblical study and literary analysis.

## **1.6 Concept Clarification**

In this study it would be vital for the reader to understand the concepts listed in the "Abstract" above. Those of "ancestors", "syncretism" and "contextualization" need particular emphasis in light of this study. These concepts will be clarified through definitions provided by the literature appropriate to the study and research.

## **1.7 Ethical Considerations**

The ethical code of the North-West University will be followed to ensure that this research is objective and that the rights of interviewees are at all times respected. The researcher aimed to

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<sup>5</sup> These men and women have given permission to have their names recorded in this document.

interview students at Dumisani Theological Institute as well as local pastors and missionaries who can provide invaluable input into this research in order to analyse the effects of ancestral worship and the challenge to change. Fully-fledged ancestral worshippers will also be consulted.

## CHAPTER 2 WHAT IS ANCESTRAL WORSHIP?

In order to analyse the influence of ancestral worship on participation in the *missio Dei*, one needs to be clear about one's understanding of *ancestral worship*. As far as the meaning of *missio Dei* goes, a brief definition was provided earlier – that of “the mission of God” – but this will be unpacked in greater detail in chapter 4. For now, the focus is purely on the meaning of “ancestral worship”. Although this dissertation is limited to King William's Town, it would be helpful to consider ancestral worship in somewhat broader terms and then to discover what it means for the people in this area.

Before embarking on this research, I considered ancestral worship to be an African phenomenon alone. However, I soon discovered that it was an issue extending beyond the boundaries of Africa. Trevor Vosloo (n.d.:7) states that “ancestral worship is found all over the world and is deeply entrenched in many different, and at times very diverse, cultures”. In an article for the *Exchange* (2007:246-247), Alexander Jebadu writes,

Religious practice that centres in venerating ancestors or the living-dead in general continues to play a significant role in the life of many Christians around the world especially in Asia and Africa as well as in Latin America, Melanesia (and) Australia...

Klaus Nürnberger (2007:v) states in the preface of his book, *The living dead and the living God*:

It is well known that ancestor veneration, belief in spirits and traditional approaches to healing play a significant role in mainline churches in many parts of the world. This is recognized not only by perceptive theologians but also by cultural anthropologists.

In May 2012, I attended an international course in the Netherlands entitled “No other Name”, the title drawn from the passage in Scripture where Peter explains that salvation is found in no other name but that of Christ alone (Acts 4:12). The course included Christian church leaders from India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Uganda and Zambia. The purpose of the course was to discover the challenges faced by these church leaders in each of their home contexts and to seek the most effective means of presenting the gospel message so that it is fully understood by the local people. The course was divided into four stages:

1. Phenomenological orientation and analysis;
2. Biblical and theological foundation;
3. Evaluative response and pastoral application; and
4. Missiological approach and missionary zeal.

It was in the first stage that the delegates could share their experiences with each other, their experiences of ministry on the ground. There I learned from fellow course participants that ancestral worship is indeed a worldwide phenomenon. The delegate from India shared particularly

on how the people regularly visited their grandparents' graves, seeking their guidance and blessing. Even the host presenter, from the Netherlands, shared how some people in Holland put faith in their ancestors. From such examples, it is clear that ancestral worship is a global phenomenon.

My apologies then to Africa! Ancestral worship is not an African phenomenon alone. As the answer to the above question (What is ancestral worship?) unfolds, one will find that there is more to ancestral worship than just a simple definition. One may have noticed Jebadu and Nürnberger's use of the term "venerating" in the above quotations. Some will argue that *worship* and *veneration* do not express the same meaning, while others will argue that these words are synonymous. Let us first be clear about what is meant by *worship*. Thereafter, the research will investigate the issue of who these *ancestors* are, or what is meant by *ancestors*, and then attempt to fully understand the meaning of *ancestral worship*. However, an attempt will be made to focus the understanding of it purely from a King William's Town perspective.

## 2.1 What is worship?

Firstly then, what does it mean to *worship* one's ancestors? *Worship* can have a number of meanings and understandings. The concise Oxford dictionary (2004:1663) refers to worship as "the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity". In the Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2003:1907) we find, "to show respect and love for a god, especially by praying in a religious building". Usually one would use the term worship in matters of religion, but just what does "worship" mean? One may admire something or someone to such an extent that in contemporary terms one might say, "I worship the ground he walks on". As a mark of respect, some are given the title, 'Your Worship', or 'Your Majesty', as in the context of royalty; or 'Your Honour', as in a court of law. When we admire the skills of a sportsman or the talent of a singer, we may treat them as heroes or even as idols. There is even the popular show on television entitled "Idols". Are these performers being worshipped in a religious sense or are others simply admiring the performers' abilities? Which term best suits the practice here: admiration, honour, respect, reverence, worship, or veneration? In a similar sense, one may ask if the people in the King William's Town community are *worshipping* their ancestors, or are they just honouring or respecting them for what they did in the past?

In a lecture (17 Apr. 2014) with my students at Dumisani, we discussed these issues at length. This particular lecture was a Homiletics class and the opening reading was taken from 2 Timothy 4:1-8 where Paul urged Timothy to preach the Word. The topic for the lecture was "Why preach?" One reason was to keep people worshipping God. If people hear the true message of the Bible, then they receive the message of God, a message which reveals God's character and his plan for

creation – the *missio Dei*. Paul warned Timothy, as seen in this text of 2 Timothy 4, that some people would turn away from sound doctrine. I asked the question concerning worshipping God versus worshipping ancestors. The answer seemed to depend on the meaning of the words “honour”, “respect”, “venerate”, or “worship”. Eventually we reached a general consensus on these terms, distinguishing “worship” from all the others – here the word worship was preferred, being understood in a more religious sense.

Up to this point, there have been two definitions of “worship” already, but what is “veneration” then? The Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary of current English (2006:1635) records the verb *to venerate* as “to have and show a lot of respect for somebody/something, especially somebody/something that is considered to be holy or very important”. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2015) renders *veneration* as “respect or awe inspired by the dignity, wisdom, dedication, or talent of a person”. From these definitions one can see the challenge in trying to differentiate between “worship” and “veneration”. What complicates the matter further is that, as already mentioned, some render these terms synonymous. From the quotes above, one saw that Jebadu and Nürnberger used the phrase “venerating” ancestors. Some may well use these terms interchangeably.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to worship in the truest sense (what the research here portrays as “in a *religious* sense”), one would rely on that deity to intervene in one’s circumstances – as opposed to respecting someone or something without expecting their intervention. For example, to “worship the ground upon which someone walks” does not mean that that person would be expected to change one’s life. But to worship God, one seeks to live a life that is pleasing to him, a life that honours him because he is God – and one expects God to intervene in, or to change, one’s life. Nürnberger (2007:110) states that “your God is something or somebody in whom you place your trust. You expect blessings and assistance from this entity”. One needs to clearly distinguish between the terms “veneration” and “worship” or at least try to understand what one means when using these terms.

For the sake of this dissertation the meaning of worship is confined to a ‘religious’ understanding, but this will be explored further. When Christians bow down to the living God, Creator of the universe and God of the Bible, they are worshipping him. They pay God honour and respect and they treat him with reverence and fear for who he is and for what he has done. They experience a trusting relationship between God and themselves and seek his intervention in their lives. Likewise, men and women of other religions pay honour to their gods in a similar way and are therefore worshipping those gods. This is the meaning that the researcher is attempting to portray

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<sup>6</sup> Mhlophe (2013:118)

here. It is not merely a matter of admiration or respect but rather a long-term, trusting relationship. After all, one can admire or respect a fellow human being, as mentioned above. But here it is a case of putting God first, before anything or anyone else; it is about trusting in him. Of course, some will regard the terms worship, veneration, reverence, honour, etc., as mere semantics, while others will want to distinguish clearly between these terms. Philip Steyne (1990:81) states that “ancestors, if not worshipped, are at least highly revered ... controversy exists whether or not recognition of ancestors with sacrifices and offerings is reverence or actual worship”. Perhaps the controversy is supported by Lenard Nyirongo’s critique of John Mbiti, among other African theologians, concerning worship and idolatry. Nyirongo (1997:39) states:

According to him, the African’s sacrifices and offerings to his ancestors are not worship, but a symbol of “fellowship,” because though physically absent, the ancestors are still close to their families. But, in another case, he rates the ancestors as not only the best link between God and man but also as other intermediaries; in yet another case he says direct prayers to God is the most important and most common aspect of worship.

Here we begin to see the wide range of meanings for the term “worship” and the complexities that can be created when terms are used interchangeably.

If we consider worship in its biblical sense, the Hebrew word *sagad* means to “prostrate oneself in worship” (Brown, *et al.*, 1980:688); in the Greek we have the word *proskuneo*, meaning to fall down before or to bow down before.<sup>7</sup> Louw & Nida (1989:540) record *proskuneo* (προσκυνέω) as: “to express by attitude and possibly by position one’s allegiance to and regard for deity”. Nyirongo (1997:40) provides a valuable argument for the meaning of “worship” by stating that “true worship begins with God’s opening the heart of the sinner and the sinner’s response in repentance and faith in God”. Worship is about someone in whom one places one’s trust, someone upon whom one depends, a trusting relationship between God and man, man in dependence upon God. Unfortunately, worship is often seen from the perspective of what man does – the focus often being on *man*’s activities and practices – but we forget that worship begins with God. It may suffice to say that God created mankind for God’s glory and for man to worship God alone (cf. Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31). When one keeps this in perspective, then the understanding of *worship* may become clearer.

The discussion in the lecture (17 Apr. 2014) mentioned earlier then focused on the practice of the local people. We agreed that some folk in our community respected their forefathers, but did not worship them as God, while others indeed *worshipped* their ancestors. There are, of course, those who worship God as well as their ancestors, referred to as *syncretism*, a matter which will be dealt

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<sup>7</sup> <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/5456/htm> and [www.gotquestions.org/Christian-worship.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-worship.html)

with in chapter 5 below. When we say that people are worshipping their ancestors, how can this be positively identified? Are there practices that portray the presence of ancestral worship among the people?

One indicator of the presence of ancestral worship, for example, would be to discover how boys go through initiation rites. Rev. Zani, whom I interviewed (19 Oct. 2014), listed some of the practices associated with ancestral worship: “eat foreskin with blood or bury it in the kraal and speak over it; ask the ancestors for protection; sexual immorality (encouraged to sleep with girls ‘for testing’); invite liquor to seal the covenant”. These acts are carried out in order to appease the ancestors, thus seeking their favour, on the one hand, or seeking to avoid their curse or punishment on the other. Harry Sawyerr (1969:68) states the following:

...the rite of circumcision gives the patient an opportunity of dropping some of his blood on the ground which is in most African circles supposed to be the origin of life and of the child. It is also the abode of the dead. So at circumcision, the parents encourage the lad to give up some of his life back to the source from which it is derived, viz. the Earth and the ancestral spirits who are often thought to have re-entered the new-born babe. Thus the youth enters into a covenant which qualifies him to be taught certain moral codes and the history and traditions of the land.

As quoted earlier, some see these acts as fellowship with ancestors, while others deem it true worship. Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) clearly states that “worshipping ancestors is the right way to communicate with God because they are our representatives to God”. When people call on their ancestors, they are seeking help and guidance, so would this not be seen as some measure of worship? According to Nyirongo (1997:82-83), and many other writers on ATR, there is no concrete evidence of the ancestors “but the experience is real! The African cannot see or touch the ancestral spirits but experiences them through the following...” Nyirongo then lists, with a brief explanation of each, these elements:

1. prayers
2. dreams
3. misfortunes and blessings
4. significant social events (childbirth, initiation, marriage, etc.)
5. appearance of snakes and other animals
6. images and shrines
7. prophets who claim they have risen from the dead
8. mediums whom ancestors possess to pass on messages

Some of these can be seen amongst the amaXhosa in the King William’s Town community. This is reality. Call it worship, call it veneration, it remains a fact that ancestral worship is deeply entrenched here.

One may yet struggle to clearly categorize ancestral worship and ancestral veneration. Will one know for sure if someone is worshipping their ancestors or merely paying them respect? Whether it is worship in the true sense of the word (the religious sense) or whether it is merely honouring or respecting ancestors, ancestral worship certainly influences one's participation in the *missio Dei* – such influence will be addressed in the following chapter. For the purposes here, *worship* is regarded as that relationship of dependence and trust for intervention by God on behalf of mankind, while *veneration* will be confined to that aspect of honouring, respecting or admiring someone or something without expecting any major intervention as such. The research now turns to the topic of “ancestors”.

## **2.2 Who or what are ancestors?**

Secondly then, the dissertation focuses on the term “ancestors”. Who or what are these *ancestors* that people worship? And are these ancestors for real, or could they be a misconception or even a demonic deception? In a general sense, ancestors are those men and women who have gone before us, who have lived before us and from whom we follow – as in our family line or family tree. Our parents and grandparents and great grandparents, etc. are our ancestors. The Oxford advanced learner's dictionary (2006:47) lists ancestor as “a person in your family who lived a long time ago”, and the Concise Oxford dictionary (2004:47) refers to “a person, typically one more remote than a grandparent, from whom one is descended”. Mhlophe (2013:152) states that “when you are tracing your lineage you are basically tracing your ancestors”. Examples of ancestors, according to this understanding of the term, can be found in the Bible (cf. Gen 5; Lev 26:45; Mt 1; Rom 4:1). These are the names of the ancestry traced back to Adam, the first man on earth. Similarly, some may refer to their ancestors as their forefathers – fathers who have gone before. Therefore, they will, in a sense, excuse ancestral worship for mere communication with their forefathers, with their own flesh and blood. These are relatives. This is family. Who would not do such a thing? In order to pay them homage or to acknowledge their legacy, the living relatives see a need to remain in contact with their dead relatives. They need to respect them for who they are and for what they have done in the past. To such advocates, ancestors are deceased family members. Therefore, it may suffice to say that ancestors are those from whom we get our family line or genealogy. We all have an ancestry – our parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and so on, traced all the way back to Adam.

Further than that, ancestors are also referred to as the “living-dead”. Nürnberger entitled one of his books (2007), *The living dead and the living God*, the subtitle of which is “Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa”. You may have noticed in Jebadu's quote above that he referred to “ancestors or the living-dead”. As such, the terms “ancestor” and “living-dead” are used interchangeably, although not all would agree. When one investigates the meaning of ancestral

worship more fully, one will be in a better position to understand each term in its entirety and thereby make the connection more accurately.

*Communication* with the living-dead, or the ancestors, is a major factor in ancestral worship. This will be highlighted below, but a more thorough rendering will be seen in chapter 4. The subtitle to Mhlophe's book (2013) is: "Should a Christian consult the dead?" Or consider again the title of Nürnberger's book (2007), *The living dead and the living God*. If people are attempting to communicate with the dead, then who or what are these ancestors? Are people communicating with their dead relatives, the so-called "living-dead", or could they be someone or something else? Vosloo (n.d.:21) entitled a chapter on this issue, "Who are these ancestral spirits then?" And his answer: "Simply put, DEMONS masquerading as Ancestors". Vosloo (n.d.:24) goes on to explain that our ancestors are not demons as such, as may be the impression. He states that when people die, their spirits are either in heaven or in hell, but the "*spirit* which appears to you is a demon acting and pretending to be the spirit of a loved one" (emphasis added). A possible comparison may be drawn from Paul's warning to the church in Corinth of the way the devil deceives people: "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light ... his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:14, 15). People are being deceived by the devil and in this case of ancestral worship, his demons may well be the ones 'masquerading' as ancestors. Could there be justification in making such a suggestion? Nonetheless, man is aware of the spiritual realm that exists (Eph 6:12). Davis (2015:45) shares about an experience when he was growing up in Pakistan, for example: "Something invisible was definitely present... I learned a profound lesson. The invisible world was real. Evil spirits existed..." The same can be said in this King William's Town context, and the evidence will be presented in 6.4 below. There is definitely a spiritual battle playing out, a battle that is real.

One could never assume that men and women who worship their ancestors would accept a claim that they were under the spell of demons or that their ancestors were actually *demons* – as Vosloo's comment above may suggest. Vosloo (n.d.:21) draws a hard line here, but one should step more cautiously. People who worship their ancestors truly believe that they are merely communicating with their deceased relatives, out of respect for their lives and legacy. Such men and women who worship their ancestors would expect the same from their own family members when they too pass away. They strongly believe that these are past family members with whom they are attempting to communicate, not demons. Nürnberger (2007:37) reminds us that "the social authority structure grows upward, as the elderly pass through the ceiling of death and the young replenish the living from the bottom of the pyramid". Perhaps people do not expect to be worshipped when gone, but they at least expect that people will remember them, honour their lives, or follow in their footsteps.

Many parents would want to leave a legacy for their children to emulate. Orobator (2008:114) suggests that “to be recognized and celebrated as an ancestor, one needs to have left a positive legacy...exemplary character facilitates the perpetuation of one’s legacy in the family or community”. By this one begins to discover how important and influential ancestral worship can be. There is a fine line between honouring one’s forefathers and worshipping them; remember Steyne’s (1990:81) comment quoted above: “controversy exists whether or not recognition of ancestors with sacrifices and offerings is reverence or actual worship”.

At this juncture, one begins to discover who these ancestors could be, and the research has also attempted to clarify the meaning of the practice called ‘worship’. The dissertation now turns to the actual *communication* with the living-dead and in this way attempts to refine the understanding of ancestral worship.

### 2.3 Communication with ancestors

There are a number of questions which need to be answered. For example, can one actually communicate with one’s ancestors? What form does this communication take, or how is it done? Furthermore, is this communication between people and *evil spirits*, or is it with actual relatives? And who initiates the communication? There may well be other questions too, but the presentation will proceed one step at a time.

In the local context of King William’s Town, the people who worship ancestors truly believe that they are communicating with their family members or relatives who are now deceased. Having interviewed a number of people on this issue, there seems to be very little doubt. The common denominator seems to be that Xhosa children have grown up with this phenomenon and that when the adults engage with their ancestors, they are speaking to their deceased relatives. For example, Rev. Saffa (19 Nov. 2014), one such man whom I interviewed, stated the following:

I grew up practising ancestral worship, from my family, by going to the cemetery and doing a service. We asked the ancestors to bless and protect us and to provide jobs and healing for us.

Another gentleman, Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), stated that the father of the house, when consulting the ancestors at the kraal (the place where animals are kept at night, but also where rituals and sacrifices are made), will worship them, “calling them by their names”, and they will plead with the ancestors to ask *Qamata*<sup>8</sup> (regarded by some as the Supreme Being) to chase

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<sup>8</sup> There is controversy over the understanding of this term. Some of the amaXhosa will refer to Creator God as *Qamata*, while some will regard *Qamata* as an imaginary son of ‘the gods’. Be that as it may, this lack of clarity may support the fact that the more traditional Xhosa people regard God as being distant,

away the bad things. It is widely accepted among ancestral worshippers that ancestors can communicate with people in their dreams. One elderly gentleman, Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014), stated that “you are talking with your grandfather, (who is) telling you what must happen or what you must do”. Such communication then takes place in dreams, in visions, and some even suggest that the dead return to speak audibly and visibly with them, implying that such visits are real. Light (2012:124-126) provides an interesting argument on this, suggesting that “many of the ways the ancestors are claimed to reveal themselves are hardly convincing evidence of communication with them”. This may serve to highlight the controversy as to with whom the living are communicating. Nonetheless, cases like these abound and this shows the reality for the folk in King William’s Town. They believe that the ones with whom they are communicating are actually their deceased relatives, their ancestors, the so-called “living-dead”. A further interviewee, Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014), is undoubtedly convinced, like many others, that “ancestral worship is deeply entrenched in our community”.

So the question remains: Can one actually communicate with the dead or with the so-called “living-dead”? Nyirongo (1997:27) quotes the following:

The dead and the living have the same level of existence. A dead person lives more or less the same life as when he was alive and can therefore eat and drink and talk with the relatives he has “left” behind. He can walk about the house at night, though invisible.

Stephen Ezeanya (1969:44) suggests that “the ancestors are in such close relationship with the people that in some parts of Igbo land it is forbidden not to reserve some food in the pots during supper lest the ancestors come and find the pots empty”. Or consider what Yusufu Turaki (2006:480) presents on the matter:

It is believed that those who die at a mature age do not cease to be members of the community but continue to play an active role in the lives of their descendants. Thus those who are dying are sometimes asked to take messages to those who have died before, and are expected to continue to communicate with the living. If burial ceremonies and rituals are not properly observed, the spirit of the ancestor is believed to be capable of haunting the living in unpleasant ways.

Ancestors are believed to be the custodians of kinship, religion, morality, ethics, and customs and are expected to bless the community when traditional customs and beliefs are upheld.

Africa is known for its depth of spiritualism and Turaki’s quote here suggests just that. But it also demonstrates the pervasive nature of the so-called living-dead. They have passed on, but they are still involved. They dare not be forgotten. Ezeanya (1969:35-36) states that “for the African,

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controlling the universe from afar and not being in close contact with human beings, hence the need for ancestors to fulfil the role of mediators between man and God.

the world of spirits is a real world". The majority of Africans regard the spiritual and material realm as a single entity. Swailem Sidhom (1969:102) records it as such,

Existence-in-relation sums up the pattern of the African way of life. And this encompasses with it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family, and himself. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from the other.

These quotations are taken from older sources which serves to highlight the fact that spiritualism amongst the African people is indeed real, is readily evident in their life world, and has been so for many years.

Furthermore, Steyne (1990:80) states that "the ongoing existence of departed family members is a given, and therefore the intimacy of the extended family includes them as well as living relatives". One can see why communication with the dead is so highly regarded in the African context. The community plays a significant role in this matter of ancestral worship. Paul Hiebert (1994:141-142) deals with "relationships in traditional cultures" and states that "in contrast with the West, relationships in traditional societies are often ends in themselves, and not means to an end". This indicates the value placed on community. He goes on,

Even in organized activities, members of the group desire consensus... Chiefs rarely make a decision without soliciting the opinions of the people, and leadership is the art of consensus formation and persuasion. Punishments are designed to enable repentant culprits to save face and be restored to fellowship in the community, rather than to satisfy the demands of some impersonal law.

Members of the society find meaning in life, not in accomplishments, but in social connections. A person with no relatives and friends is a nobody and soon forgotten. A person with many relatives, friends and descendants will long be remembered and honoured. Consequently, the people give priority to cultivating relationships over completing tasks.

It is crucial to maintain community ties rather than to seek individual gain. It seems more logical to maintain the unity rather than disturb the harmony. A community member with numerous relatives, friends and descendants is more acceptable than one without. This may be a reason why African people treat their deceased relatives as "the living-dead" and maintain *communication* with them. Could it be that if one does not believe in eternity with God, then every attempt is made to keep the dead "alive"? Otherwise death seems unbearable.

Communication with the so-called living-dead seems viable, even from some of the comments above. Be that as it may, with whom are we actually communicating then? King Saul, after not receiving an answer from God, went as far as communicating with what seemed to be Samuel, when he engaged with the witch of Endor (1 Sa 28). O'Donovan (1995:181) states the following:

The people of non-Christian religions who seek the favour of gods or spirits other than the true God, will eventually be deceived and brought into slavery by Satan and demons. The apostle Paul warned us, 'the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons' (1 Cor 10:20). This is true no matter how 'kind' the spirits may seem to be to people who seek for help. Demons are very skilled in pretending to be what they are not.

James Nkansah-Obrempong (2006:1454) seems to agree when he states that "demons can impersonate deceased people by appearing in a form that resembles them". Mhlophe (2012:159) makes an interesting observation:

We need to make the distinction between ancestors, which are our forefathers, and the spirits that make an appearance in people's dreams. Real ancestors never communicate with the living because the dead are unable to communicate with the living and vice versa. It is not ancestors communicating with the living, but what appear to be ancestors, which we should be referring to as demons.

These sentiments may be difficult for some to swallow, but one needs to come to terms with such thoughts. In his book *A letter to Africa about Africa*, Kasongo Munza (2005:28) writes: "Fellow Africans, there are very sophisticated satanic traps that still keep Africa in darkness and blood". Vernon Light (2012:119) writes, "African traditionalists are in continual bondage to their ancestors". These views seem strong and even unfair. However, the research will consider below how ancestral worship influences one's participation in the *missio Dei*, and thereby attempt to supply an answer to such views.

In this chapter, the research has endeavoured to answer the question, "what is ancestral worship?" One may begin to realize how complicated this phenomenon is. To draw a conclusion at this point, it is crucial to acknowledge that ancestors are people who are in one's family line, those who are deceased but who have been part of the family. The complicated nature of ancestral worship, as portrayed above, is the *communication* with 'ancestors'. Many are convinced that they are communicating with deceased family members. Others are convinced that such communication is impossible – or at least extremely rare – and that this communication is actually with demons who are impersonating deceased family members. More than half of those who were interviewed for the research were in agreement: The Xhosa people in King William's Town, who are contacting their ancestors, believe that they are indeed communicating with family members who have passed away – and that they in turn will fulfil the same role of communicating with the living once they have passed on too. That is how the Xhosa community operates. For those who worship their ancestors, it can be compared to a circle of life. Each member has a role to play, even when they become the "living-dead".

To draw a further conclusion at this stage, "worship" is also a complicated matter. As the research has shown, some of the people in King William's Town merely honour or respect their elders and

their ancestors, an extremely important aspect of life in community. However, there are Xhosa folk who worship their ancestors because they believe that their ancestors fulfil a mediatory role between the Supreme Being and the living here on earth. They plead with their ancestors for blessing and protection. These are the aspects of ancestral worship that have been addressed thus far. In the chapter that follows, the research will address the extent to which ancestral worship influences the people in King William's Town. To that the dissertation now turns.

## **CHAPTER 3 HOW DOES ANCESTRAL WORSHIP AFFECT THE KING WILLIAM'S TOWN COMMUNITY?**

From the above we have a somewhat clearer understanding of what ancestral worship is, but just what is its impact on the people in the King William's Town community? To what extent does ancestral worship affect this community? Having interviewed a number of people, some of them being students at Dumisani Theological Institute, it became clear that ancestral worship is rife in these parts. The standard answer from many of the interviewees was that they have grown up with it – ancestral worship is a way of life. One such gentleman, Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), stated: "Besides my family, even within the community most of the families practise ancestral worship, so I used to attend cultural events where this practice was done". Discussing this with Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014), a pastor of European descent, one who grew up in the area and who has become a missionary amongst the amaXhosa, he declared that "ancestral worship is their identity, their culture". Rev. Goosen has spent much time studying and being amongst the Xhosa people. He went on to state that ancestral worship amongst the amaXhosa "is both cultural and religious; with this practice is the desire to manipulate the spiritual realm for their benefit". This practice is deeply entrenched here; it forms part of growing up in this context.

Discussing the matter of contextualization, Hiebert (1987:210) poses the following: "As we have seen, people live in different cultures. Consequently they ask different questions. For example, Africans and Asians ask, 'What shall we do about our ancestors?' ... ancestors are important in the lives of the people". This clearly demonstrates the existence of ancestral worship in the African context. In support of this, Mhlophe (2013:13) of Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape, states that "many of those who minister the gospel to people of African descent have to deal with the issue of the veneration of ancestors". Light (2012:82) includes a chapter on African Traditional Religion and at the outset records that "the role of the ancestors determines or influences almost every other belief and custom in ATR". Further than that, Light (2012:107) in the same chapter includes the following:

... based on my own experiences with the amaXhosa, I am convinced that the beliefs about the ancestors largely shape life in Africa, especially rural communities. Spelt out more fully, the ancestral cult directly or indirectly, influences the African's inner psychology and also personal, communal, social, political, economic and religious behaviour.

One gets the impression that if you are a Xhosa person, there is a good chance that you are an ancestral worshipper. People in this context are expected to attend cultural events and ritual practices. Absence from such activities raises suspicion and leads to pressure from the community.

Although the focus is limited to this particular community, it would be useful to explore the effect of ancestral worship in a broader sense too, in an effort to highlight the tremendous influence of that it has on individuals, families and entire people groups. From the foregoing chapter it is clear that spirituality runs deep and it is a worldwide issue that people face on a daily basis. Mhlophe (2013:13) remarks: “The mystery of death has caused many people across the globe to have varied beliefs concerning the dead and their state”. Further than that, Mhlophe (:13) states that “the issue of the veneration of the dead can be very divisive. It is not just an ideological issue but goes to the centre of many families in Africa”. Ancestral worship changes lives. It affects people deeply. Orobator (2008:114) comments:

... an ancestor is someone whose presence we can still feel and with whom we can still communicate because of our love for that person. At different times, especially during festivals and family ritual celebrations (birth, initiation, marriage, reconciliation, and so on), the living community pours libation and offers sacrifices to its ancestors to invoke their presence and acknowledge their membership in the communion of the living.

From this one can understand why ancestral worship forms such an integral part in the life of the amaXhosa – it is a way of life; it is a way of culture; it has not changed and has always been like this in this traditionalist society.

The whole idea behind ancestral worship is the belief that power or life force is needed to cope with life here on earth; people need to be able to control their lives as far possible. Steyne (1990:60) states frankly, “a life without power is not worth living”. Great care is “taken to maintain a favourable equilibrium with (ancestors) by means of ritual action” (Ferdinando, 1999:43). And dealing with life goes beyond the grave because the so-called “living-dead”, it is believed, still influence the lives of those who are here on earth.<sup>9</sup> Steyne (1990:85) highlights this significant relationship:

Animist man’s dominant passion is to maintain a bond with his ancestors or a hero ancestor, because to him they are life. In times of trouble he finds in them strength and courage, knowing that these relatives in the unseen world are there to help him.

Such is the influence of ancestral worship on the lives of people here. It can be overwhelming and it affects individuals, families, and entire communities. Such influence will be seen here in the *hierarchical structures*, the *communal life*, and the *rites and rituals* of the amaXhosa.

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<sup>9</sup> Mhlophe (2013), Munza (2008), Steyne (1990, chapter 6)

### 3.1 Hierarchical structures and ancestral influence

For a clearer understanding of how ancestral worship affects the community in King William's Town, one must at least attempt to understand the *hierarchical structure* within a community, particularly in a traditionalist society such as that of the amaXhosa. This will lead one to a closer understanding of how ancestral worship affects this community. Nürnberger (2007:25) records the following:

It is taken for granted in any traditionalist culture that the status of the deceased in the community must be respected and maintained. Ancestors are not venerated because they have more life than the living, but because they are entitled to their position in the family hierarchy... Ancestors depend on the recognition of their offspring for their continued authority and belonging... To deny respect to superiors undermines the very foundations of the community. It is a sacred duty to uphold the hierarchical order because it is the infrastructure of communal life.

Ancestral worship, therefore, forms part of the community's overall structure and so to upset this balance could cause catastrophic consequences. Many people worldwide can identify with hierarchy. For example, most, if not all, societies teach respect for elders. A hierarchical structure is in place and must be maintained in order to keep the peace or to maintain order. As most of the interviews which were undertaken reflect, the eldest man in a household is the one who takes the lead and, within a community, the eldest men are the ones who must be respected by those younger than them. For example, Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) told me that "the head of the house is nominated (by the ancestors) to slaughter an animal and to mediate for the family". The head of the home takes the lead; others follow – as Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) had stated: "you are talking with your grandfather, (who is) telling you what must happen or what you must do". This quotation, along with Nürnberger's quote (2007:25) above, shows that such honour and respect carries over from the living-dead as well. Therefore, the hierarchical structure has its influence at all levels of society, both among the living and among the so-called living-dead, each member having a role to play. The senior men, therefore, lead the way in ensuring that the ancestors receive their due and that the next generation will pass on such practices in honouring the dead. Thus, hierarchical structures, it can be said, play a part in the influence of ancestral worship on this community.

Of course the hierarchical structures and the ancestors who are venerated may move beyond the immediate community and extend to superiors in society, or even to national, or at times world, leaders. Consider what Turaki (2006:480) records:

Male or female ancestors are either the progenitors of a whole tribe, clan or community, or they are national liberators and defenders of the nation. They are symbols of tribal and ethnic unity, community cohesiveness and perpetuity of traditions. Many liberation fighters including Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Kenneth

Kaunda (Zambia), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Mnamdi Azikwe (Nigeria), Samora Machel (Mozambique), Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela (South Africa) will qualify as national ancestors. As fathers, these heroes suffered and sacrificed their lives to free their people. They are held in high esteem and some of them are sometimes venerated almost as gods.

Honouring these men and women who are held in such high regard becomes part of life and also part of what is passed on through the generations. Such practice can then move beyond a single community and affect an entire nation, thus demonstrating how wide the web of ancestral worship can extend. Nelson Mandela, for example, was born in the Eastern Cape, the very province where King William's Town is situated. He became a national hero and an international icon. There is little doubt that Mr Mandela – affectionately known as *Madiba* – is worshipped as an honourable ancestor by many people, even extending beyond the boundaries of the Eastern Cape. Mathew Bomki (2011:3) of Cameroon, states that “Nelson Mandela is considered an all-African ancestor. He is not only restricted to his tribe of origin in South Africa but he is venerated by all Africans”. The life, suffering and subsequent death of Nelson Mandela were world-stage moments in history. The South African government, for instance, even before his passing, changed the country's monetary notes to display Nelson Mandela's image. Statues of Mr Mandela have been erected in his honour, even in Washington, D.C. There are many other ways in which men and women have attempted to maintain the legacy and memory of Mr Mandela. On 5 December 2014, a moment of silence was held across South Africa in commemoration of his death, and people were encouraged to celebrate his legacy, particularly on that day – indeed a hero to many. In 2015 such commemoration had been extended: “18 July has been declared Nelson Mandela International Day, but as South Africans we embrace the chance to celebrate Nelson Mandela's life for the whole of July” (Anon., 2015). Of course, statues have been erected for others who have left various legacies, for example, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Cecil John Rhodes, Paul Kruger, and so on. These are men who have left an indelible impression on us in history. Such men have been honoured and respected by their various followers, and some perhaps even worshipped.

In light of Mandela's legacy, there would certainly be two sides to the coin. One group of followers would undoubtedly treat him as an ancestor to be worshipped, while another group would simply honour him for his meaningful contribution to humanity. Many forefathers in the African context are worshipped as ancestors, and Mr Mandela would be a likely candidate. In an interview with Rev. Zani (5 Dec. 2014), I asked this very question and his response was, “Yes, Mandela is worshiped as ancestor by his own family and his extended family, just like any men who died before him”. Be that as it may, one can see the influence of ancestral veneration, both its depth and its breadth.

### 3.2 Communal life and ancestral influence

When calamity comes, it is often seen to stem from the ancestors who may have been neglected or mistreated. In an interview with Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014), he was asked about maintaining the practice of ancestral worship. He stated that “to look good among the tribe or clan, they do not ‘rock the boat’”. In other words, because of the traditionalist society or *the communal lifestyle*, and because of possible consequences, one should maintain the practices of that community. For the African, he is not so much an individual as he is a member of a clan or tribe. Hiebert (2008:108) suggests that in tribal worldviews, such as the amaXhosa, “to be an autonomous individual is to be as good as dead”. The African typically believes “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am” (Ferdinando, 1999:23) – or similarly, the Zulus believe *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of people). There is a Zairean proverb which states: “A man outside his clan is like a grasshopper without wings” (Steyne, 1990:65). People are closely connected and so one can understand why ancestral worship has such an influence on society. Members do not want to ‘rock the boat’. As Nürnberger (2007:36) puts it, “one plays by the rules as much as one can”.

Hiebert (1987:31) reminds us that “because our culture provides us with the fundamental ingredients of our thoughts, we find it almost impossible to break away from its grasp”. Ancestral worship has been part of the Xhosa culture for centuries past and O’Donovan (1995:255) states that “because their parents and ancestors used the practices of traditional religion for so many generations, they think that only these practices have real power to help them in a time of great need”. As far as the consequences go, Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) admitted that “when people find new faith or denounce ancestral worship, they are literally cut off from their immediate families and from the wider community”. Here we begin to see how ancestral worship affects communal living.

One of the questions to those interviewed was to what extent one culture could be allowed to influence another. One response was rather emphatic (Mr Mathiso, 27 Aug. 2014): “I am afraid there can be a lot of casualties, as some people are prepared to be violent in protection of their culture”. Ancestral worship is taken that seriously. Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) reflected that men who are not circumcised in the traditional way “may not sit with the others at the kraal”. He further stated that “communal living is important and people soon know about those that do not follow their practices – in this way they are sending a strong message to others who may not want to follow Xhosa traditions”. In a similar vein, Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) shared that “people will tell you about the evil that can come to you if you do not worship the ancestors”. There is pressure to conform to this form of worship, highlighting how it affects the community.

Steyne (1990:61) purports that “if anything in animist religious life may be termed sin, it is a broken relationship between persons of the same group”.<sup>10</sup> This further highlights how ancestral worship affects a community. Ancestral worship plays a pivotal role in Xhosa culture. Acceptance within the community is crucial and so ancestral worship must be practised in order to avoid shame, humiliation or rejection.

Vosloo has done a great deal of research in this field of ancestor worship and he also provides us with concrete examples from South Africa, examples which highlight the social implications of ancestral worship. Here are two examples from Vosloo (n.d.:17, 18), fictitious names being given in order to protect the identity of those concerned:

The first is about ‘Joe’ whose wife ‘Mary’ had a stroke. Joe and Mary were born-again Christians, but the family and extended family said that he and his wife had offended the ancestors and he should take his wife immediately to the sangomas (witchdoctors). He refused to do so. His son walked out on him and refused to speak to him, while others of his family ostracized him.

The other case is about a lady, we shall call ‘Joyce’. She had a nervous breakdown. Although she was a Christian, the rest of her family was not. A family ‘indaba’ was held – a custom not generally practised by whites. Basically, all the family (aunts, uncles, cousins included) comes together to discuss and decide the course of action to be taken. The one with the ‘loudest’ voice usually wins. So they decided to take her to the sangoma. They tricked her into going to the sangoma, under the pretence of taking her to our Mission. When she saw the sangoma she put up a fight and pleaded the blood of Christ over her to the extent that the sangoma had no power to do anything.

These examples expose the reality of ancestral worship in this context; they begin to reflect how ancestral worship affects participation in the *missio Dei*, a matter which is further explored below.

Closer to home, a local pastor (whose name will remain anonymous to protect his identity), used the services of an interpreter during church services or conferences. The interpreter had been helping the pastor in this way for about five years. One evening (September 2013), the pastor received an urgent call from the interpreter’s parents requesting his presence at their home. Upon arrival there he found the interpreter screaming and manifesting demonic behaviour. She (the interpreter) threw a Bible at him and yelled at him, telling him to leave. Struggling to get through to her, the pastor left and called friends and family to fast and pray. A month later she shared her testimony of how God had released her from an evil spirit. Subsequent to that, the same pastor was asked to conduct the young lady’s wedding.

In summarising the situation, the local pastor realised that, up until that incident of September 2013, the interpreter had not received salvation. The interpreter’s parents are God-fearing

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<sup>10</sup> Steyne (1990:61-62), Ferdinando (1999:23-27)

believers who attend church regularly. But the pastor found out that the mother-in-law seemed to be the cause of the problem. She did not accept her future daughter-in-law and, therefore, visited a sangoma in order to put a curse on her. An evil spirit seemed to be tormenting the interpreter. The mother-in-law was involved in ancestral worship and the daughter-in-law bore the brunt of it. This demonstrates the reality of ancestral worship and its potential effects within a community. The consequences are quite tangible. Again, this is another example of how ancestral worship has a hold on people's lives in this community, even within the church, which forms an integral part of life in community.

### **3.3 Rites and rituals and ancestral influence**

Beyond the issue of hierarchical structures, and communal life, are the *rites and rituals* that accompany ancestral worship. Exploring these will further highlight how ancestral worship affects the community. Much attention is paid to this matter here due to its major influence in the lives of the amaXhosa. One will notice how the examples which follow touch families, communities, clans, and tribes. Vincent Mulago (1969:137), commenting on vital participation within the African community (which includes the amaXhosa), states that "participation in a common life is the main if not the only basis of all their family, social, political and religious institutions and customs". Turaki (2006:480) draws a similar conclusion when he states,

It is believed that ancestors are capable of influencing the destinies of the living for good or ill, depending on how the living have treated them. This belief has given impetus to ancestor worship, which ranges from a simple pouring of palm wine accompanying a petition to elaborate animal sacrifices with festivities.

The living are constantly trying to please their ancestors and so there may be various ways in which this is done; for example, "sacrifices, offerings, taboos, charms, fetishes, ceremonies, even witchcraft and sorcery" (Steyne, 1990:60). The relationship between the living and the dead is crucial and so such people want to maintain the equilibrium, as mentioned earlier. Steyne (:63) states that "spirituality is supersensory, encompassing dreams, visions, trances and states outside the body". This is how men and women supposedly communicate with their ancestors, and vice versa. The researcher has heard of many examples of such practices in King William's Town, even from children, who believe that they received a message from their ancestors in a dream. Nürnberger (2007:38, 39) explains how the living communicate with their ancestors "through intermediaries such as clan heads, chiefs or diviners" and "they communicate with them through rituals consisting of divination, charms, awe inspiring formulations, gestures and actions that are designed to express submission and channel concerns". These are some of the elements

contained in ancestral worship.<sup>11</sup> The researcher spoke with Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015), a former witchdoctor, who explained how people are given “muthi” to deal with ailments or problems, his “‘speciality’ being the assistance of men with sexual problems”. A visit to a witchdoctor means seeking help from the ancestors, because they are the ones that are prayed to for help – the witchdoctor acts as the intermediary: “witchdoctors...link people to the world of the dead” (Mhlophe 2015:197). The visitors to the witchdoctor are encouraged to apply the ‘medication’ and also to pray to the ancestors for help. In this way they are worshipping ancestors, seeking their help and guidance. Mhlophe (2015:206), who understands the Xhosa context well, warns that “a person who engages the services of a witchdoctor is sinning against God”. This person is turning to other gods for help.

Rev. Phelisile’s example above is one of many. In that interview (30 Jul. 2015), he explained the process that he underwent in becoming a witchdoctor: “I had a dream from my ancestors to become a witchdoctor. I visited a witchdoctor. He gave me white powder to swallow. I was to eat liver mixed with gall in order to ‘feed’ these powers and talk to them. A chicken is slaughtered before any of these ceremonies and there is always alcohol involved, usually brandy, but also beer. I wore a white and blue necklace with a small bottle attached to it. The medicine was in this bottle. This was my protection.” This reflects the reality and influence of ancestral worship. Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) distinguished between different types of witchdoctors within the Xhosa culture. He stated that some believe that “when you go through problems, the ancestors are calling you to become a witchdoctor”. According to Rev. Phelisile, there are “natural or called” witchdoctors and “amakhosi or umuthi” witchdoctors, the latter being more modern and more commercialised, in the sense that they provide a “quick-fix” and are more focused on “money making” – for them it is more of a business operation. People take time to visit these witchdoctors and they have to pay for their services. Light (2012:116) reflects on the financial burden that ancestral worship can place on people:

In Africa much money is paid for the services of the witch-doctor, for magic medicines, for charms, for protection or to harm enemies, for sacrifices to the ancestors, and for expensive funerals. This money can seldom be afforded, and, where this is the case, expenditure on the above takes away much-needed capital for countering worsening poverty.

Therefore, the rites and rituals practised under the umbrella of ancestral worship affects people’s *time* and their *resources*.

Common practices within ancestral worship are *rites of passage*, which “are concerned with the progress of individuals through the various key stages of life – birth, puberty, marriage and death...

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<sup>11</sup> Nürnberger (2007, chapter 2)

They are means by which the group integrates its members into the corporate life” (Ferdinando, 1999:24). For example, in the Xhosa culture a teenage boy will undergo *initiation* rites in order to progress to manhood. He will leave home, be circumcised, and remain in isolation in the bush, away from ‘civilization’, until the wound is healed – usually a period of two to three weeks, or sometimes longer. During this time, it is the responsibility of particular elders to teach the initiates how to be men, to teach them about community values such as *Ubuntu*, how to protect women and children, and so on. Mogotlane *et al.* (2004:58) record the following:

It is only after circumcision that the boy is allowed to marry, own property and speak in public gatherings ... the Xhosa community see the practice as mandatory for the boy child to translate from boyhood to manhood.

Unfortunately, many boys suffer long-term effects after such traditional circumcisions, including the inability to procreate, or even death.<sup>12</sup> There are reports of boys who attend initiation schools without the knowledge of their parents. However, Rev. Zani (5 Dec. 2014) reports as follows:

No, circumcision is not causing death as such, but the carelessness of the person who is circumcised puts himself in danger, or the neglect by those who are supposed to look after the initiate, through the use of unsterilized weapons, or the lack of support from both parents – the mother to oversee the cooking and feeding, the father to monitor the progress of the initiate. Something like dehydration and starvation, or an unhealed wound that will lead to death, depends upon the above precautions that need to be followed.

There is nothing wrong with circumcision per se. As part of the old covenant, which we read of in Scripture, Hebrew boys were circumcised (cf. Genesis 17; Acts 15). This was a covenant relationship, instituted by God, between God and the Israelites. Circumcision was “a *sign* of the covenant” (Morris, 1976:333); “circumcision identified the recipient with the Mediator of the covenant of grace” (Horton, 2011:788). The Israelites were set apart from the other nations as a sign of being God’s chosen people. Hartley (2000:172-173) reflects this same thought when he states that circumcision “symbolized the close bond between God and one of Abraham’s seed... God had enjoined Abraham to conduct himself with integrity as being always in his presence”. This was not merely a social or cultural matter, but also a spiritual one – a matter of covenant, a matter of promise. Hamilton (1990:472) points out that this circumcision was “a religious rite...connected with the covenant”. Therefore, it was a sign of the Israelites’ bond with God, both socially and spiritually. They were to live as holy people, distinct from other nations of the world.

Furthermore, Elwell (1984:245) purports that “the external rite, whose observance is strictly enjoined..., ought to be the sign of an internal change, effected by God”. The Israelites were called

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<sup>12</sup> Mogotlane *et al.* (2004), Vincent (2008)

by God as his chosen people, set apart to be a holy nation (cf. Ex 19:6). Marshall *et al.* (1996:204) record the following on circumcision:

...from its inception, infant circumcision was the distinctive Israelite custom, not derived from Egyptian or other practice, and contrasting sharply with the puberty rites of other nations: the latter point to social acknowledgement of adult status, the former to a status before God and a prevenience of divine grace.

Circumcision in the Xhosa tradition follows this thought. It is a sign of boys becoming men. Circumcision in the Hebrew tradition is a sign of those belonging to God. The Hebrew boys were circumcised on the eighth day of their existence, while the circumcision within the Xhosa tradition takes place in the boys' teenage years, or early twenties. In the Xhosa tradition, the individual is passing through from being just a boy, to becoming a man, hence the rite of passage.

Vincent (2008:434-437) explains the process in a fair amount of detail, including how "instruction in the history, traditions and beliefs of the initiate's people" also forms part of the initiation process. This, in a sense, highlights the cultural and traditional slant of circumcision amongst the Xhosa people, as opposed to a spiritual angle. Nonetheless, this custom of initiation and circumcision certainly contains spiritual elements. For example, "the ancestors are called upon to watch over the initiate; alcohol, cigarettes and dagga are taken as part of the process; and an ox is slaughtered at the end of the ritual, so that the ancestors are acknowledged" (Rev. Zani, 6 Aug. 2015). O'Donovan (1995:234) shares that "the shedding of blood at the circumcision ceremony or in other initiation rituals is often intended to unite the boy or girl by covenant to the ancestors of the clan". This reflects the influence of the ancestors in such initiation rituals.

For some, however, circumcision may be carried out for health reasons. The understanding is that circumcision is a way of preventing HIV/AIDS. As one report (Stuurman, 2011) suggests: "When one gets circumcised...the foreskin is removed, then the penis will be easy to clean and germs cannot attach that easily, including HIV or any other STI's", says Dr Limakatso Lebina, a medical circumcision surgeon from Zuzimpilo Clinic, in Johannesburg". However, Vincent (2008:444) states that "the medical benefits of circumcision as a protector against male acquisition of HIV need to be assessed against this sobering sociocultural backdrop". Her report suggests that such an argument proves inconclusive, mainly due to other factors which may lead to contracting HIV/AIDS. The sociocultural backdrop which Vincent refers to is where men engage in sex with multiple partners, or where they seem to attain the 'right' to have sex after the initiation process. Therefore, in such a context, circumcision alone cannot curtail contracting HIV/AIDS. Be that as it may, circumcision for boys is mostly inescapable, and ancestral influence has made, and continues to make, its mark.

For many people though, circumcision is a matter of culture and tradition. It is a practice that has been passed down from generation to generation and it will not be abolished that easily, if at all. In most cases there are certainly ancestral elements attached. Judith Milasi (2006:101) declares that “the sacrifices offered to appease community gods and the ancestors and to seek their blessing on the lives of the initiates, amount to ancestral worship and spiritism”. In spite of these ancestral appeasements, Milasi still encourages initiation rites, particularly for preparing children for adulthood. However, Mhlophe (2013:249) declares that “God said nothing about a person coming to manhood through the cutting of his foreskin”. There may well be a sharp debate over these arguments, but for the purposes of this research, the focus is on the ancestral aspects attached to these rites and rituals, as well as the medical mayhem that manifests itself. Part of the influence is that young men have died as a result of these circumcision rituals.<sup>13</sup>

In most African societies there is almost no escaping these initiation rites, as Edward Newing (1975:46) purports: “...the uninitiated of the PLS (pre-literary societies) appear to have no real existence after death. They are not full persons and have no real personality to survive”. The pre-literary societies, also known as “traditional tribal societies” (Newing, 1975:13), generally lack scientific or technological development and are more steeped in oral tradition rather than literary tradition, hence ‘pre-literary’. They tend to maintain their close, cultural and traditional ties, and continue, as far as possible, to live in their more isolated communities. But initiation rites also affect those in urban areas, those who are more modern or developed in their outlook. So boys who have a better standard of education, or students who are studying to be lawyers or doctors, etc. are not immune to this practice. Xhosa boys in this area, whether living out in the villages, or growing up in town, equally face these initiation rites. This cultural, traditional practice does not discriminate.

Whether as the living-dead, or the living, those who have not gone through initiation rites receive very little recognition, if any. Boys who have not been circumcised will always be seen as just boys. They are treated with very little respect and often find themselves ostracized from the ‘real men’. Light (2012:108) states that “failure to participate in this transition ritual results in being regarded as still a child. In Xhosa tradition a boy is a thing or a dog; and this status is only really changed after circumcision”. Even today this custom, along with the ancestral elements attached, plays an influential role in society. Once boys have gone through this rite of passage, they are regarded as men, and expect to be treated as such. One young girl<sup>14</sup> (24 Feb. 2015) told of how

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<sup>13</sup> Vincent (2008:434)

<sup>14</sup> This young girl will remain anonymous.

she would have to bow her head in submission to her brother after he had returned from initiation school, acknowledging his new status.

In an attempt to understand the reality of this initiation process, I spoke with Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015), who explained how a boy would spend a week or two, even up to three weeks, in the bush. Food and alcohol are needed; a blanket is necessary to keep the initiate warm; often a younger boy will accompany the initiate in order to take care of other needs if necessary. The elder carrying out the actual circumcision is paid by means of a bottle of brandy or some other form of alcohol, or a monetary gift of between R300 and R500 is expected. Once the process is complete and the young man returns to society, he is clothed in an expensive outfit, usually including a smart jacket or blazer, fancy shoes, and a smart hat. This symbolises a 'new life' – his old clothes are usually given to younger siblings. Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015) stated that "even his underwear is new; no item of his previous clothing is worn again".

Furthermore, when the initiate returns home, a cow is slaughtered in welcoming the young man to his new status. His family is responsible for purchasing all these items, which reflects the financial burden that such rituals can place on a household. Mhlophe (2015:274) even argues that "bogus traditional surgeons" participate in this ritual "purely for commercial benefit". To compound the matter further, Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015) explained how "your privacy is affected". There are people visiting in one's home over this period – particularly when the cow is slaughtered – and these visitors need to be catered for. The visitors would be members of the extended family and also members of the community. Neglecting to participate in such rich traditions causes immense pressure. As stated already, those who reject the Xhosa traditions are seen as outcasts and treated as such. Those who have undergone the traditional circumcision rites will interrogate others, even going as far as physical inspection if necessary.<sup>15</sup> There is almost no escaping the phenomenon. This is the extent to which ancestral worship has made its mark, particularly amongst the amaXhosa in the King William's Town community. Ancestral worship takes *time*; it takes *resources*.

Another important rite of passage is that of *death*. Newing (1975:40) states that "in most PLSs mortuary rites are of the greatest importance because the connection of the soul of the deceased with what he or she knew and was accustomed to must be broken completely, otherwise the soul may return and cause harm to the kin". The ritual surrounding the death of a loved one is yet another aspect that affects society deeply. Light (2012:109) states that "the time of death and burial is marked by appropriate rites to ensure the departed becomes a contented ancestor". Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) referred to "inkomo yokhapa" (the 'accompanying' cow), which is

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<sup>15</sup> Vincent (2008:436)

slaughtered upon the person's death to accompany him when he leaves the living behind. According to one of the interviewees, Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), the practice of "wrapping the deceased's body in the skin of the animal that was slaughtered for the burial", is still common amongst some villagers. Approximately three years later, a second cow is slaughtered, which Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) referred to as "the resurrection cow". The purpose of this ceremony is to bring the deceased's spirit back so that the living can communicate with the lost loved one. At such meals and ceremonies, "liquor must be provided" (Rev. Phelisile, 30 Jul. 2015). This shows the time and money that is necessary to fulfil such ancestral obligations. Nürnberger (2007:193) agrees that "such conventions eat deeply into their time and financial resources".

Funerals have in a sense become part of the weekly itinerary of community members here. In the Xhosa culture, funerals are attended by immediate family members as well as members of the clan or tribe. Absence from funerals raises suspicion: non-attendance could be perceived as the absent person "having a hand in an untimely death" (Nürnberger, 2007:193). It seems that ancestral worship gives community members very little choice but to carry out such rites and rituals. In his chapter on "The Practice of Ritual", Steyne (1990:97) explains that such a rite is "not an individual affair", but it is for the benefit of the rest of the community – an "effective means to control the spirit world to look favourably on the devotees". Therefore, be it in the many *rites and rituals* of the amaXhosa, or be it in their *communal life*, or even in their *hierarchical structures*, one can easily gauge how ancestral worship influences the amaXhosa of King William's Town.

In drawing a conclusion to this chapter, the above examples and scenarios demonstrate how the worship of ancestors plays a major role in the life of the Xhosa people, and how this form of worship affects the community in King William's Town. Perhaps Peter Uzochukwu (2010:145) sums it up well when he states that "major family decisions or programmes for instance, serious family disputes or their resolution, are not considered genuine if the spirits of the ancestors are not invoked". This form of worship is pervasive. Of all the people that were interviewed for this research, it became clear that the majority of Xhosa people in King William's Town have been involved in, or have been directly affected by, ancestral worship. After reaching saturation point in these interviews, it could be concluded that nearly sixty percent of the interviewees came from families whose members were directly involved in ancestral worship. This is a reflection of how ancestral worship affects the King William's Town community. In the next chapter, the research considers the meaning of the *missio Dei* and how it addresses the practice of ancestral worship.

## CHAPTER 4 WHAT IS THE MISSIO DEI AND HOW DOES IT ADDRESS ANCESTRAL WORSHIP?

The research has attempted to provide a better understanding of *ancestral worship*, and to demonstrate the *influence* of this type of worship in King William's Town. Now the focus shifts to God's plan for mankind, God's mission. How does God's mission, the *missio Dei*, address ancestral worship? The first matter addressed in this chapter is an attempt to understand the *missio Dei* more clearly. Thereafter the focus will be on how the *missio Dei* addresses ancestral worship.

### 4.1 What is the *missio Dei*?

Bosch (1991:389ff.) offers a useful explanation of the origin and meaning of the term "missio Dei", or mission of God. Besides Bosch's insights, one should also consult Kirk (1999:25-30) and Arthur (2009) for further clarity. In simple terms, the *missio Dei* is the "mission of God". The term "missio" is the Latin root of "mission" and so *missio Dei* involves the mission of God or the sending of God. Mission means to perform a task, to be sent to do a job, or to be sent on a journey for or specific purpose. The terms *salah* (Hebrew) and *apostello* (Greek) refer to being sent or to the one being sent. The Baker's evangelical dictionary of biblical theology (1996) records the following definition of mission:

Mission is the divine activity of sending intermediaries, whether supernatural or human, to speak or do God's will so that his purposes for judgment or redemption are furthered. The biblical concept is expressed by the use of verbs meaning "to send," normally with God as the expressed subject. The Hebrew verb is *salah* [j;l'v] and the Greek is *apostello* [ajpostevllw]. These terms emphasize the authoritative, commissioning relationship involved. The Scriptures also employ the cognates *apostolos* [ajpovstolo] ("apostle", the one sent) and *apostole* [ajpostolhv] ("apostleship", the function of being sent), referring to the one sent and his function.

Although the word "mission" is seldom used in Scripture, the reference is regularly to God and his plan for creation. He graciously allows people to participate in his plan to fulfil his mission. The *missio Dei* is based on God's reconciliation of mankind to himself, because the prerequisite of the *missio Dei* is for man to worship God alone. God is the director; he acts first; he initiates the reconciliation. For example, God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and sent him to the land of Canaan to raise up a chosen people, in order to call all nations back to himself (Gen 12:1-5); God chose Moses as a catalyst to set the Israelites free from captivity in Egypt (Ex 3:10); and God chose many others to participate in the *missio Dei* (Isa 6:8-9; Jer 1:4-8; Jonah 1:2; Mt 28:18-20; Jn 17:18, Acts 9:15, 2 Cor 5:18, etc.). These people formed part of God's plan, to serve God

in his mission. The *missio Dei* is God's action, God's work, God's mission. Man has the privilege of participating in that *missio Dei*.

In light of the term "mission" and "missions", a point of clarity may be necessary. The term "missions" is generally regarded as that which *man* does – *his* role in the mission of God. The term "mission", on the other hand, is what *God* does. God has a mission and the church has the privilege of participating in that mission. So man is involved in missions as part of God's mission. Greenway (1999:12) states that "missions is not only work *for* God, but work *with* God". Perhaps Greenway's quotation may be misunderstood as man being on equal footing with God. This is not so. The point is that man is privileged to participate in God's mission, with God as the 'main subject'. Man is under God's direction and authority – God is at work through various means, man included. Bosch (1991:390) quotes Johannes Aagaard who states that "there is church because there is mission, not vice versa". Often we get these concepts confused. We assume that "mission is what we do" (Wright, 2006:21). When it comes to missionaries or missionary activity, the spotlight often falls on the men and women involved in missions, rather than on God. It could be said that mission has been more man-centred than God-centred. Bosch (1991:391) purports that "our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God".

The term "*missio Dei*" developed out of the work of Karl Barth, who "became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself" (Bosch 1991:389), and "it was first used at the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council (1952)" (Kirk, 1999:25). It was at this conference where the concept came to the fore, to be discussed in detail in an attempt to understand it more fully. However, Arthur (2009) assures us that "it was Aquinas who first used the term to describe the activity of the triune God; the father sending the Son and the Son sending the Spirit". Be that as it may, herein lies the sending element and the Trinitarian nature of the *missio Dei*. The *missio Dei* should be understood as God the Father sending his Son to the world, the Father and Son sending the Holy Spirit to the world, and then the Father, Son and Holy Spirit including the church in the mission of God.<sup>16</sup> This is all part of the *missio Dei*. God is at work to reconcile man to himself and the church is privileged to play a part in that mission, the privilege of participating in God's mission.

Mission begins in God. "The mission of God flows directly from the nature of who God is ... God's intention for the world is that in every respect it should show forth the way he is – love, community,

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<sup>16</sup> Bosch (1991:390), Wright (2006:62-63)

equality, diversity, mercy, compassion and justice” (Kirk, 1999:28). Bosch (1991:392) states it thus:

Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate (cf LWF 1988:6-10). Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people.

1 John 4:7-21 reminds us of God’s love. God is love and therefore we see his nature demonstrated in the *missio Dei*. In his love for mankind God reaches out to him, seeking to restore the relationship that was once perfect, the relationship that was established by God before the fall. One could suggest that because God is love, God is missional. Out of love he reaches out to his creation. Perhaps one might agree with Wright (2006:23) when he states that mission seen only in “sending” terms is somewhat limited. Mission, according to Wright, is about “God himself, God’s people and God’s world, insofar as it is revealed to us in God’s Word”, and the researcher would concur with Wright. When one reads the Bible, one discovers who God is and what his plan for creation is. God reveals himself, his nature, to mankind so that man would turn to him and discover how much he loves his creatures and his creation.

God’s mission includes “*creation, the fall, redemption, and future hope*” (Wright, 2006:64). Genesis 3:15 reflects part of God’s mission in that Jesus would overcome Satan, which he did at the cross (cf. Col 2:13-15). His mission is portrayed throughout Scripture as he leads people to follow him and to worship him alone as the only true God. God’s mission will continue until the day when there will be “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev 7:9).

In our attempt to understand fully the *missio Dei*, we ought to read and study the Scriptures, which portray God and his mission. Wright (2006:64) states that “the biblical worldview locates us in the midst of a narrative of the universe behind which stands the mission of the living God”. We are part of the account. Without going into too much detail, here follows a brief overview of that narrative,<sup>17</sup> which is God’s mission, portrayed in the Scriptures.

God created Adam and Eve and established them in the Garden of Eden, a paradise. God saw that it was all good and then he rested (Gen 1-2). But then man failed to follow God’s perfect plan. Man disobeyed God’s command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (cf.

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<sup>17</sup> Hays and Duvall (2011:19-21) provide a succinct summary of the grand narrative of the Bible, entitled “The grand story of the Bible”. See also Bartholomew & Goheen’s (2004) “The drama of Scripture”, and Roberts’ (2002) “God’s big picture”.

2:17; 3:6). There were consequences to follow (Gen 3). The intimate relationship between God and man was broken. Unfortunately there was nothing that man could do to restore that relationship. God would have to act. And in his great mercy he did. The *missio Dei* was part of God's response to man's fall. The consequences were sure (Gen 3:14-19): God banished them from the garden; but he was merciful: God provided garments for Adam and Eve and clothed them. The relationship between God and man could continue, because God was gracious and merciful, as he always is. God reconciled man to himself through the *missio Dei*. At one stage God called Abram (Gen 12), as mentioned earlier, to lead a chosen nation, the Israelites, who would be a blessing to all nations (Gen 18:18; 22:18). Their task was to worship God and God alone. In their worship of God, all nations would recognize God, Creator of the universe, and be drawn to him (Ex 9:13-16; Dt 28:9-10; 1 Kgs 8:41-43; Ps 22:27-28). One can begin to see the mission of God unfolding.

God spoke through the prophets of a coming Messiah who would rule on David's throne forever (Num 24:15-19; Isa 9:6-7; 40:3-5; Mic 5:2). God's ultimate plan was for all of creation to bow down to him (Isa 46:22-23; Phil 2:10-11), and to him alone. The *missio Dei* is God's work in transforming society to worship him alone. Wright (2006:139) purports that other gods "are nothing in relation to YHWH; they are something in relation to their worshippers". In other words, there is only one God to be worshipped, Creator God. Man made idols and other images to worship. Man honours himself and his ancestors as gods. But this is in disobedience to God and rebellion against him. The *missio Dei* is God's act of reconciling man to himself, so that he would worship God alone, as it was meant to be from the very beginning. It was Piper (2003:17) who said that "missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man". God wants to be known, and for those called to be his children, to make him known among the nations (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Wright (2006:95) states that "the mission of God to be known is what drives this whole narrative". But more than merely to be known, God is to be worshipped as the only true God, Creator of the universe. God wants to be known; God wants to be worshipped.

Further than that the *missio Dei* encompasses the whole of creation, not just the church as some may suggest. Bosch (1991:391) puts it this way: "God's concern is for the entire world... (The *missio Dei*) takes place in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church". Therefore, we are all part of the grand narrative which is God's mission, the *missio Dei*. God's mission is to reconcile mankind to himself in order that all would worship him. Those who obey will be a blessing, whereas those who disobey will be a curse. God wants people to take part in the *missio Dei*, but those who disobey, have no part in it. For example, when Abram obeyed God, he was a blessing, but when he disobeyed he was a curse (cf. Gen 12:13-20); likewise, when

Jonah obeyed God, he was a blessing (cf. Jon 3:3, 10), but when Jonah disobeyed, he was a curse (cf. Jon 1:4). In Wright's (2006:207) words, "God's intention to bless the nations is combined with human commitment to a quality of obedience that enables us to be the agent of that blessing... There is no blessing for ourselves or for others without faith and obedience".

More will follow below. For now, this is a brief explanation of the *missio Dei* of which man is privileged to be a part. The second section of this chapter now turns to the question of the *missio Dei* and how it addresses the matter of ancestral worship.

#### **4.2 How does the *missio Dei* address ancestral worship?**

In the previous chapter we dealt with ancestral worship and all that it entails, and above is a brief explanation of the *missio Dei*. One can immediately acknowledge that if God's plan is for all of creation to know and worship him exclusively, then ancestral worship is a stumbling block for those who worship their ancestors. The *missio Dei* is to make God known as the only true God, therefore, God redeemed people in order to make himself known among all nations. Israel's worship of Yahweh is often contrasted with that of the other nations and their gods. In his chapter entitled "the living God confronts idolatry", Wright (2006:139, 141) reflects that "the gods of the other nations, with their names, statues, myths and cults, clearly do have an existence in the life, culture and history of those who treat them as gods", but God's people are warned of "the enticing attractiveness and seductive power of the religious culture that lay ahead of Israel when they crossed the Jordan". The leader of the Israelites, Joshua, warned the Israelites that if they "forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he (God) will turn and bring disaster on you" (Jos 24:20). In another example, the prophet Elijah was part of God's purpose in demonstrating his power and reality, as opposed to that of Baal (1 Ki 18). The result was that the disobedient prophets of Baal were slaughtered (1 Ki 18:40) – they did not worship the only true God. In these examples we see that God requires exclusive worship. Man should not worship anyone or anything else other than Yahweh, as he was known amongst the Israelites.

In Scripture we also see reference to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6, 15; Dt 29:13), but by no means does this support the worship of ancestors. Nürnbergger (2007:59) notes that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob "were remembered because they were taken to be the 'pioneers' with whom Yahweh had entered into a binding relationship...but they did not function as mediators or religious authorities". Furthermore, Nürnbergger (2007:60) adds that "contact with the deceased was a serious offence. It was a slap in the face of Yahweh who wanted a direct and exclusive personal relationship with his chosen people... Israel related to the 'living God', not to dead people or lifeless idols". Israel's forebears were merely instruments in the hands of God who directs the affairs of creation. They were not to be worshipped, let alone contacted. Steyne

(1990:186) states that if people consult them, these “ancestors become a substitute for God, thus making reconciliation with God, relationship to God and worship of God redundant”. Israel’s forefathers were honoured for their participation in God’s service, but that was all – they were not meant to be consulted (Dt 18:11b), let alone worshipped.

God loves people and he wants them to reciprocate. Would God allow man to worship him, but also to worship other gods? Not at all. God is a jealous God and he commands us to worship him alone (Ex 20:3-5; 34:14; Dt 4:24). So then how does the *missio Dei* address ancestral worship? The *missio Dei* is spelled out in *Scripture* and that is where we turn to find the answer to this question.

As noted earlier, ancestral worship involves honouring, revering, or worshipping people, or worshipping their spirits. These are people who have passed on but who are deemed to be still ‘living’, in the sense that they can apparently still influence those on earth. Whatever the choice of word one prefers (honouring, revering, worshipping), those involved in ancestral worship are communicating with spirits as they attempt to consult the dead, as was highlighted in chapter 2 above. In Deuteronomy 18 we find that God forbids this practice of consulting the dead. From verse 9 of that chapter we read:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. (Dt 18:9-13)

These seem to be harsh words, but God is a jealous God who demands sole worship. The words quoted here are those of God given to Moses for instruction to the Israelites, God’s chosen people, who were about to enter the Promised Land. The other nations had various techniques (listed here, Dt 18:10-11) in seeking help, or guidance for the future, but the Israelites were being warned to not follow such detestable practices. Brown (1993:185) points out that “Canaanite preoccupation with such evil practices meant that they were guilty before the Lord, and their unacknowledged guilt had issued in God’s judgement – their expulsion from their land”. McConville (2002:43) explains that “the people of God should be, and can be, obedient (*Dt 30:15-20*), if only they will hear his voice” (italics mine). God’s people ought to listen to him and him alone and not to follow the practices of the other nations. These verses (Dt 18:9-14) express Israelites proper relationship with God: “the right way is a commitment of the whole self to Yahweh; the wrong way is the opposite commitment, to the ways of the nations and their gods” (McConville, 2002:300). God will drive out those who commit these detestable practices. In the same vein as

Deuteronomy 18, Light (2012:205) purports that “if the dead were intended to be contacted, the Bible would have endorsed it and provided appropriate instructions to facilitate this interaction”. According to Scripture then, consulting the dead is taboo.

In our present time, in the grand narrative of God’s mission, all men can be grafted in to that same people (cf. Rom 11:17-24), the people of God. Reflecting on this matter, Stott (1994:300) states that “some Gentiles have believed and been welcomed into God’s covenant people”. This demonstrates God’s mercy and compassion that even those outside the Israelite nation could become part of God’s kingdom. In the case in point, those who abandon ancestral worship and turn to God alone, will become part of his kingdom people. Therefore, as God’s people, we ought to obey the same instructions. We ought to serve God and God alone. In the same context of Romans 11, Moo (2000:367) mentions that “Jews forfeited their place because they failed to believe, while Gentile Christians have been included because they believed the message (v.20b)”. The instructions were given to all creation, therefore, to all nations. God’s mission is for all people to know and worship him alone. All people have opportunity to be grafted in and to follow him. God warns us in his word that we ought not to be arrogant, but to be afraid; if he did not spare his own people who turned against him, he will not spare any others who do not honour him (Rom 11:20-21). Those who worship their ancestors have turned away from the one, true God, whom alone they should be honouring. God graciously grafts people in; but the rebellious will face his wrath (Rom 2:6-8).

On this issue of consulting false gods, Chianeque & Ngewa (2006:235) present the following:

... those who practise witchcraft or act as mediums open themselves to manipulation by demonic powers. Since the believer has been called to relate to God in all aspects of his or her life, this instruction leaves no room for any consultation with anyone in opposition to God – whether in the spiritual or physical world. The Holy Spirit is the believers’ teacher and guide in all things (John 14:26). There is no room in the life of believers for either the consultation with the dead or witchcraft.

The missio Dei encompasses God and his mission. Anyone in opposition to the missio Dei must anticipate God’s wrath and due consequences. Leviticus 19:31 instructs people to “not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them.” We are warned in Galatians 5:19-21 that those who participate in idolatry or witchcraft “will not inherit the kingdom of God”. Such rebellion excludes one from participating in the missio Dei. King Saul of Israel consulted the witch of Endor and as a result was severely punished – the Philistines defeated the Israelites and Saul and his sons were killed (cf. 1 Sa 28; 31). Although at one stage in his life, Saul walked close to God, he later began to drift further and further away from God, to the point of participating in this detestable practice of consulting the witch of Endor. Unfortunately, many have used this example

of Saul and the witch of Endor as support for consulting the dead. However, such proponents take the text out of context.

Saul had banished all mediums and spiritists from the land (1 Sa 28:3b), yet he subsequently turned to one himself, the witch of Endor. Saul had also disobeyed God's commands on other occasions (cf. 1 Sa 13:9; 15:9). Saul had lost his focus on God. Mhlophe (2013:167) provides valuable insight when he draws attention to the fact that "Saul was a backslidden person who was now troubled by an evil spirit (1 Sa 16:14)... It cannot be argued that the replacement of God's Spirit in a person's life with an evil spirit, will not affect his life and conduct". Saul turned from God to other gods. God eventually rejected Saul as king. The contents of chapter 28 reveal how Saul inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer (v.6). In his rebellious state then, Saul requested the witch of Endor to consult a spirit for him. More than that, Saul did so in disguise and at night (v.8). This clearly indicates his intent to get an answer in spite of God's command.

So for those proponents who use this incident to support consultation with the dead, the context shows that Saul was in a rebellious state, rejecting the only true God. Rinquest (2006:39) states that "in the absence of knowledge from the Lord, (Saul), in desperation turns to the dark side". We may not know for sure whether Saul saw Samuel's spirit, or another 'spirit' – as Akanni (2006:375) suggests: "a familiar figure appears, who may genuinely have been the spirit of Samuel, but who could equally well have been a demon taking on his appearance". The bottom line is that Saul disobeyed God. As a result, Saul and his sons were killed and the army of Israel fell to the Philistines (cf. 1 Sa 28:19; 31:1-2; 1 Ch 10:1-14).

Saul's obedience at the outset of his reign as King of Israel meant that he could participate in the *missio Dei*, but his subsequent disobedience excluded him from participating in God's mission. Such exclusion meant rebellion against God and the due consequences were measured out against Saul, as just mentioned.

Those involved in ancestral worship turn to sangomas at various stages in their lives – when they need guidance or help, or when someone is sick, for instance. But God warns us that we should repent of such evil practices, because one day we shall all face judgement (Acts 17:30-31). Those involved in worshipping other gods will not go unpunished (cf. Gen 20:5).

However, like those who can be grafted in, all is not lost. God is "a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ps 86:15). God remembers his covenant. The *missio Dei* is "the redemptive work of God... YHWH (God) is not merely intent on liberating slaves but on reclaiming worshippers" (Wright, 2006:265, 270). When people come to faith in Christ Jesus, they find freedom and the will to serve God and worship him alone. In other

words, if those who turn from ancestral worship and turn to the living God alone, they will find redemption. God will forgive them (1 Jn 1:9). That is God's plan for creation – the worship of him alone. The first commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3), is clear enough. The worship of other deities has no place in God's kingdom. Those who worship the one, true God participate in the *missio Dei*. They are God's catalysts to lead others to experience freedom in Christ, to experience that redemption which comes from the God of the Bible.

People have often invoked other gods. One argument is that God is too far away or distant so in order to communicate with him, they need to turn to other means. Therefore, idols, mediums, spiritists, witchdoctors and ancestors are consulted in order to maintain an equilibrium, or to determine the future, or to seek protection, or to obtain guidance. But again Scripture provides the clear answer: no one comes to the Father except through Christ Jesus (Jn 14:6); Jesus is the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5). Such verses, which can be compared to the message of the cross being foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18), are challenging to ancestral worshippers. People ought to worship God alone and in order to communicate with God, Scripture teaches that it is to be done solely through Christ Jesus, God's Son. People do not communicate with God because they do not know God, or they do not want to obey God, so they consult their ancestors instead. Such people attempt to manipulate the ancestors for their own benefit, but they cannot manipulate God!

Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014) argues that “the ancestors, believed to be spiritual beings, ensure that they maintain contact with Qamata (the Supreme Being) for the welfare of their loved ones still alive. Contrary to what the Bible teaches, even those Christians who practise ancestral worship believe that the ancestors keep the same contact with God for them”. This exposes a major issue attached to ancestral worship; that of *syncretism*. Numerous men and women in this community pray to God, but also to their ancestors. They believe that their ancestors can help them in their time of need. They often turn to their ancestors when things are not going well for them, perhaps when a family member is sick, for example. But attached to this relationship with the ancestors is also a sense of fear. As previously stated, God seems too far away, so help is sought from the living-dead. Nürnberger (2007:36, 38) explains how uncanny forces exercise “comprehensive control” among African traditionalists and that “one can never and nowhere completely escape their watchful eyes...the ancestors are present here and now”. Light (2012:112), commenting on the attitude towards the ancestors in Africa, records much the same: “the ancestors are ever present”.

The fear of the ancestors seems to be greater than that of God. Many Xhosa folk in King William's Town do not want to abandon ancestral worship because, as Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) suggests, “It is the only way of believing...they should do as their forefathers did”. Mr Mathiso (27

Aug. 2014) stated that there are even “Christians who feel they cannot do away with ancestral worship as it is part of their being”. These men and women seem to fear the living and the living-dead more than they fear the living God! Mhlophe (2013:261), a Xhosa man who grew up in the Eastern Cape, acknowledges that “as children we were brought up to fear ancestors, evils spirits, ghosts, etc. but we were not trained to fear God”.

This fear factor is addressed in more detail in chapter 6 below. However, the amaXhosa also believe that God can help them too, hence they pray to both God and to their ancestors. One interviewee, Mrs Somhlahlo (5 Jun. 2015), stated that in times of need, she prays “to God first, but also to the ancestors”. A similar argument could be raised with those who pray to the saints, or even to Mary, the mother of Jesus. People look to whoever or whatever may help their cause. More on syncretism will be revealed in the following chapter. However, the answer still stands: Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5).

Elsewhere in Scripture we find verses that concur with the above sentiments. For example, Ezra records in 2 Chronicles (33:2, 6) that Manasseh King of Judah “did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites... He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practised sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists”. The consequence was that God sent the Assyrians to conquer Manasseh and his people. A hook was placed in his nose and Manasseh was carried off to Babylon (v.11). The positive aspect of this account, however, was that Manasseh recognized that the Lord is God and so he sought forgiveness from God. God forgave Manasseh and he subsequently returned to Jerusalem (vv.12-13) – and he returned to God. God is God and there is no other. We ought to repent from our folly and seek God’s forgiveness. We ought to return to the *missio Dei*, to return to God’s plan for creation and participate accordingly.

Further than that, Scripture is replete with examples of how the *missio Dei* addresses the practice of such worship.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis of this study does not allow for a thorough investigation into each of these passages. Nonetheless, one can further understand God’s disapproval of consulting the dead when one unpacks Isaiah 8:19-20:

When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of the Lord? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.

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<sup>18</sup> See Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Dt 8:19; 30:17-18; 1 Ki 9:6-7; 2 Ki 21:6; 2 Ch 33:6; Ps 81:9; Jer 13:10; Isa 8:19; 19:3; Acts 17:23; Rev 9:20.

The prophet Isaiah delivered this message amongst God's people prior to their being taken into exile by the Assyrians (722 B.C.). Isaiah warned them of God's pending judgement if they rejected God's message, if they turned away from the living God and turned to other gods instead. Oswalt (1986:237) warns that "if we will not have the Spirit who asks for our commitment to him, we must sooner or later have the spirits, who appear to ask for nothing, but in fact intend to make us slaves". Those who turn from God become dependent upon other gods and, therefore, become trapped by them. Steyne (1990:167) declares that in spite of all of animism's "power plays, it cannot save man from himself, nor can it save him from slavery to the powers of darkness". Like Saul, people become deceived, particularly by their lack of knowledge, or by their determined pursuit of answers, that they reject God and turn to anyone or anything else for help – even at great cost. God's divine power has given mankind everything he needs for life and godliness through knowledge of him (2 Pt 1:3). There is no need to seek guidance from other gods.

Oswalt (1986:237) acknowledges that "there is some difficulty in equating the dead with the gods, but the prophet, knowing of ancestor worship, may have intended to make the point that the dead were indeed this people's gods". Webb (1996:66-67) also warns that "those who have rejected the clear message he has brought from God will turn in their lostness to the occult, and in so doing plunge themselves into ever deeper *darkness* and ruin (19, 21-22)". Such is the influence of ancestral worship on its followers. The *missio Dei* is set. Those who obey God, partake in his mission, but those who reject God cannot participate therein. As a result, such people will face God's pending judgement, just like the Israelites did when they were taken captive by the Assyrians. As mentioned earlier, people often turn to their ancestors when things are not going well for them, "but messages for the present only come from the word of the Lord. The testimony and law already spoken of (verse 16) are to be the source of revelation concerning God's will" (Harman, 2005:96). Man must not seek guidance from anyone or anything else, but from God alone.

In drawing this chapter to a close, one can gauge from Scripture that the *missio Dei* is a thread drawn throughout the Bible, following the fall (Gen 3). God has a plan for his creation and we as human beings are privileged to play a part in that plan, in that mission. Those who believe in God are called to display his likeness and so draw others to believe in him. The thrust of God's mission is that he alone is to be worshipped. God has commanded his created beings to seek no other deity or medium or idol, but to seek God and to worship him alone. God, Creator of the universe, invites mere mortals to participate in this mission. Obedience to that privilege equates to worshipping and honouring God alone. This also demonstrates God's compassion and mercy and his faithfulness to his covenant, seeking to reconcile man to himself. God always makes a way for such reconciliation to take place, and he invites men to be part of this plan.

Ancestral worship plays a huge part in the lives of the African people, even in the heart of King William's Town, and the matter needs to be addressed. Mhlophe (2013:13) mentions that "the Christian faith is forced to respond to this and other indigenous beliefs. Our failure to properly respond to these beliefs threatens to scupper our efforts to advance the cause of Christ among African converts". Similarly, Stott (1961:63) states that "it is because of the unbelieving world's opposition to Christ that the church's witness to Christ is needed". God has called people everywhere to shine his light (Mt 5:16), to preach the good news (Mk 16:15), to teach people his ways (Mt 28:20), so that they too would become followers of Christ, so that they too would bow the knee to God, acknowledging him as the only, true God. God's followers ought to fulfil their role in the *missio Dei*, a role including both privilege and responsibility.

Following below will be a chapter (7) on how the church can construct a paradigm for participating in the *missio Dei* and address this phenomenon of ancestral worship. From the foregoing detail, it is clear that the Word of God does not support ancestral worship. The *missio Dei* is God's plan to reconcile man to God. Those who do not comprehend this mission need to be enlightened and shown how reconciliation with God is both possible and absolutely crucial. The men and women in King William's Town who worship their ancestors need to be shown the truth, and the followers of Jesus Christ need to fulfil their role in leading such worshippers back to worshipping the only true God, Creator of the universe. The dissertation now turns to how ancestral worship influences *participation in the missio Dei*.

## CHAPTER 5 HOW DOES ANCESTRAL WORSHIP INFLUENCE PARTICIPATION IN THE MISSIO DEI?

In the ground that has been covered so far, the concept of *ancestral worship* has been explored and the meaning of the *missio Dei* has been explained. Now the dissertation attempts to discover how the former influences participation in the latter. As has been pointed out, many people in this community are involved in ancestral worship. The question then is this: Does ancestral worship really influence participation in the *missio Dei*, and if so, to what extent? After interviewing a number of people within the King William's Town community, it became clear that ancestral worship certainly had an influence in their lives. Some of the interviewees are active church members, yet their reports reflect a disconcerting picture of God's church in this community. The evidence that supports this notion will be seen below. This chapter begins by exposing one major element that influences participation in the *missio Dei*, that of *syncretism*. The definition of the term "syncretism" is followed by an analysis of its impact on the community.

### 5.1 What is syncretism?

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* records *syncretism* as "the mixing of different religions, philosophies or ideas", while Moreau *et al.* (2004:13) regard *syncretism* as "the replacement of core or important truths of the gospel with non-Christian elements". Christopher Wright is in agreement, as recorded earlier. Wright (2010:153) states that *syncretism* is "mixing the supposed worship of the living God of the Bible with all kinds of other loves and loyalties". Likewise, Lasisi (2006:900) laments that "many religious movements in Africa have been called syncretistic folk religions, since their adherents integrate traditional elements with more recent alien faiths such as Islam and Christianity". Although syncretism is quite blatant in some areas, it can be deceptively subtle in others. And here one can mention the aspect of veneration, for example. As has been asked before, do people honour their forefathers or are they actually worshipping them? When people pray, are they calling on Jesus as the only Mediator (1 Tim 2:5), or are they praying to their ancestors? This is almost impossible to determine due to the difficulty in judging a man's heart, particularly in the practice of prayer. Of course, they could be praying to Jesus *and* to the ancestors simultaneously, as evidenced in Mrs Somhlahlo's (5 Jun. 2105) comment recorded in the foregoing chapter: "I pray to God first, but also to the ancestors". However, one can identify a tree by its fruit (Mt 7:20) and as one spends sufficient time with someone, such fruit will be brought to the light.

Concerning the Xhosa folk in this area, Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) states that "the majority are syncretistic ... many are Christian by profession, but few are truly born again believers in Christ",

while Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) suggests that the local people “do what is good for them on that specific event, mixing Christianity with traditional religion”. In a similar vein, Mr Zazi (6 Nov. 2014) concludes that “people are rejoicing in the Lord, worshipping Christ with songs and praises, but on the other hand they observe rituals pertaining to traditional cultures”. These comments come from people living here in King William’s Town, people who understand and experience the local setting. Syncretism is rife indeed, the worship of more than one deity is acknowledged among the people here, and this is being practised even in Christian churches.

There is, however, great tragedy in naively painting people with the same brush. We cannot make sweeping statements which suggest that all Xhosa folk practice ancestral worship, or that syncretism is common to all Xhosa people! Light (2012:391) warns that “to be told one’s culture is all evil is inaccurate, deeply disturbing and painful”. Manganyi and Buitendag (2013) remind one that members of the African Initiated Churches “aim to be Christian without losing their African identity”. Africans want to be African and to those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, they still want to maintain their ‘Africanness’ even in their Christianity. So the debate seems to involve culture, tradition, and religion. Be that as it may, one cannot view all the amaXhosa as ancestral worshippers, or as syncretistic. One treads on dangerous ground there. For further thought though, Adeyemo (2006:251) states the following:

ATR also differs from Christian worship in that it rarely worships the Supreme Being directly. Instead sacrifices are offered to the divinities and ancestors believed to be mediators between God and people...the gods exist for humans and the main goals of worship are to restore the balance between humanity and the spirit beings, to ward off evils such as sickness, failure and barrenness and to enhance success.

Even if such people were attempting to communicate with God, the Supreme Being, their communication via their ancestors lends itself to syncretism, because they are worshipping more than one god. They would be seeking the mediation of their ancestors, as well as that of Christ, in order to seek God’s help.

It seems that such proponents seek God for what they can get from him, and not seeking God for the sake of simply worshipping and adoring him. The focus is on man and not necessarily on God. Those who claim to be Christians yet worship their ancestors are blatantly practising syncretism, and as such cannot participate in the *missio Dei*. O’Donovan (1995:254) states that “people who come from a non-Christian background are often tempted to simply add Christianity to the religious system from which they have come”. This is also common amongst the amaXhosa of the King William’s Town community. Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) argued that some Xhosa folk live in town in order to worship in the suburban churches, but they know that “they can always go to their villages and continue to practise ancestral worship”. Pastors in local churches will preach from the Word

of God, but they will also practise ancestral worship, without reservation. Steyne (1990:83) mentions that he has “personally met individuals in Christian ministry who claim that an ancestor prompted them to accept the call”. That is syncretism, in the sense that they are really practising two “religions”. Mhlophe (2013:225) mentions that “there are church denominations that encourage the practice of consulting the dead”, and in a similar vein, Vosloo (n.d.:9) states that “instead of condemning ancestral worship, many have openly embraced it and want, if it were possible, the ‘best of both worlds’ – Christianity and the African culture”. Some people worship God, others their ancestors, while yet others worship both. People are self-centred, not God-centred. They will follow whatever suits them and reject God’s command to worship him alone. Only those who worship God alone can take part in the *missio Dei* – syncretists cannot. The bottom line is that some seem to be in a state of confusion, while others seem to be convinced of their commitment.

Adding to the presence of syncretism in the area, here follows an attempt to understand the origin, or at least part of the origin, of this syncretistic practice. This includes two perspectives, which may lead towards a better understanding of why syncretism is so rife. Firstly, Nürnberger (2007:22) records the following:

According to traditionalism, reality is not composed of energy particles that follow recognisable ‘laws of nature’, as modern science assumes. It is constituted or permeated by uncanny forces. Although there are considerable overlaps, one can distinguish between animism, where the emphasis is put on personalised manifestations of power (= spirits), and dynamism, where the emphasis is on impersonal power.

In a dynamistic worldview everything that exists harbours impersonal forces and such forces drive everything that happens. Like a vast ocean, dynamistic power can be relatively calm or in tempestuous turmoil, but it is always in motion. Power flows can go in beneficial or detrimental directions. Because these forces cannot be seen, traditionalists live in a dangerous world. To stabilise the life-world of the community, and to protect and strengthen its members, are the most pressing concerns in a traditionalist setting.

In the second case, O’Donovan (1995:255) presents these thoughts:

The reasons why Africans practice syncretism are not hard to understand. Cultural renewal in Africa has caused many people to rediscover their African past. Since culture and religion are closely related in Africa, this has led to a return to traditional religious practices. Along with this, emotional concerns for the welfare of relatives who died before the gospel came, has caused many people, including some leading theologians, to try to justify pre-Christian traditional religions. In the African world-view, God is often seen as distant and unapproachable. It therefore seems quite reasonable that human beings must relate to lesser spirits and divinities for the ordinary problems of life and not bother God.

One gets the sense that syncretism is acceptable, possible reasons being cited above. If God is seemingly far away, then communicating with him through intermediaries seems vital, particularly in relation to the apparent “forces” around us. In, but not limited to, Africa, syncretism would seem necessary and not “a sin”, as O’Donovan (1995:255) regards it. But note what Idowu (1969:11) purports:

We must admit that the danger of idolatry (properly defined) and syncretism is always with us. But while we appreciate this danger, we have nevertheless to realize that we are only placing ourselves in a questionable position if in defence of truth we run away from the truth. And half-truth is as much to be condemned as a denial of truth.

However, this is the context on the ground. How to respond to this will be dealt with in chapter 7. Syncretism is rife and supportive arguments abound. For example, Mamela Gowa carried out an investigation on how the calling to become a sangoma conflicts with Christianity. Gowa (2015) reports, “While some sangomas embrace their craft exclusively, there are those who have struck a balance between Christianity and being a sangoma, even though some would say these are two different religions”. Bear in mind that syncretism is also an ancient practice. In reference to the Israelites, the chosen people of God, the author of 2 Kings (v.33) records: “They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought”. Syncretism is nothing new. From the statements above one can start to understand the reasons for religious practices – especially driven by apparent personal and impersonal forces – and in so doing, they begin to reflect the origin of syncretism. People from of old have always worshipped various deities and to worship a number of them has been the norm for some, particularly in Africa where culture, tradition and religion run deep. For example, consider the incident recorded in Acts 17. The Athenians were very religious (v.22) and even had an inscription that read “to an unknown god”. People have regularly followed the ways of the world, worshipping foreign gods and attempting to please all gods if possible.

Among African people and their existence is this element of life-power. Nürnberger (2007:45) states that “in terms of its dynamistic worldview, Africa ... does not distinguish between power in nature, political power, economic power, social power, protective power, life-giving power and healing power. It is all one package”. Africans are very spiritual people and so in order to manage the challenges of life, they will draw on power from wherever they can. Nyirongo (1997:30) states that “in his day to day life, the African does not only appeal to God for help, but also to deities and charms – for he believes that the more power he is able to amass, the stronger or more powerful he will be”. Nyamiti (2008) agrees: “The craving for power, safety, protection and life is the driving force in African religion”. Ngong (2009:12) points out the following:

The missionary churches largely discounted this context and therefore caused the African to have a split personality – they were partly Christians and partly adherents of African Traditional Religion. In this context, the Pentecostal-type churches' presentation of the Holy Spirit as the power that is stronger than any other power is good news to African ears. These churches introduced the idea of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate power that grants the believer the ability to overcome all powers that sap the life of human beings.

Of course, the problem here is that some would seek the Holy Spirit's power purely for what they can gain from that power or attempt to seek salvation for the sake of manipulating their world around them. This focus once again becomes man-centred and not God-centred. People live in fear and this drives them to seek power to deal with such fear. There is a fear of the spirit world and how it can impact the living, hence the need for power, and hence the syncretism that is so rife among the African people.

Therein lies further support for syncretism in many an African person – power is important. This begins to highlight the influence of ancestral worship on participation in the *missio Dei*. Mrs Somhlahlo (5 Jun. 2015) did not hesitate to admit that she prays to her ancestors: "I have a small table with candles next to my bed and there I pray to my ancestors". She believes that if bad luck comes your way, "the ancestors will fix it". More than that, Mrs Somhlahlo has no problem praying to God *and* to her ancestors, asking for protection, or for healing when someone is sick, or for knowledge of the future. Again this form of worship has its focus on self, people being self-centred not God-centred. People have not changed as far as following other gods is concerned; instead they have simply sought other sources of power. They seek God's help, but they do not seek God's heart. They are not willing to allow God to change their hearts and to worship him alone. They seek all means of worship or power according to their mortal understanding. Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) believes that "a faulty gospel, the prosperity gospel..., has allowed people to simply add Christianity to animism". O'Donovan (2000:237) explains this concept of the "prosperity gospel":

Another form of false teaching which is gaining a large following in Africa today has been described as 'prosperity theology'. This is the teaching that God does not want any of his children to be poor or to lack anything they may desire...it is taught that the way to have whatever you want is simply to 'name it and then claim it by faith'. Without careful investigation, this teaching appears to have good support in the Bible.

This is a reflection of how sin has corrupted the minds of men. The biblical text is taken out of context in order to satisfy the needs of people, thereby losing focus on God and his purpose for mankind. Turaki (2006:791) affirms that "people's lives are dominated by their desire for worldly pleasures and bodily comforts, and revolve around money, possessions and the things of the world rather than spiritual values". The *missio Dei* is the mission of God. Ancestral worship

involves other gods. Therein lies the dilemma. God demands sole worship; our God is a jealous God. If people worship God for their own benefit, God will eventually not listen (cf. Rev 3:16).

Matshobane (2013:10), in reviewing Mhlophe's work on ancestral worship, states the following: "This syncretism has crippled and in many ways silenced the church in Africa in the name of being politically correct and not wanting to be offensive to culture". Following on from quoting Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) above, he further stated that "to some, this church mixing is the safe hiding place to lie low and be less committed in the things of the Lord and highly committed to the worship of ancestors without anybody noticing". On syncretism among the amaXhosa, Rev. Saffa (19 Nov. 2014) simply states: "They are double-minded, practising both ancestral worship and Christianity". In Gowa's report (2015) we find that "charismatic churches have however become a new home to many sangomas who grew up in a Christian background". Syncretism is extensive.

There can be no doubt that ancestral worship plays a significant role in the lives of people in the King William's Town area and along with that, the presence of *syncretism* is rife. The dissertation now goes further in an attempt to discover how ancestral worship influences the lives of the amaXhosa in this area, and how it influences their possible participation in the *missio Dei*.

## **5.2 The influence of ancestral worship**

One may have noticed the comment above that "culture and religion are closely related in Africa" (O'Donovan, 1995:255). In light of that, it is inevitable that ancestral worship will influence a society and its people. Some of the evidence has already been revealed above, particularly in the discussion on syncretism. But the research takes it further. People make choices on a daily basis and many of these choices are influenced by the phenomenon at hand. Take Rev. Zani's (19 Oct. 2014) comment, for example:

Ancestral worship is a cultural, religious and spiritual matter. For those who worship their ancestors, there is no separation in these practices as they are part of people's everyday life... One of the things that stands out is that ancestral worship manifests itself in the whole rhythm of daily life that permeates such commonplace things like eating, drinking, ploughing, and working. In essence this is what is expected of the community and this becomes the common point where the same nation or race shares in their worship.

Writing from a South African point of view and context, Mhlophe (2013:277) records the following: "Idolatry has permeated every part of our social sphere. We see it in business, sports, politics, media, etc... In South Africa, there are many people who would claim to be irreligious and yet venerate the dead". Having lived in the same Eastern Cape context as Mhlophe, Light (2012:107) states that "the ancestral cult directly or indirectly, influences the African's inner psychology and also personal, communal, social, political, economic and religious behaviour". The research

carried out, especially from the respective interviewees, reflects this truth that ancestral worship influences every aspect of people's lives here, both on an individual level and on a community level. People please their ancestors so that they can benefit from such practice.

From what has been presented already, there is no doubt that many an African believes that if his deceased relative has not been given his proper burial rites, he will indeed return to torment the living. In a similar vein, the parting of the deceased from this life is done in a proper manner in order to receive positive influence from the so-called living-dead. Turaki (2006:480) reminds us that "it is believed that ancestors are capable of influencing the destinies of the living for good or ill". Ferdinando (1999:33-34), Nyirongo (2007:26), Setiloane (1999:29-33), Steyne (1990:80-85), and numerous others, all share the same sentiment. This demonstrates the influence of ancestral worship, even in this community. These examples and explanations are readily seen and experienced by numerous people in this community. In a sense, for the people here, there seems to be no escaping ancestral worship and its everyday influence. But how does this phenomenon influence one's participation in the *missio Dei*? In answering this question, the dissertation presents further concrete examples.

The researcher spoke with Mrs Somhlahlo (5 Jun. 2015), who believes that her daughter's dreams have meant that she is being called by the ancestors to fulfil a special role in the community. Her daughter was 13 at the time of these dreams, and they are ongoing. Mrs Somhlahlo shared about her neighbour whose husband was admitted to hospital last year (August 2014). Her daughter had a dream that the man was dying due to kidney failure. Mrs Somhlahlo visited the neighbour in hospital and things did not look good. It was a week later that the man died from kidney failure, just as her daughter had dreamt. Mrs Somhlahlo's daughter has subsequently been to see the family elders in Tsolo, in the former Transkei. They believe that she has 'power' and is in line to be a sangoma. Asked if there was someone in her family who is or was a sangoma, Mrs Somhlahlo replied that her husband is meant to be one but that he was dodging the matter. He is facing tremendous pressure from his elders because of this. Vosloo (n.d.:13) supports this point: "It is normally believed that a sangoma comes out of a family of sangomas. One or both of his parents or grandparents was a sangoma. Thus they receive the spirit from the family and also training from these 'spirits of the departed'". Mhlophe (2013:273) would agree, having experienced this within his own family: "My maternal grandfather... was a famed medium and witchdoctor. After his death his wife tried to take over the 'mantle' from him. My grandmother believed that the mantle ought to automatically fall on her... My aunt also spent many years delving in various kinds of divinations as a result of the false belief that she also had a 'calling' from the ancestors".

In spite of being a member in a local church, Mrs Somhlahlo is fully supporting her daughter in this process of becoming a sangoma. Gowa (2015) interviewed sangomas from the Eastern Cape

and summed up their view: “You can never run away from the calling of becoming *igqirha* (a sangoma)”. Such is the influence of the ancestors. We have already mentioned birth rites, initiation rites, and burial rites. For explicit detail on such influence, Light (2012:107-120) lists and discusses numerous examples in a section entitled “The influence of the ancestral cult on the life of Africans”. This is what Vosloo (n.d.:18) found:

Children are introduced to the ancestors while they are still in their mother’s womb. This is called ‘passing the child through the fire’... This is done in one of two ways. In the urban areas, ‘muthi’ is placed on a paraffin stove and the pregnant woman steps over the smoking ‘muthi’. In rural areas, ‘muthi’ is placed in the grass and set alight and the pregnant woman steps back and forth over it. This is to introduce the child to the ancestors and naturally the sangoma oversees the ceremony. Once the child is born, an animal (usually a goat) is killed as an offering to the ancestors, and so the child is introduced to the ancestors. A piece of the goat skin is tied around the baby’s wrist as his binding to the ceremony and the ancestors.

What chance then does a new-born baby face in avoiding the influence of the ancestors? Even in his mother’s womb, the influence is being established. Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) attests to this practice in the King William’s Town area too, but Mr Vellem (6 May 2015) shared that in some cases, “once born, the mother will pass the baby over the fire as an introduction to the ancestors”. On other occasions, Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015) acknowledges that this “happens when the child is sick or there is a problem with the child”. This shows that the influence is felt even before one is born, and then the influence continues even after death, as believed by those who practice this form of worship.

One of the gentlemen interviewed, Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), was taught that “you have to bend your finger when pointing to the sky, as a sign of respect to Qamata, the Supreme Being”. Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) made a similar comment: “According to the old people, you have no right to point a finger up because you point to the Almighty”. This may be amongst the smaller issues, but it is nonetheless an indication of the influence of the ancestors on the King William’s Town community. There is the common understanding that if things are not going well, “the father of the house will go to the kraal to consult the ancestors, so that they can intervene and bring about change” (Mr Mathiso, 27 Aug. 2014). In the same interview, Mr Mathiso mentioned that “even during drought, the elders of the community will assemble on a particular mountain to worship and plead with the ancestors to ask Qamata for rain”. Notice that the pleas or prayers are made to the ancestors – “human beings must relate to lesser spirits and divinities for the ordinary problems of life and not bother God” (O’Donovan, 1995:255). This excludes God and consequently affects one’s participation in the *missio Dei*. Praying to the ancestors is not part of the *missio Dei*.

When we were involved in the International Conference with De Verre Naasten (2012), mentioned in chapter 2 above, a follow-up conference was planned and this took place in our community of King William's Town (11-22 Nov. 2013). The aim of the subsequent conference was to attempt to implement in a local context what was learned there, hence Dumisani being the host. During this conference, the participants visited Chalumna (13 Nov. 2013), an area about 70km from King William's Town. Rev. Goosen, the contact for this visit, introduced the delegates to a Xhosa bishop who was willing to share about Xhosa traditions and customs.<sup>19</sup> He admitted to leading his own church from his home, but he also readily consulted his ancestors. He demonstrated how he approached the kraal from his hut, the front door of which faced the kraal, where prayers were made to the ancestors and where sacrifices to such ancestors were performed. Only the male visitors were allowed to accompany the bishop into the kraal, while the women remained in the hut. When we entered the kraal, he prayed in Xhosa to the ancestors, introducing us, his guests, to them as we entered. This was reality; this was ancestral worship at face value.

The bishop was adamant that he would not field any controversial questions, so one could not challenge him about 'walking two roads', about syncretism. When an attempt was made, he dodged the questions and reminded the delegates of the reason why they had arrived there, that of purely gathering information about the Xhosa people. But here was a man seemingly 'under the influence' of ancestral worship. He was leading his own church, under the banner of the Zion church, but still he was engaged in ancestral worship. This had been explained to us by Rev. Goosen, our contact, who had begun a relationship with the bishop many months before that day in an attempt to explain to the bishop the truth of the gospel.

Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) has seen the influence of ancestral worship first hand: "Occasionally, at all-night services, I have witnessed the ancestors being venerated, worshipped, prayed to". These were supposedly Christian church services. Rev. Goosen, as mentioned earlier, has spent much time with the amaXhosa, so he speaks from years of experience. These are everyday events; ancestral worship has a daily influence on the locals' lives.

On visiting sangomas, Vosloo (n.d.:20) reports that "it is also so popular and an everyday occurrence that there are many pastors who use 'muthi' supplied by a sangoma to give them 'power', to attract crowds when they preach". It seems that this phenomenon has influenced people from all walks of life, even Christians. On interviewing Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2014), he stated that he has "witnessed a pastor inviting family members at a burial ceremony to come and

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<sup>19</sup> The bishop will remain anonymous in order to protect his identity.

speak to their loved one who was now dead". He regards this as "a covenant with death". The family members are covenanting with the deceased – and the pastor is inviting this activity.

This phenomenon is real and it is found at the grassroots level. But it is also influential in the upper echelons of society. South Africa's leaders call on their ancestors too, trusting them for guidance, protection, success, and so on. Light (2012:118) lists a former president of South Africa as an example: "Thabo Mbeki travelled once a year to some area in the old Transkei for ancestral veneration. This could be in his capacity as the president of South Africa, and hence the veneration may be sacrifice and/or intercession to the ancestors on behalf of the amaXhosa or the entire nation." Vosloo (n.d.:17) found the following: "In my experience I have seen business professionals as well as top Government officials give honour to the dead". In the same light, Ngong (2009:16) writes: "It is not unusual for those in position of power to appeal to spiritual forces to keep them in power for as long as possible, even when this means the use of violence". That is ancestral influence in everyday life.

And it goes further. In South African sport, for example, the ancestors also make their mark. Take Malan's article (2010), for example:

As the enemy striker missed yet another open goal, the African man seated beside me pointed skywards and yelled: "Higher powers!" He could have been referring to God, I suppose, but here in Johannesburg, another explanation seemed more likely. It was Friday June 11, 2010, and South Africa's national squad had just moved into a one-nil lead against Mexico in the World Cup's opening game, a development so unexpected that it simply reeked of ancestral spirit intervention.

Polls show that about 80 per cent of South Africans patronise traditional healers, which implies at least a vestige of faith in the cult of ancestor worship and its loosely allied forms of magic and sorcery. Tales of the African occult are a staple in Johannesburg's tabloids, and sangomas' touts prowl busy intersections, handing out leaflets offering cures for everything from broken hearts and bad luck to Aids and poltergeist infestations.

Such is the influence of traditional healers. The advertising of the sangomas' trade mentioned by Malan also occurs on the streets of King William's Town. Here is a sample list of one such 'healer', Dr Mama Dumba, whose flyer I was handed while in traffic (12 May 2015) in King William's Town's main road:

Bring back lost lover	Cure pressure
Strengthen relationships	Take care of bad headaches
Stop your lover or husband from cheating	Take away stomach problems
Get promoted at work	Bad and constant coughs
Win court cases	Diabetes
Bring back stolen property	We take care of madness
Strengthen your business	If you want to have children

Remove bad luck	Body pains
Strengthen men's penis	Endless vomiting
Widen men's penis	Find work
We take care of stubborn children in homes	Remove curse
Bring back respect from the community and work place	

With this list of so-called healings comes a "100% guarantee!!!" This type of advertising and practice is rife in King William's Town. This type of trade penetrates nearly, if not, all levels of society. However, one must note that some traditional practitioners use purely natural remedies and so-called science, but others "seek the help of spirits when they prepare their traditional medicines" (O'Donovan, 1995:257). One needs to be sure of the methods employed and to seek the Lord's discernment on this. One cannot paint all with the same proverbial brush.

Mhlophe (2013:85, 132) mentions other examples of how ancestors influence society. Firstly, Africans believe that there is a world that exists below the waters, so "some Africans flock to the beaches in the beginning of every year...to get the powers and blessings of these water spirits for the year ahead... Others say they go to wash off the 'bad luck' of the previous year". Secondly, he states that "there are people who put tokens and totems around their homes and bodies and believe that these things would protect them". Those interviewed attest to these examples from a King William's Town context. Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015) states that "some go to the rivers, dams, or to the sea". Xhosa folk in the villages surrounding King William's Town usually display, on a pole in their property, the horns of an ox. By such behaviour and practice, one can see the level of influence of ancestral worship in this community.

The researcher continues to have opportunity to engage with Dumisani students on this topic and on one occasion discussion was held on the authority of God over all other deities. Mr Vellem (6 May 2015) acknowledged that he was aware of church members in his area who "continue to pray to their ancestors". We were seeking ways to deal with this matter, which will be addressed in chapter 7 below. This comment from Mr Vellem merely highlights the frequency of the phenomenon.

Reading an article in the *Daily Sun* of 9 May 2014, there was a case of an ailing woman who was being prayed for at her home. Whilst the people were gathered inside praying, a man was caught placing *muthi* (a witchdoctor's medicine) at the front door. The people inside were enraged, blaming the man for the woman's illness and seeking to do him harm. After confronting the man's mother, she admitted to sending her son with the *muthi* to the woman's house. The *Daily Sun* report read: "The mother confirmed she had sent her son to the sangoma to fetch *muthi* meant to protect her family from bad luck and evil spirits". On the one hand, those who were praying for the woman were enraged because they believed that this form of medicine would only do the woman

harm. The woman who sent the muthi with her son, on the other hand, believed that the muthi would bring about healing. This reflects the animosity that ancestral worship can create. Some believe it works; others avoid it because it is deemed evil. Although the incident took place in KwaZulu Natal, it again shows the frequency and intent of people seeking help from other sources, like witchdoctors, rather than from God.

Having been a teacher and boarding-house superintendent at a local school in King William's Town (2003-2007), the researcher has seen Xhosa children wearing amulets or even bearing the scars from visits to a sangoma. In order to participate in such rituals, the children are sometimes absent from school. A clear example of this is when high school boys attend initiation school. There are always pleas from teachers or headmasters to arrange these rituals during school holidays so that learners' academics are not affected. There was a case in point, at this same school in King William's Town, where first-team rugby boys were not allowed to play matches because they had previously chosen to attend initiation school.<sup>20</sup> These examples compound the evidence for ancestral influence in our community.

One needs to be reminded of the emphasis that the amaXhosa place on community and on their culture and traditions. Therefore, the ancestors play a pivotal role in the life of the amaXhosa. Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) highlighted the influence of ancestral worship on one's participation in the *missio Dei* when stating that "Africans who do not follow traditions are placed in a certain class. They are shamed or derogatory comments are passed, particularly at family gatherings". These are Xhosa men and women who have left ancestral worship and have become true believers in Christ. Their participation in the *missio Dei* has affected their identity among family and even clan members. They are isolated and ostracized. Of course, this may prove to be a catalyst for others to make a stand against ancestral worship. Persecution for following Christ is real (2 Tim 3:12) and this is evidence of that fact. These men and women have chosen to participate in the mission of God, despite the pressure from those who worship their ancestors. Again the *missio Dei* is the mission of God. That mission means leading people to worship and obey God alone. Therein lies the challenge for some, while others have chosen to obey God alone and to participate in his mission.

Ancestral worship involves the worship of other gods. According to the *missio Dei*, as seen in Scripture, one should not worship other gods; one should worship God alone. And this is how ancestral worship influences participation in the *missio Dei*. It involves putting one's faith in other deities, or as portrayed above, in the so-called "living-dead". One cannot walk two roads (Josh 24:19-20); one cannot be lukewarm (Rev 3:16). Man ought to serve the Triune God alone (Ex

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<sup>20</sup> The respective individuals will remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the incident.

20:3; Mt 4:8-10). There is certainly pressure on members of this community. There seems to be no escape. Even the matter of respecting one's elders, and the hierarchical structures within the Xhosa communities (chapter 3), have serious implications for following this ancestral tradition. Light (2012:127) labours the point thus: "To tamper, or worse, to remove the ancestral and other occultic traditions, would surely collapse the very framework of African society and identity with serious negative results". As mentioned, those who do attempt to obey the Bible and break with the ancestral cult, face tremendous pressure from members of clan and family alike. In the interview with Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), he noted the following:

At present, there is this constant battle between ATR (African Traditional Religion) members and the Christian community, because ATR members believe that Christians are infiltrating Christian principles into their culture... ATR members believe that Christianity is meant for Jews and not for Africans, so therefore African Christians have abandoned their own culture, in favour of this foreign one.

There seemed to be a similar notion from Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014): "If you do not embrace ancestral worship, you are professed to be doomed and bad luck or misfortune will follow you and your children and those not yet born. This scares those who may think to turn away from this practice, and people would rather have 'dual membership', so to speak". This is an indication of how this type of worship affects participation in the *missio Dei*. One either cannot participate in the *missio Dei*, or one is obliged to practise syncretism. Of course, this is not acceptable to God, a jealous God who will not share his glory with another (Isa 42:8; 48:11).

So, in drawing a conclusion to this chapter, there is very little doubt as to the impact that ancestral worship has on the people of this community and also on their participation in the *missio Dei*. One can fathom this effect from what has been presented above, and also with reference to chapter 3. Ancestral worship is an all-pervasive phenomenon and to escape its influence brings on great pressure, even from immediate family members. Yet in spite of such pressure, there are indeed men and women who have chosen to follow God alone. If one were to worship God and the ancestors, then one cannot participate in the *missio Dei*. God is merciful and has put his mission in place so that people can turn back to him, to be reconciled to the only, true God. Syncretism is unacceptable in God's sight. Therefore, a choice must be made, a choice that has been presented to mankind by a loving and compassionate God. The following chapter investigates various reasons why the Xhosa people struggle to escape the influence of ancestral worship. The final chapter will then present ways on how the church can possibly address this matter.

## CHAPTER 6 WHY IS ANCESTRAL WORSHIP SO INFLUENTIAL?

From the findings above it is clear that ancestral worship has a tremendous influence on the people in this community. One can already begin to see why attempting to escape the influence of ancestral worship would be quite difficult, and in the mind of some, perhaps even impossible. This form of worship runs deep, particularly when one takes culture and tradition into consideration. Mhlophe (2015:51) points out that “in the name of culture, succeeding generations feel trapped and duty bound to follow the habits of others”. But besides these cultural or traditional reasons, there is a deep spiritual element involved in ancestral worship – this is worship, this is religion, this is spiritual.

Perhaps the church did not always respond appropriately to this phenomenon. On a broader scale of missionary endeavour, for example, Verkuyl (1978:168) states that “impure motives have also been clearly discernible throughout the history of the Christian mission”. Although Verkuyl strongly defends the cause of the missionaries, he nonetheless lists issues from the past such as the “imperialist motive”, “cultural motive”, “commercial motive”, and “the motive of ecclesiastical colonialism”. These examples sadly reflect an era where the church was caught up in political or economic matters, as promoted and implemented by certain countries over others. Sanneh (2003:55) similarly suggests that the work of the church was seen as “missionaries from the West coming to Africa or Asia and converting people, often with political incentives and material inducements”. Closer to the issue at hand, Nürnberger (2007:78) notes:

As some African scholars emphasize, the condemnation of ancestor veneration by the missionaries as idolatry or demon worship may have been too rash in very many cases. Such missionaries took their clues from the crass stance of the biblical witness, as they understood it, but they did not always consider alternative possibilities that may have been in line with the biblical witness.

Many have criticised the work of missionaries in Africa, but Bosch (1991:343) supports their proper motives when he points out that missionaries “were children of their time”; as too does Verkuyl (1978:168-169): “we do the thousands of missionaries who worked during the era of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism a great injustice if we see them only as the willing tools of imperialism”. Nürnberger (2007:53-54) similarly supports what missionaries tried to achieve:

When spelling out...failures I am far from joining the chorus of those who condemn the early missionaries as a bunch of arrogant and paternalistic bigots, or the spiritual storm troopers of Western imperialism... I have no doubt that many things have gone wrong very badly on the mission field... I cannot help but appreciate their achievements. Where would the African church be today, indeed where would modern Africa be today, without their pioneering work in almost all dimensions of life!

Furthermore, Nida (1954:253) sees missionaries and their respective endeavours as thus:

Trial by ordeal of poison, haunting fears of black magic, cruel mutilations in the name of religion, pathetic squalor resulting from caste disabilities, widespread ignorance, legal and social disabilities of women, and unrelieved suffering of body and spirit have all been combated with the most selfless devotion that the world has ever found in any group of people.

This research is not in the least about measuring the success or failure of missionary endeavours. But from the comments made thus far, one may suggest that maintaining ancestral worship is as a result of what the church in general seemed to be doing – that of simply condemning certain practices without thoroughly investigating them – or as a result of colonising countries trying to control the lives of local people groups. Mhlophe (2015:191) goes as far as saying, “Some people do not trust the Bible because of falsely believing that it was produced by Europeans for the purpose of subjugating black people.” This demonstrates the reaction of some and hence the support for their way of life from of old.

The researcher is in agreement with the likes of Bosch, Nida and Nürnberger who commend the missionaries in their endeavours to present the gospel message. They were indeed people of their time and they attempted to deliver the gospel message in the way that seemed most appropriate for the local people in that specific time and place – much the same as missionaries attempt to do today. The influence of ancestral worship has affected many people’s lives in the past and continues to do so today, and some of the reasons follow below.

This research has shown how broad the topic of ancestral worship is. In dealing with this phenomenon in the past, there may well have been legitimate cultural and traditional practices that were thrown out with the bathwater as such. These may have been practices which were actually in accord with Scripture, but there may well be other practices that were unbiblical. Nonetheless, when dealing with this subject, address Africans as Africans; and do the homework first. Many lessons can be learned from the pioneer missionaries of the past. But many lessons can also be learned from the point of view of the local people, in this case, those in and around King William’s Town. Ancestral worship is indeed a deeply-entrenched phenomenon. An attempt has been made to categorise the reasons for its influence under the following four headings. These may not include the complete list, but they nonetheless reflect some of the reasons why people in King William’s Town are so influenced by this form of worship.

### **6.1 Ancestral worship is part of culture and tradition**

One major reason for maintaining this practice is that ancestral worship is part of the *culture and tradition* of the Xhosa people. Culture and tradition are so similar that for the purposes here they are treated as synonymous. The Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary of current English (2006:357) renders *culture* as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of

a particular country or group”, while the same dictionary (:1569) renders *tradition* as “a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people; a set of these beliefs or customs”. These definitions highlight the fine line between culture and tradition. For the purpose of this research, a distinction between these terms is not absolutely critical, so for this section of the document, consider culture and tradition as two parts of the same umbrella.

As suggested in a previous chapter, to be Xhosa is tantamount to being an ancestor worshipper. One has seen from the above detail that this form of worship is deeply entrenched, King William’s Town being no exception. People have grown up with this phenomenon. Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) shared that “today’s people have a slogan, ‘Masibuyeleni eMbo’, meaning ‘let us go back to the old way’”. Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) purports that “protection and guidance from the ancestors is an ingrained belief”. Ancestral worship is a way of life here and has been so for many, many years.

Addressing a basic understanding of culture, Nida (1954:37) states that “people act as they do because of the fact that earlier members of the culture acted in a particular way”. In a similar manner, Mhlophe (2013:14) mentions that “many people feel beholden to the traditions of their ancestors and feel that the best way to honour their legacy is to continue these traditions”. Ancestral worship is part of the amaXhosa culture and therefore this people group will continue in their tradition. Mhlophe (2015:121) also attests to this as such: “Often when I question some people concerning a practice connected to culture they would angrily retort, ‘this is how I was raised’”. It is interesting to note the title of Mhlophe’s book (2015): “Freed by God but imprisoned by culture”. In his introduction, Mhlophe (:10) writes: “There are many intersections between African culture and the veneration of the dead”. Ancestral worship and culture are intertwined.

Due to the nature of ancestral worship, particularly the central role which it plays in the culture of the amaXhosa, there is immense pressure from the community for any member who does not toe the line. Many believe that to avoid paying honour to ancestors will bring misfortune to the family or even to the wider community. Vosloo (n.d.:17) states that “there is great pressure placed on anyone who would refuse to submit to the ancestor’s or sangoma’s advice”. In a similar vein, Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) made it clear that letting go of ancestral worship “can be humiliating because you lose your identity in the community”. He mentioned “a disconnection ritual, ‘ukuhlamba’, which nobody wants to do because it could mean being ostracized from your family and even from the clan”. Rev. Matshobane explained that this process is embarrassing to the family as well – even the family would be ridiculed and ostracized from the rest of the community. They would be seen as “the ones who do not follow our culture” (Matshobane, 8 Jun. 2015).

Ancestral worship is part of the Xhosa culture and so the pressure to conform is immense. Williams (1991:300) makes the following comment:

In standing uncompromisingly against ancestor worship the Lord's church is unique and this causes Christians to be persecuted by their families. Almost every African Christian can tell stories about such persecution. A number of young people here have been driven from home because they stopped worshipping the ancestors.

Because of culture and identity, the community plays an integral part in maintaining its heritage. To honour one's elders, for example, is extremely important and everyone knows this and attempts to maintain it for the good of the community. It goes without saying that people believe that honouring the dead, the living-dead, is crucial to the community's welfare. As has been seen, many hold firmly to the belief that the recently departed still play an active role amongst the living and so to honour them is part of the Xhosa culture. Bae (2007:53-54) highlights it this way: "In this paradigm the forefather depends on the children's respect for his position which is manifest in veneration and an adherence to traditional customs and orders". Many Xhosa people worship their ancestors because it is a matter of culture and tradition, and they believe that it is necessary for the stability of the wider community – "this has been a common form of worship at home ever since I was born", stated Mr Zazi (6 Nov. 2014). Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014) attested to the same: "I have been exposed to ancestral worship since childhood". This highlights the fact that for many Xhosa people in King William's Town, such worship is practised because it is part of culture and tradition.

On the issue of ancestor worship and culture, Bae (2007:42) records the following:

Together with the growing solidarity among black South Africans during the Apartheid regime, there emerged a new self-awareness and black identity which coincided with their antipathy towards Western missionaries... This revival of group identity and everything African was accompanied by a renewed interest and adherence to African culture – specifically ancestor veneration.

Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) similarly stated that "apartheid laws and the harsh approach to the Xhosa people's ancestral worship has made them stubborn". Culture plays a crucial role in community life and even under this umbrella, ancestral worship has had, and continues to have, its tremendous influence. The examples of rites of passage discussed earlier (e.g. circumcision rites) form part of Xhosa tradition, and along with such rites come the ancestral elements. In this, attention is drawn once again to the importance of culture and tradition within ancestral worship. Arguments and examples such as these abound and it becomes quite clear that Xhosa folk in this area will not neglect ancestral worship because it forms part of a long-standing cultural and traditional heritage. Its influence is not easily avoided.

## 6.2 Ancestral worship is part of religion<sup>21</sup>

A second major reason for the Xhosa people being so influenced by ancestral worship is because it forms part of their *religion*. Ancestral worship is just that, the *worship* of ancestors. Uzochukwu (2010:144) invites one to ponder somewhat as he writes,

...the dead (as reincarnated bodies or spirits) continue to live a form of life that is still linked with the living members of their families while enjoying a supernatural status. Within this scheme, ancestors are believed to be worthy intermediaries between God (the giver of all life) and the living...

The Xhosa people pray to their ancestors because the ancestors are believed to be mediators between those on earth and God above. Without wanting to sound like the proverbial 'stuck record', ancestral worship is definitely a spiritual matter. The following comments from interviewees support this notion: "As I have read and also heard from my elders, the ancestors are known as spiritual beings who mediate between Qamata and the living" (Mr Mathiso, 27 Aug. 2014); "I believe that we meet with our ancestors in spirit, even though they have passed on but their spirit lives" (Mr Zazi, 6 Nov. 2014); and "African culture and spirituality are considered as primary for the value of good, harmonious human relationships" (Rev. Zani, 19 Oct. 2014). To add to this brief list indicating that ancestral worship is a spiritual matter, Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) responds as such:

Ancestral worship is not African Christianity. Christianity was not an African religion before missionaries arrived in Africa. Ancestral worship is the Africans' traditional religion; that is why the old people of Africa believe that it is the only way to have communication with God... Ancestral worship is a spiritual matter, which can be likened to that which the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit does amazing action, as do our ancestors, according to our belief.

Once again, these are men who have grown up in the King William's Town area. These views come from their own experience. Such comments also highlight the deep spirituality of the Xhosa people. Turaki (1999:75) reports that "our observation of modern Africa, in spite of colonisation and Christian missionary work, has shown that the traditional religious system has persistent and enduring features, a worldview and influence, and for this reason, it still has a place in the lives of Africans". Participation in ancestral worship is ongoing and one reason is that it is part of the local people's religion.

Steyne (1990:61), from an African point of view, states that "life without ancestral focus is empty and meaningless". Ancestral worship in a religious sense is seen in the numerous rituals, sacrifices, fetishes, prayers, and so on, that African people carry out (cf. Steyne, 1990:93-157).

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<sup>21</sup> Nürnberger (2007:153-156) offers a comprehensive comparison between African religion and the Christian faith.

In the local context, the religious nature of ancestral worship is seen in sacrifices – often of goats or cattle – that take place on a regular basis. Each sacrifice pertains to a specific need or circumstance, such as funerals, or seeking guidance from ancestors for various reasons. For example, Mrs Somhlahlo (5 Jun. 2015) was instructed by her elders to sacrifice a goat as part of “a ceremony to speak to the ancestors” about her daughter. Speaking to Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015), he shared about how people in the ancestral cult prepare for Sunday worship. These are members of a so-called ‘Christian’ church. He spoke briefly about how meals should be prepared for the week leading up to the Sunday. He stated that “all participants in that week must not swear, have sex, or sleep in their beds, but on the floor” until the Sunday morning. One can gauge from this explanation that the religious aspect of ancestral worship is taken quite seriously.

When considering religion as a reason for ancestral worship’s tremendous influence, one needs to consider what is happening in some of the churches in the area. As previously mentioned, Africans seek power from a variety of sources and so ancestral worship is one way to acquire this power, and God of the Bible is another. They will join the church in order to gain more power. Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) acknowledges that “‘Christianity’ as defined by many Africans would allow ancestral worship” to be part of their religion. Rev. Saffa (19 Nov. 2014), a true believer, shared about how he was asked to leave a certain ‘Christian’ church because he was “preaching the gospel message”. The elders wanted to “maintain their traditions”, meaning they wanted to maintain ancestral worship. They did not want to hear the truth (John 8:32). Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) had a very similar experience, the elders of that church rejected his “gospel preaching”. Further than that, Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) recognized that “today’s people are so confused when it comes to worship”.

There are pastors in local churches who practise syncretism – preaching from God’s Word, yet also worshipping their ancestors and encouraging their congregants to follow suit.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Mhlophe (2015:188) states that “...there are denominations in South Africa who have changed their liturgy so that it includes the veneration of the dead as part of their services”. Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) offers support for this change when he states that “in the African church liturgy, they use ‘camagu’ instead of ‘amen’”. From the website of the Icamagu Institute (n.d.), one will discover that: “‘Camagu’ is a Xhosa term that is used in all the activities that are associated with ancestors. Camagu broadly means, ‘Be honoured’, ‘Thank you’, ‘Let it be so’, ‘I have heard’, ‘I promise’, ‘Give respect, dignity and spirituality in the African context’”. These examples demonstrate how the churches in this area, and even further afield, have welcomed ancestral

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<sup>22</sup> Rev. Saffa (19 Nov. 2014), Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014), Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014), Mr Zazi (6 Nov. 2014), Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014), Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014), Mr Vellem (6 May 2015), Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015), and Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) all reported on pastors from various local, Christian churches who preach from the Bible, but also encourage ancestral worship.

worship with open arms. Mhlophe (2015:74-75) categorically states that “by encouraging their children to consult witchdoctors and the dead, parents in South Africa have passed a culture of rebellion from one generation to the next... You cannot ignore man’s spiritual condition when evaluating his ideas and the institutions he has established”. These parents have rebelled against God, having established ways of worship that are contrary to God’s Word. They have chosen to practise syncretism, or simply to follow the ways of ancestral worship, in spite of God’s command to worship him and him alone. Ancestral worship is practised as a religion; it simply becomes part of the religious life of many African people.

Bae (2007:45) acknowledges that the “sense of *ubuntu* and brotherhood within the [African Independent Churches] is one of the reasons why ancestor veneration remains a significant element in these churches”. He further states (2007:51) that “in the traditional religious context a person’s actions from birth to death serve to bind him or her as a communal being to everyone around him/her...sacrificial meals are a symbolic manifestation of this unity between the family/community and ancestors”. This serves to highlight the religious nature of ancestral worship.

Furthermore, the spiritual aspect of ancestral worship runs much deeper than mere fetishes, or visits to a sangoma, for instance. There is tremendous spiritual warfare playing out, even beyond the African context (cf. Jn 10:10; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12). Mhlophe (2015:196) explains the relevant issue of spiritual manipulation and declares the following:

Followers of this religion may think that they are succeeding in manipulating spirit forces but they are the ones who are being manipulated by spirits. These spirits ‘make’ unending demands so as to keep people bound.

The Xhosa people who practise ancestral worship are trapped by this phenomenon of trying to appease their ancestors, of trying to manipulate the spirit world in order to create harmony and stability. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) is of the view that “Africans have always been superstitious, but this stems from ignorance, because our forefathers did not know any better”. He explained that if someone recovered from an illness, then “they believe that the ancestors answered”. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) sees this kind of contact with the ancestors as “a covenant with death”; as does Mhlophe (2013:129). Such people are in bondage with Satan. Matshobane’s view may be perceived as too critical, but contact with the ancestors remains within a spiritual dimension. To add to this, Vosloo (n.d.:14) suggests that people seek the spirit world because “they know there is power beyond themselves and they desire the benefits of this supernatural power”. Experience has shown that this practice of contacting the dead, whether acknowledged as evil spiritual forces at work, or mere communication with deceased family members, has produced results. The support of such a statement concerning the results of ancestral contact will be taken

up below (6.4). For now, the attention is on the spiritual dimension of ancestral worship. It is part of the amaXhosa people's religion.

Steyne (1990:85) highlights the need for this communication, for example among the Xhosa people, when he states that "dependence on the ancestors provides continuity with the past, a reverence for established customs, an intense awareness of the immediacy of the spiritual world and a demonstrable dependence upon unseen powers". Ancestors are departed loved ones and the living believe that their living-dead are doing their bidding on their behalf. This connection with the parted runs deep. The religious, spiritual element is quite tangible. This is a sure reason why the amaXhosa are so influenced by this form of worship.

Ancestral worship has been passed down from generation to generation, whether it be in the name of culture, or tradition, or religion. The fact remains that ancestral worship runs deep and its influence cannot easily be avoided, and one major reason is that it is part of the people's religion here.

### **6.3 Ancestral worship spells fear**

Apart from the *cultural*, *traditional*, and *religious* aspects of ancestral worship, another major reason why Xhosa folk do not want to part from this type of worship is *fear*. Man aims to maintain harmony between the physical realm and the spiritual realm, because it is believed that the ancestors' "blessing can uplift the community, while their displeasure can upset the stability of the community" (Nürnberg, 2007:32). Steyne (1990:136) comments on reconciliation between the living and the dead and records that "the concern for reconciliation does not arise out of a sense of guilt or even shame, but rather that of fear". There is a genuine fear in the minds of people here. They will pray to their ancestors in times of need, usually making use of sangomas to consult the ancestors on their behalf. Mrs Somhlahlo (5 Jun. 2015) wanted to know from her ancestors about her daughter's so-called "power". Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) noted that an animal's bleating meant that "the ancestors have accepted the sacrifice", but if the animal did not cry they would "go to the witchdoctor to find the reason why".

This indicates the measures that are taken in order to maintain harmony between the living and the living-dead. There is certainly an element of fear attached, particularly when subsequent steps are taken, for example, seeing a witchdoctor. O'Donovan (1995:311) acknowledges this fear:

For a great many people, including some weak Christians, the fear of witches and witchcraft is the greatest single fear in their lives... the very fear of witchcraft can be so great that a person can develop serious symptoms of physical or mental illness. We must not underestimate the power of fear itself, whether there is actual witchcraft involved or not.

It is difficult to grasp the extent of the spiritual realm. But men engage in this realm in order to attempt to control their own situation. One reason for doing so is that of fear. Mhlophe (2015:205) suggests that people “are running away from the wrath of ancestors, social stigmatization and from evil that seems to lurk at every corner”. “Fear is accentuated by the ever present evil spirits, familiars, sorcerers and witches”, remarks Light (2012:111).

There seems to be a catch-twenty-two scenario. Those who worship their ancestors do whatever seems necessary to honour them. On the one hand the ancestors require certain rituals and the living respond; but on the other hand the living seek the ancestors’ help, which may include sorcery and witchcraft. This is a catalyst for fear. As Mhlophe puts it, they “are running” (2015:205). Ancestors can help, but can also bring calamity, hence the catch-twenty-two. Steyne (1990:166) purports that “whereas community seeks to bond people together in common concern, animism introduces aberration, division and even destruction”. Simply put, ancestors “are loved and feared” (Light, 2012:112). However one perceives it, there can be little doubt that fear plays a significant role in ancestral worship.

Further than that, the living are aware that one day they too will enter the world of the ancestors. In that case they must do all they can to ensure a smooth transition into that state. Light (2013:90-91) reflects this point as such:

Because of the role of ancestors in relation to the living, Africans are under tremendous pressure to ensure their dead relatives achieve and maintain ancestorhood as well as to do everything possible to attain and sustain ancestral status themselves after their death. The benefits for the living-dead and the living are so great that no African can be expected to be neutral on this matter.

For the amaXhosa, there is a circle of life. There is much to be kept in mind while living, in preparation for being part of the living-dead. It would suffice to say that fear is one reason why the cycle of ancestral worship continues from generation to generation.

Bae (2007:42), under a section entitled “Christianity as interloping missionary religion”, records that “Christianity does not address the deepest needs and fears of the African people” and suggests that “this is probably one of the reasons why many African Christians revert to the traditional practices associated with the traditional African religions in times of crisis”. Bae also comments (2007:50) on the positive and negative influences of ancestral spirits upon the living and purports that “this permeates the dread and fear of sorcery and fear of the influence of evil spirits”.

The pressure to conform is immense and fear plays a role no doubt. Take initiation rites, for example. Some boys fear this whole process of going to the bush, yet they fear the repercussions

if they do not conform. Rev. Zani (6 Aug. 2015) has been counselling such boys because they do not want to conform to the ancestral elements of the initiation process.<sup>23</sup> In an email received from Rev. Zani (4 Sep 2015), he stated that “the use of alcohol, inviting the dead spirits to ask for the ancestors’ protection, sexual immorality, and inviting liquor to seal the covenant” are some of these elements. For any Xhosa initiate then, there is a measure of fear in what he will face when he undergoes this procedure, but perhaps equally so, the fear of the repercussions for rejecting this traditional, cultural practice.

Included in this aspect of ancestral worship is the fear of death during such circumcision rituals. Vincent (2008:434) reports that “young Xhosa men are today no less eager to be circumcised than their forebears”. Vincent (2008:434) gives a brief report from 2006 on the number of deaths and injuries that were experienced in that year in the Eastern Cape: “...there were 19 deaths of initiates in the Eastern Cape reported by October alone (in other words excluding the end-of-year December initiation season). A further 63 Eastern Cape initiates underwent penile amputations and a total of 562 were hospitalised”. Such reports and deaths continue even today. Thus ancestral worship continues in spite of the fear attached to such practices.

This affects Xhosa boys. But girls are not exempt from the influence of ancestral worship. Despite the respect that girls are expected to pay the ‘men’ when they return from their initiation rites, there is also a rite that Xhosa girls face called “intonjani”. Girls also go through “a time away for teaching life orientation, mentoring, supporting and guidance” (Rev. Zani, 19 Oct. 2014). They are taught “the secrets of sex, reproduction, marriage and family life” (O’Donovan, 1995:232). Ancestral influence, therefore, covers the full spectrum of the community here.

For the people in King William’s Town, this fear is real and they attempt to seek power from all angles in order to establish harmony or stability. One way they do this is through ancestral worship. There is “a fear of the evil repercussions if they do not worship their ancestors” (Rev. Phelisile, 30 Jul. 2015). This practice must be maintained in order to maintain harmony. Turaki (1999:185) states that “spiritual and mystical powers have the tendency of decreasing or being lost all together if one is not always in touch with their sources”.

Mhlophe (2013:259) highlights the fear factor by presenting the following:

Many people would readily admit that it is fear that motivates them to keep the lines of communication between them and the dead open. They have been brought up to believe that there will be terrible consequences if a person ignores the dead... I was told that I am only safe from their wrath if I make a point of involving them in every area of my life.

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<sup>23</sup> The boys’ names are withheld as per counselling practice.

Ancestral worship has tremendous influence on people in King William's Town due to the fact that it spells fear. There is yet another major reason why people in this area are influenced by this phenomenon: ancestral worship seems to produce results.

#### **6.4 Ancestral worship seemingly works**

Research has shown that ancestral worship brings results – some good, some bad. This is another major factor which demonstrates the influence of ancestral worship amongst the amaXhosa. Simply stated: ancestral worship *works*. Mr Mathiso (27 Aug. 2014) is convinced of this:

During drought the elders of the community will assemble on a particular mountain to worship and plead with the ancestors to ask Qamata for rain. After the religious worship there, the rain would come. Some say that at times it would rain whilst they are still on the mountain.

Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) reports on a case where “a community member's goats were stolen. The man sought the advice of a sangoma, who told him exactly where the goats were. Upon investigation, the man found his goats, just as the sangoma had said”. Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) states that many Xhosa people believe that “visits with a sangoma work; people see results”. As reported earlier, Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) was once a sangoma who helped “men with low sexual libido”, and from his point of view his trade produced positive results. These are examples from the King William's Town area. The people who practise ancestral worship here do so because they believe that it works; they have seen its results.

Pastor Surprise Sithole (2012:24-25) grew up in Mozambique. His parents were sangomas. Part of his life story goes like this:

Did my parents have real power, or were they charlatans? The answer is both. Much of what they did was trickery, pure and simple. But I also know that they sincerely believed in the spirits, and I saw many strange events for which I have no other explanation besides the supernatural... Sometimes they would name people and ask the spirits to bring them to our door. The next day, the ones they had named would show up, crying and moaning about the burdens that had fallen on them.

The validity of the above accounts may be questioned by some, but those who were impacted by them will have little doubt, if any, that they were real. They believe that what they did ‘worked’ – it brought results. Vosloo (n.d.:19-20) explains that curses from sangomas “can even cause death... It is said of those in Johannesburg and Soweto who were once successful but now are found scratching through dustbins... have been cursed by a sangoma on behalf of a jealous family member, friends or neighbours”. This indicates the apparent effectiveness of ancestral worship.

Again, having been a primary school teacher the researcher has seen how children have been scarred as a result of visiting witchdoctors. Their parents and elders believe that ancestral worship works and so they take their children to see such practitioners, whether for protection or for healing. Vosloo (n.d.:9) purports that “instead of condemning ancestral worship, many have openly embraced it and want, if it were possible, the ‘best of both worlds’ – Christianity and the African culture”. Mhlophe (2015:196) argues that “people are not drawn into this world because they love it but because of how it benefits them... African religion is helping people to prevent misfortune and maximize good fortune”. Such people are pragmatists – if it works, use it.

There are many people involved in this type of worship. There must be a reason for it. For many, the reason is that it works. Mr Ndyalivane (20 Oct. 2014) states that “ancestors appear to you in a dream” and “everything of yours will go well”. In much the same sense, Steyne (1990:138) suggests that all sacrifices and offerings relate to the well-being of the offerer and/or sacrificer which issues in his success in life”. Ancestral worship is practised by many Xhosa folk in this area because it seems to produce results. Light (2012:125) records that “for Africans, the positive results stemming from appeasing ancestors confirm the validity of the ancestral cult”. It is a cultural and traditional phenomenon and supposed results have been realized over many years. Hence, its influence continues unabated and, therefore, tradition may be the real reason why this form of worship continues. Nonetheless, the results that it brings is another sure reason for ancestral worship to continue. Mhlophe (2015:154) declares that the devil “does not mind people knowing about religion, philosophy and man’s tradition, as long as they do not know their identity in Christ”. In other words, even if people have been misled by this phenomenon, it continues because it seems to work. Nürnberger (2007:156) suggests that “individuals have no right to question the inherited structures”. Their argument would be along the lines of “this has worked in the past, therefore, do not question it.” Ancestral worship influences a community because it seems to work.

Other reasons for not wanting to, or not being able to, escape the influence of ancestral worship could be those such as tragic events in one’s life, the pressure from community to conform, the African Renaissance (returning to African roots), and so forth. Ancestral worship seems to be a solution to man’s problems and many are its advocates. Nonetheless, the research has attempted to demonstrate the overwhelming influence of ancestral worship on the King William’s Town community and why such advocates struggle to let it go. The reasons that have been cited here are that it is part of *culture and tradition*; it is part of *religion*; it spells *fear*; and ancestral worship seemingly *works*. With all of the above detail in mind, including the foregoing chapters, the dissertation now attempts to present possible ways for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and in so doing address the influence of this phenomenon of ancestral worship.

## **CHAPTER 7 A PARADIGM FOR THE CHURCH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MISSIO DEI AND ADDRESS ANCESTRAL WORSHIP**

The whole thrust of the *missio Dei*, or mission of God, is to reconcile man to God and to God alone. Ancestral worshippers have set themselves up in opposition to the worship of the only true God. Therefore, those who follow Christ as Lord and Saviour ought to follow God's leading as they attempt to participate in God's work of calling people back to himself. The church must tread cautiously and aim to handle the issue of ancestral worship with extreme care. There is no one on earth who is without sin (2 Ch 6:36), so the approach towards any paradigm of such nature must be one of humility and understanding and in full reliance upon God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those in King William's Town who are called to participate in the mission of God should listen carefully to the advocates of ancestral worship, in an attempt to understand them fully, to understand their side of the situation. Only then can a more effective paradigm be established.

The teachings of Scripture leave us little choice but to engage with those who worship their ancestors. As already stated, one needs to understand the context of ancestral worshippers more fully and thereafter respond in an appropriate manner. Nürnberger (2007:106) states that "ancestor veneration as such should not be condoned, but those who are under the spell of ancestral authority should be accepted into the fellowship of believers without being under pressure". Upon reaching saturation level with respect to the interviews, more than half of the candidates agreed that the only way to deal with the influence of ancestral worship was "by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour" (Rev. Saffa, 19 Nov. 2014); only "those who have found true faith in Christ" (Rev. Zani, 19 Oct. 2014) will be able to let go of this form of worship and thereby also participate in the *missio Dei*. The interviewees who agreed with such sentiments were those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who would not practise syncretism. Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) declared: "I know many Xhosa people who have only Jesus as their Mediator (1 Tim 2:5), and who are truly people of God (1 Pt 2:9). Many lives have changed through Scripture and in our current context many testify to this reality". These are people who have been set free from spirits and from fear. They have been delivered from the deception of the devil. Mhlophe (2015:317) makes a pertinent remark: "Knowing your identity in Christ helps you to understand the thing about you that the devil seeks to steal or distort". People who worship other gods have been deceived. They are following other gods because they do not know the truth, or the truth has been distorted. Vosloo (n.d.:53) summarily states that ancestral worship is "demonic and typical of one who does not have a proper relationship with Jesus Christ... One must choose either the living God or the dead".

People outside the kingdom of God can come into God's kingdom as they begin to worship God alone. This kingdom of God can be succinctly defined as such: "The kingdom of God affirms God's present rule and points to Christ's final rule on earth in the future" (Hiebert, 2008:278). God will not tolerate polytheism, the worship of many deities, or any other form of worship. God created mankind to worship him alone and "God holds people responsible for their decisions and their behaviour" (O'Donovan, 1995:88).

The church is privileged to participate in the *missio Dei* and with that privilege comes responsibility. Grudem (1994:867) states that "we can understand the purposes of the church in terms of ministry to God, ministry to believers, and ministry to the world". Grudem (1994:867-868) goes on to present these purposes under the headings, "worship", "nurture", and "evangelism and mercy". These are ways in which the church can participate in the *missio Dei*, fulfilling both its privilege and its responsibility, particularly in the light of ancestral worship in King William's Town. In that way the church becomes missional. Goheen (2011:191) explains that "to describe the church as 'missional' today means (1) that it participates in God's mission; (2) that it continues the mission of Old Testament Israel; (3) that it continues the kingdom mission of Jesus; and (4) that it continues the witness of the early church". In this way one can see that the contemporary church, like the early church, is part of the grand narrative of the Bible: "A church that is governed by the Bible cannot evade the missional thrust of the God and the gospel revealed there" (Wright, 2006:44). Such sentiments serve to guide one in establishing a paradigm for the church to more effectively participate in the *missio Dei*. Acts 2:41-47 includes elements of the ministry of the early church: worship (*leiturgia*), service (*diakonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), communion (*koinonia*), and teaching (*didache*) – (cf. Bock, 2007:146-156). Boice (1997:56) described this church as "a Bible-studying church that practiced fellowship. It also worshipped and evangelized". These essential elements should be seen in the church today as it strives to participate in the *missio Dei*, in each local setting and to the ends of the earth. Goheen (2011:191) states that "God charges [believers] to live for his glory and to participate in his redemptive work".

What follows then is a *paradigm for the church to participate in the missio Dei as it attempts to address ancestral worship*. Unfortunately, space does not allow for a fuller rendering of each aspect of this paradigm, but the researcher has attempted to highlight a broad framework. For a fuller understanding of each aspect, further study and research would be necessary.

## **7.1 Worship God alone**

In order for change to take place, in order for candidates to deal with the influence of ancestral worship in their lives, they need to *worship God alone*. Vosloo (n.d.:31-39) formulates seven steps to deliverance and in his first step, "repentance", he states that "the right concept of who God is,

should be introduced and emphasized continuously". There should be an understanding of ancestral worship, an understanding of Christianity, and an understanding of the spirit world, to name but a few steps towards a paradigm for the church to address the matter. But if one does not begin with a proper understanding of who *God* is, one cannot render God the proper worship that he expects and deserves. It is encouraging to note that "African life is rich with an awareness of the Supreme Being" (O'Donovan, 1995:41). However, the challenge is that many people have a distorted view of God. One can only worship God if one has a fuller understanding of who God is. Grudem (1994:444) recognizes that, because of sin entering the world, "the image of God in us is distorted". For example, God is thought to be so highly exalted that "he must be approached through intermediaries" (O'Donovan, 1995:41) and this often leads to syncretism. Others believe "in one supreme deity...but few people actually practise it in pure form...men seek out the lesser powers to meet their desires" (Steyne, 1990:35). These views and concepts about God must be cleared up in order to understand what it means to worship God alone. Mhlophe (2015:206) explains that many Africans believe in divine beings other than God:

They claim not to worship these divine beings but feel duty bound to honour them. It is to these divine beings that many Africans have actually entrusted the security of their lives and they believe that their success in life depends on these divine beings...excluding these divine beings in any part of their life would leave that part vulnerable to spiritual attacks. The danger in this way of thinking is that it encourages fatalism...the idea that all events in a person's life are determined by fate and therefore inevitable.

But God calls us to worship him, to seek him, and to "choose life" (Dt 30:19). Commenting on animism, Steyne (1990:167) professes that "in spite of all its power plays...it cannot save man from himself, nor can it save him from slavery to the powers of darkness". God is the only answer.

God is "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19), "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Ex 3:15), "the God of the Hebrews" (Ex 3:18), YHWH (the Lord), as the Israelites knew and understood him. "The Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. There is no other" (Dt 4:39). God "is a holy God; he is a jealous God" (Jos 21:19). We are commanded to worship him alone (Ex 20:3-6). As difficult as it is for mere mortals to understand the Creator fully, one can know God because God reveals himself in nature (Gen 1; Ps 104; Rom 1:20), and also through his Son, Jesus Christ (Jn 14:9; Heb 1:3). "Christ Jesus shows us who God is as far as we can comprehend him" (Hiebert, 2008:266). God also reveals himself to us through the Bible, the Word of God (Jn 1:1-3), and also through the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, who helps us understand who God is (Jn 16:13). Wright (2006:92) explains that "it was God's purpose that ultimately all nations would come to know the name, the glory, the salvation and the mighty acts of YHWH and worship him alone as God". We may never understand God fully and exhaustively, but as Grudem (1994:150) points out, we will "never tire in delighting in the discovery

of more and more of his excellence and of the greatness of his works". This God is the God whom mankind should rely on to intervene in his life, the God whom one should trust, the God with whom one should have a loving, reverent relationship, and the only God whom all men should worship.

When those who worship their ancestors witness the body of Christ worshipping the only true God, then they too would be more inclined to follow suit. In the same way that "Israel knew God in order that through them all nations would come to know God" (Wright, 2006:262), so believers today worship God in order that others would be drawn to God to do likewise. This is often referred to as the "centripetal" role of God's chosen people (Wright, 2006:524; Goheen, 2011:197) – the church participates in the *missio Dei* and draws others to God to worship him alone. The church "is to be an attractive community that draws the nations to God by the shining example of its own life" (Goheen, 2011:197). Bosch (1991:168, 169) purports that the church exists "for the sake of the world ... that community of people who are involved in creating new relationships among themselves and in society at large and, in doing this, bearing witness to the lordship of Christ". This is the role of believers; this is their participation in the *missio Dei* for the sake of the world. In relation to other gods, Steyne (1990:175) states the following:

God's response to His people is one of love and integrity, and in keeping with His character is one of holiness, love, righteousness, kindness, grace and mercy. These qualities are not found in any other god. He is the God who is Wholly Other. He is the God to be celebrated and not appeased. He is to be enjoyed and worshipped because of His sheer goodness. He is to be trusted, for from of old He has consistently kept His promises... The preceding generations have proved this to be so.

When people begin to understand who this "Wholly Other" God is, then they can begin to deal with the influence of ancestral worship. O'Donovan (1995:41, 42) acknowledges that "the traditional view of God in Africa is very close to the biblical revelation of Almighty God", but he also emphasizes the following:

It is clear in the Bible that God wants to have a personal, direct relationship with human beings. He and he alone is Lord and God. He does not want people to honour, venerate, worship, submit to, or seek help from, any other gods or spirits. Here lies a deadly error of traditional religions all over the world. There is no one whom God will accept as a mediator between God and human beings except Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5).

Those in King William's Town who worship their ancestors need this understanding of God. Davis (2015:159) points out that "every culture on earth, small or large, has within it that which reflects the image of God and that which reflects the fallen nature of the human race". It is the former that needs to be absolutely clear, in an effort to lead ancestral worshippers away from this harmful practice and to begin to worship God alone. The latter – man's fallen nature – also needs to be addressed, so that people know what to avoid, or what to let go of. When people understand who

God is, they can then begin to change, turning from worshipping other gods to worshipping the one true God. When the church fulfils its role of worshipping God alone, then others would be drawn to do the same, to worship God in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

Packer (2010: 66-67) highlights the importance of knowing God when he purports that the truths about God “are the foundation of theistic religion, and until they are grasped the rest of the gospel message will seem neither cogent nor relevant... We must know what it means to call God Creator before we can grasp what it means to speak of him as Redeemer”. Those who worship their ancestors lack a proper understanding of God. As noted already, “the Supreme Being is not usually sought out, because he is perceived to be so great and remote that little may be achieved by attempting to come before him” (Ferdinando, 1999:31). This perception is incorrect, for God is “not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24-28). Similarly, Light (2012:131) notes that “there is far more contact with the ancestors, deities...life-force, and traditional diviners and healers than with God”. This view of the Supreme Being cannot be compared with Creator God. God is a personal God, interested in and concerned for all mankind. A distorted view of God will not help people escape the influence of ancestral worship. Syncretism is rife in King William’s Town. But when men and women see true believers worshipping God alone, it may lead them to turn away from worshipping their ancestors and to turn to worship God alone, thus avoiding syncretism.

Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) and his wife were both sangomas. Their lives were changed through the preaching of the gospel message and the work of the Holy Spirit. This took place under God’s sovereign will, no doubt, but a proper understanding of God was a catalyst for this change. At the end of the interview, Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) insisted that the following be included in this research: “My desire is to see unsaved leaders of the Zion church turn away from ancestral worship”. This couple has a better understanding of God, Creator of heaven and earth, hence the change in their lifestyles and new commitment to God in worshipping him alone.

Those who have been practising ancestral worship will find it difficult to avoid its influence, particularly for reasons mentioned in chapter 6. But God should come first in people’s lives. God comes before tradition or culture, God comes before pragmatism, God comes before one’s ancestors. That is why, in the first commandment (Ex 20:3), God commanded mankind to have no other gods before him. Mhlophe (2015:62) states that “your eternal salvation does not depend on submitting to culture but on submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ.” And God makes it possible through the work of his Son, which will be addressed in 7.2. Nürnberger (2007:241) states that “those who are under the spell of ancestral authority and subject to the fear of uncanny forces...are welcome in the community of believers. God’s suffering, redeeming and transforming acceptance of the unacceptable restores the dignity of all human beings, whatever their cultural and religious dispositions may be”. Those who worship their ancestors *can* be reconciled to God.

God has made it possible. Hiebert (2008:326) proposes that “people can enter the kingdom with a minimum understanding, but also that this is only the beginning of a lifelong process of growth in understanding and godly living”. People need to turn away from serving foreign gods and turn to worship God alone, and as they do so they will grow more and more in their understanding of God. The church needs to be responsible and exemplary in its worship. God commands it for the benefit of himself, for his people, and for those who have not yet turned to him. Similar to Bosch and Goheen’s comments recorded above, Wright (2006:62) acknowledges that “the church was made for mission – God’s mission”. The church ought to worship God alone and be a catalyst for others to do the same. In the same way that Israel was chosen to worship God and so attract other nations to God, so too should believers today worship God with the view of attracting non-believers to worship God alone. Wright (2006:186-187) rightly writes:

God’s goal of blessing the nations requires not only that the nations eventually come to abandon their gods and bring their worship before the living God alone... God’s mission also requires that God’s own people in the meantime should preserve the purity and exclusiveness of their worship of the living God, and resist the adulterating syncretisms that surround them. An obedient and covenantally loyal Israel would be seen by the nations and the result would be praise and glory to YHWH the living God (Dt 4:6-8; 28:9-10).

Goheen (2011:192, 204) refers to Christians as “a ‘come and join us’ people” who need to “embody the good news in a world that needs to see it”. Thus the initial stage in the church’s paradigm to participate in the *missio Dei* and address ancestral worship would be the *worship of God* alone, with the view of attracting others to do likewise. The next stage in the paradigm is to *preach the gospel*, the good news of Jesus Christ.

## **7.2 Preach the gospel**

As the majority of the interviewees proposed, the only way for people to deal with this form of worship and to escape its influence, is “by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour” (Rev. Saffa, 19 Nov. 2014); “by giving your life to Jesus” (Rev. Phelisile, 30 Jul. 2015). But one needs to understand who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. This can be done through the faithful *preaching of the gospel*, like the preaching that Peter practised at Pentecost (Acts 2:21-40). Those who worship their ancestors need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ and the redemption that is offered through his work on the cross, “and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Although man was once in a perfect relationship with God, there came a time when this relationship was tarnished (Genesis 3). From that time forward, man has been born in sin and consequently needs reconciliation with God in order to restore that relationship. Satan, a fallen angel of God (Rev 12:9), came to deceive mankind (Gen 3:1) in order to spoil that perfect

relationship between man and God. Those who worship their ancestors have been deceived. Nonetheless, their disobedience has left them in a precarious predicament. Despite the deceptive tactics of the devil, man is still accountable to God (Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10). The devil tempts us, but we take the steps of sin. One cannot blame the devil. Man is responsible for his actions. He needs to hear the gospel of Christ in order to deal with this problem and to have the relationship with God restored. Man has followed the ways of the world. The church is God's instrument in leading such people back to the truth and preaching is one way of initializing this change. Goheen (2011:204) states that "preaching that does not invite God's people to embody a different story of the world than the one offered by the dominant culture will leave them vulnerable to the idolatrous story of the culture". People need to hear the truth of the gospel message. Nürnberger (2007:115) explains it as such:

The self-disclosure of God is hidden in a most horrific event, the crucifixion of Christ. The cross is anything but survival, redemption and blessing... God has done this on purpose. He wants to assure us that if he can turn such a deadly curse (the cross) into life and blessing, he is also capable of dealing redemptively with our own smaller or larger catastrophes and predicaments. God wants us to trust him, in spite of all experiences to the contrary.

This shows that those who have turned away from God can still be reconciled to him, through Jesus Christ. God is holy and just and loving. This is who God is and the work that he has accomplished through his Son. In spite of years of exposure to and involvement in ancestral worship, people can be set free from its grip as preachers share the truth with them (cf. Jn 8:32). Believers participate in the *missio Dei* as they preach the gospel to those who do not know the good news of Jesus Christ and his atoning work on the cross (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17).

Since the fall, and even today, man's heart has become corrupt; his mind has been deceived; he has chosen to follow other gods and worship them instead. Erickson (1985:603) states it thus: "Just as for Adam and Eve, the consequence of sin, for anyone who believes in the judgement of God, is that God becomes feared. He is no longer one's closest friend, but is consciously avoided". Preaching the gospel is an important aspect in the ministry of the church. The apostles appointed seven men to wait on tables so that they would not "neglect the ministry of the word of God" (Acts 2:2b). In this paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and address ancestral worship, preaching plays a pivotal role. This preaching must remain faithful to the Word of God, the gospel message that is the power of God to transform people's lives (Rom 1:16). As was mentioned in 5.1, some pastors will preach from the Word of God but they will also practise ancestral worship without reservation. Preaching by those who do not walk close to the Lord will be powerless. To deliver the gospel message more effectively requires an intimate relationship with the Lord. God holds all mankind accountable (Jas 3:1). We ought to hold each other accountable too (cf. Acts 17:11; Col 3:16), particularly in this area of preaching. A paradigm for

the church to participate in the *missio Dei* should include preaching. Furthermore, such a paradigm should also include *prayer*.

### **7.3 The importance of prayer**

*Prayer* is a vital cog in the ministry of the church, often referred to as the 'engine room' of the church. Goheen (2011:207) declares that "the church that does not learn to pray fervently and corporately will never become a truly missional church". Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) acknowledges that ancestral worship is "a spiritual matter". He explains that "evil spirits are involved in ancestral worship, but the people will not admit it". O'Donovan (1995:195) declares that "the most widespread work of demons in the world is the work of lying and deceiving people...demons also lie and persuade people to believe lies". Along with this, Mhlophe (2013:132) suggests that "lies are seductive and have become more attractive than the truth". This indicates the depth of ancestral worship. There is a spiritual battle waging and to be more effective in this battle, one needs prayer. Paul reminded the Ephesian church to "be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (6:18). To support this, Steyne (1990:218) suggests that "the Scriptures, along with an active prayer life, must evermore be the central focus and motivation in the life of the church member. Christians have to know that they are at war with gods of power".

Since the disobedience of Adam and Eve, man has become a sinner having fallen into the devil's trap of questioning God's authority and his character (cf. Gen 3:1b). From then on, man fell into temptation and doubt. Not only did man sin, but he entered into a state of sinfulness. Erickson (1985:578) affirms that "it is not simply that we are sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners". Man seeks to honour God, or god(s), and in so doing, he worships and responds as he deems fit. There are expectations that he attempts to meet, whether through sacrifice or offerings or prayer. This may include certain morals and ethics. Good behaviour or appropriate responses may bring good fortune or may help to appease the spirits. Steyne (1990:39) intimates that "his religion must be one of works, and he must have faith in his own ability to make things work in his favour". The research has shown such elements: "sacrifices, offerings, taboos, charms, fetishes, ceremonies, even witchcraft and sorcery" (Steyne, 1990:60). However, Mhlophe (2015:33) expresses that "even if man's behaviour improves, it is the state of his heart and standing before God that needs urgent attention (Galatians 3:11)". Good behaviour or good morals and ethics are not purely what God desires. What counts are hearts fully committed to God alone. God must be first in people's lives and there must be no other gods before him. Man's dependence must be on God alone.

There has to be a change of heart, a turning to God alone as Lord of one's life. Praying to ancestors is taboo in God's eyes. Mhlophe (2013:166) declares that "as long as people believe

that their ancestors are helping them it will be difficult to wean them off from consulting the dead". Man needs to see how his heart and mind have been corrupted by the devil's schemes. The devil has come to deceive and to destroy (Jn 10:10; 1 Pt 5:8). O'Donovan (1995:194) shares the following thoughts concerning man and his ancestors:

It is significant that concern for the spirits of ancestors is found in non-Christian religions in many parts of the world. This is not surprising, because people feel a strong emotional attachment to their ancestors and relatives. Traditional religions throughout the world which seek the help of ancestral spirits, reveal a consistent pattern of belief which has very effectively deceived people. Such beliefs have kept many people from finding a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

This is the state of sinful man and also an indication of how Satan has 'succeeded' in deceiving mankind. Ancestral worshippers would not agree though. They argue that such communication is not demonic, or of the devil, but communication with their ancestors, and that such contact is absolutely necessary. Mhlophe (2013:159) warns that one must distinguish between "ancestors, which are our forefathers, and the spirits that make an appearance in people's dreams". However, one cannot communicate with the dead and vice versa. Worshipping anything or anyone other than God is unacceptable to him. God is to be worshipped alone and part of such worship involves prayer. God commands his followers to call unto him (Isa 55:6; Jer 33:3).

The church needs to realize the importance of prayer and its leaders should lead by example. God answers the prayers of his saints according to his divine purposes (cf. Mt 6:33; Jas 5:16; Rev 8:3-5). An unbelieving people need to see God's people fervent in prayer. In this way they participate in the *missio Dei* and thus draw others to the only true God. Bock (2007:151) emphasises that the community of believers "seeks God's direction and is dependent upon God because God's family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord's direction". Thus *prayer* is a crucial element in a paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and to address ancestral worship more effectively. Prayer is a crucial catalyst to help those who are trapped in ancestral worship, to set them free and to have them believe in God alone.

A further aspect in this paradigm is the belief in and obedience to *the authority of God's Word*.

#### **7.4 The authority of God's Word**

There are regular references to Jesus as the Word of God (Jn 1:1, 14), but in this section the focus is on the written Word of God, the Bible. In a paradigm for the church to address the influence of ancestral worship, *the authority of God's Word* needs to be included for without it not much teaching about God and about the things of God can take place. The 66 books of the Bible are the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God, which "is useful for teaching, rebuking,

correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Man is sinful and wayward yet God has given him the Bible to direct him back to God. Even though the words were written down by men, these authors were led by the Holy Spirit to record God’s Word accurately (2 Tim 3:16; Pt 1:20-21). Grudem (1994:50) includes the following on the Word of God:

Once again it must be noted that these words are still considered to be God’s own words, even though they are written down mostly by human beings and always in human language. Still, they are absolutely authoritative and absolutely true: to disobey them or disbelieve them is a serious sin and brings judgement from God (1 Cor 14:37; Jer 36:29-31).

This is the seriousness of this document, the Bible. It is not just a history textbook, or man’s interpretation of history and of God. When Peter addressed the crowd at Pentecost, he referred to the Scriptures that the people knew (cf. Acts 2:16) – the Old Testament. Today we have the authoritative, inspired Word of God – both the Old Testament and the New Testament – to direct our lives. Hiebert (2008:266) affirms that “the Bible itself is the history of God’s progressive revelation of himself to humans”. It is the truth about God and his creation and the Holy Spirit helps people to understand it and to interpret it accurately (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13-14). People’s lives have been changed by God and often the Bible is the catalyst. Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015), for example, shared about how his life changed when he heard the Word of God: “Unknown African preachers preached on Exodus 20:3. The Word of God started to penetrate and told the evil in me to get out”. At that stage, Rev. Phelisile was a practicing witchdoctor. He recounts that he was drunk, but he “sobered up immediately. I took the necklaces and small bottle and gave it to the preachers”. (These items are used by witchdoctors for protection.) This is a demonstration of how God works through the preaching of his Word, the Bible. Jesus told those who believed in him that if they obeyed his teaching they “will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). In a sense, this truth of God’s Word set Rev. Phelisile free from sin. God’s Word will not return without its aim being accomplished (Isa 55:11).

In reference to those who practice Christianity and African Traditional Religion simultaneously (i.e. syncretism), Mhlophe (2013:302) declares that “non-Christians do not submit to the Bible”. But a choice must be made. People either follow God wholeheartedly, or they are not truly following him (cf. Rev 3:16). This is the issue with syncretism where people follow more than one god. As the research has shown (5.1), many people in King William’s Town attempt to follow God, but they also follow their traditional religion, or other practices. Those who are so influenced by ancestral worship need the truth of the Bible to penetrate their hearts and minds, as it did Rev. Phelisile, and numerous others in history. As recorded earlier, Steyne (1990:218) suggests the following:

The Scriptures, along with an active prayer life, must evermore be the central focus and motivation in the life of the church member. Christians have to know that they are at war with gods of power... It is Satan's master plan to keep people walking by faith with the God revealed in the Bible. Therefore it will always be essential to submit all religious experience, teaching and methodology to the Bible – God's Word. Short of this Christianity will be less than biblical, and Christians will live in defeat.

This is a tremendous challenge, but it is true. People need God's Word in order to understand him better and to see why ancestral worship should not be allowed to influence people so much in King William's Town, or further afield.

The Bible contains the gospel message, the good news of Jesus' *incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly session* (cf. Packer, 2010:73), and if people are to turn to Christ they need the Bible, or at least, they need someone to share this good news with them (Rom 10:13-15). Ferdinando (1999:403) explains that "all the powers of evil are created beings, and the Bible consistently affirms their subjection to the creator, even in their rebellion". Those who follow other gods mostly do so due to ignorance, as recorded earlier from Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015): "this stems from ignorance, because our forefathers did not know any better". People need the truth, the truth contained in God's Word (Jn 17:17).

However, there is the danger of misinterpreting God's Word, or twisting the truth to suit certain needs. Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) highlighted the fact that many folk in this area "follow people who profess to be appointed by God and the ancestors to lead them... They bent or merged Christianity with their traditions to suit them". Mhlophe (2015:42) warns that "as a Christian you do not have the option of a neutral zone when a conflict arises between God's Word and some part of your life". We may never understand the Bible fully, yet Hiebert (2008:267) reminds us that "through careful study of the Bible and discussions in the church as a hermeneutical community, we can at least become aware of the reality that our own understandings of Scripture are deeply shaped by our own worldviews and therefore learn to read the Bible with fresh eyes". Ultimately, one must rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13) to interpret the Scriptures as accurately as one can. Boice (1997:56) highlights the fact that the early church studied the Word: "A Spirit-filled church always studies the apostolic teaching. It is a learning church that grounds its experiences in and tests those experiences by the Word of God". Believers know and understand that the Word is living and active (Heb 4:12) and always accomplishes its purpose (Isa 55:11). Therefore, participants in the *missio Dei* should be demonstrating such practice for themselves and for the sake of their neighbours. Ancestral worshippers need to see and come to believe the authority of God's Word for their lives.

In this brief section, one can gauge how important the *authority of God's Word* is as part of a paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and to deal with the influence of ancestral worship. Moving on to another part of that paradigm, one needs to understand the new identity, *the new identity in Christ*, as one is freed from ancestral worship and as one begins to follow Christ Jesus alone. This then is a fourth aspect of a paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and address ancestral worship.

## **7.5 The new identity in Christ**

Following on from the previous section on Scripture, there is the issue of the *new identity in Christ*. In the Foreword of Mhlophe's *Christianity and the veneration of the ancestors*, Floyd McClung (2013:7) purports that "the Bible is not a treatise on Western culture, or a defence of African culture, but it presents a third way, what we may call 'kingdom culture', where God rules and the teaching of God's Word is the truth that judges whether a culture is fulfilling its intended purpose, or not." McClung highlights the issue of "kingdom culture". This is part of the new identity. People turn to God and join a "kingdom culture". Goheen (2011:208) refers to this as "a contrast community". Goheen goes on: "We live as part of our culture, and yet as a contrast community we challenge the religious spirits that are incompatible with the kingdom of God". These are people who are living for God's purpose, people participating in the *missio Dei*. This is the new identity.

The Bible teaches that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17). There needs to be change in order for this new identity to be recognized, and this identity is in Christ Jesus. Erickson (1985:944) reassures us that "we all need to undergo metamorphosis if we are to please God". Paul, addressing the Galatians, explains that those who are joined to Christ – this new identity – have "crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" and they "live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:24, 25). The new identity involves a change from the worship of other gods to the worship of the only true God. In order for the church to establish a paradigm for participating in the *missio Dei*, proponents in this participation need a new identity. In Paul's letter to the Galatians he also explains this new identity whereby he lives by faith in Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Therefore, in order for people to avoid the influence of ancestral worship and to begin to worship God alone, they will have a new identity.

The new identity involves taking off and putting on. It is about dealing with past sinful habits and replacing them with new righteous, holy behaviour (cf. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:1-17). When one attempts to empty oneself of evil behaviour and does not repent of the sin, nor replace it with the things of God, then evil can return or continue as before (cf. Mt 12:45). When Rev. Phelisile (30

Jul. 2015) had given his life to the Lord, he subsequently faced a serious trial. He was “tempted to return to a witchdoctor for help” but his daughter encouraged him to remain faithful to God. The new identity requires a complete change of belief and lifestyle or the temptation to return to sinful ways would seem more enticing – such as syncretism. Vosloo (n.d.:40) warns that “deliverance from the lingering power of sin is important”. In dealing with those who are tempted to return to former, evil practices, Light (2012:386) suggests that “white leaders are usually inexperienced here, so the help of an African pastor in demonstrating spiritual warfare is necessary”. The spiritual battle is intense (Eph 6:12). Turning from worshipping other gods to worshipping the living God is not easy, but God is all powerful and the devil is limited in his exploits (Rom 8:28, 31-39).

The research has shown the pressure faced by those who turn from worshipping their ancestors. In such cases, Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) recommends that “we need to create a new Christian community where those who have turned from ancestral worship can get support”. This falls in line with the “kingdom culture” addressed earlier. There needs to be support for those who become participants in the *missio Dei*, and that is the role of the church – to carry each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2). Bock (2007:155) shares the following thought:

The portrait of the early church in Acts shows that community and the welfare of the group were a priority. This attitude reflected spiritual maturity that allowed the church to grow. In the case of this earliest community, the believers’ preaching was matched by their community, making a powerful testimony for their mission.

This reflects the ‘*koinonia*’ amongst believers, their life in communion. A prime example of carrying each other’s burdens may be seen in boys who seek to undergo circumcision in a Christian way. Rev. Zani (4 Sep. 2015) records the following:

The Christian boys from Christian families have a better chance to turn things down because they agree to go to the bush, but conditionally: 1. they don’t invite their ancestors to watch over them – they call on the name of the Living God; and 2. they don’t use or buy any alcohol, cigarettes, or dagga to keep them under the influence – they use and bring their Bibles for reading and sharing with other boys. To the Christian boys the bush becomes the mission field. Though they face much opposition, they carry on with their Bible study and evangelism. When the Christian boys come out of the bush it becomes a revival and many unbelievers who attend are saved.

There are indeed many challenges which face initiates in this period in their lives, but they are willing to face the opposition in the name of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They make a stand against ancestral worship in spite of the element of fear. But they support each other and also receive support from members of the church. This is their new identity in Christ. Goheen (2011:215) states that “it is the working together of both word and deed in the fullness of the church’s witness that makes the gospel credible”. The world is always watching and participants in the *missio Dei* need to honour God in word and deed.

This, of course, is not to suggest that the kingdom culture, those of the new identity, becomes an isolated entity. They are still in the world, but not of the world (Jn 17:16). Sanneh (2004:46) warns of Christians either isolating themselves from the world, which he calls “quarantine”, or being totally of the world, which he refers to as “accommodation”. He declares the following rather:

Both quarantine and accommodation in fact threaten religious integrity: the one by cutting us off from the world, and the other by surrendering to it. Reform, on the other hand, points to God’s action at the stage where the message intersects the world of culture, and mission is the promise and engagement with that action.

This highlights the fact that God has a plan to reconcile man to himself, the *missio Dei*, and Christians, with their new identity in Christ, should be part of that plan – instead of following the ways of the world. God’s plan is to reform mankind to his ways (Rom 12:2). Their identity should be in Christ first, then in other aspects such as nationality, or culture, for example. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) declares that “you are a Christian first and then an African; you lose your identity, but it is now in Christ (2 Cor 5:17)”.

This then is a further part of a paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and address ancestral worship and its influence in King William’s Town, this *new identity in Christ*. When people see the Christians’ new identity in Christ and are exposed to their obedient lifestyle, they will come to know God as the only true God who makes himself known through the lives of his people. The research now turns to a final aspect to be included in a paradigm for the church’s participation in the *missio Dei*, that of *teaching and discipleship*.

## **7.6 Teaching and discipleship**

One may understand the need to *worship God alone*, to hear *the gospel message*, to realize the *importance of prayer*, to accept the *authority of God’s Word*, and to acknowledge the *new identity in Christ*, but all of these aspects of such a paradigm need thorough *teaching* and effective *discipleship*. The local church needs to participate in the *missio Dei* as effectively as possible and so teaching and discipleship are necessary. The church exists for God’s mission and its ministry needs to be carried out as unto the Lord (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:23). Following on from the church’s ministry listed at the beginning of chapter 7, Bock (2007:147) states,

In Acts the speech not only describes a gospel presentation that is full of important Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology; it also portrays the fact that an appropriate response to this gospel can be described in various parallel ways. This message of hope from God is what the church witnesses to as it calls all people to believe.

This paradigm for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* attempts to do just that, to call people to “come and join us” (Goheen, 2011:192), but more than that, “not proclaiming, ‘Come to us!’ but

'Let us follow him!'" (Bosch, 1991:376). Israel was a light to the nations; today the church continues to participate in God's mission, the mission of Old Testament Israel, the kingdom mission of Jesus, and the witness of the early church (cf. Goheen, 2011:191-200). Members of the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). These elements are to be seen in the church today as its members participate in the *missio Dei*.

Reports on missionary endeavours have sometimes shown that faulty teaching and lack of proper discipleship have stunted potential church planting and church growth. Nürnberger (2007:40) suggests that Africans turned to other helpers because "the Christ they came to know through the message of the missionaries, subsequent indigenous leaders, even their own reading of the Bible, does not seem to have covered their most pressing spiritual needs". Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) mentioned this "faulty gospel" in the King William's Town context. Rev. Zani (19 Oct. 2014) went as far as saying that "the wrong impression that people believe is that the Bible was brought by white people to rob the Africans, and to separate them from their families, tribes and clans with apartheid laws, including the harsh approach to their ancestor worship". People have misinterpreted the Bible and the Christian religion, and even manipulated the message of God to suit their own ends. Teaching and teachers can sometimes be called into question. Spirituality in Africa runs deep, therefore, any correction or redirection will require thorough inquiry into that spirituality, followed by careful explanation of, and guidance into, the proper worship of God, according to the proper interpretation of God's Word, hence the need for thorough teaching and effective discipleship. Light (2012:390) purports that it is crucial "for Christian discipleship in Africa to be fully cognizant of ATR because of the challenges it presents to Christian growth". On the one hand, those presenting the gospel message need a proper understanding of that message, as well as a proper understanding of ancestral worshippers and their context. On the other hand, those who worship their ancestors need clear explanation and guidance on what it means to worship God alone. This is a lengthy process where proper teaching and discipleship are crucial. Within this process is the ongoing need of prayer to God for guidance and intervention (1 Tim 2:1, 2, 4).

Setiloane (1999:44) is under the impression that "the Christianity that the missionaries handed down to our forefathers was not distilled and purified", meaning that the message presented to the African people was a 'Western' message, and the African context was not always taken into proper consideration. Rev. Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) suggests that "thorough teaching is needed from Scripture, expository teaching, in order to rectify the situation". Rev. Matshobane, like most of the other interviewees, is convinced that the influence of ancestral worship can be overcome. Rev. Phelisile (30 Jul. 2015) is an example of how effective teaching was the catalyst for such

change in his own life. Rev. Goosen (3 Aug. 2014) has seen how lives in King William's Town have changed "through Scripture" and this was as a result of proper teaching and discipleship.

There is certainly no simple way to change a worldview, or to encourage people to worship God alone, when such people have been worshipping their ancestors for so many generations before. However, Munza (2008:38-44) paints a beautiful picture of how to change a worldview, which is summarized here:

1. *Clearing the ground* – the most important task for the growth of Africa is to come to a decision to break all kinds of taboos and mysteries, which block the growth of our continent;
2. *Digging* – dig out all the bad soil (wrong beliefs and practices);
3. *Fertilizing* – this consists of feeding the worldview with both the Lord's social and scientific principles;
4. *Tending* – tending has two aspects: weeding and pruning (the negative influences and values do not go away once for all, they continually return), and watering, fertilizing and monitoring (pastors, lay leaders, Sunday school teachers all have their plantations that need the application of Living Water – John 7:38).

Throughout this process, Munza stresses the need to maintain the good of the African culture without simply eradicating everything: "I am fully convinced that there are a lot of positive concepts in our culture...with the Lord's light it helps us to explore, evaluate and select what is good and positive from what is negative" (Munza, 2008:40).

It is important to realize that the change that is necessary to worship God alone, although a major decision and redirection, does not mean, for example, a complete change in culture or tradition. When someone is a Xhosa person and chooses to follow God, he remains to be a Xhosa person, but his new identity is in Christ. Light (2012:385) brings a measure of reassurance: An African convert can still remain "unashamedly and proudly African". All people are made in God's image. The decision that men and women have made concerning the gods which they follow, whatever the reasons may be, is the major stumbling block. The reasons and challenges for those who worship their ancestors in King William's Town have been spelt out above. With thorough "clearing the ground", "digging", "fertilizing", and "tending", such change can take place. The influence of ancestral worship can be overcome and people can be led to participate in the *missio Dei* and manage ancestral worship, the various aspects of the paradigm being presented in this chapter – *inter alia*, people need to *worship God alone*, hear the *gospel message*, see the *importance of prayer*, grasp the *authority of the Bible*, and understand the *new identity*. These aspects need thorough *teaching* and effective *discipleship*.

In his book *Transforming Worldviews*, Hiebert (2008:319) explains that "we must see worldview transformation as a point, conversion, and as a process, ongoing deep discipleship". Rev.

Matshobane (8 Jun. 2015) acknowledged that he could dream about his father because he had a relationship with him, but he declared that “my theology informs me that he doesn’t speak to me!” Men and women need to be taught and nurtured on becoming followers of Christ. Once again, syncretism plays a major role in King William’s Town and this highlights even further the need for proper teaching and discipleship. Mhlophe (2015:322) focuses on a “kingdom culture”:

The benefit of living under a kingdom culture is the fact that it is not based on human experience but on the authority of God’s Word. This means that a kingdom culture is oriented towards God... Because of its orientation it does not suffer from the many ills besetting our human-oriented cultures. It does not suffer from selfishness, pride, discrimination, etc. It treats each person with dignity and respect and extends proper stewardship and care towards all of God’s creation.

This is the change that God offers to those in his kingdom, to those who choose to worship God alone. People do not need to be trapped by their culture, or tradition, or anything else man-made. There is a way forward. Through thorough teaching and discipleship, people can be enlightened as to that which should be abandoned and that which can be carried forward, as they choose and endeavour to follow God alone. Participants in the *missio Dei* are God’s instruments to help others join the kingdom of God and thus to transform the culture from within, in order to glorify God.

In drawing this chapter to a close, the way forward is for people to turn from their human constructs and to follow God’s ways alone. With a better understanding of what it takes to *worship God alone*, to hear the *gospel message*, to see the *importance of prayer*, to grasp the *authority of the Bible*, to understand the *new identity*, and with thorough *teaching* and effective *discipleship*, one could well see more people turning from the worship of foreign gods, to the worship of the only true God. In this way, a paradigm is established for the church to participate in the *missio Dei* and address ancestral worship, a pervasive phenomenon in King William’s Town.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

There can be very little doubt that ancestral worship is an extremely pervasive phenomenon in King William's Town and that many lives are affected by its influence. However, one must acknowledge that God has set a plan in motion, the *missio Dei*, to address such mistakes, or ultimately, such disobedience. "The chief purpose for which man is made is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever" (Ward, 1998:5). There may be many reasons cited for man to worship his ancestors, but according to God's Word this is sin because it is rebellion against God's command to worship him. God called people to worship him alone and ever since the fall God has even called people to participate in this work of reconciling man to himself. God frees people from all that hinders them to worship him alone. For many years, man has attempted to seek his own future, to build his own kingdom and to worship his own gods. However, God will not tolerate such rebellion, as has been reflected on many occasions throughout Scripture and throughout history. Such rebellion has also been spelt out in this dissertation.

*Chapter 1* painted the picture of how this study came about and how the respective steps of this research would be carried out. *Chapter 2* involved various explanations on who the *ancestors* in question were, highlighting the confusion which could arise when one speaks of one's ancestors. Included in this chapter was an attempt to clarify the meaning of *worship* and to present the various understandings of worship, inter alia, veneration, reverence, honour, etc. The chapter also covered the area of *communication* with the spiritual realm, which then raised the question, with whom are men and women actually communicating? With a somewhat clearer picture of ancestral worship then, *Chapter 3* dealt with its effect on the King William's Town community where the issues of *hierarchical structures*, *communal life*, and *rites and rituals* were unpacked. This chapter certainly brought to the fore the tremendous influence of ancestral worship on the lives of many people here.

*Chapter 4's* focus was on the mission of God, the so-called *missio Dei*. In this chapter one could see that God has a mission and that man is privileged to be invited by God himself to participate in that mission – the reconciling of mankind to God. The chapter then shifted its focus towards how the *missio Dei* addresses ancestral worship, reflecting that man is to worship God alone. Those who worship their ancestors have rebelled against God and there are consequences to be faced. Those who honour God are a blessing, but those who rebel are a curse. Following on from that, *Chapter 5* highlighted the *influence* of ancestral worship on many of the amaXhosa in King William's Town, particularly highlighting the issue of *syncretism* – the simultaneous worship of God and of the ancestors. Man ought to turn to God alone; syncretism is not acceptable before a holy God.

*Chapter 6* presented various reasons why the amaXhosa in King William's Town maintain this type of worship. Such reasons ranged from *culture and tradition*, to *religion*, to *fear*, and to apparent *results* experienced due to ancestral worship. Those interviewed vouched for the reasons listed in this chapter, yet it was acknowledged that other reasons may also exist. *Chapter 6* certainly reflected the reality of this pervasive phenomenon in King William's Town. *Chapter 7* presented a paradigm for people to participate in the missio Dei and to address the influence of ancestral worship on the many lives affected here. Men and women in King William's Town need to know the truth about God's plan for mankind. People need a clearer understanding of what it takes to *worship God alone*, to hear the *gospel message*, to see the *importance of prayer*, to grasp the *authority of the Bible*, to understand the *new identity*, and this is done more effectively when there is thorough *teaching and discipleship*. As influential as ancestral worship is on participation in the missio Dei, God is sovereign and he can make a way for men and women to escape the traps and schemes of the devil.

Further research into this interesting yet disconcerting phenomenon in King William's Town would prove even more fruitful. As the research progressed, there seemed to be more that could be discovered. Perhaps the comment that ancestral worship is "pervasive" in the African context is an understatement. More than half of those interviewed were part of families where this phenomenon was unashamedly practised. Many people have been deceived by the devil and his schemes. Such people need to know the truth.

God has given each one of us the privilege of participating in the missio Dei. It was Augustine who once remarked: "Without God we cannot; without us he will not" (Rice, 2009). God calls those who believe in him alone to play a vital role in calling others to himself. This is indeed a tremendous privilege, but also a great responsibility. As one grows in one's knowledge of God, through the process of sanctification by his Word and by his Spirit, may believers continue to participate in the missio Dei, and may many more be added to this number until the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

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## **ANNEXURE**

### **Interview Questions:**

The following questions will serve as a guideline for structured interviews with students at Dumisani Theological Institute, with those who attend local churches, with pastors dealing with ancestral worship, and with others who admit to practising ancestral worship in the King William's Town community. These interviews will be carried out to saturation level, in order to get as much out of the interviewees as possible and to reach a more informed analysis of the influence of ancestral worship in this community.

1. To what extent have you been exposed to ancestral worship?
2. Tell me more about your culture and what role the ancestors play.
3. Is ancestral worship purely a cultural matter, or is it a religious and/or spiritual matter?
4. Why is ancestral worship often treated as a secret activity?
5. Comment on the worship practices of people in your local context.
6. How widespread is ancestral worship?
7. What is your understanding of the necessity of ancestral worship?
8. How influential is ancestral worship in your community? Have you seen its impact?
9. What would the response be if one were to attempt to abandon ancestral worship?