

**Pastoral approach to the African Christian woman affected by
grief due to the loss of her spouse**

by

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Declaration

I, Thoredi Elizabeth Choabi declare that this dissertation, submitted to the North West University, Mafikeng Campus, is my own work and has not been previously submitted to any University. Sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

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Abstract

The focus of this study is on the pastorate to the African Christian widow affected by the loss of her spouse. The African Christian widow is believed to be in a disposition as she may be torn between African beliefs and cultural practices and Christian values regarding death during the grieving process. In this regard, it is suspected that cultural prescripts can negatively influence the grieving process from a Christian perspective, causing a complicated grieving process. This creates particular challenges for pastoral counselling which usually approaches pastoral challenges from a purely Christian, and mostly, Western perspective. This study has therefore attempted to develop a pastoral approach that is cognisant of the African Christian widow's disposition by investigating African beliefs and practices surrounding death and mourning within the framework of a normal grieving process.

In addressing this problem the study attempted to accomplish the following objectives:

- To describe the unique position of the African Christian woman against the background of the African worldview and culture.
- To describe the concepts of death and dying within the African context.
- To identify and describe some of the rituals associated with grieving within the African context.
 To describe pastoral care and to identify some of the perceived challenges for Christian African women during the grieving process.
- To design a Biblical based theory for the pastorate to the African Christian widow.
- To propose a conceptual framework for the pastorate to the African Christian widow affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse.

As the study's main aim was to contribute to the field of practical theology and pastoral care, the interpretive model of Osmer was applied in a literature based approach. Another important aim was to contribute to the growing corpus of literature on contextualised pastoral care which is much needed within the African context. In this way it hopes to make a contribution to a pastoral approach which is cognisant of the African worldview and culture while is at the same time congruent with the Bible as the Word of God.

Key terms:

Pastoral care

Pastoral counselling

African Christian widow

African worldview

African traditional culture

African beliefs

Grief

Ancestors

Dreams

Rituals

Opsomming

Die fokus van hierdie navorsing is op die pastoraat aan die Afrika Christen weduwee wat deur die dood van haar eggenoot geaffekteer is. Die vertrekpunt is dat die Christen weduwee waarskynlik verdeeldheid sal ervaar tussen haar Afrika lewensbeskouing en kultuur en haar Christelike waardes tydens die rouproses. In hierdie verband word verwag dat die Afrika lewensbeskouing en kultuur die rouproses vanuit 'n Christelike oogpunt nadelig kan beïnvloed en gekompliseerde rou tot gevolg kan hê. Dit veroorsaak eiesoortige uitdagings vir die pastoraat wat vanuit 'n Christelike en meestal Westerse perspektief geskied.

Hierdie studie was derhalwe daarop gemik om 'n pastorale benadering te ontwikkel wat die Afrika Christen weduwee in ag neem deur die Afrika lewensbeskouing en kultuur aangaande dood en rou te ondersoek binne die raamwerk van die normale rouproses.

In die ondersoek hiervan het die studie gepoog om die volgende doelwitte te bereik:

- Om die unieke posisie van die Christen vrou binne die konteks van die Afrika wêreldbeskouing en kultuur te bespreek.
- Om die konsepte van dood en sterwe binne die Afrika konteks te beskryf.
- Om sommige rituele wat verband hou met die rouproses binne die Afrika konteks te beskryf.
- Om pastorale sorg te omskryf en sommige van die vermeende uitdagings vir die Afrika Christen weduwee tydens die rouproses te artikuleer.
- Om 'n Bybelse basis teorie vir die rouproses te ontwerp.
- Om 'n konseptuele raamwerk vir die pastoraat aan die Afrika Christen geaffekteer deur verlies en rou daar te stel.

In die lig daarvan dat die studie 'n bydrae tot die Praktiese Teologie en die pastoraat wou maak, is die model van Osmer binne 'n literatuurstudie oor die onderwerp aangewend. Nog 'n belangrike oogmerk was om 'n bydrae te lewer tot die groeiende versameling van gekontekstualiseerde literatuur wat 'n behoefte binne die Afrika konteks geword het. Dit hoop om 'n bydrae te lewer tot pastorale sorg wat die Afrika wêreldbeskouing en kultuur in ag neem en terselfdertyd getrou is aan die Bybel as Woord van God

Sleutel terme:

Pastorale sorg

Pastoral berading

Afrika Christen weduwee

Afrika wêreldbeskouing

Afrika tradisionele kultuur

Afrika beskouinge

Rou

Voorvaders

Drome

Rituele

Chapter one: Introduction

1.1. Background

Death remains one of life's most challenging events (Akume *et al.* 2013:5728). Depending on the relationship with the one who passed on, the intensity and influence of the loss may vary. In general, the grief resulting from loss can be seen as a normal and helpful reaction on the road to recovery for those remaining behind. The normal grieving process therefore, does not imply any mental deficiency or a lack of faith, but represents the natural reaction people have to death, irrespective of all the assurances regarding loss they may have nurtured through life (Corr *et al.*, 2003:213).

Due to the universality of the phenomenon of grief, some attempts have been made at structuring a so-called normal grieving process. According to Nevid (2009:395,396), Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's five normal stages of handling grief still serve as the standard example of this:

- a. Denial- the mourner is in a state of shock denying the death of the loved one.
- b. Anger- Once reality of death is recognised, feelings of anger and resentment take central stage.
- c. Bargaining- At this stage the person attempts to make a deal with God such as promising to do good deeds in exchange for bringing the deceased back.
- d. Depression- It reflects the growing sense of loss and a sense of utter hopelessness that may ensue.
- e. Finally, acceptance- as the mourner works through the earlier stages he/she eventually achieves some degree of inner peace and acceptance.

While it may be true that there are some universal aspects to the grieving process, it is also true that cultural differences causes the grieving process to be unique (Drenth *et al.* 2010:1). For example, in some cultures grief is shown through wailing. Reverence for the deceased is shown through the torment displayed by crying. In China professional wailers are hired whilst in other cultures wailing is restrained. Rules in Egypt and Bali, both Islamic countries, are opposite. In Bali women are discouraged from crying while in Egypt women are considered abnormal if they don't nearly incapacitate themselves with demonstrative weeping. In Japan it is extremely important not to show grief because death is seen as a time of liberation and not sorrow (Carteret, 2010:3).

In Africa, death throws entire communities into *limbo*. All work stops. There is extreme wailing, those who are left behind must change their attire and important arrangements are made at their homes. In the case of a woman being widowed, she is supported spiritually day and night. This is to show that something serious has happened and the deceased was a treasured member of the community (Nürnberger, 2007:53).

These cultural expressions of grief obviously impact on how people advance through the grieving process. In this study the focus will be on how culture impacts on African women during the grieving process. More specifically on African women of the Christian faith, as it is suspected that much inner conflict between the Christian faith and cultural prescriptions can arise in times of grief due to the loss of a spouse. From the onset of the grieving process over a spouse Sossou (2002:201) points out that the entire being of African widows are affected as African culture dictates radical changes in the widow's social status and lifestyle. Where the natural inclination would be to mourn the passing of the life-partner, much physical and emotional energy is absorbed by attending to culturally prescribed customs and beliefs which come into play when a husband dies. Apart from this, much confusion is also generated by African beliefs regarding life after death as opposed to Christian beliefs about the afterlife.

According to Mtshayisa (2009:13,31), the majority of African Christians worship both God and their ancestors. As it is believed that the deceased lives in a spirit-land, the deceased are often referred to as a living dead or an ancestor. These ancestors are regarded as the custodians of the family or tribe. They continue to have a bond with the living and exercise influence over them. Nürnberger (2007:25) adds that families perform rituals to confirm the authority and power of ancestors or deceased elders. Berg (2003:197) states that through these rituals communion with the ancestors is established. In turn the ancestors act as protectors, mentors and guides for the individual. Should they not be attended to, they withdraw their protection. It is in this lack of connection, this broken link, that the individual seemingly becomes exposed to the powers of witchcraft. Magezi and Myambo (2011:163) explain that in this situation, the African Christian widow experiences tension when she refuses to participate in these traditional ways of appeasing the *ngozi* spirit. Their family members may accuse them of being directly or indirectly responsible for the misfortunes happening in the family, which in this case, is associated with the angered *ngozi* (ancestral) spirit.

An important implication of this cultural uniqueness, which becomes apparent in both beliefs and rituals, is that it creates the possibility of inner conflict and the complication of the grieving process. In the case of an African Christian woman, the loss of a spouse most probably will result in conflict between the mourner's natural inclination to grieve, her faith convictions and the adherence to customs prescribed by culture. According to Botha (2006:25), "pathological grief is when grief for a particular individual, in a particular culture, appears to deviate from the expected course in such a way that it is associated with excessive or prolonged psychological symptoms". It can also be described as complicated, abnormal, atypical, prolonged, unresolved or dysfunctional grief. Worden (1991:75) states that distinctions between normal and complicated grief is not easy to make. The distinction between normal and complicated grief is hampered by factors such as culture, religion, personality, age, society, type of death, the relationship with the deceased and many more. It is also not easy to differentiate between complicated grief and other related disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. Especially vulnerable to this will be ethnic groups where culture plays an important role during the grieving process, like Africans which are known for their culturally saturated grieving rituals.

African Christian women, who accepted the Gospel message, but have not yet abandoned the beliefs and practices of traditional beliefs (Afeke & Verster, 2004:47) will probably be affected the most. African Christian women are especially vulnerable as some degree of compatibility between Christianity and African Traditional Religions and cultural beliefs exists (Mbiti, 1970:435). In addition, Mbiti (1970:435) shows that there are areas of common ground like God, continuation of life after death, spiritual beings, and the works of God. With regards to these aspects, Christianity, traditional religions and African culture overlap. On the other hand, magic, witchcraft, sorcery and divination which feature prominently in traditional religion, fall outside the Christian frame of reference and are therefore incompatible with Christianity (Mbiti, 1970:435). Therefore, irrespective of her Christian faith an African Christian widow will always be affected by culture. One reason why such practices and ideals are upheld is because these traditions have long existed before Christianity came to Africa. As a result many Africans are Christians, but still follow their traditions even if these traditions disagree with the Bible.

One of the main theological concerns stemming from this notion of a culturally influenced grieving process is the challenge it poses for pastoral care. Traditionally pastoral care is understood as:

“The ministry of the cure of souls consists of helping acts done by representatives of Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns” (Clebsch & Jaeckle, 1964:4).

Buffel (2004:40) describes pastoral care as:

”that multidimensional ministry of all believers in the church, which is concerned with the wellbeing of all of God’s people, be it as individuals or communities. In this ministry, which occurs in socio-economic, political and cultural contexts, each one is a brother or sister to the other. The all-inclusive ministry of keeping each other or mutually taking care of each other takes the context of the brother or sister into cognisance”.

Louw (1998:21,22) emphasises the importance of pastoral care as “cura animarum” i.e. care of the whole person from a specifically spiritual perspective. This soul care is about people and the centre of their existence, their focus on God and dependence upon Him. It describes a very special process of caring; caring for human life because it is created by God and belongs to God.

The challenge of the pastorate to the culturally influenced grieving process is however to be duly contextualised while at the same time providing guidance which is theologically grounded in the Word of God. In this regard Buffel (2004:37) points out that pastoral care cannot continue as if the Western realities are the only realities confronting the world today.

1.2. State of the current research

A void exists in literature which can inform the pastoral process with regards to Christian women grieving in an African context. This topic of African widowhood has attracted attention in Africa and several studies in literature dealing with grief, rituals, suffering and harassment of the African widow until the mourning period has been concluded. However, there is no study at present dealing with ancestral dreams and visions of the late husband,

how they torment the African Christian widow and pressure from in-laws to perform the reconciliation rituals thereafter. Much as Christianity has grown in Africa, Turaki (1997:41) argues that the traditional African worldview has its own African morality and ethics which define what reality is in an African sense. This can be seen in how Africans live and do things differently from the Western worldview. Because of the nature of this study, pastoral care will investigate and integrate material from an African worldview and culture, to help the African Christian widow to deal with this tormenting situation.

1.3. Problem statement

A void exist in this African context as Western literature is generally informed by first-world theology and worldviews, therefore, it does not satisfactorily speak to the interaction between Christian faith, African culture and gender. A need for a critical-loyal dialogue with culture, rationality and humanity currently exists (De Jong van Arkel, 2000:144).

According to Buffel (2004:37) pastoral care cannot afford to remain chained to Western individualism and clericalism as it does not accommodate the African worldview. This underlined the need for pastoral approaches that are sensitive to the worldviews and cultures of counselees. According to Van der Walt (1994:39), “a worldview is an integrated interpretive set of confessional perspectives on reality which underlies, shapes, motivates and gives direction and meaning to human activity.” Walsh (1989:9) defines a worldview as a “vision of life ... a perspective through which to make sense out of life”. Inevitably, worldviews become visible in culture and can even be deemed an expression thereof. A closer definition of culture can be that it is a private and collective practice based on a world view that has endured generations and that defines and gives meaning to being within a collective and the larger world (Brunsdon, 2015:10). The pastorate that wants to guide the grieving African Christian woman, will therefore have to be informed by indigenous knowledge, knowledge from Africa that can be interpreted in the light of the Scriptures.

In this regard it should be kept in mind that Christianity in Africa came to a people who were profoundly religious in their own way. In other words, by coming to Africa, Christianity had to be judged by traditional religiosity (Mbiti, 1970:432). While the Bible is the sacred book of Christianity, African Religion has no scriptures or holy books. It is written in the history, the hearts and the experience of the people. Having no sacred scriptures, it moves with the times. Other practices are forgotten or amended to suite the changing times. One cannot tell how the African religion was five hundred years ago and how it may differ today (Mbiti,

1991:17). It must be appreciated then, that the influence that culture exerts on Africans, must never be underestimated, making the need for well informed and contextualised Christian texts all the more important.

The main research question of this study will therefore be: How will the pastorate approach the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse?

In order to provide pastoral counselling for the African Christian widow, common ground has to be established between Christianity and African traditional religiosity. This has to be carefully determined with the aid of academic understanding, the grace of God and the sympathies of the human heart (Mbiti, 1970:435).

1.4. Aims and objectives

The main aim of the study is to design a pastoral model which can address the needs of Christian African women affected by grief due to the loss of a spouse.

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives are set:

- To describe the unique position of the African Christian woman against the background of the African worldview and culture.
- To describe the concepts of death and dying within the African context.
- To identify and describe some of the rituals associated with grieving within the African context.
- To describe pastoral care and identify some of the perceived challenges for the African Christian widow.
- To design a Biblical basis theory for the pastorate to the African Christian widow.
- To propose a conceptual framework for the pastorate to the Christian African widow affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse.

1.5. Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that Western orientated pastoral approaches do not sufficiently address the challenges experienced by the African Christian widow who is affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse and that an appropriate pastoral model needs to be developed.

1.6. Research Method: The model of Osmer.

This study will contribute to the field of Practical Theology and pastoral care. Practical Theology can be defined as a “critical theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the triune God” (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:6).

Explicating this notion of practical theology Swinton and Mowat (2006:6-9) highlight the following aspects. Firstly, Practical Theological enquiry is critical. It assumes that the various practices that are performed by the Christian community are deeply meaningful and require honest critical reflection if they are to be and remain faithful to the script of revelation. Secondly, Practical Theology is theological reflection. It is criticised at times as having lost sight of its theological roots because of using other sources of knowledge such as social sciences and pushing its primary theological task into the background. Thirdly, Practical Theology embraces the practices of the world. The practices of the Church cannot be understood as ontologically separate or different from the practices of the world. Both fall within God’s creation and both are caught up in God’s redemptive movement towards the world. Fourthly, the primary task of Practical Theology is to ensure and enable faithful practices i.e. its goal is to enable faithful living and authentic Christian practice (Swinton & Mowat, 2006:6-9).

Practical Theology can also be seen as a discipline that seeks to help humans to encounter God and to live in fellowship with Him and other people. It is concerned with those religious actions that communicate with others through the service of the Gospel so as to make room for God in this world (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:7). “The pastors, preachers, counsellors and Christians perform these Christian actions both inside and outside the church. These actions are communicated not just in language and creeds but also in deeds. These acts are intentional acts aimed at intervening in a situation with the view of transforming the church and society” (Buffel, 2007:31).

For this purpose this study will consider research methods designed to aid Practical theological research. Over the years many different models have seen the light to aid critical reflection on the faith practices of the church. In recent years the models of Zerfass (1974), Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991), Müller (2005) and Osmer (2008) were some often used in the South African context.

This study favors the approach of Richard Osmer (2008) as it seems likely to address the research questions this study is investigating.

Osmer (2008:4) suggested that four questions can be asked during the process of practical theological interpretation, which, within the context of this study can be explicated in the following way:

1.7 The descriptive-empirical task

The first question concerns the establishment of the current state of affairs, also referred to as “priestly listening” or merely trying to establish “what is going on”? Osmer (2008:35, 36) suggested that priestly listening can be an activity of the entire Christian community, not just its leaders. It reflects the nature of the congregation as a fellowship in which people listen to one another as a form of mutual support, care and edification. Priestly listening is needed in intercessory prayers, preaching, teaching, pastoral care and other forms of ministry, attending to personal relationships, investigating the circumstances and cultural context of others in more formal and systematic ways. Smith (2010:102,103) quotes Osmer’s ‘spirituality of presence’ as a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations’. It is to this process that Osmer (2008: 37-39) refers to as *priestly listening*. In a congregational setting, priestly listening can be informal, semiformal or formal. While valuing informal and semiformal attending, Osmer focuses on formal attending, which he defines as ‘investigating particular episodes, situations, and contexts through empirical research’. He argues that qualitative research methods do not necessarily treat people as objects, and are thus consistent with priestly listening.

As this study is interested in the grieving process of African Christian women and also concerned about the way cultural prescriptions may complicate grieving, it will attempt to “listen” and describe what happens with these women during the grieving process and describe the effects of this way of grieving on the outcomes of the grieving process against the background of the Christian tradition. It will therefore grapple with the question: “What does African culture impose on them and how is this in conflict with their Christian faith?” In this regard literature on African worldviews and culture will be consulted and related to the content of the Christian faith. As this study intends to provide some basic theoretical knowledge on the topic, it will not engage African women empirically. Observations from an insider’s perspective will however be made as the researcher is also an African Christian

female who often observes the challenges of fellow female believers in a congregational setting.

1.8. The interpretative task

If satisfied that the specific area of interest is described, the focus shifts to an interpretation of the data. Requiring “sagely wisdom” answers to the question “why is this going on?” is sought. According to Osmer (2008:4), the interpretative task means ‘drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring. Osmer (2008:82-84) suggests that sagely wisdom requires three key characteristics namely: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgement. Osmer (2008:82) explains “thoughtfulness” as leaders being considerate and kind in the way they treat others or insightful about everyday’s life matters. Smith (2010:105) depicts it as the ability of reflecting deeply about life questions. For this task Osmer (2008: 83) indicates that it will be necessary to draw on theories from the arts and sciences to understand and respond to particular challenges. Osmer however reminds us that all theoretical knowledge is fallible as it is constructed by human reason and always subject to future reconsideration. Therefore, it must be applied cognisant of its limitations (Smith, 2010:105). To this end “wise judgement is needed to interpret the information gathered (Osmer, 2008:84). This involves *phronesis*, Aristotle’s concept of wise judgement as practical wisdom and prudence. This involves “discerning the right course of action in particular circumstances, through understanding the circumstances rightly, the moral ends of action and the effective means to achieve these ends” (Osmer, 2008:84).

In the context of this study, this movement of Osmer’s model suggests that after a description of mourning amongst African Christian women was made, this information also needs to be interpreted. Why are African Christian women mourning in this fashion – and most importantly to what effect? As grief in a pastoral context is most often described from a Western point of view, posing this question is an attempt to understand the reasons why women of the Christian faith continue African cultural practices that in all probability complicate the grieving process. Subsequently, why does African culture, exert such a powerful influence over these women - even in the light of the burdens it imposes on them. Existing literature on these practices will have to be consulted in order to aid such an interpretation.

1.9. The normative task.

The next movement of Osmer's model concerns finding answers to the question: What ought to be going on? Involving what Osmer refers to as "prophetic discernment" this normative task of practical theology is about "using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses and learning from good practice" (Osmer, 2008:4). "Prophetic discernment involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word" (Osmer, 2008:134-135). Discernment is an activity of seeking God's guidance amid the circumstances, events and decisions of life. To discern means to sift through, sort out and weigh the evidence in order to make a correct Biblical decision. Failure to discern or distinguish between truth and error can lead to wrong/false teaching (Osmer, 2008:137). Osmer suggests three normative approaches to use in Prophetic discernment to seek God's daily guidance which are: Theological Interpretation, Ethical Reflection and Good Practice. Therefore, these very important approaches will be used to interpret the culturally saturated situation of the African Christian widow.

Theological interpretation focuses on the interpretation of present episodes, situations, and contexts with theological concepts. This style of theological reflection is widely used in Practical Theology, Christian ethics and political theology but differs from other forms of theological reflection such as Biblical Studies, Dogmatic Theology etc. (Osmer, 2008:139). Ethical Reflection refers to "using ethical principles, rules or guidelines to guide action towards moral ends" (Osmer, 2008:161). Using the Bible as a guide while at the same time being sensitive to the cultural plight of the widow by not criticising, but rather applying empathetic counselling. According to Osmer (2008:152), "Good Practice provides normative guidance in two ways: it offers models for good practice, from the past or present, with which to 'reform a congregation's present actions'" and "It can generate new understandings of God, the Christian life and social values beyond those provided by the perceived tradition" (Osmer, 2008:152). Generating a new understanding of God that can strengthen the widow and leading by example as the researcher is an African and understands this ancestral background. The Bible is the Word of God. It is the breath of God, authoritative and fully equipped to teach and correct us (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16, NIV).

The third movement of Osmer's practical theological interpretation asserts that alternative or better practices exist that can replace the practices under investigation. As this study intends to investigate the grieving practices of African Christian women, the Christian tradition and Scriptures will be used to establish what the Christian message about the finiteness of man is

and how those who remain behind can respond in the light of this. Inevitably, this will also enable some comparisons between cultural practices and Christian dogma, i.e. a theological/ethical evaluation of the practices concerned. In this regard Nürnberger (2007:45) suggests that the authority of Christ differs from the authority of ancestors and leads to freedom or as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:17: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”.

As this movement also involves the investigation of good practices, theories about grief will also be consulted in order to establish how the so-called “normal” grieving process unfolds in order to inform the pastoral process on alternatives for a culturally influenced grieving process.

1.10. The pragmatic task.

The fourth movement of Osmer’s model is designed to answer the question: how might we respond? Osmer (2008:176) explains this movement as “the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable”. It is concerning leading change that will bring positive results by impacting an individual physically & spiritually. Therefore, one of the strategies to be used to implement change in the life of the African Christian widow during this challenging situation will be through counselling and prayer teachings. This action will help her spiritually and physically and enable her to stand independently and face the challenges. In addition, forming a small support group of widows going through this same emotional experience to share their views, can give one another spiritual and moral support and pray for one another.

As this study is at its core seeking theological answers to the pastoral guidance of culturally conflicted mourners, relevant Scriptural passages will be investigated exegetically. For example in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV) the Bible says ‘Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new’. The Christian African widow is a new creation in Christ and old things such as ancestral rituals for the dead have passed away. It will also investigate concepts such as the blood of Jesus Christ and how it can be used to address the powers of ancestral dreams and its foundations in the lives of mourners and other related issues.

Therefore, in the execution of Osmer’s four movements, this study will mainly rely on an investigation of existing literature about the focus area of this study as well as examining parts of Scripture that relate to this. The investigation of existing literature rests on the

assumption that knowledge accumulates and that current studies benefit from previous projects – thus making scientific research study a collaborative effort of many scholars (Neuman, 2011:111).

To this end, the study will unfold as follows:

Chapter 2: The unique position of Christian women in the African context.

Chapter 3: The concepts of death and dying within the African context.

Chapter 4: Rituals associated with grieving within the African context.

Chapter 5: Pastoral care and challenges for the pastorate to Christian African women affected by grief due to the loss of a spouse.

Chapter 6: A Biblical basis theory for addressing the grieving process in the African context.

Chapter 7: A conceptual framework for pastoral care of Christian African women challenged by grief and loss.

Chapter 8: Summary and conclusions

Chapter two: The unique position of Christian women in the African context

2.1. Introduction

As this study is investigating the pastorate to the grieving African Christian woman, the unique position of Christian women in the African context requires clarification. This is done from the assumption that the African woman is first and foremost African, thus immersed in the African worldview and culture. Becoming a Christian implies some form of uniqueness as Christianity implies a value system that may not be exactly the same as that of the African worldview. As Turaki (1999:1) contends: “The traditional religious beliefs, practices and religious and cultural life are in great measure, different from that of Christianity.” When Christianity is understood against the background of a certain tradition like that of the Reformed, Methodist, Catholic or Lutheran, this uniqueness might even be more accentuated as many Africans are in some way influenced to hold on to some of the “precious traditional religious beliefs, practices and behaviour even after becoming Christians” (Turaki, 1999:2). This uniqueness is even further accentuated when the African worldview and culture is compared with other worldviews and cultures, like the Western culture which is prominent in Southern Africa.

This chapter intends to articulate this unique position of Christian women in the African context to which the pastoral process should be sensitive.

2.2. A general overview of the African worldview and culture

In Africa most of the Africans have lived in a traditional society and were influenced by culture, irrespective of their Western exposure. No matter how educated they become, most of them still retain their cultural ties. Much as the Christian woman has grown in that traditional environment, once she converts to Christianity, it becomes difficult for her to practice culture, especially in areas that contradict the Bible.

2.2.1. The African worldview

According to Turaki (1997:40), the “African worldview is the embodiment of culture, religion, customs, values and traditions” Turaki (1997:40) cites Oji (1988:15) to describe the African worldview as:

“the basic fundamental core of their reality which manifests in their

belief and values response to the physical and spiritual realms. This influences

the way they think, observe and perceive; which ultimately controls the way they dress, build their houses and maintain their environment. It is the basic principle within life of a particular geographical region that affects perception, motivates life, determines values and truth, generates beliefs, moulds behaviour and excites emotions”.

Turaki (1997:41) argues that the traditional African worldview has its own African morality and ethics which defines what reality is in an African sense. This has a profound and persuasive influence on how Africans live and do things which differ from the Western worldview. This worldview can be seen in the way Africans understand and interpret Christianity or any foreign religion or worldview. It is also visible in the way ethnic groups or tribes understand and interpret their relationships with others and the world around them.

Thabede (2014:234) cites Barker (1999:522) and Asante (1987) describing the African or Afrocentric worldview as “the way a person tends to understand his or her relationship with social institutions, nature, objects, other people and spirituality. This is based on African cultural beliefs, practices and values”. Thabede (2014:233) cautions that when counselling African people, pastors or counsellors “have to be sensitive to the African worldview because it informs the way in which Africans relate to phenomena including challenges that life presents to the African people.”

This is true because if a counsellor/pastor does not understand the African cultural background he/she will not be in a position to help those that are challenged or affected. Africans are rooted in their culture and most of them believe in two traditions namely African and Christian.

2.2.2. The African culture

Every nation, society, has its own culture be it Western or traditional. Rossouw (1993:894) describes culture as “the interpretative and coping mechanism of a society. It is a way in which people understand themselves, their world and the appropriate interaction with one another and with the world they live in”. Mbiti (2015:11, 29) explains that in African culture there are beliefs which show how people think about the universe and this determines their

attitude towards life. These beliefs can even be religious in nature as they are concerned with issues regarding God, birth, death, spirits, human life, magic, the hereafter and so forth. Some of these take on a practical form as they influence and determine how Africans pray, make sacrifices and offerings, perform ceremonies and rituals and observe customs.

Whilst Thabede (2014:234) defines culture as customs, habits, skills, arts, values, ideology, and religious behaviour of a group of people, Familusi (2012:300) defines culture as “a way of life for people. Thus culture is made up of customs, traditions, beliefs, behaviour, dress, language, works of art and crafts, attitude of life among others, which vary from society to society and suggests that cultural values are largely relative”.

According to Obiechina (1975:32), African culture refers to the way African people do things although cultural practices may differ from society to society or from one ethnic group to another. Cultural practices are usually conveyed orally by word of mouth through direct contact between individuals depending on the memory and habits of thoughts, action and speech for cultural continuity. This information is passed from generation to generation as long as they can remember, otherwise it can disappear completely. In the olden days parents used to sit around a fire and relate cultural stories that helped children to understand who they are, where they come from and where they are going. It would be expected of them to teach their children too. Technology such as television has reduced that kind of bonding and sharing.

It should therefore be clear that culture has a deep influence on the psyche and actions of the African. It is meaningful for the day to day life, but also for the understanding of phenomena with deeper meaning, like death and dying and eternity.

2.2.3. Women in the African worldview and culture

In general, the African people can be viewed as a patriarchal grouping where men have more power than women. This is confirmed by African culture as culture often favours men. Oduyeyo and Kanyoro (2005:10) noted that the position of women in Africa today within society and religion tends to be prescribed by male authority. Their unchanging set of norms prescribed is enshrined in a culture that appears not to be changing as can be seen in rituals and ancestral worship. Familusi (2012: 299) contends that there is a need for a paradigm shift to emancipate African women affected by a hostile African culture. As a result most of the traditional practices within the African culture are agents of female oppression.

2.2.3.1. Marriage in the African worldview and culture

Lewis (1977:341) argues that women are universally subordinate to men and that men are dominant due to their participation in public life and at home. Once an African woman is married, she loses her freedom. Akinnawo and Adetula (2006:211) argue that in African culture most women face male dominance particularly in political, social and economic controls. This has caused a lot of disharmony in families. Women are regarded as child bearers and only have the right to keep the home and care for the children. Even male children are taught at an early age that they are superior to girls. From a young age girls are groomed for marriage and taught submission by their mothers. No matter how educated women are, there are certain social taboos. For example, if a man comes home late at night, the woman is not supposed to inquire about his whereabouts. This is due to the fact that the man paid lobola (bride price) for his wife and therefore has ownership over her. On these grounds he expects her to take instruction from him and behave properly. In the same regard African men do not assist women with daily chores because other males will then have a dim view of him. At least some men in urban areas have changed due to the influence of the church and the media.

Cornelius (2013:173,175,179) states that the current culture can help to shape the roles of men and women in a particular society. Part of the male dominated society can unfortunately also be responsible for violence against women which has become a trademark of the South African society, as it impacts negatively on families and the broader society. The Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1998 by government. Violence against women robs them of their confidence and creates an environment where women are constantly controlled by men. In some ethnic groups culture prohibits abused women to report abuse to the authorities as it would be a sign that she does not love and respect her husband.

In some respects then, African culture renders women vulnerable and serves to maintain practices which subordinate African women in general. This subordination is characteristic of all life-events, even during the mourning period.

2.2.3.2. The role of ancestors in the African worldview and culture

In contrast with the Christian faith, Oladosu (2012:160) indicates that traditional Africans still believe in the existence of ancestors and communicating with them. This existence can be seen in the religious rituals of Africans as they interact with the living dead. In most cases these interactions are to keep the ancestors as far away as possible, to avoid misfortunes or

any kind of harm. That is why Africans perform rituals to appease them and plead for peace. Ross (2010:45) adds that ancestors “mete out punishment to people if rituals are not observed”. Contact with the ancestors is maintained through ancestral dreams. According to Turaki (1999:199), Africans view dreams in a serious light and endeavour to seek their meaning and explanation. Dreams are the chief source of revelation from, and means of communication with, the spirit world. Through dreams the living communicate with the gods, divinities, the spirits and the dead. Dreams are also used as a means of receiving guidance, commands, good messages of blessings or bad omens and warnings.

Adeyemo (2010:1019) supports the view that God uses dreams or visions as a means of communication with his people. Dreams may reveal God’s plan for the future and even warn us of anything that might happen to us. However, in this context, ancestral dreams encountered by the African Christian widow and rituals performed thereafter are unacceptable in the light of the Scriptures. Seeing the dead, visiting the graves talking to them and appeasing them through rituals based on instructions in the dream, are foreign to the Bible. Furthermore, they do not comfort nor heal the African Christian widow. Instead they bring forms of inner conflict between her religious convictions and her culture. Whether she continues with those rituals or defers, she experiences no peace because she is not communicating with a physical human being anymore. Nyirongo (1997:79) states that “there can be no fellowship between the departed and the living and that the African’s claim which is supported by many African theologians are nothing else but illusions”.

2.2.3.3. The spirit world and witchcraft in the African worldview and culture

According to Letsosa and Semanya (2012:2), most Africans believe in the existence of witchcraft and the impact it has on their lives. This is congruent with the rich African beliefs surrounding the existence of a spirit world. Turaki (1997:195) suggests that witches use innate or mystical powers which are evil to do harm to people. They are granted those powers by ancestral spirits. These powers are believed to be hereditary and believed to be a gift from an unknown source. The witches who are both male and female use medicines to give to their clients when the need arises. Nyirongo (1997:182) indicates that there are some Africans who see witchcraft as both good and evil and this belief is held in Africa as a whole. However, Letsosa and Semanya (2013:1,2) argue that witchcraft is evil. Therefore, people suspected of witchcraft run the risk of being killed by the community. In most cases women are the victims as they are often accused of witchcraft. Most Africans who consult these

witches aim at finding solutions to their problems. There are day witches who cast spells to attack their victims in broad daylight and use animals like snakes or lightning to kill or bewitch them. Night witches use also animals like snakes at night to attack their victims and people fear them (Letsosa & Semanya, 2013:1, 2).

Witchcraft plays an important role in times of death. Here witchcraft can be believed to play a role when someone passes away. For example, when an African widow's relationship with her late husband was bitter, the in-laws can accuse her of killing the husband through witchcraft. This would cause a lot of tension and she would be mistreated through negative remarks or ostracised by her in-laws during and after the burial of her late husband. The inner emotional torment would be unbearable for her and in most cases could lead to illness. This is a crucial time when she needs spiritual and physical healing the most.

2.3. Concepts of God in the African worldview and culture

The concepts of God in the African worldview can mostly be related to views as found in the so called African traditional religion. One of the most comprehensive works in this regard, must be that of Mbiti, "Concepts of God in Africa" (1970). In this work, Mbiti engages with about 250 different ethnic African groups and their beliefs about God. These beliefs are systematically put forward under categories like the nature, attributes and providence of God. What transpires from this comprehensive work is how God is linked to the pre-Christian African world. Therefore, Mbiti reports about God's relation to mythical trees (Mbiti, 1970:110) and even holes and caves (Mbiti, 1970:150).

Turaki (1997:145) also believes that "God in traditional Africa must be defined and interpreted within the comprehensive traditional worldview". In general however, African people view God as omniscient thus placing him in the highest possible position. God is described as the one to whom complete wisdom, knowledge or understanding belongs. People's wisdom is limited but only God knows all things. God is All-seeing and All-hearing. That is why God's "Great Eye" is keeping a perpetual watch everywhere and at all times, without limitation and without exhaustion. It never tires, never blinks and never sickens. "God is not omniscient, but has the ability to know everything, observe everything, and hear everything, without limitation and without exception many Africans use the name of God in prayers and thanksgiving, in rituals and ceremonies" (Mbiti, 1970:5). According to Mbiti (2015:35), African people regard God in many African languages as the Creator of the universe. They believe that there is no way the universe came into existence except through

God. In South Africa, the Batswana call God the Creator “Modimo”, Xhosas “Thixo” whilst Zulus call him “Unkulunkulu” but the meaning is the same and he is known as someone high above ancestors.

According to Kasambala (2005:306), “within African spirituality God stands at the upper level. God is the Supreme Being, Creator, the Sustainer of the Universe, the final authority of all things, the Overlord of society who has power over life and death. Furthermore, God is seen as a great ancestor, the founder and progenitor, the giver of life, the power behind everything that is”. As much as he is present, African people see him as distant but not absent from them (Kasambala, 2005:306).

Beyers and Mphahlele (2009:3) conducted research amongst African Christians in Mohlakeng, South Africa, to hear their views about Jesus Christ. They regard Jesus Christ as a Great Ancestor, Powerful Leader and Healer which, according to them, are both religious and cultural. They name him the way they were taught in the Bible and by their parents. Therefore, it is not difficult to call him Great Ancestor because their culture and belief help them to accept him that way.

This raises the very important question within the framework of this study, namely, who the God of African traditional religion really is. Is He the same God of the Christian Gospel, the Father of Jesus Christ?

According to Nyirongo (1997:11), some theologians indeed argue that Africans worshipped the true God before they came into contact with the Christian Gospel. These arguments are mostly based on evidence such as:

- The belief in the existence of God as the Almighty and Creator of all things.
- The acknowledgement of attributes such as purity, infinity, eternity, immutability, omnipresence, sovereignty and providence, which set God above man
- The dependence of Africans on God as the provider of all good things such as rain, many children, prosperity, health and long life (Nyirongo, 1997:11).

Turaki (1999:28) also suggests that that “the traditional concepts and attributes of God as stated by the African pioneering theologians and scholars are comparable to those of Christianity”.

However, Ferdinando (2007: 127) strongly contests this argument: “The fact that adherents of African traditional religion may have worshipped a single supreme being does not mean that

the one they worshipped can be simply identified with the God and the Father of Jesus Christ.” This argument is partly based on the fact that some African groups like the Luo, maintains that the notion of a single supreme being, came from Western missionaries and was in fact contrary to traditional African beliefs (Ferdinando, 2007:127). Ferdinando (2007: 127) therefore asks if Africans ever worshipped “God as such” and argues that they did not. “The focus of religious life was rather on lesser spirit beings” and there is no adequate recognition that the great power of the one God could really be concerned with this or that side of one’s own small life” (Ferdinando, 2007:128). Together with the writings of scholars like Bediako and Idowu, Mbiti’s other writings were also done from an apologetic point of view, therefore wanting to argue in favour of the God of the Christian Gospel, but without providing objective proof that the God in African Traditional Religion and the God of the Gospel are indeed the same (Ferdinando, 2007:129).

2.4. The uniqueness of the African Christian woman

In the light of the afore mentioned, it seems then that the worldview in which Africans are submerged, relies on notions and beliefs that differs substantially from what could be called a Christian worldview.

This means, that when an African woman, comes to faith in the Christ of the Gospel, a new set of values becomes part of her worldview. Her challenge would be a renewal of the mind as Paul alludes to in Romans 12. It would therefore be useful to pass a few remarks on what a Christian worldview, based on Christian faith, would entail.

Van der Walt (2008: 93) contends that central to a Christian worldview are the Scriptures. The revelation about God, becomes the criterion against which everything that is known, can now be measured. The Christian worldview is thus a worldview based on a physical text as opposed to the African worldview which relies on oral tradition which varies between the many different ethnic groups as Mbiti (1970) has shown. Having the Bible means that the Christian can now study the things they experience in the light of the Word in order to come to a new understanding. For, as Van der Walt also argues, the Christian worldview is also aimed at changing practices and society (Van der Walt, 2008: 93).

In the light of what has been discussed in this chapter, it will imply that the African woman firstly has to re-evaluate herself and her place in the community. Being in Christ, for example, will mean that she can no longer be discriminated against just because she is part of a patriarchal culture. As Genesis 2:18 confirms, God created man and woman equal.

According to Assohoto and Ngewa (2010:14), the woman was the God-ordained complement of the man and therefore must be recognised as such. This would also mean that she cannot be ostracised by society as a female after her husband had died or be bound by fear of ancestors as the Bible has radically different views on these matters. Above all, the ideas about God in African culture differ substantially from that in the Gospel. Most importantly, the God of the Gospel is a relational being that is very interested in the personal well-being of His covenant children (Genesis 17) not leaving the Christian widow at the mercy of ancestors or the community, but through His covenant grace also willing to guide her through this difficult period by His grace and the consolation of the Holy Spirit and the faith community.

The unique position of the African Christian woman can thus at best be described as a unique disposition as the African worldview and culture has a real potential of complicating the grieving process, rather than accommodating the grieving process in a positive way.

2.5. Preliminary synthesis

Worldview and culture are powerful forces that have a directive function in the lives of its adherents. The African worldview and culture is saturated with mystical forces and exerts much power over Africans. Especially at the crossroad between earthly life and the hereafter, these mystical forces apply their influence through the communities that maintain them. It is during this period that the African Christian women can realise that there are many things that do not concur with her Christian faith, causing much emotional turmoil and inner conflict. The very cursory overview of this chapter attempted to show the influence of the African worldview and culture by highlighting a few aspects central to it. When compared to basic Christian beliefs, the unique challenges for women of the Christian faith within the African context, transpired. These challenges are of the utmost importance to pastoral caregivers who have to counsel these women.

In the next two chapters, in depth attention will be given to the meaning of death and dying within the African context, as well as to the rituals African culture exposes women to. This will be done in line with the rationale behind this study, namely that these aspects can seriously complicate the grieving process for the African Christian widow, necessitating pastoral guidance through this period.

Chapter three: The concepts of death and dying within the African context.

3.1. Introduction

As suggested before, African Christian widows are probably one of the most vulnerable groups in the South African context in terms of complicated grief which results from conflicts between their faith and culture. Whilst death and grieving is a part of life, African culture and traditions complicate closure over the death of a spouse due to mourning beliefs and rituals, which ultimately affect widows and delay their healing process. Manyedi *et al.* (2003:70) indicate that in South Africa widowhood is very complicated amongst African widows due to the cultural beliefs and traditions within different communities. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore death and dying in the African context in order to identify some of the challenges the Christian African widow is facing as a result of this.

3.2. Death in Africa

According to Van Zyl (2009:175), in Africa death is one of the most important events in the lifecycle. For the deceased it is an event of moving on to a new mode of living. For the living, the death of a member of the community creates the opportunity for sharing and caring, that is, for strengthening *Ubuntu*. During this difficult period people from all walks of life including the church and neighbours come together, irrespective of their differences, to assist the chief mourners and show them support spiritually, physically and emotionally. According to Baloyi (2014: 1), this uniting feature of death amongst Africans is accentuated by the fact that African people are not even deterred by the distances they need to travel to attend a family member's funeral. The traditional burial rituals that occur during this period have evolved to assist the bereaved to come to grips with the loss of their loved ones and usher them into a better life in the hereafter.

Because death is feared in African societies it is mostly a taboo topic for the living. Consequently little is done to prepare persons for the process of dying (Nürnberg, 2007:24; Van Zyl, 2009:175). It is perceived as the loss of vitality and the most serious matter one can think of. With the exception of the death of the elderly, death always evokes conspicuous lamentations, painful isolation of those concerned and extensive mourning (Nürnberg, 2007:24). Gehman (2005:77) reports that death is viewed as an enemy, a snatching of life, something that maliciously takes away a person. .

Within the African worldview Nyirongo (1997:79) states that all Africans see death as an unnatural and sorrowful event. It is an unwelcome and sad event which should be understood through the sorrow expressed by the community, especially close relatives. In some cases it is believed that death is caused by some evil agent like a spirit, witchdoctor or an ill meaning person.

Within the African worldview death is also attributed varied significance. Therefore, the death of a woman or child is not viewed in the same light as that of a married man. A married man is a symbol of authority in the family especially if he was a respected leader of a community. His funeral cannot be viewed as ordinary. That is why Owen (1996:7) says “but for all women the death of a husband has extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, protector and breadwinner, but also heralds a radical change in her social status and lifestyle”.

3.3. The effect of death on man as a spiritual being

African tradition agrees with Scripture that man is a spiritual being. He is not only a body but has a spiritual side to him which links him to the supernatural while he is alive and continues to exist when the body dies (Grebe & Fon, 2006:34). In the African view Nyirongo (1997:80, 81) indicates that death is a separation between body and soul. The soul leaves the body, lingers around in the funeral home until it is bid a proper farewell by means of a ritual, sacrifices and petitions and taken to the grave for burial. This signifies the transition from the physical to a spiritual existence.

3.4. Immortality

Nyirongo (1997:81) suggests that soul of the deceased becomes immortal but close relatives must perform funeral rites to enable it to travel to the spirit land. It is believed that if a man dies his soul roams around his homestead or neighbourhood. After the funeral rites, the soul joins the other ancestral spirits in the spirit land somewhere in the ground where it leads almost the same life it led on earth. There is no heaven, hell or resurrection. The only difference is that in the spiritual state the individual gains a more vital force than in the material state. If the funeral rites are neglected it is feared that the spirit will continue to hover around and torment the relatives through various misfortunes.

Mbiti (1990:25) states that this person is physically dead but is alive in the memory of those who knew him during his living years as well as in the spirit world. That is why he is called an ancestor or living dead. When kept in remembrance, he remains in the state of personal immortality. “This personal immortality is externalised in the physical continuation of an individual through procreation” (Mbiti, 1990:25). For example, when a baby is born it can be given the name of the departed whom the baby is considered to resemble closely. This makes people happy that a departed member of the family has come back in part through the birth of the baby (Mbiti, 2015:93). Even in South Africa most Africans name their children after the departed or elderly people to show respect. Lesejane (2006:177,178) indicated that such naming suggest that children are gifts from ancestors or regarded as the same ancestors having come back to life. That is why they are named after elderly or deceased relatives. From the time of naming, the child would have the same authority as the person after whom he or she had been named. Such a child is special and pampered by relatives especially those who were closely related to the deceased. Mbiti (1990:25) stresses that it is therefore very important for an African man to marry and have children. He must have sons so that they should survive him and keep him with the other living dead of the family in personal immortality and not for him to vanish out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished.

However, according to Grebe and Fon (2006:34), in African tradition the departed do not leave earth for another distant sphere like hell or heaven. They rather stay in close proximity to the living as ancestral spirits who are much involved in the affairs of their living descendants. Though death brings physical separation it does not sever the bond between the living and the dead (Nyirongo, 1997:81). Sometimes the family talks about the departed in the present tense to show that he is still with them. For example if one wants to borrow an item that belonged to the deceased for example, a spade, the widow would inform the borrower that she still has to get permission from her late husband.

3.5. Death and the Community

Death affects the whole community and anyone who attends the funeral must behave appropriately (Nyirongo, 1997:81). The community that supports the bereaved family is normally divided into four categories or groups namely the church, relatives, neighbours and friends. Each has an important role to play. The church offers spiritual support on a daily

basis by holding prayer services until the last day. The presence of friends brings comfort and moral support to the family. Neighbours lend a hand of compassion by opening their homes to accommodate relatives who come from far, free of charge. They help in the daily chores such as cooking and aid the family by bringing any equipment, items or utensils needed for the burial.

According to Baloyi (2014:1), the ritual surrounding death has a uniting function for African people. “An African funeral is a very social event for the entire community in which the deceased lived”. Regardless of whether the deceased was a Christian or not, people come together, even if they were not close to the deceased. Irrespective of distance, most relatives would come to pay their last respects to the deceased and provide the bereaved family with emotional support. That is why at times a funeral can be postponed to a later date just to ensure that relatives who live far away are able to come and pay their last respects (“go itlhobogella moswi”¹) and to give it the dignity it deserves.

This gesture is visible even if people were enemies. Usually they bury their differences by supporting the bereaved family as a way of showing that they have forgiven the deceased or the deceased and family must forgive them depending on what the situation was before his departure. In most cases the two parties will work together harmoniously and the family’s attitude will show that they welcome the rivals and make peace with them even without discussing the matter. Their mere presence brings comfort, unity and a new healthy relationship. Therefore it can be said that death opens doors for reconciliation.

3.6. Causes of death: witchcraft and sorcery

Amongst African people, witchcraft is usually considered to be one of the major causes of death (Baloyi, 2014:3). Death is not natural but mystical. Even if it is caused by an accident the question would be, why did it happen and who caused it? That is why some Africans consult a traditional doctor to inquire about the causes of death. The traditional doctor would then communicate with the ancestral spirit(s) to determine what the true cause is (Gehman, 2005:78). Since ancestors are linked to the cosmos, the land and water, Cumes (2013:59) informs us that they can provide information that is not confined to the space-time continuum.

¹ “Go itlhobogella moswi” means final emotional surrender and acceptance that the deceased had really died

Even if the cause of death was from an illness like HIV /Aids the African widow can still be blamed for killing or bewitching her husband by close relatives. Although devastated by the loss, the family becomes insensitive to her feelings and emotions. Even if the post mortem reveals that a spouse died from natural causes, she can still be suspected of contributing to his death especially if she is still young. Jose and Mohan (2014:150) cite a case where a 27 year old widow reported verbal abuse by the in-laws blaming her for the death of her husband. Even her immediate family suspected her of not taking care of her husband. Even disclosing that her husband had died of natural causes did little to change the family's suspicion towards her. This underlines how difficult it is for Africans to accept death as a natural part of life and why death is only accepted as the will of God if the deceased was old.

It is mainly in the light of this that African widows must exert themselves in the expression of grief to prove that she loved and respected her husband. She must weep and be sad and depend on both her family and in-laws to take over during the funeral preparations. Sossou (2002:202) states that "a woman is expected to grieve openly and demonstrate the intensity of her feelings in formalised ways". If she does not show sorrowful emotions it can be interpreted as rejoicing over the death of the spouse and that she may have contributed to the death of her husband. In such cases Nyirongo (1997:81) states that the widow may be accused of having bewitched the husband and consequently be treated as an outcast. Research conducted amongst Nigerian Yoruba widows by Oyenyim and Ayodeji (2010:3154) indicate that wailing loudly for several days before and after the death of a husband is supervised by female members from the late husband's side. Physical punishment can be administered if found that the widow has not wailed thoroughly enough. She can even be accused of being responsible for killing the husband. Owuor (2006:2) reports that in some cases a traditional doctor would be consulted to find out who was responsible for using witchcraft to cause the death of the deceased. Nürnberger (2007:24) also adds that an untimely death is often ascribed to uncanny forces set in motion through enmity, sorcerous' manipulation or witchcraft.

Even in present day South Africa in both urban and rural areas, African widows are still blamed for killing their husbands. The death of a husband is seldom accepted as natural or as coming from God. According to the research conducted by Manyedi (2001:137) on African widows, communities still blame widows for killing their husbands. This can be viewed as discriminatory because men are not blamed when their wives die.

3.7. Ancestors: The living dead

In Africa it is believed that the dead communicate with the living on a regular basis. This communication occurs mostly through dreams or visions. As they are no longer restricted by physical responsibilities, they keep the family on the right path of cultural and religious traditions (Djedje, 2013:43). Ancestors or living dead are not gods but are believed to mediate between the living and God (Cumes, 2013:59). The living continues to have a relationship with the dead by appeasing them through sacrifices. If they are appeased, it is believed that these ancestors have the ability to bestow good luck, but if they are ignored they can cause trouble, misfortune and even death (Baloyi, 2014:4).

Amanze (2003:45) explains that not all persons are elevated to the ranks of ancestors. According to Ige (2006:30), to qualify as an ancestor one must have led a transparently good moral life as dictated by the ethical standards of the society and die at an old age. Amanze (2003:45) notes that in each society it is the people who select the living dead for the rank of ancestor. One has to possess certain qualities such as physical integrity and morality, personal social standing and self-control in order to be considered as such. In some societies a person may not become an ancestor unless he or she has descendants. “Perhaps the ultimate qualification to become an ancestor is death. Death is the dividing line between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is however not the only criterion. Not all dead people are considered as ancestors” (Ige, 2006:29).

For example, a husband who commits suicide cannot qualify to be an ancestor because he has set a bad example by taking his own life. His spirit cannot be accepted in the spirit land by other ancestors. Similarly, an alcoholic or anyone with a bad character such as theft or anger cannot be accepted as an ancestor because families fear dysfunctional ancestral characters that might affect the family negatively and bring disgrace and disaster to the lineage. Families avoid naming their children after such ancestors because it is believed that they might inherit their bad personalities and tarnish the image and dignity of the family. To support this view Cumes (2013:60) also suggests that “African philosophy believes that not only can unhappy and dysfunctional spirits affect their progeny from the beyond, but also that a dysfunctional spirit can reincarnate into the family and recreate the same dysfunction in a future generation”.

Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:1300) explain ancestors or living dead as holding influence over their descendants. Their identity is explained as transcendental beings representing the religious, ethical and institutional values of society in their community. Their abode and influence range from the physical to the spiritual world. Ige (2006:27) adds that since ancestors are no longer visible in the physical sense, Africans attribute supernatural powers to them. These supernatural powers are derived from the Supreme Being², but are used independently of him. These powers can be applied either for good or evil and is respected as the ancestors have been bestowed with dignity and prestige through death.

According to Ige (2006:27), the duty of ancestors is to remain present in the lives of the living, watching over the household and the property of the family, being interested in the welfare of their living descendants and remaining involved in the family affairs such as their traditions, customs, health and fertility. Even, when a woman is being given in marriage, libation³ is poured to the ancestors so that she must be accepted by them. According to these beliefs, ancestors are also concerned about maintaining moral values amongst the living. Therefore, they can discipline any erring member of the living belonging to their clan. Punishment is especially given for transgressions like incest, stealing, adultery and bearing false witness as well as other moral vices.

In Africa men and women qualify to be ancestors as long as they died naturally at a ripe old age and were properly buried, but male ancestors are more prominent since traditional African societies are patriarchal (Ezenweke, 2013:4). In other countries such as rural Japan older women are regarded as ancestors and communicate with the living in dreams. They are regarded as caregivers and family protectors (Traphagan, 2003:127).

Finally Mbiti (1990:151) stresses that although people may fear that the living dead would cause them to die, there is little evidence to support the belief that they actually cause death. This stems from the belief that if the living dead have been offended before they died, or were not properly buried, they can attack their victims with death or cause misfortunes. It is a known fact amongst Africans that the only remedy is to harmonise the situation by appeasing them through rituals.

² Supreme Being in this context refers to God.

³ Libation is a ritual of pouring African beer onto the ground by the family to enable communication with ancestors.

3.8. Haunting by spirits

It is common for most people to feel close ties with the deceased early after passing on. According to Daggett (2005:197), “this is due to the occurrence of vivid dreams or waking visions in which they briefly reunite with their lost loved ones and exchange ideas with or without words. These encounters provide them opportunities to say farewell and receive assurance that their late spouses’ existence continues though on a different plane”. Kübler and Kessler (2005:110) suggest that this is aggravated by the fact that widows in their loss are longing for and seeking connection with the deceased.

Although this phenomenon also occurs amongst Africans, it bears a different character. There is a belief that some spirits come to haunt their relatives after their death, mainly by appearing in dreams. Adeyanju and Ogungbamila (2013:647) suggest that in some instances this communication between the living and the dead is so depressing and tormenting that it affects the health of the African widow and she experiences psychosocial problems such as hallucinations, hearing the voice, dreaming and seeing the face of the deceased husband over a period of time. Thereafter she is afraid to sleep alone in the bedroom.

To support this viewpoint, Khomo (2012:2) published an article in the Daily Sun showing an African widow with a swollen face who lost her left eye sight due to slaps she encountered in dreams by her dead husband. The dead husband abused her physically whilst he was alive and is believed to still torment her in dreams and to continue to abuse her by forcing her to do a reconciliation ritual. This affected her health very bad.

To date in South Africa this belief is still prevailing that a spirit of the late husband can come to haunt his African widow after his death and burial. When the widow has fought with the deceased before he died, there is that possibility of “visits” by the late husband. The traditional doctor would be consulted for advice or at times the spirit would explain in the dream/visitation what it wants. These visitations are normally stopped through a ritual and refusal to obey these instructions can lead to misfortunes or death.

3.9. Children of the deceased

The death of a father compels children to show respect by supporting their mother. This respect is especially shown through the attire children wear during this period. Girls are expected to wear dresses instead of slacks and also something on the head as a sign of

mourning. Boys are expected to wear jackets and long trousers especially during services though this is not obligatory. Children are further expected to stay at home to welcome visitors and mourners and, if older, can be allowed to choose the coffin for the deceased. Behaviour of children must be such that it can be visible that they are mourning.

3.10 Immediate family members

Manyedi (2001:78, 84) reminds that the understanding of the concept of family in African culture is wider than in Western culture. Therefore, immediate family members include uncles, parents, sibling and aunts. Their duty is to support the widow emotionally and financially. Most widows claim to get more support from their own family than in-laws. Some start to sleep over at the widow's house from the day of death until a week after the funeral. They assist in daily chores and act as managers and whenever something is needed by outsiders they are there to help. However, in-laws play a major role in decision-making and arranging the funeral of their son. Even if the widow's family may be prepared to assist, they can be prevented from handling cultural issues such as traditional rituals. According to the in-laws, the African widow now belongs to their clan because she is married.

3.10.1. Implications for the African Christian widow

In the light of the aforementioned, it is important to articulate some of the implications of the concepts and beliefs about death in Africa for the African Christian widow.

The death of a spouse poses the African Christian widow with a twofold challenge. She has to negotiate the grieving process and she has to integrate African traditional beliefs and practices with her Christian faith. According to Turaki (1999:36), in-laws who still adhere to traditional beliefs, will pressure her not to allow Christian values to assume prominence or supremacy over their long revered African religion. The in-laws will expect the African Christian widow to show respect to their customs because to them African religion and Christian faith are two separate issues. When it is time to apply Christianity one is expected to do that without allowing it to clash with African culture and vice versa.

3.10.2. A stressful mourning period in the light of African culture

A first implication for the African Christian widow is that the mourning period becomes more stressful than usual as a result of cultural prescriptions. Louw (2008:534) states that it is

difficult for the African Christian widow to maintain traditional beliefs and rituals linked to dying and mourning due to her Christian belief. While some traditional practices may aid the grieving process, others contradict the Christian faith as it ascribes to practices that are foreign to Scriptures. Irrespective of the contradictions between Christian faith and African tradition, the traditional African families expect the African Christian widow to adhere to their African culture. As a Christian this puts her in a dilemma between combining her faith with traditional customs. Grebe and Fon (2006:25) argue that the problem the African Christian widow is facing is that of syncretism which the church has not properly addressed yet. Christians are trying to combine their faith with African tradition. That is why to traditional in-laws it is non-negotiable for the African Christian widow to disobey their culture. If she chooses to maintain her Christian faith without mixing it with her African tradition, she is likely to be isolated by her in-laws and stigmatised. This ostracism by in-laws is mostly aggravated by fear of harsh punishment by ancestors. As mentioned earlier, it is believed that these ancestors can attack the whole family spiritually by tormenting them in dreams or physically causing sickness and accidents, even death.

Such practices create confusion when the African Christian widow is faced with ancestral challenges. Because there are so many discriminatory restrictions surrounding death, at times she would be torn between Christianity and culture. That is why some widows, when faced with this kind of situation, end up compromising their faith which creates inner conflict and affects them spiritually.

To support this viewpoint Manyedi (2001:72,74) points out that some widows follow tradition even if they do not believe in culture for the sake of maintaining the family dignity and peace. Otherwise, failure to obey in-laws can result in the widow being suspected of killing the late husband. She may even be ostracised at times by some of the members of her own family who strongly believe in culture and tradition being followed. This kind of pressure on the African Christian widow affects her emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically.

Turaki (1999:37) stresses that some traditional extremists can even accuse the African widow of accepting the white man's religion i.e. Christianity and making the African gods angry at her African prostitution with Western religion and culture. On the other hand the African Christian widow will be torn between serving two masters as she does not want to be unfaithful to God. The Bible in Hosea 4:12b says "a spirit of prostitution leads them astray,

they are unfaithful to God” (NIV). Turaki (1999:37) further states that “salvation for Africa lies in its repentance and the return to revering and embracing African gods, religion and cultures”. This suggests that in-laws expect the African Christian widow to embrace their African religion and culture which according to them is superior to Christianity. Therefore, the African widow is expected to know how to differentiate between the two practices and not to allow her culture to suffer at the expense of Christianity which in-laws perceive as foreign. In most cases Africans are not opposed to Christianity, but hold their culture in higher regard.

This indicates that the Christian message regarding mourning seems to contradict African culture and some traditional beliefs. Magezi (2006:507) states that whilst the African Christian widow experiences intense tension between faith and African traditional practices, Magezi and Myambo (2011:163) stress that “it is imperative that churches and pastors ministering to her should provide sound and contextual relevant responses to that situation. Failure to do so will inevitably lead a person to seek traditional solutions”. “There should be an appropriate and relevant pastoral intervention as the church is a sub-community within a larger community where people experience the realities of life” (Magezi & Myambo, 2011:163).

3.10.3. Acknowledgement and acceptance

In light of the African view that the deceased remains with the living as an ancestor, initial acknowledgement of the husband’s death and eventual acceptance thereof, are compromised. Adesina (2014:154) suggests that it is difficult for African women to accept death as real. Belief in sustained contact with ancestors postpones the challenge of dealing with the reality and implications of death.

3.10.4. Isolation and conflict with family

Until the family of the deceased comes to terms with the passing of their loved one, the African widow is subjected to isolation and suspicion from family members. As shown, much pressure is placed upon widows during this period to earn the trust of the family by exerted expressions of mourning. This has the potential of diverging the widow’s emotional energy away from coming to terms with her husband’s death to pleasing the family and

earning their trust. The physical and emotional isolation which result from her spouse's passing away is in this way aggravated even more (Adesina, 2014:154,155; Louw, 2008:504).

3.10.5. Anxiety and fear

As a result of how death and dying are viewed within the African context, the African widow is potentially exposed to anxiety and fear. This especially refers to phenomena that are very real within the African culture, but are difficult to explain in real terms. One example is the vivid experiences through dreams of the deceased. According to Thwala *et al.* (2000:1) dreams in the African worldview have great significance and are to be taken very seriously. Dreams are usually associated with ancestors who want to reveal something unknown to a human being to convey a warning or danger. In this context it becomes difficult for an African Christian widow to handle this situation of seeing her dead husband in dreams. The African Christian widow is cognisant that Christianity does not welcome instructions of ancestral dreams because communication with the dead is forbidden (Deuteronomy 9:13, NIV). No matter how often she can see her late husband in the dream; this does not offer healing solution. This is because of the nature of instruction given by the deceased of performing rituals, which is a challenge to her Christian faith. This gives her no peace and causes depression as she does not know where to turn to. She is aware that the situation can be volatile if she informs her in-laws as they will expect her to follow instruction which is not Biblical.

Fear and anxiety can further be spurred on by the close links between death, witchcraft and sorcery within the African culture. As shown, the African widow can at any time be viewed as a suspect or party to her spouse's passing and she lives under the threat of some kind of retribution for a significant period, once again channelling much emotional energy away from the task at hand, which is the mourning of her husband.

3.10.6. Preliminary synthesis

This chapter has tried to show some of the significant meanings of death and dying within the African context. It discussed the effects of death on man as a spiritual being, African immortality, how death affected the community, the causes of death such as witchcraft and sorcery, ancestors or the living dead and their interaction in the African community, how they haunted the families. Children of the deceased and immediate families were also

discussed. Implications for the widow were also highlighted and the stressful mourning period she underwent as a result of culture. All these different implications such as isolation and conflicts within the family, anxiety and fear the African Christian widow is experiencing, were of utmost importance to enable the pastorate to deal with the grieving African Christian widow.

In the next chapter attention will be paid to rituals associated with grieving within the African context and some of the implications it has for the African Christian widow.

Chapter four: Rituals associated with grieving within the African context

4.1. Introduction

According to Dlukulu (2010:57) and Volkan and Zintl (1993:51), death rituals have an important psychological significance for African people. During that period, mourners need time and space to grieve which is one of the reasons that most cultures and religions have funeral rites to address and meet that need. Some of these rituals are important as they help the family to come to terms with the death of the deceased and accept it whilst involved in planning the funeral, viewing the body, memorial services and accepting condolences from friends, relatives and the community at large. These rituals differ from culture to culture, ethnic groups and clans although there are also similarities amongst them.

Akujobi (2009:2457) states that mourning rituals in African culture complicates widowhood to the extent that African women fear the immanent experience of becoming a widow. Widows go through much hardship that stems from the society, the husband's family and from tradition. Adebowale (2015:113) states that these cultural practices in African societies have worsened the situation for widows as it exposes them to indiscriminate abuses. A study by Kotzè *et al.* (2012:742) revealed that South African mourning is also shaped by discursive practices of both traditional culture and gender practices of bereavement. Much as culture has its own values, ideas, beliefs and practices with regard to death, Manyedi (2001:33, 46) stresses that coping with the death of the husband could have been easier if the widow was within a culture that accept and acknowledge death as a natural way of completing the life cycle that God created.

This is mainly as a result of many traditional rituals that are observed. Almost every African family occasion requires a unique ritual performance. For example when a baby is born, a teenager enters into manhood or a man and woman marry, certain rituals are performed to grace the event. This is not unusual when it comes to death. Mourning rituals are carried out from the day of death, after the burial and throughout the year. These rituals differ from one ethnic group/clan to another. For instance, rural widows observe mourning rituals slightly differently from urban widows and the same applies for Christian and non-Christians. Because of the multitude of these mourning rituals, this chapter will mainly focus on those that are most common amongst Black South Africans. The aim is to indicate what potential effect they might have on the grieving process of the African Christian widow.

4.2 Mourning Rituals

According to Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:77,78), most African widows begin their mourning with what is called “a sitting,”. The widow sits in a designated place, usually the bedroom with elderly women where people come to express their condolences and prayers. The widow is given a blanket to cover herself and a cloth⁴ to wear on the head. All furniture is taken out except for a mattress on the floor where she sleeps. In most cases the mattress is put on the floor without the base as a symbol of grief and respect for the deceased. In some rural areas she can even sleep on a mat as part of tradition. Furniture such as sofas, television and pictures are removed from the sitting room to make space for plastic chairs and a table for the ministers who will be preaching until they decide to move services to the tent. After the burial, family and trusted neighbours will put the furniture back. Some families even smear windows and mirrors with a mixture of ashes and water as a sign of mourning and for people to identify the house easily. The windows will be washed on the day of the burial whilst mourners are at church and the graveyard.

During the sitting, an African widow cannot leave the bedroom except to go to the bathroom. If she needs anything, she has to ask someone to bring it to her. According to Idialu (2012:7), she is not permitted to go to the toilet unaccompanied and if the ablution facilities are outside the house, an elderly woman or widow has to accompany her. She cannot walk in front of that elderly widow. This is a symbol to show that she is in a state of helplessness. Traditionally, this practice is maintained until the burial. According to Manyedi (2001:69), she is not expected to talk freely to people, neither loudly nor to scream as this will be interpreted as if she is joyful about the death of her husband. That is why other widows express their grief by extreme crying until they are taken to the doctor and sedated. This demonstration of emotions adds more respect to the deceased and satisfies her in-laws and the community that the widow loved her husband.

4.3. Clothes of the deceased

In most African cultures found in Southern Africa the clothes of the deceased are wrapped in a sheet and the bundle is put in a corner with a lit candle for the whole week. Selepe and

⁴ In Setswana this cloth is called a *tuku* which is derived from the Afrikaans “kopdoek” loosely translated as a head-cloth.

Edwards (2008:3) note that after the burial these clothes are washed so that they can be distributed to family members at a later stage. The distribution is done by a specified person as determined by his family which is usually the uncle. Water is sprinkled over them as part of the ritual. Usually the uncle and aunt of the deceased are the ones to pick out the best clothes for themselves first. If they are dead their children can come to be in their stead. The remaining clothes are shared amongst children and family members and to whomever the deceased gave a verbal directive before he departed. All clothes which are regarded useless or torn can be burned afterwards.

4.4. Attire

Far more restrictions are placed on widows than on widowers. They endure the most humiliating rituals in relation to dressing codes, eating foods, ostracism, discrimination etc. (Sossou, 2002:202). According to Letsosa and Semanya (2011:2) and Idialu (2012:7), a widow must wear mourning clothes for a year and the purpose is to express sorrow. They are expected to mourn for a longer period than widowers. Letsosa and Semanya (2011:2) and Idialu (2012:7) observed that African widows express their grief by wearing black or any colour determined by the family. Widowers are also expected to mourn their late wives but their rituals are less demanding. They usually put on a jacket and on the day of the funeral a black band can be pinned around the arm of the jacket for a short period, but it is not compulsory.

During the week of the burial, the in-laws or the widow's family would buy a mourning cloth for the widow to wear on the day of the funeral and afterwards. Although black clothing is also worn by Western people at funerals, black, blue or purple dresses are the most commonly worn by Africans to identify widows in South Africa. The colour of the mourning cloth depends on the in-laws. This cloth would be taken to the seamstress to design a dress called "rou". There are different names for this dress like "ukuzila" in Zulu (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007:69). However, the most common name used for this mourning garment amongst Africans in South Africa is "rou". Rou is an Afrikaans word to describe mourning or grieving. According to Manyedi (2001:70), she has to wash it separately at night and does not hang it for people to see. Should it be torn, she is not expected to mend it.

Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:78) state that the rou is compulsory for the African widow as it is a symbol of respect for her late husband, her families and the community. In African culture

she is still a married woman and not regarded as single. Therefore, it is a sign of mourning and a measure to stop men from flirting or bothering the African widow with sexual advances. To the widow the rou acts as a self-disciplinary measure to remind herself of her status as a widow and new leadership role she has to assume at home in the absence of her late spouse. Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:79) report further that after a year a cleansing ritual is performed where after the garment is burned. A widow's hair is cut off after the funeral and in some cultures she is smeared with dung and cannot wash that day mainly to remove bad luck (sefifi⁵).

At this stage the rou indicates to the family and whole community that the African widow is ritually unclean at the death of her husband (Idialu, 2012:8). That is why Letsosa and Semenya (2011:2) and Manyedi (2001:68) stress that it is traditionally unbecoming for an African widow to engage in any intimate relationship with any male partner as she will transmit impurities that can cause illness. Manyedi (2001:68) further states that because of her ritual uncleanliness, it is culturally believed that her blood is too "hot" and still one with the deceased therefore, she cannot indulge in such an act. If she can be tempted and does engage in such an act it can be culturally dangerous to both parties and can lead to a fatal sickness called "boswagadi⁶". During sexual union blood is exchanged and contaminates both parties. Therefore it is culturally believed that this encounter can even affect their families and bring bad luck (sefifi). It is believed that the sickness can affect the man by painful swelling of the feet, tummy and the skin becoming pale. It can be fatal if not treated. Thus a cleansing ritual has to be performed and medication obtained from traditional healers. It is traditionally assumed that the spirit of the deceased cannot rest properly if such an act occurred.

4.5. Recreation

Kotzé *et al.* (2012:754) found that during the burial week all forms of recreational activity that a widow normally enjoys, such as listening to the radio, watching television etc. is prohibited. Family meetings are held almost daily to decide on the burial and most decisions are taken by her in-laws. She has no say even if she does not like the idea. For example the in-laws can decide to bury the deceased at a village where his ancestors were buried. It can

⁵ "Sefifi" is a traditional Setswana word for bad luck.

⁶ "Boswagadi" is sickness caused by sexual union between a male partner and a widow during mourning period as she is ritually unclean and still one with the departed.

be an inconvenience financially and otherwise as they would expect her to obey and provide money for all the expenses. In some cases the fight with in-laws becomes so extreme and sensitive to a point whereby the widow would apply for a court interdict to allow her to bury her husband at their common home without their interference.

Even after the burial of the deceased there is no freedom of movement for the African Christian widow (Idialu, 2012:7). Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:78) and Manyedi (2001:66) report that an African widow is not expected to visit other people or go to any social events such as weddings, parties, funerals or any community gathering. She is expected to sit at home and not participate in societal activities and if there are pressing matters to attend to, she has to be accompanied by someone and be back home before six o'clock at night. Intermingling or socialising is prohibited as she is still unclean. Otherwise the in-laws can suspect that she is rejoicing about the death of her late husband. They can even suspect and accuse her of killing her husband through witchcraft. Therefore, she has to be in that pensive mood for a year until a cleansing ritual is performed. That is why in some cultures they do not permit the widow to go to church until after a certain period. This is a source of frustration and bitterness for the African Christian widow as the church is her main source of spiritual support.

Furthermore, Manyedi (2001:66, 67,150) noted that if she visits church, she will be at the back and not mingle freely with other members of the church and must hurry home after the sermon. After six she has to put lights on because in the African culture there is an expression that says "the sun must not set on her outside her home" because she has to light a candle for the clothes of the deceased. In the rural villages she is not expected to cross the field or kraals as she will affect the harvest or bewitch the cattle with her black clothes. They may even want to kill her or chase her out of the villages or call her a witch, which may cost her life if there is no intervention. These restrictions make the African widow to feel lonely, bitter and frustrated as she is believed to be infested with bad luck.

The only time the widow can socialise with other people is when she is giving thanks to all who have helped her during the funeral through a small ceremony or gathering. This usually takes place at her home on a Saturday, a week after the burial. Mostly those invited are friends, neighbours and relatives who did daily chores like cooking, erecting the tent, digging at the grave, slaughtering of the cow etc. Traditional food is cooked for them and African

beer (bojalwa ba digarawe⁷) is brewed. Although conversation centres mostly on the departed as they reminisce about him. The general mood becomes lighter and she can even smile and relate some humorous stories about the deceased.

4.6. Utensils

Immediately after the death of a husband the widow's food is served on separate plates and fed by one person until after the funeral. Her utensils are separated and washed alone and not mixed with others because she is ritually unclean. In some families especially in rural areas, anything that is given to the widow would be put on the floor for her to pick it up because she is ritually unclean.

4.7. Children of the deceased

Sossou (2002:205) stresses that mourning of the late husband is not left entirely to the African widow. Children also mourn for their dead parent but the patterns differ from one child to the other depending also on the age. For example, a small child cannot fully comprehend what is happening and therefore accepts death easily, whereas an adult child understands death and its implications. That is why adult children of the deceased participate in cleansing and mourning rituals.

For example, in South Africa grown up children wear a black button on the left hand of any garment they are wearing. Usually the black cloth is sewn to that button by the seamstress or any relative and pinned to the children's garments with a safety pin. Since their mourning period is shorter than the widow, after three months those buttons are taken off and a cleansing ritual is observed whereby a sheep is slaughtered and they are smeared with dung and stay like that for the whole day. They eat traditional food and drink African beer to appease the ancestors.

4.8. Services

Manyedi (2001:81) states that "from the time of death until the burial, the church usually gives the widow spiritual support by way of holding services and prayers to comfort the bereaved." Even if the departed was an unbeliever the whole neighborhood and family

⁷ "Bojalwa ba digarawe" In this context African beer is served to all helpers especially grave diggers and all helpers who were coordinating the funeral.

friends would gather and ask any preacher to give words of encouragement from the Bible and to pray. During that week a tent will be put up inside the yard or in front depending on space at the house solely for the purpose of prayer services. Due to discriminatory restrictions, the widow will be expected to be in her bedroom listening to the messages. It is seen as taboo if she can interact with other mourners. Another disadvantage is that at times the tent where the service is held can be far from the widow's bedroom and prevent her from hearing the Word of God. This can affect her as a Christian because that is from where she draws her strength.

4.8.1. Viewing of the corpse

Viewing of the corpse differs from family to family but the most observed is on the day of the funeral. In this scenario the two stages or phases of viewing of the corpse will be explained. The first stage is on the eve of the burial. Usually this takes place when the undertakers bring the remains home. A guard of honour is made by the community for the deceased with lit candles outside the yard up to the front door. Immediately when the coffin enters the house, hymns will be sung followed by prayers to welcome the deceased. As quoted earlier, Nyirongo (1997:81) states that these rituals, sacrifices and petitions are very important in African culture because it is believed that since the day of death, the deceased's soul has been roaming or lingering around the funeral house or in the neighbourhood therefore has to bid farewell to his household by entering his yard and house.

The second stage of viewing occurs on the day of the burial. Selepe and Edwards (2008:3) state that there is always an elder, usually an adult male, to open the coffin and stay close to it to monitor the viewers. Mourners are not allowed to linger for a long time around the coffin. They are allowed to view the corpse usually very early at home. This may take place an hour or two before going to church or an hour before the funeral service commences at home. Once the coffin is closed custom will not allow the coffin to be opened to anyone to view the corpse unless there is a special case which must be negotiated with the close relatives like the deceased's uncles. The belief is that a coffin must not be opened frequently because it can open the door for death of members of the family. It is like an invitation to death for members of that family. If someone in the family dies shortly after the funeral, it can be said that this death was caused by the carelessness of the family by opening the coffin for a second time.

4.8.2. Night vigil

A night vigil is held on the eve of the funeral. The night vigil/service is similar to a memorial service. It provides opportunities to help the family deal with the death of their loved one. It is a time to reflect and focus on the life of the late person, to remember what an asset he was to the community and family. This supports and strengthens the family in their farewell to the departed and in their knowledge that God has made good use of their family member.

“It is during this stage that the African Christian widow seems to be developing a positive attitude towards widowhood and mourning, thus making it easier for her to cope” (Manyedi, 2001:81). This opens an opportunity for the community and the church to express their understanding of the family's pain. Anyone who is not on the programme on the day of the funeral is allowed to convey his/her condolences verbally without time restrictions. After the service people are served with food or any refreshments such as tea, soft drinks and cake.

These services used to be conducted for a whole night, but due to changing times in our country such as escalating crime, the duration is mostly two to three hours. They are not held in high esteem like before because such mourning places are at times targets of crime whilst services are being conducted. As a result, community members are released early to allow them to go back home in time and leave family members to prepare for burial the following day.

4.9. Cleansing

On the day of the funeral one or two baths of water are put at the gate mixed with something like aloe or a green plant so that mourners can wash their hands in order to remove bad luck. This is done when the procession returns from the graveyard. All have to wait for the widow and family to wash first then the rest of the community follow. The spades which were used to throw soil into the grave are cleaned with the same water after which the water will be discarded. In this way bad luck is separated from all mourners who participated at the service

in the graveyard. At this stage a meal called “mogoga⁸” is served which was prepared outside in big black pots called “drie voet⁹” with firewood during the night.

According to Manyedi (2001:71,116), immediately after the burial of the deceased a mixture called “dipitsa” or “dipitsana¹⁰” is prepared for the African widow. She is expected to drink this concoction to cleanse her blood as she was previously united with the deceased. The aim of the ritual is to disconnect the African widow from the deceased as she is regarded as one with him, and therefore unclean, until this cleansing ritual has taken place. Because the widow was housebound during this time, this mixture is bought from traditional doctors or herbalist shops by her in-laws or relatives. Once again the purpose of this mixture is to cleanse the widow from bad luck (“sefifi”) and this has to continue for a certain period as determined by the family or a traditional doctor. Refusal to drink the substance can lead to accusations that she might have killed her husband or can raise suspicions that she is a witch.

After the final step in the process of traditional purification or cleansing has taken place, the widow is free to wear her normal clothes again (Letsosa & Semanya, 2011:2). Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:78) state that the aim of the cleansing ceremony is to relieve her of mourning clothes and to remove the bad luck that came through the death of her husband. This is conducted by slaughtering a cow or sheep depending on the finances of the family and African beer is brewed and traditional food is served on that occasion. New clothes are bought for her by her brother or uncle from the maternal side. She is now free to start a new life on her own.

4.10. Dreams and rituals

According to Ademoye (2010:1019), more than a third of our lives are passed in sleeping. During that time of sleep we have many dreams which have many functions. Some experience anxiety dreams which can express their state of mind whilst others reveal or conceal secrets. That is why during the mourning period it is not unusual for an African

⁸ “Mogoga” is traditional food prepared for mourners. In olden days it was cooked without salt, tasteless and eaten by hand to show that they are mourning. Nowadays mogoga is prepared according to affordability.

⁹ “Drie Voet” is a black cast iron pot used for cooking at African funerals, weddings or other events. However in Afrikaans these cast iron pots are known as “drie-poot pot”. “Poot” is a synonym for “voet” which means foot.

¹⁰ “Dipitsa or dipitsana” is a herbal mixture obtained from herbal shops or traditional doctors to heal the widow of bad blood and disconnect her from the late husband

Christian widow to have dreams of her late husband. Mayfield (2008:78-81) states that during mourning, it is common for bereaved people to have difficulty sleeping. After the death of their loved ones, they experience sleeplessness and grief which produce a feeling of exhaustion. Some end up haunted by disturbing and destructive dreams and wake up in a state of distress or agitation. Even older sources like Jastrow (1959:52) state that dreaming of the deceased is quite common among people who have recently suffered the loss of a loved one. Black *et al.* (2014:11) highlight that dreams encountered during bereavement can help a widow to adjust in areas of complications. However, in an African context an African Christian widow experiences ancestral dreams which causes a lot anxiety.

Ademoye (2010:1019) suggests that across Africa, it is believed that serious dreams are a means of communication between this world and the spirit world of ancestors, divinities and the high God. The living communicate with ancestors through sacrifices and divinations, and the latter respond through dreams and visions and sometimes through mediums. Jedrej and Shaw (1992:86) state that in African culture dreams are perceived as having meaning which must be properly interpreted.

Nyirongo (1997:82) is of the opinion that dreams enable one's soul to leave the body to meet and converse with an ancestral spirit. Gehman (1989:156) suggests that such dreams can cease when one becomes a Christian. However, this is not the case because African Christian widows still testify of having dreams which are experienced as visitations from the deceased. Therefore, if the African Christian widow experiences such dreams, her relatives would expect her to perform rituals for ancestors, because failure to do so could bring ill fortune to the whole family. To this end she would be put under pressure by her family especially her in-laws whom she must obey according to African customs.

Much as such practices create confusion when the African Christian widow is faced with ancestral challenges, much as there are so many discriminatory restrictions after the burial of the late husband, the African Christian widow must make a choice whether to cooperate with the ancestors i.e. her living dead and follow instructions by performing rituals to avoid severe punishment or follow Christian principles of 'sola scriptura' i.e. the Word and fervent prayers. The fact of the matter is she was introduced to the ancestors when she entered into marriage and rituals were performed to prove that she was accepted as part of the family. Therefore, it is an ancestrally binding covenant she entered into aware or unaware of its spiritual implication at a later stage of her life. Furthermore, as a Christian she can put her

foot down and follow her faith even if she is accused of killing her husband because Christians live by faith no matter the circumstances (Hebrews 10:38a). Furthermore, the battle is not hers as the Omnipotent God will fight and provide for her and her children during the lonely road of widowhood.

4.11. Preliminary synthesis

This chapter introduced rituals in African culture and some having important significance whilst others complicated widowhood. It showed rituals performed on the widow and her children. It further explored the negative impact some of these rituals have on the African widow as she faced lack of freedom, oppression from in-laws followed by torment in dreams. Cleansing rituals performed immediately after the burial as a way of purifying the African widow were also explored. The study further showed the role of the church and its support during the mourning period.

The next chapter will describe pastoral care and identify African women during the grieving process.

Chapter five: Pastoral care and counselling within the context of the African Christian widow

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will explore pastoral care and counselling within the context of the African Christian widow. It is argued that the grieving African Christian widow should be approached with a contextual pastoral approach. According to Turaki (1999:19), the goal of a contextual approach is to make theology “relevant and meaningful” in its application within a particular context.

According to De Jongh van Arkel (2000:161-162), pastoral care can unfold in four different ways: *Mutual care* is the most basic form of pastoral care and refers to believers taking care of one another, usually in a congregational setting. *Pastoral care* can be viewed as a second level of pastoral care and refers to a more organized and official approach to caring, often done by pastors, but also elders within a congregational setting. *Pastoral counselling* is a third level of pastoral care and refers to a more intensive and structured approach which requires training in both theology and counselling models which are relevant to the congregational setting. *Pastoral therapy* refers to a long term therapeutical engagement which relies on long-term reconstructive therapeutic methods. This requires professional training on the part of the counsellor.

Although the local church usually provides much support in terms of mutual care, this study suggested that more thinking is needed in terms of counselling the African Christian widow. Hence the next section will discuss pastoral care and counselling within the context of the grieving African Christian widow.

5.2. Pastoral care and counselling within the context of the grieving African Christian widow

There are an abundance of notions and definitions of what pastoral care entails. Clinebell and McKeever (2011:3) describe pastoral care and counselling as valuable instruments through which the church can stay relevant to the needs of believers during trying times. Lartey (2003:62) defines the functions of pastoral care as healing, guiding, sustaining, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering. Magezi (2007:655, 656) reminds that pastoral care and pastoral counselling are intertwined and one cannot carry out pastoral counselling without pastoral care. The challenge for this study is to suggest a pastoral approach to the African Christian widow who is experiencing complicated grief, due to the many cultural

practices surrounding death which is in conflict with her Christian convictions. Pastoral care as we currently know it, is however generally based on Western thought in terms of what counselling should entail. As Masango (2013:746) points out, Western approaches do not always take cognisance of very important African motives like *Ubuntu* and respect for ancestors.

Louw (1997:392) proposes that for pastoral counselling to be “real African” and address African issues properly, it should undergo a paradigm shift. In this African context pastoral counselling “should reflect the philosophy or life view of the African culture”. To support this viewpoint Buffel (2004:37) stresses that pastoral care:

“...cannot continue as if the Western realities are the only realities confronting the world today. It cannot afford to focus only on Western individualism and clericalism, as is often the temptation. Pastoral care has to be understood as broad and as inclusive as possible in order for it to be a communal praxis that is both relevant and contextual. For pastoral care to be liberated, there has to be a paradigm shift, in such a way that it adopts a systemic approach which is in line with the African world-view”.

According to Louw (1997:392, 393), this does not mean that Western theories and models should be discarded when tending African people. It should however contextualise the message of the Gospel and show God's faithfulness by communicating and interpreting it from an African viewpoint. This means that “Pastoral care should become more contextual and therefore community- based and existentially oriented” (Louw, 1997:392, 393). This approach would benefit the African Christian widow and the community at large.

The question now arises what it would mean to take the African context into consideration, or to use Turaki's expression, to make pastoral counselling relevant and meaningful? (Turaki 1999:19-20). It is suggested here that pastoral counselling can be made meaningful and relevant by at least considering the following aspects as the minimum requirements within a pastoral approach to the African Christian widow.

- The identity of pastoral counselling
- The African worldview and culture
- African Traditional Religion

A short discussion on each of these aspects will attempt to illustrate how this is relevant for a pastoral approach that is meaningful for the African Christian widow.

5.2.1. The identity of pastoral care and counselling

When engaging the African context, clarity should first be sought about the identity of pastoral care and counselling. This means that in approaching the African Christian widow the counsellor does so with *cura animarum* at mind, wanting to take spiritual care of the widow. “Here, epistemology, the authority of Scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, the church and the tradition all come to mind as these are some of the unique building blocks of soul care from a Christian perspective” (Brunsdon, 2015:5). In this framework pastoral counselling can be defined as “the expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion of the Scripture’s understanding and portrayal of God’s encounter, intervention, interaction and involvement in our being human” (Louw, 2010:73).

Within this framework the African context can be approached in a spirit of hospitality. Hospitality points to the Spirit-enabled Christian virtue of being able to show kindness, acceptance and warmth when welcoming guests or strangers as seen in Hebrews 13:1–3. Within the framework of practical theology, this suggests a “willingness and openness” to take seriously the insights of other views and convictions (Brunsdon, 2015:5). According to Swinton and Mowat (2006:94), hospitality functions “with no a-priori assumption that theology needs to merge or follow the perspective on the world that is offered to it”.

A contextual approach in this study is thus not understood as a mere merging of different values but a true willingness to respect and understand other traditions while remaining true to the Word.

Taking pastoral care of the African Christian widow and counselling her, will imply that the counsellor approaches her from a Christian perspective with a Christian frame of reference in mind. Respecting her background, culture and belief system, this will require an emphatic engagement aimed at bringing a Christian perspective on issues that might be causing her to

experience complicated grief. These would include issues about dreams, ancestors and the like. The purpose of introducing these perspectives would be to guide the widow through the grieving process as part of the process of healing (Clinebell, 1984:40). Turaki (1999:20) suggests that Christianity or the Christian worldview needs to be developed when using a contextualised approach. This means that the counsellor needs to “emphasise a Christian way of seeing, understanding, interpreting and approaching the totality of human life” (Turaki, 1999:21). Approaching counselling as an emphatic engagement is mindful of the fact that the pastoral process is not about scolding the widow for her African background and beliefs, but to develop the Christian belief system she already has as a Christian believer.

5.2.2. The African worldview and culture

A contextualised pastoral approach should at least also be knowledgeable on the African worldview and culture. As shown in chapter 2, African living is guided by a unique worldview which is submerged in the mythical and linked to beliefs about ancestors. Much about the African worldview is foreign and mystical to modern Western thinking and understanding of reality. For Africans their worldview is however real and therefore exerts a powerful influence over them, directing both their thoughts and practices, even those who converted to Christianity. A contextualised pastoral care should therefore actively engage the African worldview when attending to Africans by learning about their worldview – what it entails and how it impacts within a certain situation.

As culture is often an expression of a particular worldview, a contextualised pastoral approach must be equally serious in its understanding of, and engagement with, the African culture. This study has pointed out that death in the African context is saturated with meaning and surrounded by multiple cultural practices aimed at honouring the departed and protecting the next of kin from bad consequences. Not all of these practices can be labelled bad or harmful to the widow. In fact some pay testimony to the African notion of *Ubuntu* as it expresses the communities’ support towards the widow and her children.

Others, however, can indeed be labelled as harmful in the sense that it can complicate the grieving process by distracting the widow from the core tasks associated with the grieving process. A point in case is the practice whereby widows are expected to abstain from church attendance for three to twelve months after their husband’s death (Letsosa & Semanya, 2011:1,3). This practice rests on the belief that the widow is impure through the connection

with the deceased and can only join the faith community again after a traditional cleansing period. Such a cultural observance is harmful in several respects. It labels the widow as impure, denies her the right to be strengthened by the faith community and brings tension in terms of Hebrews 10:25 (NIV) which explicitly encourages the believer not to neglect the meetings of believers.

It was however pointed out that much pressure during this time is put on the widow to adhere to these practices as non-compliance can bring harm to the family of the deceased. Shikwati *et al.* (2013:3) observe that most African Christian widows who do not follow mourning ritual procedures experience guilt afterwards. This guilt is often instilled by relatives who blame them for neglecting cultural practices. Therefore, even the African Christian widow will comply with these practices in order to avoid conflict. In these cases the aspect of mutual care becomes important as African Christians also have a responsibility to educate one another in the Christian way of living.

A contextualised pastoral approach should engage this and many other cultural practices which have the potential of confusing the widow and which is built on non-Biblical beliefs, so that the pastoral process can free them from practices which inhibit consolation and spiritual growth through the grieving process.

5.2.3. African Traditional Religion

According to Nwokoro (2014:1), African traditional religion and Christianity interacted since the arrival of the European missionaries in Africa. Currently Christianity is occupying a unique position amongst Africans and is growing. This, despite predictions that it would become less significant as it was closely associated with colonial presence and perceived to be dependent on its structures (Bediako, 2000:304, 305). “There is also a growing interest in traditional religion and culture in many parts of Africa, and those who are showing this interest are in fact mainly Christians or people who have been exposed to Christianity” (Mbiti, 1970:430). This clearly shows that “the time has come for the Church in Africa to look carefully at the relationship between Christianity and Traditional Religions” (Mbiti, 1970:430). This underlines that a contextualised approach to pastoral care should attempt to understand African Traditional Religion, without compromising the Christian message.

According to Müller (2014:3), in the past the fear has been “what becomes of Christianity when it is uprooted from its Western-colonial heritage and transplanted into African soil? Does it retain certain central characteristics through which it attracts and binds new converts, or does it lose any prior distinctiveness as new converts selectively deconstruct and reconstruct aspects of Christianity to suit their own needs and context?” Another view of Maluleke (2010:372) is that Christianity being Africanised is viewed as suspect “either because it is assumed that Christianity is universal or that Africanisation can only mean a lowering of universal “Christian standards” in order to fit in with some local “African standards”.

These fears should however not deter pastoral theology to engage with African Traditional religion, but rather be an encouragement to understand and deconstruct the meaning of this ancient form of religion in the minds of African people. As was indicated earlier, the Christian gospel is unique and offers something other than African Traditional Religion, bringing new hope to the African who has lost someone.

5.3. Preliminary synthesis

This chapter explored pastoral care and counselling within the context of the African Christian widow. It suggested that pastoral care and counselling should follow a contextualised approach in order to be relevant for the African Christian widow.

It was suggested that a contextualised pastoral approach is first of all aimed at spiritual care which proceeded from the notion of *cura animarum* where the Word of God, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit stand central. Bringing the Christian perspective in an emphatic way to the African Christian widow, it aimed at engaging issues within the African framework regarding death and dying which had the potential of complicating the grieving process.

A contextualised pastoral approach should at least also engage the African worldview and culture as well as the African Traditional Religion in order to be relevant to the African Christian widow.

In the next chapter a pastoral Biblical basis theory will be constructed in the light of the findings of the previous chapters which can serve as framework for engaging the African Christian widow in pastoral counselling.

Chapter six: A Biblical basis theory for the pastorate to the African Christian widow

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to design a Biblical basis theory which can serve as a theological framework for the pastoral counsellor that engages with the African Christian widow. This discussion will focus on uncomplicated grief. Some of the main issues that are prominent in the grieving process discussed in the previous chapters will then be put into a Biblical framework in order to guide the pastoral process.

6.2. Uncomplicated grief

According to Wilkinson (2000: 291, 292), grief is a normal response to loss. It is regarded as healthy since failing to show any grief response cannot be deemed normal. Therefore, Wilkinson suggests that grieving should not be “medicalised”. The normal grieving reactions which ensue after the loss of a loved one is therefore not a disorder but rather a healing function.

Zisook and Shear (2009:68) argue that it is difficult to describe when grief is “normal” as the way in which people grieve differs from individual to individual. The duration of the grieving process is usually influenced by multiple factors such as personality, age, health, cultural identity, spirituality, support and resources.

However, normal grief can be described as a process through which someone who has lost a loved one succeeds to adjust to life without a significant other. For many years already the thinking of pastoral caregivers about the grieving process is dominated by the models of Kübler-Ross and William Worden. As shown in chapter 1, Kübler-Ross (cf. Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) suggested that people move through five stages when grieving: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and final acceptance. Not much different from Kubler-Ross, is the model of William Worden (2008) that suggested that grieving people should accomplish four tasks when mourning:

- To accept the reality of the loss

According to Worden (2008:39), when a person dies, the first task of grieving is to come to terms with the reality of the end of that person’s life. One has to accept the pain emotionally and physically until it becomes real that he is gone and the reunion

with him is impossible in this present life. Worden (2008:42-43) indicates that coming to acceptance may take time but at least it means one is ready to start a new journey of healing. This can occur through engaging in a ritual such as a funeral or writing a letter to that person who has died, talking to a therapist or close friend. All these different phases are to help one to come to terms with reality of that situation.

- To work through the pain and grief

Worden (2008:46) mentions that at this stage grief is naturally accompanied by a wide range of intense emotions such as sadness, longing, emptiness, loneliness, anger and anxiety. No matter how painful, there is no way to avoid it. One has to go through the process by taking good care of himself/herself such as eating well, sleeping, exercising and spending time with people he/she feels comfortable with. Other support structures such as church members can also help the bereaved endure the pain. This helps them to relate better with the pain.

- To adjust to a new environment without the deceased

Worden (2008:46-49) suggests that gradually the bereaved will start a normal routine. She is vulnerable and entering a new world without the deceased and has to adjust to a new life without a partner on a daily basis. She will realise the different roles her loved one performed internally, externally and spiritually. The tasks of readjustment happen over a period of time. It means she has to acquire new skills and tasks such as how to pay the bills, parenting, living alone and so forth.

- To find an enduring connection with the deceased while moving forward with life.

To accept the loss of a partner Worden (2008:50-52) argues that it does not mean a relationship has ended. The mourner does not forget the deceased but continues to live in a healthy and normal way and feeling hopeful again. Discovering new aspects of self and forming new relationships and moving forward. Finding an appropriate, ongoing connection in our emotional lives with the person who has died, while allowing us to continue living. This means we continue to engage in activities that are meaningful to us and bring pleasure and even new activities are included. Life does not stop when the person dies. Therefore, the one who remains must live a purposeful and meaningful life. Everyone has a choice to make in life.

In the light of this, complicated grief will occur when the grieving person fails to complete any of these tasks. For example, when a widow cannot succeed in accepting the loss of her spouse or cannot adjust to the new environment, this would represent complicated or pathological grief. The Christian message about death and eternal life contradicts complicated grief as it is a message that transcends earthly death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15).

This study is suggesting that some of the beliefs and rituals associated with the African worldview and culture have the potential to complicate the grieving process of the African Christian widow when compared to the tasks associated with normal grief. The following table suggests that certain aspects associated African beliefs and rituals concerning death have the potential of causing complicated grief:

Grieving Task	African beliefs and practices that can complicate the normal grieving process	How
Accept the reality of the loss	The notion of the living dead (ancestry).	The deceased stays part of the widow's life and prevents her from "moving" on.
Work through the pain and grief	Witchcraft and sorcery.	The widow is suspected of having a part in her husband's death and has to be exonerated by the family by observing certain rituals. This leads the focus away from her personal grieving process.
Adjust to a new environment	Haunting by spirits. Re-occurring dreams about the deceased. Attire	The occurrence of these phenomena keeps the widow spiritually "hostage". Prescribed attire inhibits

	<p>Recreation</p> <p>Cleansing rituals</p>	<p>adjustment for at least a year – as the widow is constantly reminded of her loss.</p> <p>The widow is isolated from all positive actions such as recreation and support other than those prescribed by cultural practices.</p> <p>The widow is ostracised through the specially prescribed utensils and cleansing rituals as if she has done something wrong. It isolates her and leads to intense feelings of loneliness.</p>
Find an enduring connection with the deceased while moving forward with life	Ancestry fills the widow with fear and anxiety.	The ancestors have to be appeased, making the connection negative rather than positively enduring.

As noted previously, not all aspects associated with the African beliefs and rituals concerning death are suspected of causing complicated grief. Some of these aspects can also be deemed positive and beneficial to the grieving process:

Grieving Task	African beliefs and practices that can promote uncomplicated grieving	How
Accept the reality of the loss	<i>Ubuntu</i> – the community surrounds the widow in the occurrence of death.	The presence of the community signals the undeniable occurrence of death.
Work through the pain and	Rituals in general, like the	These rituals are designated

grief	initial “sitting”.	forms of grieving which help the widow to give expression to grieve responses.
Adjust to a new environment	Be accustomed to being without a husband on daily basis. Be independent	Connect with God spiritually more through the word of God
Find an enduring connection with the deceased while moving forward with life	Disconnect herself from the spirit of the dead but have a loving memory of husband in heart	Through the help of the Holy Spirit and prayer, live a purposeful and meaningful life

From the above, it should be clear that some of the beliefs and practices surrounding death in Africa have the potential of inhibiting the African Christian widow of accomplishing the tasks or stages generally associated with the grieving process. The beliefs and practices that have the greatest inhibiting potential are those that oppose the widow’s Christian beliefs: The notion of the living dead (ancestry), witchcraft and sorcery, haunting by spirits, re-occurring dreams about the deceased and some discriminatory rituals concerning attire, recreation and cleansing rituals which are foreign to the Scriptural message of equality and inclusivity.

Once again, the African belief-system and cultural practices are not entirely negative. As shown, certain aspects can indeed be supportive of the grieving process. But from a pastoral perspective, clarity is needed about how to approach the problematic aspects as pointed out from a Biblical perspective.

6.3. The role of the Bible for the African Christian widow

For the pastoral counsellor, engaging with the African Christian widow, it will be important to place the central themes of the African grieving process within a theological framework. This is very important because according to Molobi (2005:114) Africans interpret the Bible by relating it to their own worldview and culture, thus giving preference to their worldview and culture, rather than to Biblical principles.

According to Miller-McLemore (2014:163), “the Bible is at the heart of Christian faith and practice. Reading and interpreting the Scripture is constitutive of Christian worship and

spirituality. As the primary witness to the apostolic faith, the Bible is a formative authority in Christian doctrine and ethics". As Christian, it can thus be expected from the African Christian widow to apply Biblical principles during the grieving process. Especially in the areas that she suspects that her African culture is opposing her Christian faith. The pastoral process should be reminiscent of the promise that whoever accepts Jesus Christ as savior is now a new creation, the old person in her has gone and the new has come, 2 Corinthians 5:17. According to Galatians 3:27 (NIV), the believer is baptised into Christ and clothed with Him. In dealing with life's biggest challenges, this new life has to prevail. As Mbiti (1970:435) contended that "African Traditional Religion is largely but not entirely compatible with Christianity", the African Christian widow needs to be sensitised for the Christian message pertaining to the central issues of the grieving process.

6.4. Life after death

Like in the African belief system, death in the Christian faith does not signal a final end. In Christianity earthly death marks the beginning of eternal life for believers with God. Christianity teaches us that those who die in Christ are united with Him immediately after death (cf. 1 Thessalonian 4:13-17; Philippians 1:21-23). However, according to the Bible, death marks an end of the deceased's relation with this world. There is no communication with the dead person as his soul has departed and in fact God discourages all attempts to do so. In contrast with Christian faith, Nyirongo (1999:73) states that in African tradition, the Supreme Being created man with the ability to be immortal by becoming an ancestor. Therefore, he must lead an exemplary life and when he dies, the soul leaves the body but continues more or less the same way he lived whilst alive. Again there is no resurrection or eternal union with God.

Munyai's (2007:119,121) research amongst traditional Vendas seems to affirm this. According to the findings of this research, Venda people believe in the immortality of the soul and as well as an interdependence between the living and the dead as ancestors and the living are able to communicate with each other. These ancestors are appeased so that they should sleep well. Resurrection does not exist as they believe in the continuity of the spirit world.

Mtshayisa (2009:3) supports the view that Africans do not believe in the concept of resurrection of the dead like in Christianity. According to Parrinder (1954:135), the spirit of

a dead person remains in the vicinity of his/her grave and is available to receive gifts and consultations. With regard to this statement it seems that “Christianity in Africa has not adequately tapped this resource that can make Christianity authentically African. The challenge is legitimate because the process of indigenising African Christianity still has a long way to go in Africa” (Adamo, 2011:9).

In Matthew 28; 5-7, the angel said to the women,

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘he has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. ‘Now I have told you’.”

Also in the same text in Luke 24:5 the angels ask the women who went to the grave to look for the body of Jesus, “why do you look for the living among the dead”. This is an illustration that Jesus Christ is the only one risen and alive forevermore and the firstborn from the dead. No human being dead can physically appear in a spirit form to the living and talk to them until Christ’s second coming (Rev 22:7).

This belief creates a challenge for the African Christian widow on two levels. Firstly, it makes it hard to attain closure about a deceased loved one if there is a possibility of him still lingering on this earth as an ancestor. Secondly, it opposes the Christian faith which does not recognise this belief.

6.5 Communicating with spirits of the dead and rituals in honour of them

From a Christian perspective communication with the spirits of the dead or ancestors through dreams or visions is another problematic issue surrounding death and the grieving process. Amanze (2003:54) points out that “the role of ancestors as intermediaries tends to challenge the Christian Church’s teaching that Jesus is the only Mediator who has ascended to the holy of the holies and is now sitting on the right hand of the Father interceding on behalf of human beings”. Shabangu (2005:119) argues that to speak for example, of “Christ our Ancestor” could be misleading if it is intended to convey more than that Christ is God, the ancestor and source of all life, and even this meaning requires further clarification in view of Christ’s relationship as the only Son of the Father. This leads an African Christian widow in a state of confusion as to

follow the Bible or her tradition because she knows that even in the grave Jesus was and is still Lord. Deuteronomy 18:10-11(NIV) provides God's view on consulting the dead:

“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 your God and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out these nations before you. You must be blameless before the lord your God.”

Zukeran (2002:3) supports the above passage that contacting the dead is forbidden because the spirits of the dead cannot contact the living. The Bible teaches that communication with the dead is not possible. Throughout the Bible, God commands his people not to indulge in the practice of necromancy or the art of communicating with the dead. Therefore, from a Christian's point of view, the living cannot communicate with the dead.

Nürnberg (2007:85) states clearly that the deceased are not entitled to exercise authority over the living after they died. In Isaiah 8:19 it is stated: "why consult the dead on behalf of the living", this shows that the living cannot have fellowship with the deceased. The question is who are the Christian African widows seeing in the dreams or speaking to at the graveyards? Is that communication with ancestors through rituals Biblical? Nyirongo (1997:79) states that "there can be no fellowship between the departed and the living and that the African's claims which are supported by many African theologians are nothing else but illusions". Afeke and Vester (2004:54) also indicate in Isaiah 8:19 and Deuteronomy 18:9-13 that God has always cautioned the Israelites never to seek advice from the dead about their future.

Ecclesiastes 9:4-6 (NIV) states: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward; and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun". The enemy uses faces of the dead to cause confusion to mankind and block their relationship with the living God.

Magezi and Myambo (2011:172-174) explain through this Scripture that the teaching clearly suggests that the dead cease to have any association with, and/or influence on the living. In Luke 16:19-31 the parable of the rich man and Lazarus reinforces Eccl 9:4-6 that the dead has no share with the living. The principles that could be derived from this parable are: “when people die they go to places they deserve. The dead cannot move from the place of their destiny to another. The dead do not return as spirits to the living. No communication between the living and the dead exists” (Magezi & Myambo, 2011:174). Bae and Van der Merwe (2008: 1307, 1308) note that in Luke 16, about Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus provides clear insight into the condition of the dead and what happens after death. The request of the rich man was not granted to show that it is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living.

According to Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:1312), “demons have the ability to assume the form of someone who died and would therefore be recognisable to the person to whom they are appearing.” That is why in 2 Corinthians 11:14 the Bible cautions us that “Satan masquerades as an angel of light” and deceives many, even believers and in Revelation 16:13 “there are spirits of demons performing miracles signs” going to the world just to deceive people as their mission is to “kill, steal and destroy” mankind (John 10:10). Therefore, Jesus Christ also cautions us about the resurrection of the dead in Matthew 22:32 and said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”. He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Grebe and Fon (2006:31,32) argue that Satan and his demons try to blind the mind of people to believe and see the light of the gospel: 2 Corinthians 4:4. He tries to make believers ineffective for God and controls their cultures and societies through demons by false teachings. That is why some believers still believe in Christ and cultural practices that are not according to Christian principle (Grebe & Fon, 2006:31,32). Therefore, communion with the dead is a demon, not the departed and anything coming between us and God is an idol and that idol is a demon (Van der Walt, 2003:80).

These phenomena seem to go unchallenged within African communities because they have long existed. Moreover, other Africans, including some Christian widows, do not mind the traditional practices surrounding death. They see it as an inheritance from their forefathers which is passed on from generation to generation. Even local congregations do not challenge this culture as it can show disrespect to the departed. These beliefs are so deeply rooted that

most uncritically take part in these practices. They prefer to practice the African beliefs and Christian faith together.

According to Oladosu (2012:160), communication with ancestors is facilitated through rituals. Usually these rituals are performed to keep ancestors as far away as possible as to avoid misfortunes or any kind of harm. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008: 1299,1321) state that ritual practices associated with ancestor worship is an attempt to preserve good relations with the departed person. It is also a ritual through which the widow can show her loyalty to her deceased spouse. Therefore, it is expected of her to bring offerings to the ancestors. Indirectly this means that she believes in the power of the ancestors and that communication with them is still possible. Nyirongo's (1997:79) claim that "there can be no fellowship between the departed and the living" and suggests that the African Christian widow who takes part in such practices is compromising the Christian faith. In 1 Corinthians 10:18-22 Paul calls them the sacrifices offered to demons, not to God. He says a Christian cannot drink the cup of the Lord and a cup of demons too; he/she cannot have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons. He asked this question, "Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than Him?" This implies having double standards.

The belief that communication with the dead is possible has even more implications, especially if there was a conflict between the husband and wife at the time of the husband's death. Research by Molobi (2005:10) indicates that if the departed was offended before he died, the relatives would fear that he might take revenge in the form of misfortunes and illnesses as an ancestor. In such cases the in-laws would demand a reconciliation ritual to be performed by the widow to earn her husband's forgiveness. This puts the African Christian widow in the uncomfortable position to admit that such a possibility exists. According to the Christian Gospel, reconciliation between people is only possible while they are alive and then only in the light of Christ's redemptive work (cf. Luke 16:19-31). Recognition of both the possibility of communicating with the deceased as well as participation in rituals that support such a belief, is problematic in the light of Scriptures. This is another factor that can inhibit the grieving process as it puts the African Christian widow in a compromising position in terms of what she believes, bringing anxiety that would otherwise not be part of the process.

6.6. Witchcraft

Witchcraft and witchdoctors are still a reality in African culture. They become part of the grieving process in cases of dispute between the widow and her in-laws. As has been alluded to earlier, the widow can be suspected of killing her own husband through witchcraft if he passed away at an early age. Also, if there were ill-feelings between husband and wife at the time of his passing, the in-laws will suspect the widow that she used witchcraft to kill her husband. This situation can worsen if the family decides to retaliate by requesting a witchdoctor to avenge their son's death by killing the widow.

Obviously all references to witchcraft are judged negatively in the Bible. In the light of Acts 8:9-25 and Acts 13:8-25 Letsosa and Semanya (2012:8) highlight the disadvantages of witchcraft. It is one of the worst forms of deception and therefore evil. It opens the door for demonic powers and as such opposes the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who practice witchcraft have to be rebuked, through God's Word, so that they may see Christ and his love. Therefore, Christians should not view witchcraft as a positive practice. They should see it as an enemy of all that is right. Its practices lure people from what is true to what is false and turns the hearts of people away from God.

6.7. Participation in doubtful rituals

In chapter four a whole array of rituals associated with death and the African culture were discussed. As suggested earlier not all of these rituals are harmful, although some seem to be in direct conflict with the message of the Christian Gospel.

In counselling the African Christian widow, the counsellor will have to be able to put doubtful rituals and the widow's participation in them into perspective. In this regard, rituals that are meant to cleanse the widow come to mind. On the one hand, these rituals suggest that the widow is somehow unclean and even harmful to others, putting her in a humiliating position. On the other hand it contradicts the Christian message that believers are redeemed and holy in the eyes of the Lord, thereby compromising the sufficiency of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In this regard Letsosa and Semanya (2011:7) note that:

“it is more important for people to get their hearts right with God than to conduct the order of the ritual correctly; and getting the heart right with God begins with faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, finding forgiveness and cleansing from God through him, and following his teachings about the spiritual life faithfully. There is a real danger to replace the true meaning of the word of God the letter and the spirit of it with traditions”.

According to Hebrews 9: 12-14, the believer is redeemed by the blood of Christ and freed from all guilt. The same principle is upheld by Romans 5:9. 1 Corinthians 6:20 reminds us that the price Christ paid freed us from all traditional manipulations. Therefore, the church has to teach its congregations to equip themselves to stand up to such trials. No traditional purification is necessary for the African Christian widow as she is not unclean. Spiritually she has been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Christ once and for all (Hebrews 10:10). In Hebrews 7:24-28 Christ became a sacrifice once and for all so that we should not be bound by unnecessary rituals and sacrifices.

To support the viewpoint of the blood of Christ, Letsosa and Semanya (2011:6) show that death does not, nor in any way, defile the African Christian widow with regard to traditional purification. Therefore, pastors or church leaders should teach the bereaved and the whole body of Christ about the effect of the blood of Jesus Christ and that traditional purification is just to undermine the power of the blood of Christ.

A good example of such a doubtful ritual is demonstrative wailing. As mentioned in chapter three, an African widow has to demonstrate her grief with consistent crying mostly to show the in-laws that she loved and respected her husband. Letsosa and Semanya (2011:5) indicate that there is nothing wrong with crying for a departed partner, however crying unceasingly without hope in the resurrection is discouraged by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Paul reminds Christians “not to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Demonstrative crying is thus a ritual to please the in-laws, while at the same time contradicting the Christian message.

6.8. Preliminary synthesis

This chapter attempted to design a theological framework for the pastoral process when engaging with the African Christian widow. This framework was designed with normal grieving in mind. It was shown that some aspects of African beliefs and rituals regarding death can pose challenges for the pastorate. Particularly those that challenged Christian doctrine were pointed out as potential challenges within the pastoral process. Against this background the Biblical message about themes such as eternal life, communication with the deceased and witchcraft were discussed. It was shown that the pastorate could bring new perspectives to the grieving widow that will help her to accomplish the tasks generally associated with the grieving process.

The next chapter proposes a conceptual framework for pastoral care of Christian African woman challenged by grief and loss as a result of losing her spouse.

Chapter seven: A conceptual framework for pastoral care to the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse

7.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to design a conceptual framework for pastoral care to the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse. As the study thus far indicated that certain aspects of the African worldview and rituals regarding death have the potential to hamper the grieving process of the African Christian widow, the challenge remains to provide a conceptual framework for the pastorate. The purpose of such a conceptual framework is to propose what the pastoral process can anticipate in the light of the findings of this particular study. As this research did not engage with actual persons, but relied on literature on the topic, it cannot provide a blueprint or a model that will be appropriate for all cases of this nature. Therefore, it will only try to provide markers which are based on the findings about the topic.

Some of the important questions that come to mind in the suggested conceptual framework would be: How would the pastorate to the grieving African Christian widow unfold? What issues can the counsellor anticipate? How can the African Christian widow best be supported within the context of the traditional practices as described in this study?

7.2. The pastorate to the African Christian widow

In designing a pastoral model for the African Christian widow challenged by contradicting beliefs and rituals, Louw (1997: 392) suggests a systemic model to contextualise pastoral care in an African context. As indicated in chapter six the African pastoral care should move away from Western philosophies that are not relevant to African culture.

7.2.1. A systemic approach

Louw (1997:395) highlights the need for a systemic approach to pastoral care in a multicultural setting like South Africa. He suggests that pastoral care is an encounter which is engaged in a conceptual network of a systemic and a cultural relationship which is connected to God. According to Louw (1997:395), a systemic approach is a way of thinking that seeks to understand human problems by accommodating culture, attitudes, values, customs and rituals.

Louw (1997:396) cites Graham's (1992:39-40) four characteristics of a systemic view of reality:

- Its affirmation that all elements of the universe are interconnected in an on-going reciprocal relationship with one another.
- Its affirmation that reality is organised. The universe is an organised totality of which the elements are interrelated.
- Its emphasis upon, homeostasis, or balance and self-maintenance. Balance is maintained by transactional processes such as communication, negotiation and boundary management.
- Its emphasis upon creativity in context, or finite freedom. Though systems are self-maintaining, they are also self-transcending.

In this way, the pastoral process should be able to be culture-sensitive and will help the pastoral counsellor to approach the African Christian widow in a way that recognises her cultural background.

7.3. The pastorate as an organic process

This study anticipates that the pastorate to the African Christian widow will unfold as an organic process. This means that it can be seen as an encounter between the widow and the counsellor that is not fixed, but moves through different stages. These stages are an indication of the different goals the counsellor and the widow want to accomplish during the pastoral process. In this case, to guide the widow through the grieving process and helping her to overcome possible complicated grief related to her African culture that opposed her Christian values as discussed in the previous chapter.

7.3.1. The stage model of Egan

Several authors suggest that the counselling process unfolds through different stages. Egan (1994:22-24) suggested a stage model which has three stages which “overlap and interact with one another as clients struggle through the natural process of constructive change”.

According to Egan (1994:22), these stages outline what clients need to do in order to manage the problem situation.

7.3.1.1. Stage 1: Reviewing the current scenario

Egan (1990:30-31) mentions that in this scenario, the principle is to “help clients to identify, explore and clarify their problem situations and unused opportunities”. This stage deals with current issues. This process helps clients to acquire effective problem-managing or coping skills based on three principles of feeling, thinking and action. As a result, this model helps clients to face problems and develop unused resources and opportunities by taking them through various stages in a more professional based context of counselling.

7.3.1.2. Stage 2: Developing the preferred scenario

At this stage Egan (1994:23) maintains that the main principle is to help clients “identify what they want in terms of goals and objectives that are based on an understanding of problem situations and opportunities”. This scenario deals with what the client wants. On the basis of this, the client should be helped to development goals, objectives or agendas based on an action-oriented understanding of the problem situation. Egan (1994:23) proposes that this stage will yield the best outcome or result if the client is presented with a wide range of possibilities for a better future. Incentives that will enable the counselee to be committed to the proposed outcomes, should also be identified.

7.3.1.3. Stage 3: Getting there

Egan (1994:23) suggests that in this stage the principle is to “help clients develop action strategies for accomplishing goals, for getting what they want”. Egan (1994:24) notes that clients may know what they want but still need to be helped on how to achieve the goal. According to Louw (2000:351), this means helping the clients to brainstorm a range of strategies for applying their agendas and choosing the best that suite them, their environment and to formulate a plan.

Egan (1994:24) indicates that all the three stages are cognitive in nature. The clients need to act on their own behalf right from the beginning of the counselling process and in their real day to day lives.

7.3.2. Taylor's metanoia model

Taylor (1991) suggested that pastoral counselling unfolds via a so-called "metanoia model". "Metanoia", the Greek word for changing one's mind or attitude suggests that the pastoral process is aimed at change. For counselling to be effective, it has to involve change in a person's thinking attitude. Taylor (1991:8) suggested that change occurs through the stages of exploring, understanding and acting.

7.3.2.1. Stage 1: Exploring

According to Taylor (1991:8), during examining and exploring, the pastor employs presence skills (attending, responding and assessing) to help people to identify underlying emotions and perceptions. Manthei (1997:61) suggests that during this stage the pastor should spend time assessing the client's emotional and physical state, the type of problem the client describes and his/her readiness for counselling. The pastor should be a good listener and encourage the client to talk freely and openly about his/her problems or concerns. Louw (2008:241) indicates that the presence of a pastor is so important to clients because it brings God to the community of believers. A pastor therefore represents God and the clients see that God cares for them through their suffering and pain. Therefore, during counselling, this presence builds trust between pastor and the clients.

7.3.2.2. Stage 2: Understanding

Taylor (1991:8) suggests that at this stage, the pastor applies proclamation skills to confront unhelpful beliefs and then communicates the Gospel. According to Nelson-Jones (2009:99), the understanding stage requires the pastor to have a good relationship with the clients. The pastor should move the counselling and helping process forward by clarifying both the client and his own understanding of the targeted problem situation. Louw (2000:369) indicates that this step can be achieved in pastoral counselling by the pastor, when he uses Scripture as a distinctive communication medium. However, the Word of God should be used as a means of contextual interpretation rather than a mere homiletic proclamation.

7.3.2.3. Stage 3: Acting

During this stage Taylor (1991:8) indicates that people must be assisted to develop a plan of action to change their conceptions and behaviour. Manthei (1997:58) suggests that once the problem has been explored, goals can be set to achieve the plan of action. Taylor (1991:8) indicates that at times the particular situation cannot be changed but pastoral counselling can help to change people's perspectives on the situation. Pretorius and Van As (2003:286) both

employed Taylor's model (1991:4) in their article "The need for more Christian counsellors", and concur that this model can be utilised by both lay and ordained Christian pastors to deal effectively with postmodern traumas.

7.3.3. Louw's stage model

This study favours the proposal of Louw (2000:355) which suggests that the therapeutical process unfolds at the hand of four stages. Louw (2000:355) emphasises that "these basic components of the stage model create the impression that each stage may be regarded as a separate entity". "Schematising the counselling procedure may also create a wrong impression that each stage is sharply outlined and demarcated as if it is possible to divide human reactions and the process of communication into watertight compartments". However, pastoral counselling cannot be fragmented into separate stages. Similarly one stage does not automatically lead to a second or third stage. One can be at stage 4 and start again at stage 1. The only factors that are consistent throughout are understanding, love, acceptance and empathy (Louw, 2000:355). According to Louw (2000:356), the stage model acts like a compass. It cannot predict a certain course because the route is not demarcated. It is not a prescription or a rule book to be followed faithfully, otherwise counselling can become artificial. It is just a model to help increase a pastor's counselling skills and the effectiveness of their pastoral involvement.

7.3.3.1. Stage 1

According to Louw (2000:356), the counsellor must make contact and develop a relationship of trust between him/herself and the counselee through interaction. Since the person may already know the pastor, they can soon start to disclose personal information. In the process of self-disclosure and self-comprehension, the pastor should try to understand the client and allow specific traits to come to the fore. For example, it can be an aggressive behaviour, aloofness or dependencies. The pastor must show understanding, love, acceptance and empathy towards counselees by listening effectively to their stories. All people are unique, therefore at this stage the primary concern is about the person and not the facts or problems.

7.3.3.2. Stage 2

Once counselees have disclosed their problems by expressing their emotions, they find it easier to distinguish between their emotions and actual problems. Through diagnosis and interpretation problematic perceptions of counselees can be identified. According to Louw (2000:357), interpretation helps to link the real problem to the person's most profound need for security, value and meaning. During this stage the pastor must integrate information divulged during counselling by connecting what the person cannot link together. The pastor must collect information logically and help the person to reflect on the consequences which were not clear to him/her previously. The pastor should help the person to eliminate irrational thoughts which often come from perceptions that are not based on facts or reality.

7.3.3.3. Stage 3

During this stage the pastor and the counselee seek to identify resources which can help to solve problems (Louw, 2000:360). In order to encourage effective counselling, the pastor and the counselee can enter into an agreement in which they commit to work constructively towards a solution. The identification of viable and simple goals are important.

Once counselling commences, evaluation of progress should be made regularly (Louw, 2000:361). Therefore, the counselee should be given homework assignments and be encouraged to keep a diary or journal to record actions and progress. Louw (2000:363) suggests that the counselling process should not be too rigid or boring, but rather flexible and adaptable.

7.3.3.4. Stage 4

Louw (2000:364) explains that stage 4 is aimed at promoting change and renewal, to influence the counselee, broaden their perspectives and to enhance maturity. The therapeutic aim is to establish a constructive thinking which reflects on the value of life in terms of grace and salvation (Louw, 2000:365).

In order to establish new patterns of thinking, Louw (2000:365) suggests that the gospel should be communicated through prayer to strengthen hope and faith. The effective use of Scriptures communicates the promises of God, while prayer establishes fellowship and hope which enhances the development of faith.

7.4. The pastoral process as an informed process

Mack (1994) suggests that pastoral diagnosis is an important part of the pastoral process. Working with personal inventory forms, Mack (1994:211) suggests that the gathering of different types of information is of paramount importance before the pastoral process can deploy. These include information on the emotional state of the counselee and also physical information such as sleep patterns, diet, exercise and types of medication the counselee is using at the time of counselling.

7.5 The use of Scriptures in counselling

As much of the widow's challenges are related to her Christian faith which is opposed by African beliefs and practices, it can be suspected that a great deal of the pastoral process will revolve around educating her from the Scriptures.

The use of Scripture in the pastorate is an important aspect of the process. Louw (2000:369) highlights the need of Scripture during counselling to edify and empower the counselee. Louw suggests an organic use of Scripture during counselling. The organic use of Scriptures means that the pastor first listens to the counselee before applying the Scriptures in counselling. Scriptures are used to interpret the situation of the counselee rather than a homiletic tool. This guards against a Biblicistic use of Scriptures during counselling.

7.6. Markers for a pastoral approach to the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse

In this section an integration of the goal of the pastorate to the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse (uncomplicated grief) with the stage model of Louw and the information documented so far, will be made.

7.6.1. Stage 1: To accept the reality of the loss

7.6.1.1. Communication and understanding (empathy)

As this study indicated, the death of a spouse is immersed in cultural meaning and accompanied by a number of rituals and practices that overwhelms the widow. Apart from this, she is challenged by the reality of her husband who passed away. Engaging in the pastoral process with the grieving widow should not be postponed. Louw (2000:356)

suggests that in most cases there should already be a good relationship between the pastor and the widow who may know one another within the congregational setting.

From a stage perspective the purpose of the first stage will be to establish communication with the widow and to provide a sympathetic environment where true empathy can be communicated. From the basis theory developed in this study, the pastor can at least expect some of the following behaviour to be present. The widow may be in a state of shock and denial about the passing of her spouse. This may be made more difficult by the experience of vivid dreams about the deceased of which the meaning is unclear. As African rituals take immediate effect after the passing of a loved one, the widow might not have any time for herself, as her house will be filled with family and neighbours who will assist her during the time of the sitting and the performance of the tasks leading up to the burial, leaving her little or no time to come to terms with her loss. The pastor can however use this time to help stress the reality of her loss in an attempt to facilitate the acceptance of what has happened.

According to Worden (2008:27) and Mack (1994:212), the pastoral counsellor should be vigilant in terms of physical and mental symptoms such as sleep and anxiety as irregular or no sleep and abnormal levels of anxiety can inhibit the mourning process. If they occur, the pastor should also try to help with the management of these. Worden (2008:31) suggests that depression may also occur. “While in depression as well as grief, you may find the classic symptoms of sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, and intense sadness, however, in a grief reaction, there is not the loss of self-esteem commonly found in clinical depression”.

As can be expected, active listening would be the most important function during this initial stage of counselling, creating a platform for future counselling. The pastor should also assist, as far as possible to manage the widow through the initial stages of the mourning process.

7.6.2. Stage 2: To work through the pain and grief

7.6.2.1. Emotional and spiritual stability or growth (restoration with God and inner peace).

It is imagined that much of the widow’s time will be occupied by the completion of rituals until after the burial of her husband. As discussed, much time will still be consumed by practices and rituals associated with her husband’s departure after his burial. After this is completed, the widow will have more time to herself and will start to process what has happened to her. Here it is suspected that conflict may start to develop between the cultural prescripts regarding death and dying and her Christian convictions. Apart from dealing with

pressure caused by her in-law's expectations, she will most probably have to deal with her own inclinations to succumb to traditional beliefs.

As Louw (2000:357) explained, the focus of this stage is on the thought patterns of the counselee. The pastor therefore needs to establish potential problematic thinking that can derail the normal grieving process and make the necessary links between the widow's culturally influenced thinking and how she feels. It may help if the pastor can establish how well the widow is versed in culture as well as in Christian faith in order to ascertain where her spiritual strength lies. How does she, for example, deal with the relevant rituals, the opinion of family and how does she incorporate her Biblical knowledge within the process?

It will now be important to establish what specific challenges the widow experiences. In the light of this study challenges are anticipated on the following terrains.

- a. Ancestral veneration. Specific beliefs about ancestry places thinking about the deceased at a disposition. By becoming an ancestor, the widow's husband is still involved in her life, making final acceptance and new commitments difficult.
- b. Visions and visitations. Vivid dreaming about the deceased has a special and specific meaning within the African frame of reference. It raises questions pertaining to its meaning and suggests some supernatural connection with the deceased which can be difficult to understand.
- c. Rituals. It was pointed out, that although some rituals can be helpful in terms of supporting the widow and helping her with specific tasks directly after her husband passing, some rituals are degrading for the widow as it effectively discriminates and isolates her from meaningful support. It forces her to identify with ideas that are foreign to the Christian Gospel, such as the beliefs in so-called bad luck and the use of medications prescribed by traditional healers.
- d. In-laws. As shown, the passing of the widow's husband puts her in direct conflict with her late husband's family as she has to show that she had no unnatural contribution to his passing. This creates tension which has to be managed.
- e. Witchcraft and sorcery. Unfortunately, as death is not seen as a natural occurrence in Africa, issues regarding witchcraft and sorcery can also be part of the grieving process. This can form part of the issues that will need to be resolved.

7.6.3. Stage 3: To adjust to a new environment

7.6.3.1. Decision-making process (coping strategies)

After learning what the relation between the widow's challenges and specific issues relating to the African understanding of grief are, a pastoral strategy needs to be formulated. This entails what the specific themes are that the pastoral process should focus on.

It is anticipated that pastoral care in this instance, will mainly have an edifying function, that is, to lead the widow in terms of a Christian perspective to cope with her grieving. This implies that the pastor will need to be well versed both in African beliefs, but especially in how the Christian message responds to these issues in order to put them into a Christian perspective.

Information gathered about the widow will provide clues about her values, expectations and convictions and will guide the counselling on the way forward. In the case of the African Christian widow information will probably include most of the practices discussed earlier in this study, which will indicate how these beliefs and practices were helpful or not helpful in the healing of the widow's grief. In establishing which of these beliefs and practices were not helpful, the pastor would know on which of these to concentrate during future counselling.

Most probably, the edifying function of the pastoral process can be conveyed by means of critical discussions during counselling sessions or by giving homework in the form of Bible studies which can be discussed during sessions (Louw, 2000:362).

7.6.4. Stage 4: Finding an enduring connection with the deceased while moving forward with life.

7.6.4.1. Implementation of Action-plan/strategies to move forward with life

Louw (2000:363, 364) indicates that this final stage is aimed at helping the widow to apply her resources of faith to attain long term goals and actions. Within the framework of grieving this will entail facilitating an enduring connection with the deceased while moving forward with life.

The focus will now be on growth through the cultivation and nurturing of new patterns of thought based on the Christian Gospel. It will be of specific importance to encourage the

widow to engage with her congregation and community to fill the void of her spouse with new meaning.

The integration and internalisation of new Scriptural knowledge is important to ensure that the new value system is applied during this period of grieving.

It would be difficult to predict how long this process will take, but the pastor should try to establish if the widow is indeed moving forward, by being sensitive for any signs of progress.

7.6.5. Preliminary synthesis

The aim of this chapter was to design a conceptual framework for pastoral care to the African Christian widow. It suggested that the pastoral process unfolds organically along recognisable stages. Different examples of stage models were discussed, amongst other that of Egan, Taylor and Louw. Louw's proposal of a stage model was applied to the African Christian widow. Although different stages were anticipated, it was also stressed that the notion of stages only served as a clue how the pastoral process should unfold. It should not be viewed as a fixed recipe for pastoral care, but rather as a guide of how the process can unfold. It can also help the pastor to determine if the pastoral process is moving forward.

In the conceptual framework suggested in this chapter, Worden's four tasks of grieving was coupled to Louw's stage model, to provide some idea of how pastorate should unfold to the African Christian widow.

Chapter eight: Summary and conclusion

8.1. Introduction

The focus of this study was on the pastorate to the African Christian widow affected by the loss of her spouse. The African Christian widow was believed to be in a disposition as she may be torn between African beliefs and cultural practices and Christian values regarding death during the grieving process. In this regard, it was suspected that cultural prescripts could negatively influence the grieving process from a Christian perspective, causing complicated grief. This created particular challenges for pastoral counselling which usually approached pastoral challenges from a purely Christian, and mostly, Western perspective. This study has therefore attempted to develop a pastoral approach that is cognisant of the African Christian widow's disposition by investigating African beliefs and practices surrounding death and mourning within the framework of a normal grieving process.

8.2. Findings

In terms of the different objectives set by the study, the findings can be summarised as follows:

8.2.1. Objective 1: To describe the unique position of the African Christian woman against the background of the African worldview and culture.

In order to describe the unique position of the African Christian woman the following aspects were discussed in chapter 2:

- The African worldview
- The African Culture
- Women in the African worldview and culture
- The role of ancestors in the African worldview and culture
- The spirit world and witchcraft in the African worldview and culture
- Concepts of God in the African worldview and culture
- The uniqueness of the African Christian woman

This chapter found that worldview and culture are powerful forces that have a directive function in the lives of its adherents. The African worldview and culture is saturated with

mystical forces and exerts much power over Africans. Especially at the crossroad between earthly life and the hereafter, these mystical forces apply their influence through the communities that maintain them. It is during this period that the African Christian woman is exposed to many phenomena that may not concur with her Christian faith, causing much emotional turmoil and inner conflict. When compared to basic Christian beliefs, the unique challenges for women of the Christian faith within the African context, transpired. These challenges were of utmost importance for pastoral caregivers who had to counsel these women.

8.2.2. Objective 2: To describe the concepts of death and dying within the African context.

In order to describe the concepts of death and dying within the African context the following aspects were discussed in chapter 3:

- Death in Africa
- The effect of death on man as a spiritual being
- Immortality
- Death and the Community
- Causes of death: witchcraft and sorcery
- Ancestors: The living dead
- Haunting by spirits
- Children of the deceased
- Immediate family members
- Implications for the African Christian widow
- A stressful mourning period in light of the African culture
- Acknowledgement and acceptance
- Isolation and conflict with family
- Anxiety and fear

This chapter showed some of the significant meanings of death and dying within the African context. It revealed that the African understanding of immortality is not the same as the Christian understanding. In the African context the African Christian widow and close relatives, for example, have to perform funeral rites which some Africans believe that it enables the soul of the deceased to travel to the spirit land. The community also has a supportive role to play during death rituals. Since death represents a mystical happening

amongst Africans, African Christian widows can be blamed for the deaths of their husbands through witchcraft and sorcery. Ancestors or the living dead are believed to haunt the bereaved families. Children of the deceased and immediate family members show their respect through specific attire and support of the widow. It was shown that this period could be very stressful for the widow as she somehow has to integrate her culture through rituals and practices with her Christian faith. All these different implications, such as isolation and conflicts within the family, cause anxiety which creates unique challenges for the pastorate to the African Christian widow.

8.2.3. Objective 3: To identify and describe some of the rituals associated with grieving within the African context.

In order to describe some of the rituals associated with grieving within the African context, the following aspects were discussed in chapter 4:

- Mourning rituals
- Clothes of the deceased
- Attire
- Recreation
- Utensils
- Children of the deceased
- Services
- Viewing of the corpse
- Night vigil
- Cleansing
- Dreams and rituals

This chapter introduced some of the typical rituals in African culture associated with death. Although they are deemed functional within African thinking, they have the potential to complicate the grieving process from a Christian perspective. In this regard it was shown that some of these rituals limited the freedom of the widow, made her vulnerable to accusations from and exposes her to interpretations of dreams which are interpreted in ways which are foreign to the Christian faith. It was also highlighted that the death of a spouse puts the widow in a disposition that she is deemed unclean, therefore needing cleansing rituals

performed immediately after the burial. This effectively – and unfairly stigmatises the widow as if she had done something wrong.

8.2.4. Objective 4: To describe pastoral care and identify some of the perceived challenges for the African Christian widow.

In order to describe pastoral care and identify African women during the grieving process, the following aspects were discussed in chapter 5:

- Pastoral care and counselling within the context of the grieving African Christian widow
- The identity of pastoral care and counselling
- The African worldview and culture
- African Traditional religion

This chapter explored pastoral care and counselling within the context of the African Christian widow. It suggested that pastoral care and counselling should follow a contextualised approach in order to be relevant for the African Christian widow.

It was suggested that a contextualised pastoral approach is first of all aimed at spiritual care which proceeded from the notion of *cura animarum* where the Word of God, prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit are central. Bringing the Christian perspective in an emphatic way to the African Christian widow, it wanted to engage issues within the African framework regarding death and dying which have the potential of complicating the grieving process.

A contextualised pastoral approach should at least also engage the African worldview and culture as well as with the African Traditional Religion in order to be relevant to the African Christian widow.

8.2.6. Objective 5: To design a Biblical basis theory for the pastorate to the African Christian widow.

In order to design a Biblical basis theory for the pastorate to the African Christian widow the following aspects were discussed in chapter 6:

- Uncomplicated grief
- The role of the Bible for the African Christian widow

- Life after death
- Communicating with spirits of the dead and rituals to honour them
- Witchcraft
- Participating in doubtful rituals

This chapter attempted to design a theological framework for the pastoral process when engaging with the African Christian widow. This framework was designed with normal grieving in mind. It was shown that some aspects of African beliefs and rituals regarding death could pose challenges for the pastorate. Particularly those that challenge Christian doctrine were pointed out as potential challenges within the pastoral process. Against this background the Biblical message about themes such as eternal life, communication with the deceased and witchcraft were discussed. It was shown that the pastorate could bring new perspectives to the grieving widow that will help her to accomplish the tasks generally associated with the grieving process.

8.2.7. Objective 6: To propose a conceptual framework for the pastorate to the African Christian widow affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse.

In order to describe a conceptual framework for the pastorate to the African Christian widow affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse, the following aspects were discussed in chapter 7.

- The pastorate to the African Christian widow
- A systemic approach
- The pastorate as an organic process
- Stage model of Egan
- Taylor's metanoia model
- Stage model of Louw
- The pastoral process as an informed process
- The use of Scriptures in counselling
- Markers for a pastoral approach to the African Christian woman affected by grief due to the loss of her spouse

The aim of this chapter was to design a conceptual framework for pastoral care of the African Christian widow. It suggested that the pastoral process unfolded organically in recognisable

stages. Different examples of stage models were discussed, amongst others that of Egan, Taylor and Louw. Louw's proposal of a stage model was applied to the African Christian widow. Although different stages were anticipated, it was also stressed that the notion of stages only serve as a clue as how the pastoral process should unfold. It should not be viewed as a fixed recipe for pastoral care, but rather as a guide of how the process could unfold. It could also help the pastor to determine if the pastoral process was moving forward. In the conceptual framework suggested in this chapter, Worden's four tasks of grieving were coupled to Louw's stage model, to provide a framework for the pastorate to the African Christian widow.

8.3. Conclusion

Losing a spouse presents a very unique challenge to the African Christian woman. Challenged by the normal tasks of grieving, she is also confronted by adherence to both culture and faith. Being submerged in rich cultural meanings which are full of rituals and mystery, the African worldview and culture imposes meaning on the grieving process which was shown to be foreign to the Christian understanding of death.

This opens the door for a pastoral approach that should be cognisant of the African worldview and culture and mindful of the inner conflict that can arise as a result of this. In this way this study appeals for a cultural sensitive approach to pastoral care which will engage the African Christian widow in an edifying way, comforting her while at the same time leading her to consolation and a liberating view on death, which was conquered in Christ.

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