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Chapter 1

Introductory Orientation

1.1   Introduction

The authors of the Bible were persons of their own times. They wrote in particular settings and addressed their writings to specific problems and to a particular people who lived in a definite historical context. Their attitudes, outlooks and beliefs were those appropriate to people of their time (Cook 1983:47).

In the Bible, we are offered great insights into the problems facing the people of God in the Old and New Testament times and into the minds of the leaders responding to the issues of their day. There is a sense in which these biblical words and insights are time and context bound. Only through scholarly interpretation can these words have meaning for modern people. Since biblical writers wrote to address situations and problems prevalent at the time, there is a need for modern interpreters to take cognizance of their new situations, and in this particular thesis it is the African context in which the researcher seeks to apply the gospel message.

Many African biblical scholars have been trained in the tradition of Western biblical scholarship, and they read the Bible through the interpretive grid developed in the Western culture, and then seek to apply their findings and results in their own contexts (see Mndende1997: 39-50). One outcome of this tendency has been a visible gap between this academic reading of the Bible and the social,

economic and religious experiences of ordinary African Christians. Therefore, appropriate indigenous hermeneutics need to be applied.

Kalu (1999:1) calls this enterprise, interpreting the Bible with African lenses:

> "An image for preservation depends much on the type of lens used in capturing it. And this is true concerning African lenses, which can portray African differently depending on whether one is wearing the pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial or post-independence lenses. Why African traditional lenses? These give the correct indigenous reading concerning what before the advent of Western, Islamic or other external influences came into Africa."

Besides, Africa, and her peoples' adherence to their traditional religions (in many parts of the continent), they are not strangers to the Bible and they have been a truly religious people. In various ways some African biblical scholars have demonstrated that the African continent contributed in more than one way towards the development of the history of the Bible.

Amanze (2001:273-286) approaches this fact in the same way when he argues that the contentious issue has been the relationship between Christianity and African culture. Often Christianity has been set against everything African. Much preaching and teaching emphasizes

the foreignness of Christianity in Africa, alienating many Africans. He maintains that the faith of many believers is skin deep. When Christianity came to Africa it found fertile soil for the Gospel because Africans have been from the beginning a God-fearing people. In this regard African traditional religions can be perceived as *preparatio evangelica*.

He further maintains that African culture has much in common with the Old Testament culture and people of African descent have contributed substantially to the origin and development of Christianity as evidenced in the role that Africans have played in salvation history in the development of Christian thought. African foundations of Christianity are not myth but a reality to the extent that it can be argued that Christianity is indigenous to Africa as other traditional religions are. This calls for more input in this area of study and research.

Africans and their traditional religions, will be highlighted in this thesis as not strangers to biblical history and tradition. Adamo (2001:104) carefully investigated Africa and Africans (with specific reference to their participation in biblical history). He argues that Africa has made a significant contribution to the religious life and the civilization of the ancient Near East, and particularly ancient Israel. For instance, he mentions Ebed-melech (Jer 38:1-7, and 15-17), who is of African descent. He is portrayed as an example of courage, faith, compassion and kindness to Israel by delivering one of her greatest prophets. He taught the weak king (Zedekiah) and his people the sense of right and wrong. When Zedekiah could not decide what to do with

the prophet Jeremiah (because of the fear of his princes who wanted the prophet to die) Ebed-melech, the African with great courage and faith, went to the king, challenged and taught him the sense of right and wrong (Jer 38:13). Jeremiah's life was saved.

Maimela (1990:70) also makes interesting and noteworthy remarks about Africa's contribution towards the Christian faith. He regards the physical contribution of Africa towards Christianity as a prelude to spiritual contribution and as a platform for biblical hermeneutics (a division of a scientific interpretation that this thesis aims to employ in evaluating the embodiment of the gospel message in African traditional culture). He maintains that Africans should be made aware of the fact that their ancestors have made significant contributions to the origin and growth of Christianity. He says that:

> "One of my theses is that without Africa and its people, the world would not have had Christianity and the Jewish religion, both of which have been given birth through the African contribution."

Maimela (1990:70) cites few examples. When Abraham, the carrier of God's blessings to the world, encountered all sorts of problems in Canaan because of the drought, we are told that he would have died of hunger had the Africans in Egypt not come to his rescue by giving him food and shelter. Thus by saving him from starvation and giving him sustenance, Africans in fact literally saved God's promises to Israel, promises that were later fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Maimela also refers to Moses and Jacob (see Gen 46 and Ex 2).

In view of the fact that Africans are such welcoming people who do not discriminate against other people because of color or religion, they accommodated Jacob and his sons. It is also not surprising that Joseph, a "foreigner" was elevated to the rank of governor and partner in the running of the affairs of the Egyptian State. It was because of this African help and intervention that the Israelites settled, multiplied in Egypt and later demanded their freedom. Furthermore, Moses who was used by God to free the Hebrew slaves was brought up in the African royal family and given the best education that Africa could provide at that time. These are just only geographical and historical accounts that took place and touched on the African continent and do not necessarily bear strong emphasis on the embodiment of the gospel message in the African traditional culture, but touch on the physical connections which later contribute and impact religious issues.

Opoku (1993:68) summarizes Africa's hospitality as follows:

> "Contrary to the impression that the spread of other religions in Africa is due to the palpably clear "weakness" of the host religion, it may be affirmed that the ability to accept truth outside of one's own immediate environment and tradition is a sign of strength and maturity. It is not its lamentable opposite: for the truth is rarely a possession in the baggage of religious personalities or protagonists which they generously dish out to the benighted ones who are without it, but rather it is a horizon towards which we are all moving. It may be compared to a river flowing

towards the ocean along whose journey tributaries join

to enlarge it before it finally reaches its destination."

The argument in this thesis is to enlist African traditional culture and religion as a 'tributary' to the host of world religions by demonstrating that the African culture embodies gospel features. In the African experience, all men are the children of God, and none is the child of the earth. All peoples are tributaries of truth since they are God's children. For God shares his truth liberally with all people, and as the truth we know encounters others, it becomes stronger and deeper as it continues its journey in leading us to God, the source of all truth, and our final destination.

Finally, Maimela (1990:71) contends that when Herod threatened Jesus, Africa was ready to host him (Matt 2:13-18). Jesus went to his 'uncles' and 'aunts' in Africa. Joseph (the father of Jesus) did not run away from Bethlehem to Athens in Greece or Rome or London. Africa thus acted in a caring and protective manner to the founder of the Christian faith. To crown it all:

> "The Bible declares that even on his way to the cross, Jesus did not receive help from any of his Roman oppressors or from any of his Jewish sympathizers. Rather it was from his African uncle, Simon from Cyrene (modern Lybia), that Jesus received help to carry the cross which weighed heavy on his shoulders."
> (Matt 27:31-33)

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The greatest challenge facing African theologians today is to discover and to interpret the gospel message in Africa. While such ways of interpretation will remain true to the rich heritage of the past and present biblical scholarship, they should also be groundbreaking in the new search for relevancy of new contexts, such as an African context. Mbiti (1977:28) calls the Western interpretation of the Bible in Africa, cultural imperialism, and he calls for its termination.

> "Cultural imperialism must terminate first in order to allow the indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the Gospel, on its own terms and without pressure from outside. With humility and gratitude let us borrow and learn from other cultures, but let us not become their cultural slaves."

Recognition of the importance of the context of the people to which the message is being transmitted is a hermeneutical requirement. The question that this thesis seeks to address is what the African perspective of the Gospel is?

Pato (1997:54) is right in raising a question whether it makes scientific sense to speak of "a perspective from an African culture and spirituality" when the African continent is so vast and diversified. While one can no longer speak of 'Africans' in general, or of 'African tradition' in a pure state because of its evident diversity and complexity, and in the face of profound

current mutations, black Africa does exhibit certain data and represents an entity (Penoukou 1991:29).

Pato (1997:54) on the one hand contends that the African continent consists of such a variety of ethnic groups, each with its own customs, history and ways of life, that sweeping generalizations about things that are said to be of African, are always risky. Only at a level of abstraction can one use generalizations to refer to African people. Zahan (1979:2) on the other hand, argues rightly that the diversity of African ethnic groups should not be an obstacle to such an undertaking. The variation in religion has less to do with the ideas themselves than with their expression by means of dissimilar elements linked to the occupations and the fauna and flora of the area.

Mbiti (1975:28) maintains that in two-thirds of Africa and Madagascar we find strong African Religion everywhere, though less so in Ethiopia, where Christianity has been a powerful religion since about the fourth century. Our investigation of African Religion in this thesis will concern this region which covers two-thirds of the continent.

A map of the African continent (Adapted from Mbiti's 1975:29 Introduction to African Religion) showing the spread of African Traditional religion is appended as an addendum at the end of this thesis. This has been included simply to show that not the entire continent of Africa had and practiced African Traditional Religion. Only certain portions of the continent as

shown, practiced African traditional culture. Therefore, even in the references to African Traditional culture, this thesis does not claim to speak for all Africa. Other portions of the continent of Africa such as Egypt were Islamic, even to this day. Even though the state of events has changed over the years, basic patterns are still discernible.

The map shows a vast area, with nearly a 1000 major African peoples (tribes as they used to be called). It has many geographical contrasts including huge equatorial forests, the Great Lakes and rivers, sparsely and densely populated areas, about a thousand distinct languages and many more dialects. Mbiti (1975:28) further maintains that this is the continent from which slaves were so mercilessly and harshly taken by the Arabs on the eastern and northern section, and by the Europeans on the western section, and 'exported' to Asia, Europe and the Americas. All these and many more are the factors that prevailed when African Religion took shape. It was influenced and it also influenced Christianity.   This thesis examines how this religion and culture of Africa embodies the gospel message.

In this thesis, two typical examples of ethnic groups from various parts of the continent will be cited at a level of abstraction to demonstrate particular ideas of the concept of salvation as embodied in African traditional culture. The South African experience especially with regard to the transmission and reception of the gospel message during the colonization period will also be used more concretely in referring to

Africans' social and religious contexts especially where this research is conducted.

In this short introductory remark, it has been alluded to the fact that interpreting the Bible, especially in Africa, depended on the type of lenses used in capturing and preserving the image. This will determine whether one uses pre-colonial, colonial or post- colonial lenses. Each period influenced the way scholars of religion interpreted and applied their findings to the new contexts. The physical contribution that Africa played towards the development of the biblical history, (Jewish and Christian) demonstrated her humanity in various ways.

Then, the African cultural context became pivotal, as scholars debate the fact that foreign cultures must terminate first so that indigenous cultures can relate more effectively to the Gospel. African traditional culture seemed strange and indifferent to the gospel message. This, I argue, is because of different theological perspectives and need re-interpretation. The statement of the problem will revolve around Africa's continued adherence to her traditional culture in the face and advance of Christianity.

The statement of the problem to be investigated and a paradigm to be employed in this research will be elaborated upon in the following section. The chapters or division of the entire study will also be outlined for easy reference.

1.2   The Problem

The assertion of Olowola (1993:7) that while many Africans today are being exposed to modern education, traditional thought is still the source of the basic worldview of most of the people, raises questions as to why Africans would not just be satisfied about the worldview presented by the Westerners. Many Western educated Africans still want to pay *lobola* (bride price). They find meaning in this cultural activity and it has psychological or theological significance, in that Africans believe the marriage union where *lobola* has been paid has been approved by the society (of both the living and the living-dead).   In their traditional home setting, roles of male and female are still well defined. For example, we rarely find African men (husbands) scrubbing or sweeping floors. The opposite for women is also true. African women do not look after cattle. This clear division of roles has psychological and social significance to Africans.

Vilakazi (1986:55-65) also makes a remarkable observation that one of the ever-present anxieties of a Zulu (one of the African ethnic groups) is to make sure that he is right with his ancestral spirits. He will therefore make feasts regularly and name all his ancestors and ask for their guidance and will pay particular attention to their messages, will study their whims and fancies, and will also look out for any signs of revelation by them.

This remark by Vilakazi is in my opinion still valid today even though this is no longer applicable to all the Zulus. Today the Zulu traditional culture has been assimilated into the Western culture, especially in urban areas of South Africa. It is no longer easy to trace it in its pure sense, African traditional culture and religion. The problem of establishing accurate figures of the Zulus that still adhere to their traditional culture is compounded by the fact that it is practiced privately in homes of people. Africans do not publicly recruit members for their religion as the case could be in Christianity or Islam.

There are no public institutions such as church buildings or halls where services are held. But in spite of these and many other factors (hierarchical priesthood, formal training and ordination to priesthood) African traditional religion is alive in the hearts of its practitioners. Everyday African widows are seen dressed in black attire for specific periods of time of mourning. This practice is observed to ensure that all 'goes well' with the widow. Africans are seen time and again visiting grave- sites of their departed relatives to 'talk to them'. These practices have been there in the African culture and have psychological significance in that people believe they are in harmony with their ancestors.

Van Niekerk (1996:34) cites an example of a publication of M.V. Gumede (with a B.A. from the University of Natal and MBChB from the University of the Witwatersrand). In his book 'Traditional healers', Gumede argues that the role of Africa's traditional healers become more important and that

more than 80% of black patients first consult traditional healers before knocking at the doors of western medical practitioners for help. This also confirms that many Africans still look to traditional thoughts for answers to problems of life.

It may at this stage be necessary to explain briefly who an African is as the term will be used in this current study. In this thesis, African will refer to black people of African origin. It is these people who share the same history, or experience of colonization (that is who were colonized or their forebears colonized), especially during the period of European occupation of Africa. They share in one way or another the same culture.

This definition of an African is not absolute and exhaustive. In certain respects, it excludes people who only acquired citizenship of Africa or South Africa because they stayed here for a specific period of time required by the private laws of countries to be called citizens of Africa, or their ancestors acquired such citizenship. They may believe that they have contributed to the material or spiritual development of the African continent and therefore claim to be Africans. But they do not share or come from the same culture. They have not experienced the history of colonization.

Christian missionaries who were responsible for the proclamation of the biblical message, were also instruments at the hands of the colonizers (Ndwandwe (2000:4). This means that while the gospel message was preached to Africans,

colonization also took place. There tended to be an overlap between the gospel message and western material and normative culture. The colonization of the African continent, did not happen by accident. Bosch (1991:226) argues that the roots of the later conquistadores and the entire phenomenon of the European colonization of the rest of the world lay in the medieval teachings on just war. Of course, colonization of non-Christian peoples by Christian nations predated modern colonialism by many centuries, but those exploits were launched by Europeans to other Europeans, and in each case the vanquished peoples soon embraced Christianity and were assimilated into the dominant culture.

Bosch (1991:227) maintains that now however, European Christians met people who were not only physically, but also culturally and linguistically very different from them. One of the most appalling consequences of this was the imposition of slavery on non-Western peoples. In the ancient Roman empire as well as medieval Europe slavery had little to do with race. After the "discovery" of the non-Western world beyond the Muslim territories this changed; henceforth slaves could only be people of color. The fact that they were different made it possible for the victorious Westerners to regard them as inferior. Spain and Portugal introduced slavery and were soon emulated by other emerging powers, that all claimed a share in the lucrative trade in human bodies.

Bosch (1991:227) recalls that in 1537 the Pope of the Catholic church authorized the opening of a slave market in Lisbon,

where up to twelve thousand Africans were sold annually for transportation to the West Indies. By the eighteenth century Britain had the lion's share of the slave market. In the ten years between 1783 and 1793 a total of 880 slave ships left Liverpool, carrying over three hundred thousand slaves to the Americas. It has been estimated that the number of slaves sold to European colonies amounted to between twenty to forty million. And all along the (assumed) superiority of westerners over all others became more and more firmly entrenched and regarded as axiomatic.

The rationale of this short allusion to slavery in Africa is simply to demonstrate to what extent and magnitude African traditional culture in particular was overlooked as opposed to western culture, which in turn undermined its enshrining gospel features. This system of trading with humans made it difficult to appreciate gospel features enshrined in the African traditional culture. Even in religious circles, Africans had no chance being recognized as humans with a religion and culture. The following chapters will deal with the history of Christianity in Africa. The chapters will examine certain aspects of African traditional culture that embody gospel features as well, in the context of Africa.

Perhaps rather incongruously, the colonial period also precipitated an unparalleled era of mission. Bosch (1991:227) argues that Christendom discovered with a shock that, fifteen centuries after the Christian church was founded, there were still millions of people who knew nothing about salvation and

who, since they were not baptized, were all headed for eternal punishment. This is another fact that inculturation hermeneutic (a paradigm employed in this thesis) attempts to explain in the context of African context and perspective.

To sum it up therefore, culture, history, attachment to these and consciousness of identity, and not skin color, primarily defines the African. The fact that most South Africans or people of African historical and cultural descent are black is only one characteristic, a bonus which generalizes and typifies Africans.

Many other African tribes and ethnic groups in the African continent as demonstrated in special works of scholars such as Mbiti (1969), Bediako (1995), Gaba (1978) and Idowu (1969) still revere or venerate their ancestors. The researcher of this thesis concurs with the views expressed by these scholars, however, he further investigates whether could this practice be contrary to the gospel message as has been maintained by other scholars such as Musasiwa (1993), and O'Donovan (1992). This is another question that this thesis intends to investigate. Mbiti (1975: 28) maintains that a few attempts were made by Christian missionaries three to five hundred years ago to bring Christianity to some of the coastal peoples (People along the coasts of Africa would be the first to make contact with outsiders before those of inland provinces). Although this was successful in converting Africans to Christianity in some areas, this success did not last long, nor did it penetrate much into the interior except in one or two places.

But from the nineteenth century onwards, Mbiti (1975: 28) maintains that Christianity had spread in every direction, so that by now many African people have heard the Christian message, and many millions of Africans have accepted the Christian faith. We often find both Christianity and African Religion side by side. In many ways (such as being accommodative to foreigners) African religion, prepared the way for the conversion of African peoples to Christianity. Mbiti (1975: 30) also confirms that their conversion does not mean that they have abandoned all their former religious ideas and traditions. Why does it happen that Africans cling to their traditional culture? Why do some Africans still practice this culture in the privacy of their homes, especially where it is condemned by some interpreters and preachers of the gospel message (in particular from adherents of other world religions) as not being in accordance with their teachings? Could the Gospel be enshrined in such African traditional culture and religion?

Writing on the concept of salvation, Theron (1996:119) comments that to be saved means to be accepted. One is first accepted into the community of the living by being good to one's neighbours and secondly accepted among the community of the dead ancestors by remembering them through prayers and offerings. (Asante 2001: 340-364) maintains that the African's conception of individuality as a reality defined by the community is crucial to the understanding of salvation. He argues that salvation can hardly be defined as individual experience in isolation from the community.

If the African's existential reality is informed and defined by the community, then newness of life through the work of Christ will not be experienced in isolation from the community. The Gospel can hardly be proclaimed in the traditional African context as an invitation to come out of the community. The Gospel must rather come to the African as an invitation to experience newness and fullness of life in community.

Another biblical scholar, Zvanaka (2000: 221-232) describes how in another African tribe in Zimbabwe, the Shona Zion Apostolic churches perceived of salvation. He argues that though Christianity has gained a firm foothold, old traditions, cultural practices, customs and norms are still alive. Tradition still influences the Zionist world-view. Life is not fragmented but seen as a totality of distinct yet integrated components: social, economic, political and spiritual. God's salvation encompasses all aspects of life.

Another African scholar Soyinka (1976: 51) argues it this way.

> "The death of an individual is not seen as an isolated event in the life of one man. Nor is individual fertility separable from the regenerative promise of earth and sea. The sickness of one individual is a sign of, or may portend the sickness of, the world around him. Something has occurred to disrupt the natural rhythms and the cosmic balances of the total community".

Could the concept of salvation be viewed and accepted or taken as religiously valid only through the eyes of Christianity? Should interpreters accept only the biblical or Christian understanding of salvation as the only truth? Theologians who understood and interpreted the *Sola Scriptura* slogan in an absolute and exclusive sense believed that African culture should not be used in theology. A typical example of one of the 'Sola Scriptura' theologians is Hodge, who wrote elsewhere that the 'Bible is a storehouse of facts' (quoted in Marsden 1980: 113). These theologians missed the fact that the Gospel is received in a cultural context. This thesis investigates via quantitative research (that is by reading books) the experiences of specific African communities, only as examples, the Anlo Ewe and the Ndembu, what salvation means to them in their cultural contexts and how it is gained.

On analysis of the statement of the problem, it becomes evident that the majority of traditional people of Africa, still adhere to their traditional culture. This has been against many attempts by Christian missionaries over years of colonization to 'civilize' and change this African traditional culture and religion. Bosch (1991:291) succinctly describes this situation when he writes:

> "Christians did not, on the whole, have any doubt concerning the superiority of their own faith over all others. It was therefore perhaps, to be expected that their feelings of religious superiority would

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spawn beliefs about cultural superiority. The ancient Greeks called other nations *barbaroi*".

Although many Africans have converted and accepted Christianity, they still practice the traditional religion that is embedded in their culture and it is argued in this thesis that it enshrines gospel features.

This is the bone of contention that continues to be debated in this thesis whether, the gospel features are enshrined in the African traditional culture. Scholars such as Hodge (quoted in Marsden 1980: 113) that proclaimed *Sola Scriptura*, could not accommodate African traditional culture and religion in their interpretation of the gospel message.

The researcher does not intend to make an exegesis of texts as such but to give textual examples where necessary to highlight specific incidents where there may be a correlation of gospel features.

In the light of these factors surrounding the problem statement mentioned above, the researcher suggests a paradigm called the inculturation hermeneutic procedure that will help interpret and investigate the embodiment of gospel features in the African traditional culture and religion.

1.3   Inculturation hermeneutic

This research methodology (the inculturation hermeneutic) has been selected and will be used throughout this thesis in an effort to interpret and demonstrate how the African traditional religion and culture enshrines the gospel message. The emphasis will be on the African cultural context and the perspective or world-view of the African people. This is because it is the African culture and religion that we attempt to highlight in the investigation. The Christian perspective will only be touched upon as a useful point of contact for presenting one's message. It is such points of contact which make any Christian agent in the Christianization process ponder seriously over the whole missiological and evangelical enterprise. This means that as one preaches the gospel message mainly from the Christian perspective. It is important to keep in mind that other faiths such as African Traditional culture, embodies or enshrines the gospel features as well. It is not only the Christian perspective that one must be opened to and 'ignore' other avenues of cultural contexts.

Ukpong (1995:5) maintains that inculturation hermeneutic is an approach to biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African, and for that matter any socio-cultural context the

subject of interpretation. This is different from making another context the subject of interpretation and then applying the result in the African context. This will help to avoid using a specific or particular religion or faith, and in this case, Christianity as a yardstick against which to measure another faith, African traditional culture and 'want' the latter to comply or be the same as the first. In this thesis some correlative ideas between African traditional culture and biblical concepts will be brought up as a means of indicating similar thoughts in expressing gospel message.

The idea is not to make a comparison between Christianity and ATR but to demonstrate that the Gospel or its features are enshrined in African traditional culture. Therefore Christianity and the Gospel are not assumed to be the same, neither is (African Traditional Religion) ATR and the Gospel assumed to be the same. Each religion, in its own special way enshrines gospel features. Inculturation hermeneutics presupposes that the Bible is appropriated to its readers as 'Word of God'.

In no way is the researcher intending to place one religion (Christianity) over and above the other faiths (African traditional religion, Hinduism or Islam). The researcher is also not equating these religions or claiming that they are on the same footing. Such work may be beyond the scope of this thesis at this stage. There may be areas of differences or similarities brought about by different contexts. These experiences need to be analyzed and interpreted accordingly in contexts, using appropriate methods of research and study such

as the inculturation hermeneutic approach. Christianity as a religion is specifically referred to in certain areas of this thesis because the researcher is an African Christian, and not an Islamic African or Hindu African. Therefore being an African who has been brought up and accepted the Christian faith, it is rather easier to examine Gospel features in both Christianity and the African traditional culture.

Such a comparison may be useful do demonstrate that the gospel features are enshrined in African traditional culture and religion just as it assumed by Christians that the Gospel is enshrined in the Christian religion. Dever (1990:9) argues that the Bible (which is a Christian document) is not the "word of God" in itself (as the Fundamentalist doctrine of verbal inspiration holds), but rather may become the "Word of God" insofar as it points beyond itself, to the God who stands above all human description.

The experience and knowledge of wanting to retain traditional world-views and revering ancestors as outlined in the statement of the problem paved the way for what was later to be known as "inculturation". Bosch (1991:452) maintains that a plurality of cultures presupposed a plurality of theologies and therefore, for Third-World churches, it is a farewell to a Eurocentric approach. Such an approach is even more needed in the light of the way in which the West has raped (forcefully deprived) the cultures of the Third World of their identity, inflicting on them what has been termed "anthropological poverty" (Frostin 1985:15).

In which respects does inculturation differ from its predecessors such as 'accommodation', or 'adaptation'? It differs in respect of the agents. In all earlier models (anthropological, praxis, synthetic and semiotic) it was the Western missionary who either induced or benevolently supervised the way in which the encounter between the Christian faith and the local cultures was to unfold (Bosch 1991:453). The very terms "accommodation", "adaptation", etc. suggested this. These terms implied that the local culture was only accommodated into the 'true and bigger' culture. Sometimes the local culture was supposed to adapt to the dictates of the 'superior' culture. The process was one-sided, in that the local faith community was not the primary agent. This led to widespread condemnation of African cultures and neglect of local customs. O'Donovan: (1992: 2,3,42) boldly writes:

> "The message of the Bible is for all people of all times, but to each group the truth of the Bible will seem somewhat foreign because it is a revelation from God and not from man. Since the Bible is the revelation from God, the world-view of the Bible is the correct view of reality. For a person to really understand the truth of God, he must believe in the world-view presented in the Bible, even if that world-view has some elements contrary to his own world-view".

Here, O'Donovan does not differentiate in historical or contextual contexts. He expects every passage or verse in the Bible to speak relevance to any new situation.

For example, if one reads at face value Exodus 20: 3, which reads: You shall not have other gods besides me. And if a lay or untrained reader of this text neglects local customs, African culture, with its ancestral cult, could easily be misinterpreted as worshipping ancestors.   In inculturation, however, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly to the laity (Luzbetak 1988: 66).

Neither the missionary, nor the hierarchy (popes and bishops of the mother church), nor the magisterium (special magisterial powers of the church) controls the process. Bosch (1991:229) describes this as the church being understood as 'sacral-hierarchical institution'. Faith matters are performed by means of a system of authorization and delegation. This does not mean that the missionary and the theologian are excluded. Schreiter (1980:18) regards the participation of the missionary and the theologian as indispensable and he writes:

> "… to ignore the resources of the professional theologian is to prefer ignorance to knowledge"

In this way, missionaries no longer go with a kind of Peace Corps mentality for the purpose of "doing good", however. They no longer participate as the ones who have all the answers but are learners like everybody else.

Here, the emphasis is on the local situation. At this local level, inculturation comprises much more than culture in the traditional or anthropological sense of the term. It involves the entire context: social, economic, political, religious educational, etc. Luzbetak (1988:252) remarks this way:

> "More concretely, the world-view provides answers to such basic questions as: How do humans differ from non-humans (animals, objects, and the invisible beings)? What is the proper orientation to time and space? Who belongs to the invisible world? What is believed about life after death? What in life or the world is desirable or undesirable, and to what degree"?

In using the inculturation hermeneutic approach, the researcher better addresses the African social context and delves deeper into the understanding of the culture of Africa.

Inculturation also consciously follows the model of the incarnation. This incarnation dimension of the Gospel being "enfleshed", "embodied" in a people and its culture, is of a "kind of ongoing incarnation". In this paradigm, it is not so much a case of the church being expanded, but of the church being born anew in each context and culture.

Again, following directly from the previous point, the earlier models did indeed suggest an interaction between Gospel and

culture, but one in which the theological content of the interaction remained obscure. The co-ordination of Gospel and culture should, however, be structured in a christological way (Gensichen 1985:124). This implies that as people of different cultures are encountered, the good news concerning Jesus' proclamation, should not be lost sight of. Christ remains central in every activity or culture. The missionaries do not just set out to "take Christ" to other people and cultures, but also to allow the faith the chance to start a history of its own in each people and its experience in Christ (Bosch 1991:454).

Inculturation suggests a double movement: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. The Gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon (Geffre 1982:482), while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context (Schreiter 1980:12).

The researcher found this method of interpretation more suitable for understanding the embodiment of gospel features in the African traditional culture. This is because on the one hand the methodology will offer the cultures 'the knowledge of the divine 'mystery', while on the other it helps them 'to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought'. This will be demonstrated later in the thesis where Africans were in many ways denied their traditional expression of their culture and religion.

Ukpong (1995:5) mentions that inculturation hermeneutic concentrates on the reader, but the 'reader' is to be understood as the 'reader-in-context', that is, reader who consciously takes his/her socio-cultural context as a point of departure in the reading. He/she should be part and parcel of the Christian community whose world-view and life experience he/she shares. In inculturation hermeneutic it is required that the reader be an 'insider' in the culture that is the subject of interpretation. This means someone who has acquired knowledge, experience and the insights of the culture and is also capable of viewing it critically.

During the course of this thesis it will be argued that some scholars of religion misrepresented African religions and culture (see also Mndende 1997:39-50). Westerlund (1993:59) puts this argument thus:

> "Although scholars of religion have primarily aimed at description and understanding, or depicting an 'inside view' of African religion, they have clearly been influenced by theological biases and thus tended to 'Christianize' these religions. In broad comparative studies, based on religionist concepts of religion, they have abstracted African religions from their cultural and historical contexts. Anthropologists, on the other hand, who have primarily concentrated on monographic works and aimed at theoretical explanations, have

been influenced by secular biases and have thus
tended to 'secularize' these religions".

This argument comes about when one uses a specific religion
as a 'yard-stick' and then expects all others to comply fully
with that religion. If the religion used as a measuring stick is
Christianity, it is expected that other religions must resemble or
be the same as Christianity, including its human culture. If the
other religion seem to worship in a different way from
Christianity, it is termed secular. This thesis intends to avoid
such a pitfall.

In interpreting a text, apart from the conceptual framework
used and the socio-cultural context that constitutes the point of
departure for interpretation, the interpreter is further
conditioned by factors that may be regarded as personal and
subjective. These may be social, like one's status in society,
biological, that is, the interpreter's gender, ideological, etc.
These give rise to biases in the interpreter's mind as he/she
approaches the biblical text. The primary object of exegesis as
such is the ideal meaning of the text, that is, what it actually
says about its immanent referent.

Therefore, the text always means something other than, and in
the case of a classic, more than, its author could have intended
or its original audience could have understood. Dever (1990:6)
maintains that in the Bible there is no real historiography in the
modern sense; indeed, the word 'history' does not appear once
in the Hebrew Bible. Biblical writers rarely claim to base

themselves solely on factual records, to be totally objective, or to cover the whole story. They are concerned not with the question, 'What really happened?' but with the larger question, 'What does it mean?' For them and for their original readers, the Bible is 'His story'. It is the eyes of faith. It is the story of the saving acts of God on behalf of his people.

In inculturation hermeneutic such conditioning is acknowledged and the interpreter is to be critically aware of it and use it positively. He/she does this by analyzing such influences critically thereby exercising control over them, and by using them positively, critically and creatively.

Finally, Ukpong (1995:6) maintains that the term 'contextual' is also used to refer to the fact that every hermeneutic/theology is informed by the perspective of a particular context, whether this is adverted to, acknowledged or not. Theologians and exegetes have become more and more convinced today that, ideology aside, no exegesis can be acultural, that is, no exegesis is done from a universal perspective. Human beings perceive reality from particular, not from universal perspectives.

Mosala (1987: 126-134) uses concepts like "the Word of God", "the particularity of the Gospel", "oppression and oppressors" and "the God of the oppressed" in black theology revealing a captivity to the ideological assumptions of white theology. He argues that this captivity accounts for the current political impotence of black theology as a cultural weapon of struggle,

especially in relation to the black working class struggle for liberation.

The other side of the coin is that biblical text itself is not acultural and universal, rather it is steeped through in the culture and life experiences of those communities that produced them (Kraft 1979:236-237; West 1992:4-5; Ukpong 1994:305-306). This fact has been alluded to in the introductory orientation of this thesis. Any reading cannot be expected to be acultural. Tracy (1987:79) puts it this way:

> "There is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text."

In this general sense, every hermeneutic or theology is contextual; even classical Christian theology which claims to be universal is acknowledged today to be contextual (Schreiter 1980:207) because it is informed by the classical Graeco-Roman culture.

Having examined the paradigm of inculturation hermeneutic to be employed in the study and what it means, the researcher approaches the work with a qualitative research approach whereby a variety of books, and articles on the subject are read and analyzed.

From this discussion, it is evident that inculturation hermeneutic remains one of the Third World approaches to biblical interpretation that seeks to make the African, and his

socio-cultural context the subject of interpretation. The term 'contextual' is used to refer to the fact that every hermeneutic or theology is informed by the perspective of a particular context, whether this is adverted to, acknowledged or not.

Before embarking on the analysis of the African cultural features embedded in the Gospel, the researcher gives a summary of the different chapters of the study. This should assist the reader to obtain an overview of the contents and gain insight into the research strategy.

1.4   Structure of the thesis

This study consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the research project. The problem statement is indicated, giving reasons for instituting this particular investigation. The submission made here is that the Gospel is embodied in the African traditional culture and religion. The methodology employed in investigating and demonstrating this submission is the inculturation hermeneutic that was pioneered by scholars such as Ukpong. A brief explanation of this method of investigation has been done. The division of the study is tabled as an overview.

Chapter 2

The African perspective of the gospel message is outlined. This African perspective places the gospel message in context so that culture and the gospel message are distinguished. This chapter gives a short history of Christianity in Africa to demonstrate its transmission and reception. The Bible is taken as a book of faith for Christians. It contains gospel message in as far as it points beyond itself, to the God who stands above all things. The inculturation hermeneutic approach is brought in to highlight misrepresentations of previous attempts at conveying the gospel message to Africa. Gospel features enshrined in the African traditional culture and religion are investigated. These include among others, birth, the role of traditional doctors, the concept of God and attributes, sacrifice, marriage and initiation rites.

Chapter 3

This chapter examines the cult of ancestor veneration. It investigates the role that is played by ancestors in the lives of traditional Africans. The place occupied by African ancestors in the daily lives and activities of people is highlighted. Questions such as whether ancestors are worshipped or venerated are posed. Could ancestor veneration be contrary to the gospel message? How the inculturation hermeneutic approach could help readers interpret the religious context of the African world-view.

African cultural practices associated with ancestor veneration are discussed to further explain and demonstrate how the gospel message is enshrined in the tradition and culture of Africa.

Chapter 4

This chapter attempts to investigate the concept of salvation, its nature and meaning in African traditional religion from the African perspective. The significance of sacrifice, qualification and participation requirements for salvation is examined. This demonstrates how the gospel message of keeping oneself pure is enshrined in African traditional culture and religion. A health profile of traditional healing and modern medical care are investigated to highlight as attempts to save lives. Two typical examples of African communities are investigated to demonstrate the concept of salvation in typical African contexts. Here, not only the spiritual but also the physical or bodily salvation is investigated. Again, the methodological strategy of inculturation hermeneutic is employed to investigate this concept and to contextualize the African milieu.

Chapter 5

This chapter is the epilogue and suggests ways of addressing critical needs of Africa. In investigation of African traditional culture, one easily discovers striking similarities with

Christianity that provide useful points of presenting one's message. It is precisely these points of contact which make any agent (preachers, theologians) in the Christianization process ponder seriously over the whole missiological and evangelical enterprise. The agent needs to think whether it is still right for him/her to consider all those who want to remain in their own religious persuasions as eternally damned. By carefully employing the inculturation hermeneutical approach, the Gospel is affirmed to be 'enfleshed' in the African traditional culture and religion.

The researcher has examined specific features of the African traditional culture to demonstrate that these features enshrined gospel values. In their own particular way, Africans gave thanks and praise to God. They believed strongly that their departed relatives have 'returned' to their Maker. If these ancestors have not yet attained salvation, special rituals of purification are performed by the living to ensure that the departed or living-dead attained eternity.

Over and above all, the living kept themselves pure in the eyes of God and their fellow human beings. They prepared themselves for participation in salvation.

Chapter 2

The Gospel: An African perspective

2.1   Introduction

Ukpong (1995:3) maintains that one significant thing which the Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century did to African Christians South of the Sahara, was translating the Bible into African languages and teaching them to read it. After they had been made able to read the Bible in their languages, they also read the Bible "with their own eyes", that is, from the perspective of their own culture, world-view and life experience. They appropriated its message, the gospel message that it enshrined. African Christians were now set on a journey of discovery, which has played a great role in the rapid and widespread embrace of the Christian faith in sub-Saharan Africa today.

The Bible enshrines the gospel message in as far as it points beyond itself. It points to the God who stands above any human description. In this sense the Bible contains 'good news'. This concept of the 'good news' is developed from the New Testament books. Du Toit (1983:3) explains that 'gospel' referred, not to a book, but to the good news concerning God's eschatological act in Christ Jesus. He maintains that in fact this is its most common meaning in the New Testament, where it is used for Jesus' proclamation as well as the apostles' preaching (Mk 1:15; 8:35; Rm 1:1,9,16,etc.) It is in this context that the word 'gospel' will be used in this thesis, whether with reference to particular biblical texts or African traditional religion and culture. It refers to

what God expects from his children, who belong to his family or his kingdom. They exhibit a specific defined behaviour that makes them belong to God. They are 'born of the Spirit'.

Yet even in the New Testament more than once we find the word 'gospel' being detached from the proclamatory event as such, so that it refers to the content of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:1, for instance, it no longer denotes the actual proclamatory event, but the standardized version of the central salvational events, i.e., Jesus' death and resurrection. The first concept of the 'good news' as described earlier will mostly be used in this study.

Ozankom (2001:65-74) makes an important observation when he says that while the political and social problems of Africa define to a large extent world perceptions, the role of traditional African religion in forming the African world-view must not be overlooked. Religion is an essential element of African culture and is characterized by belief in an almighty or Supreme God, Creator of the universe, the veneration of ancestors, a spiritual world that is involved in this world, and a strong sense of community that includes the living and the dead.

Unfortunately, stereotypes from earlier European studies of traditional religion, such as totemism, polytheism, ancestor worship, demon worship or simply the worship of nature, continue to obscure its definition. African traditional religion can only survive by making its past relevant to present challenges. This includes opening dialogue with Christianity. The inculturation hermeneutical approach aims to open that dialogue whereby the African traditional culture is investigated, to establish how it embodies the gospel message.

In the Bible, Africans discovered a Jesus who healed the sick, (Jn 5:1-18) made the lame to walk, and restored sight to the blind (Jn 7:1-7) - a reality that held great attraction for them. They discovered a Jesus who drove out demons from the people and confronted the power of Satan, another reality that they sought to actualize in their communities through their culture but most of the teachings of their mother churches chose to ignore. Appiah (2003:54-65) argues that inculturation theology recognizes that God enters every culture in order to lead people to an understanding of themselves in the light of their faith in him and his love. In Africa, it seeks to re-interpret conventional patterns of thought and narratives about African people so that new and more liberating narratives will emerge.

In this thesis, the researcher does not intend to make a one to one comparison of Christianity and African traditional culture and religion. Insights and reference to texts from the Bible are brought in only as contact points of presenting one's message, where there could be ideas or thoughts similar to practices in African traditional culture. Therefore, biblical texts will be cited (as attempts to demonstrate that the gospel message enshrined in the Bible, is also embodied in African traditional culture). On the African traditional culture, no texts may be used because African traditional culture was transmitted orally from generation to generation. The Bible is taken as the document that enshrines the Gospel in as far as it points beyond itself (to the immanent referent). Christian missionaries of the nineteenth century made use of this document, the Bible, to convey the gospel message to Africans. Certain features of the African culture enshrined gospel

message however they could not be realized and appreciated. It is these features of African traditional culture that this thesis investigates to establish their embodiment of gospel message.

Dyrness (1990:37) noted a dilemma that was posed by two conflicting realities within the Christian church in Africa:

- the persistent (and growing) influence of traditional religious beliefs and,
- the uncompromising teaching of the missionaries that these 'things'(African traditional cultural beliefs) are part of the world of sin and darkness and must be repudiated.

This tension, and the anguish and misunderstanding it has caused to both parties, must be the starting point of any discussion of theology in Africa. This therefore calls for a relevant methodology that will help interpret the African context. The central issue therefore that preoccupies inculturation hermeneutic (Ukpong 1995:4) may be stated thus: If Jesus is 'alive' today, and indeed having risen from the dead, how do we make him and his message challenge contemporary society and the life of individuals? What does the Christian life in Jesus mean in the African socio-cultural context in the light of the gospel message?

Ukpong (1995:6) maintains that inculturation hermeneutic (as other Third World hermeneutics) is a "contextual" hermeneutic. In the following section, the researcher investigates a short background of Christianity in Africa so as to place the gospel message in perspective.

2.2   Motivation and background

During the period of colonialism, African culture came under tremendous attack by some missionary individuals and bodies. Much of African culture in all its forms, was altered or supplanted by the more vigorous and technically advanced forms of colonizing western culture, backed by the political power dominant at that time, in any particular area (Baffa 1978:294)

Ndou (2000:5) maintains that African traditional religion, especially the belief in, and the veneration of the living dead, exist side by side with what he calls the "white man's religion", i.e. Christianity. And referring to the transmission of the gospel message to Africa and the Venda culture, he says:

> "Had the missionaries made a study of Venda culture, and employed their findings in their mission strategy, there would undoubtedly have been less confusion, as cultural customs and practices would have been interpreted correctly, and ultimately the Gospel would have been accepted with greater ease in Venda."

This extract from Ndou explains how the lack of knowledge of indigenous culture brought psychological pain to local people. In their minds they had to deal with new concepts that in a way contrasted with their traditional culture. If missionaries had studied the local

cultures, they would have blended the gospel message with local cultures. To put it differently, they could have contextualized the gospel message so that it suited the new African cultural context.

Another typical example of the cultural damage whereby the 'colonial' era in this country will be remembered of is recalled by Dyrness (1990:37) when he says that Robert Moffat did outstanding work of evangelism and Bible translation in Kuruman, Southern Africa. He however, notes a conclusion of another author as having said about Moffat:

> "In spite of his love for the Africans, he had little interest in the background of their thought. He underestimated their religious traditions, and introduced the fervent evangelical Christianity of his own tradition, without considering the possibilities of its adaptation to the African world".

This situation left a lingering sense of cultural inferiority, and much more, a theological one. Dyrness (1990:40) argues that theological consciousness presupposes a religious tradition, and tradition requires memory, and memory is 'integral' to identity. This kind of memory was denied by African Christians. Africans were asked to repudiate their past and live a borrowed heritage.

Mbiti (1978:273) in dealing with the background to the transmission of the gospel message emphasizes the fact that it was revealed to the world, in the context and language of the culture of Palestine. It was within this cultural context that everything that is real, actual, probable

and even improbable, as far as Christianity is concerned, was first conceptualized. This process of conceptualization culminated in what is called 'the world-view', that is, 'the Christian world-view'. Kraft (1979:53) referring to the powerful influence of the world-view says that it lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with the strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture. This kind of interpretation shows clearly the importance of employing inculturation hermeneutic method so that one differentiates issues of culture from the gospel message, and avoid the problem of enforcing ones own world-view on others.

Ndwandwe (2000:4) maintains that when the missionaries and colonialists brought the Bible to Africa, it was part of 'a package deal' (see also Comaroff & Comaroff 1991). By saying that it was part of a package deal the implication is that the missionaries, who were responsible for the proclamation of the biblical message, were also instruments at the hands of colonizers. Mofokeng (1988:34) expresses succinctly the view held by many black Africans that when the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible. This statement does not only express the dilemma that faces the black South Africans in their relationship with the Bible (Mofokeng 1988:34) but embodies also the scepticism with which missionary enterprise is presently viewed.

Ndwandwe (2000:4) continues to say that missionaries did not only bring with them various European and American cultural values but also identifiable ideologies characteristic of their age (cf. Kalu 1979:17). Their endeavours at evangelization were constantly

hampered by their inadequate understanding of the dynamics of the local situation (Kalu 1979:17), so that second and third generations of Christians are rebelling against the illegitimate and unchristian violence done to their traditional customs (Gatu 1979:525). It is against this background that missionaries are blamed for the apparent failure of black South Africans to embrace the Gospel wholeheartedly. Hiebert (1989: 53) expresses this concern as follows:

> "The failure to differentiate between the Gospel and human cultures has been one of the great weaknesses of modern Christian missionaries too often have equated the Good News with their own cultural background. This has led them to condemn most native customs and to impose their own customs to converts. Consequently, the Gospel has been seen as foreign in general and Western in particular. People have rejected it not because they reject the lordship of Christ, but because conversion often has meant a denial of their cultural heritage and social ties."

The main reasons for this failure are attributed to the fact that they neglected the traditional religions that they found in place and condemned them as the work of Satan without any salvific value (Maimela 1985:64). Another reason lies in the cultural superiority and great condenscension that they showed towards indigenous peoples (Bosch 1991:291; Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:xiv). They saw themselves as agents sent to bring true faith to the heathens and to save their souls from darkness and eternal death (Maimela 1985:64). Most of them

dismissed what they observed of the religious ideas and observances, with abhorrence and derision (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:xiv). In doing so they created the impression that people of other faiths were enemies of God while Christians, as the new Israel, were God's privileged people (Maimela 1985:65).

Bosch (1991:292) makes interesting observations in this regard when he writes that just as the West's religion (Christianity in particular) was predestined to be spread around the globe, the West's culture was to be victorious over all others. He notes an argument of G.W.F. Hegel a century ago that the world history moved from East to West, from 'childhood' in China, via India, Persia, Greece and Rome to 'adulthood' in Western Europe. The conclusion was that Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning. This understanding of the 'course of world history' or of the 'geographical basis of world history' is argued with complete candor and with a total absence of any fear of contradiction; it should be clear to everybody who has eyes to see.

Bosch (1991:292) agrees that Hegel attempted to maintain the semblance of fairness, and with great detail surveyed one continent after the other, assessed its culture (or lack of it: 'Chile and Peru are narrow coastal territories, and they have no culture of their own'. 'Africa is characterized by concentrated sensuality, immediacy of the will, absolute inflexibility, and an inability to develop', and in the light of his 'objective' findings established the indisputable and self-evident superiority of the West.

Like all other Westerners in the Third World, missionaries were to be conscious propagandists of this culture. As children of their time, their reading of the Scriptures was far from being neutral. They approached the Bible with presuppositions, shaped and informed by their culture and class (Maimela 1985:65; Holter 1999:1). Bishop Colenso among early missionaries is one of a few exceptions. He refused to accept that every custom must be evil, just because it was their custom (Hinchcliff 1968:65). However, the notion of the pre-eminence of what could be Christian and European still lingers. The inculturation hermeneutic approach attempts to correct perceptions such as these.

Adeleru (1999:4) applauds a conclusion of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1958 that the church under God's guidance will be enriched by the wealth which African culture will bring to her life. Not only could this statement indicate very strongly the yearning for an African expression of Christianity, it reversed the missionary approach of viewing African religion and the related cultures as a demonic development fit only for complete eradication.

Dzobo (1988:23-28) affirms that all the time the missionaries to Africa were attempting to create Christian societies by eradicating existing cultures. European churches are now accommodating to the cultures in which they found themselves. The church in Black Africa is evincing courage to be her African self. The culture is the realm of God's saving activity, where we find God. He cites examples where personal names have always been 'life-affirming'. The Ewe name '*Aqbenyeqa*' means 'life is the most important thing,' and the common greeting '*Do aqbe*' means 'good night' or more precisely 'sleep life'. Jesus presents himself as life (Jn 6: 47). He concludes that for evangelization to

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dictate what culture should be, is wrong. African culture tries to 'concretize' the gospel message in the daily lives of its practitioners.

The bold statement of the Catholic Church as contained in the message of cardinal Arinze, cited in Isizoh (1998:17) says:

> " … many providential events in recent years, more than perhaps any other period in previous centuries, have combined to favour better knowledge of African traditional religion and culture in the Church and in the world".

This is yet another assertion that African traditional culture enshrines the gospel features, a fact that this thesis investigates. This statement of Arinze advocates for a better knowledge of African traditional culture. It does not dismiss African culture as something contradictory to the gospel message. There are gospel features that are embedded in African culture as will be investigated in the following chapter of this thesis.

Despite the positive paradigm shift demonstrated in the preceding statements, in accommodation of African traditional culture and religion, one needs to remain aware that the opposite is true. There are those who remain adamant and differ with these views because of different frames of reference. The focus in hermeneutics has always been on the text but of late a paradigm shift has occurred. West (1995:60) maintains that the focus has shifted from concentrating solely on the text onto the relationship between the text and the reader. Therefore scholars have to interpret the relationship between the text

and the readers or recipients of the message. Hutchison (1987:113) submits that sometimes it is the unwillingness to grant other cultures the kind of hearing expected for Christian and Western values. Holter (1999:1) correctly observes that:

> "In Africa – as everywhere else – the interpretation of the Bible takes place in various different contexts; different, of course, with regard to theological and ecclesiastical tradition, but different also with regard to educational level and sociological setting."

Such stances are confirmed by Musasiwa (1993:65-69) who uncompromisingly holds to the view of the finality of Christ for salvation. He holds the view that because Christ is supreme, final and sufficient, African Traditional Religion has become unnecessary and must be put off by those who belong to Christ. He claims that it is possible to say 'yes' to African culture and 'no' to African Traditional Religion (ATR).

Scholars of African religion express debatable views on this matter. Ilogu (1988:113-122) questions whether the Gospel can be presented in a way that leads to a new way of life without destroying existing cultural patterns. He maintains that such a presentation is possible if the Christian message is known in depth and if attention is given to the sociological and cultural forces and patterns.

But how does one separate religion from culture? Magesa (1997:24) describes religion as:

> "… a believing view of life, approach to life, way of life, and therefore a fundamental pattern embracing the individual and society, man and the world through which a person (though only partially conscious of this) sees and experiences, thinks and feels, acts and suffers, everything. It is a transcendentally grounded and immanently operative system of co-ordinates."

Religion and culture are intrinsically intertwined. Ojike (1946:181) underscored the importance of religion, in a contrary view to Musasiwa's uncompromising stance cited earlier, especially towards the African:

> "If religion consists of deifying one character and crusading around the world to make him acceptable to all mankind, then the African has no religion. But if religion means doing rather than talking, then the African has a religion."

To sum it up, the background of Gospel transmission to Africa, shows indifference to local customs and culture. There was little or no sound knowledge of African Traditional culture. Christian 'missionaries' who were instrumental in transmission of the gospel message, did not contextualize their message.

This misrepresentation of the gospel message is what prompted the investigation so that present and future researchers may be able to reach out and harmonize different cultures and the gospel message.

The inculturation hermeneutic approach is employed for a better interpretation of the African context.

The different scholars cited thus far show a realization that African traditional culture embodies features of the Gospel. Africans were not a nation of pagans who never knew the presence of God in their lives. Although there was no specific founder of African religion, no written book such as the Bible or Koran, Africans knowledge of God is embedded in their culture. The names that Africans used in referring to God demonstrate this knowledge. Shuuya (1973:47) lists some of the several names for the Supreme Being and compares their meaning to biblical concepts in the New Testament:

Names of the Supreme Being:

Name of society	Name of God	Meaning
Shona	Mwari	The Supreme Being
		The God of cosmos
		The God of fertility.
	Runji	God.
	Nyandenga	The Great one of the sky
	Chipindikure	God.
	Musikavanhu	
	Mutangakugara	
Congo	Muwari	God Creator.
Zambia	Mulungu	Creator.
Zulu	Nkulunkulu	The great great one.
Nigeria	Oris	The very source of Being

Ruanda	Imana	Creator, good God.
Venda	Raluuhimba	God.

On the basis of the views of these scholars, the researcher submits that African traditional culture enshrines gospel features and will examine these in detail in chapter two of this thesis.

Having examined a short history of Christianity in Africa and the divergent views expressed over the period of time, the researcher now turns to gospel features enshrined in African traditional culture and religion. The inculturation hermeneutic approach is still employed to contextualize the African setting.

2.3   Some Gospel features in African traditional culture

 The gospel features investigated in the African traditional culture, include the aspect of birth, sacrifice, the role of traditional doctors, marriage and the concept of God and His attributes. An analysis of these features, employing the inculturation hermeneutics, indicates that Africans had a unique way of life that acknowledged the 'hand of God' in the phenomenon of birth. Sacrifice was an intrinsic way of conveying innermost messages of reconciliation and spiritual cleansing. Sacrifice was not an end in itself. The ultimate recipient was and remained God. Traditional doctors interpreted messages and prescribed medicines and gave advice. Marriage became a vital institution for procreation that ensured continued existence of society. The concept of God and attributes demonstrate how Africans conceived of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. In all these

cultural practices, gospel features are enshrined and worth investigation.

2.3.1 Birth

2.3.1.1   Birth in African traditional context

The African concept of birth and all that goes with it envelops the gospel. In order for one to comprehend the African conception of individuality and also the community, it is useful to trace the coming-to-be of the new member of the family. The new baby would arrive with the waiting hands of the elders of the household. The experienced elderly women in the households make sure that the 'new-born' is safely delivered. They also ensure that the mother is safe after delivery. The baby is introduced into the family with cheerfulness, joy and prayers. The arrival of this unique individual is reconciled with his/her belonging to the family that decides his/her name.

In the African traditional culture, the birth of a child was taken as a gift from God. Mbiti (1969:110) maintains that in African societies, the birth of a child is a process that begins long before the child's arrival in this world and continues long thereafter. It is not just a single event that can be recorded on a particular date. Nature brings the child into the world, but society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person. For it is the community that must protect the child, feed it,

bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate the child into the wider community. Children are the buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of 'spring' when life shoots out and the community thrives. The birth of a child is, therefore, the concern not only of the parents but, of many relatives including the living and the departed.

Gbadegesin (1998:292) states that:

> "The meaning of this is that the child as an extension of the family tree, should be given a name that reflects his/her membership thereof, and is expected that the name so given will guide and control the child by being a constant reminder to his/her membership of the family and the circumstances of his/her birth".

Mbiti (1975:89) cites several examples of how the names of children expressed religious feelings of people. This in itself indicates how gospel features were enshrined in the culture in terms of even the language. Many of the names that are given show peoples' religious feelings. Mbiti (1975:89) claims that this practice is found all over Africa. We need to remember here that the feelings of people are very strong at certain stages of life, especially birth, marriage and death. Therefore it is no wonder that many African names reflect the religious feelings of the parents concerned.

Mbiti (1975:89) maintains that in some countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Sudan, the name of God is often made part of the child's name. This shows how much, people associate God with the continuation of life and the birth of children. Thus, for example, we have names like: *Byakatonda,* which means 'for or by the Creator' (*Bya+ Katonda* – the second word is one of the names for God in Uganda); *Byaruhanga*, which means 'things of or for God' (*Bya + Ruhanga*, the last being a name for God in Uganda); *Bizimana*, which means 'God knows everything' *(Bizi + Imana*, the last being a name for God in Rwanda and Burundi), and many others.

This custom has continued even under Christian influence, and many new religious names are being added which make use of Christian ideas without necessarily being borrowed foreign names. Thus, for example, we have names like *Tukacungurwaruhanga*, meaning 'We were saved by God' *(Ruhanga* being the name for God in parts of Uganda*);* *Asimwe*, meaning 'Let him (God) be thanked', and so on (Mbiti 1975:89).

African Christians and Muslims have adopted the custom of using religious names from their faiths and sacred books. In the Islamic faith we have names like Mohammed, taken after their prophet and founder of Islam. In Christianity we have names like Mary, taken after Mary the mother of Jesus. We have names like Peter, John, Matthew, James, and so forth taken after the disciples of Jesus. In so doing, they are following the

'world-wide' custom of using religious names, which is practized by Christians, Muslims and African traditionalists alike. This is an ancient and universal practice. This simply shows how a language becomes part and parcel of culture through which gospel values are expressed.

Many rituals are performed after the birth of a child, but of particular interest to this study is a rite among the Gikuyu peoples, on the East Coast of Africa. This rite is known as 'the second birth' (*kuciaruo keri*, literally 'to be born twice'), or 'to be born again' (*kuciaruo ringi*) (Mbiti 1969:116). This takes place before the child is initiated; and unless the child has gone through this 'second birth' he cannot participate fully in the life of the community.

Mbiti (1969:116) cites specific community activities such as assisting in the burial of the child's own father, to be initiated, to get married, to inherit property and to take part in any ritual. This rite is therefore very essential in the Gukuyu life. Between the age of six and ten, the child re-enacts its birth. If the mother is dead, then another woman is substituted, and will henceforth be regarded as the child's mother. During the rite, the child is placed between the legs of the mother, and is bound to her by a goat intestine. The intestine is cut through, and the child imitates the cry of a baby. The mother is shaved, her house is swept and she visits the fields to collect food.

The rite symbolizes physical birth, but it takes place at an age when the child can remember the occasion. Thus the child enters into the conscious experience of its birth, the beginning of its '*Sasa*' (time after birth) period. But the rite also ends the child's 'babyhood', and brings it to the gate of full participation in the life of the community. Now the child is ready to enter the stage of initiation, ready to be incorporated into the activities and responsibilities of corporate manhood. It now passes from the period of ignorance to one of knowledge, from a state of being a passive member of the community to the new stage of being an active and responsible member of the corporate society. Man has done his part, to 'create', to 'cultivate' and to make 'grow' the child that God has given in a complete physical state to the community.

To sum up, the culture of this particular African community demands that when a child has been born physically, it must also be born ritually or religiously in order to make it a social member of the community. The gospel message enshrined in this cultural practice is the religious birth that will mean that the child will participate fully in religious observances. He or she will for example enter marriage in an approved and acceptable manner to God. Hermeneutically, this cultural practice can be interpreted to be analogous to the biblical concept of being *'born again' or 'born of the spirit'* as expressed in some New Testament books, (for example Jn 3:1-9) albeit in different milieu and contexts.

At a later stage, the child goes through a series of initiation rites. These initiation rites are like the birth of the young people into the state of maturity and responsibility. Initiation rites dramatize and effect the incorporation of the young into the full life of their nation. This could include participation in giving thanks to God for good harvests and healthy life. These are gospel features which the culture or religion embodies. It is with the help of inculturation hermeneutic approach that the traditional culture can be appreciated. Only after initiation, where this is observed, is a person religiously and socially born into full manhood or womanhood with all its secrets, responsibilities, privileges and expectations. One could say that initiation is a ritual sanctification for a new life.

2.3.1.2   Birth in the biblical context

Born into God's family in the New Testament has strong affinities with what happens in African traditional culture and religion. In order to provide supporting information to this notion of birth in the African traditional culture and religion as embodying gospel features, biblical texts are cited as dynamically equivalent features (Jn 3: 1-36). These texts are not used as yardsticks to measure the 'validity' of African traditional culture, but are cited to mediate the gospel message. Stuhlmacher (1979:89) maintains that inculturation hermeneutic sees the Bible as a document of faith and therefore demands entry and sharing the faith of the biblical community expressed in the text.

Before any person becomes part of a larger social entity, one is born into a family, which is a microcosm of the larger whole society. Birth indicates the point where the life and status of a person as a 'child' starts within a particular family, giving him or her an 'open future' of life within that family (Van der Watt 1999: 149). The child has no choice in the matter; it is so only by divine providence. Malina (1981:40) puts it so succinctly that one is born physically and symbolically into the group, and there is nothing one can do about it.

Birth is important in determining a person's identity as well as honor, that is one's position within a social reality (Van der

Watt 1999:140). One belongs by blood to a group and this obliges the person to respect, observe and maintain the boundary lines, definitions and the order within the group (Malina 1981:40). Through birth, one is placed within a social reality and his or her relation to other members of family is therefore properly defined (Van der Watt 1999:494).

The father as head of the family was the point of reference in the Mediterranean cultural context. Everything else revolved around him and he was the embodiment of all that the family stood for (Malina 1981:40). This meant that members of his household were obliged to honor and respect him. Any action to the contrary constituted a great offence punishable in a variety of ways. The Hebrew understanding embodied the idea that dishonourable action towards the father of the family equals dishonouring God, who is represented in the institution.

The case regarding children and their birth of God in the Johannine corpus is also investigated here. In the Johannine corpus, being born of God indicates the source and manner of birth (Morris 1974:101). In the book of 1 John (3:9), the author employs the 'birth metaphor'. He takes it from family language to describe the new relationship between the believers and God. The birth here indicates the figurative, but analogous nature of birth. What happens to a person when he starts to believe is associated with what happens to a person when he is born naturally (Van der Watt 2000:185).

In the letter of 1 John that the believer is 'born of God' (1Jn 3:9) punctuates this birth as being of course different from physical birth. Being born again (Jn 3:3,7), or born 'from above' expresses essentially the same thing (Ringwald 1986:179). What could be asked is the relation to the usage of the genitive. Could it be a reference to possession, that is, ownership by God or origin from God?

There is a sense in which both ideas are present in 1 John. In employing the genitive, the identity of believers is firmly established. The identity and worth of each person is defined as part of the larger whole (Schofield 1964:96), the family of God. What this implies is that there is a direct link between God and the believer. The believer's origin is traceable directly from God. The believer is by virtue of birth rooted and related to God as a child is to a parent (Kysar 1986:70). By using 'from' the author indicates the nature of a person as well as the nature of his or her actions. (Van der Watt 2000:185). The second idea of origin or source is also encapsulated in the use of 'from'. The believer, therefore, belongs to God and is God's possession.

Birth and acceptance into the family automatically means that the child stands in a specific, well-defined relationship to the father of the family (Van der Watt 1999:495). As is obvious the author has metaphorically defined this relationship between God and the believer in terms of the most intimate social phenomenon in the ancient world, namely, the family. The author uses a metaphor of natural birth to explain the second

birth, 'spiritual birth', which according to John is acceptance into God's family. This is being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5-6). By so doing, he has managed to represent the new reality, that is, the reality of belonging to the heavenly family of God.

Even though in 1 John (unlike in John's Gospel) faith is not stipulated as a condition for belonging to God's family, there is a sense in which faith is implied. In fact one cannot enact conduct appropriate to one's membership, unless faith is the driving force. Faith here means accepting the veracity of Jesus as the Christ who has come in the flesh (1 Jn 4:2).

When one evaluates this biblical text in the light of African traditional setting, and using the inculturation hermeneutic approach as defined earlier in this thesis, similar features seem to surface. The contexts are not the same. God is not openly mentioned in the African traditional context but is implied. Ancestors are the ones to whom born children are commended and initiated to society. This idea of going via the ancestors is in line with the African way of showing respect. A child would never approach the head of the family directly with a request. The child would rather ask the mother to convey any request to the father on his/her behalf. This idea of showing respect is also indicated when Africans want to make requests to God. They would do so via the ancestors.

The rites of passage are performed later in life when the child could be in a position to take decisions towards responsibility

for his or own sake. If he behaves in a manner different from what is expected of him or her, he/ she is liable for punishment or exclusion from family and community. The thanks-giving occasion for a 'new-born' or initiate is directed to ancestors, who would covey such thanks to God. It is society that initiates, instructs and commands the child into community values, through rites. In the biblical community, it is society that teaches ordinary people to be children of 'new communities'.

In 1 John, faith is also an imperative from God. Believers are commanded to 'believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ' (1 Jn 3:23). Obedience to this command leads to fellowship with God and his Son, the fellowship that was expected among members of the Johannine community. What makes the view of the author of 1John so distinctive is his insistence that it is the moral quality of one's life, which determines one's parentage (Kysar 1986:70). In the Johannine circle the distinction between believer and unbeliever is clear-cut (1 Jn 2:4,6,10). Acting in terms of right conduct is not a matter of choice for God's children, it is demanded by their identity and it shows where they belong.

Another demonstration of the importance of belonging to a family or tribe in a biblical text is in Matthew 1. Jesus is not just a figure from nowhere, but a descended of David who was a descended of Abraham. A list of the ancestors of Jesus is mentioned. Matthew 1:17 mentions that there were fourteen

generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from then to the birth of the Messiah.

Africans enter the reading of biblical texts such as this one with their own cultural dimension that is very similar to this. Jesus becomes a typical figure that is attached to his ancestors. There is in a sense the continuity with figures of the Old Testament. African traditional culture places great importance in the continuity with ancestors. A person is born and has a physical as well as a spiritual bond with his/her ancestors. Here, life continues even death, although in a new and different form from the present. One is born again or 're-exist' in another world, a world with God.

Another gospel feature embodied in African traditional culture and religion, is sacrifice and is investigated in the next section. This practice has its own equivalence in other world religions, but here, the African traditional context is investigated.

2.3.2 Sacrifice

2.3.2.1   The significance of blood and sacrifice in the ancestor cult

In many and various ways, African peoples respond to their spiritual world of which they are sharply aware. This response generally takes on the form of 'worship' that is eternalized in different acts and sayings. Sacrifices and offerings constitute one of the commonest acts of worship among African peoples. Mbiti (1969:58) draws a distinction between 'sacrifices' and 'offerings'. He says that 'sacrifice' refers to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or in whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living-dead. 'Offerings' refer to the remaining cases that do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly the presentation of foodstuffs and other items.

In some cases, sacrifices and offerings are directed to one or more of the following: God, spirits and living-dead. Recipients in the second and third categories are regarded as intermediaries between God and men, so that God is the ultimate Recipient whether or not the worshippers are aware of that.

Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be a very common practice among Africans (Tlhagale 1995:53). Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be done in moments of great sadness such as when someone has died, there is drought or inexplicable disaster. Sometimes it is done in moments of great joy such as in the case of marriage. These are not the only occasions when slaughtering is done.

Sometimes, when it is perceived that there is a dark cloud hanging over the family leading to various difficulties for members of the family such as unemployment, or illness, an animal suitable for this purpose would be slaughtered. Also in times of celebration, such as the birth of a child, slaughtering would mark the occasion. The ritual of slaughtering is also prevalent among Christians, a thing that may suggest that a dichotomy is not perceived at all.

Westcott (1966:34) rightly points out the place occupied by blood in the Jewish sacrifices and the connection with the general conception attached to it throughout the Pentateuch. The idea of sacrifice is, therefore, central in both the Old and New Testaments. It is also central to most cultures in Africa. What needs to be noted is that in sacrificing, it is the life (blood) of the victim that is made sacred by the consecration and not the flesh, which the worshippers eat (Ubruhe 1996:14). Westcott (1966:43-5) claims that its atoning virtue lies not in its material substance but in the life of which it is the 'vehicle'.

 In many cultures, blood equals life. Blood is the substance of life. Its spilling brings death. As a symbol 'blood' represents the place where life and death meet, and because it marks the frontier between life and death, it has often been a pathway of communication between people and God (Rees 1986:47). The ideas underlying this statement that blood is life (cf. Gen 9:4) and therefore sacred, have their background in the Old Testament (Lev 17:11). Release of life through death and by the sprinkling of the blood of the victim (and the sinners who

identify themselves with the victim) is brought into the presence of God (Montefiore 1964:155,156; Ubruhe 1996:15).

Sacrificing is an attempt to bridge the chasm between our world and God, to reach into the unseen world where God lives, where human words cannot reach enough. To convey an important and delicate message to God, blood is used to effect such communication that the researcher now turns to.

2.3.2.2   The symbolic use of blood as a means of effecting communication

Many Africans believe that the blood of a slaughtered animal effected communication with the living-dead. The blood of the sacrificial animal is offered to the ancestors because blood is the symbol of life. The sacramental dimension of the ritual increases the faith of the participants, in spite of some elements that may seem to the outsider to be very human and even profane.

The initiation schools for boys where they undergo circumcision among the Xhosa and the Ndebele African tribes of southern Africa regard blood to be extremely important. The blood from the initiates drops into the soil and symbolically 'joins' the initiates with the ancestors. The process of the initiation school is accompanied by relevant ritual performance. The rituals will effect communication that the ordinary modern health centres such as modern hospitals and clinics cannot provide. During the ritual, the boys are

integrated and introduced into the broader community of the living and the living-dead.

Circumcision could be performed easily and quicker at a hospital or clinic for health reasons such as preventing infections, but such 'operations' do not equal or replace the special communication with the ancestors as required and demanded by the African culture and tradition. The psychological or religious significance is hampered. Anyone may go to a medical practitioner for circumcision, but a 'void' will remain that this was not done traditionally. Culturally, he is still like someone who never had been circumcised. Ancestors have not been invoked. He may then be required to undergo the ritual despite having 'visited' the hospital.

One of the biblical texts that mentions circumcision is Luke 2:21. It says that when the eighth day came, Jesus was circumcised. The suggestion here is that it was a cultural practice of the time and of the tribe and not much of a health issue, although health is not ruled out. This is mentioned here only to highlight the significance and influence of tradition or cultural aspect of the time regarding circumcision and does not in any way suggest a communication with ancestors of Jesus as the case is with the African culture.

In the African traditional culture, circumcision, strengthened the psychological bond between the initiate and his/her ancestors. The initiate becomes attached to his/her ancestors. He/she has to learn their teachings and behave in a way

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approved by the society to which he/she belongs. Ancestors are believed to be making a link between the living and the spirits. This African cultural practice results in ancestors being respected and in turn God being given much higher respect.

The ramifications of the use or function of blood in the Bible for reconciliation and purification are very broad for full and complete explanation in the scope of this thesis. It is however interesting to note that Jesus attached so much significance to blood when he said to his disciples:

> "This cup is God's new covenant sealed with my
> blood, which is poured out for you". (Lk 22:21).

Each time, Christians 'drink' his blood, they relive their faith in him in the present. They are 'connected' to him. They communicate with him. The death of Christ on the cross might have been a historical event, but how his blood saved and continues to save the world (to all that accept him as Lord and Saviour) is quite another phenomenon, a matter of faith.

In the biblical passage cited earlier (1 John), the idea of sacrificial blood is used by the author without questioning it. He presumes the availability of this common stock of knowledge among members of his community as he draws from it and applies this knowledge to the new situation. The imagery of cleansing with blood in 1 John reflects sacrificial terminology from the Levitical practices of Israel. In accordance with the typical teaching of the Levitical

ordinances, the blood of Christ represents Christ's life (Westcott 1966:35)

Such an interpretation of the biblical text in an African context goes beyond comparing baptism in the New Testament and the initiation rites in African traditional religion and culture. But it identifies features that 'undergirds' the African life and world-view and thereafter using it to identify a context in the Bible that will enable an African reader to appropriate the text.

Éla (1988:19) comments about the acts of sacrifice and says:

> "… when people offer beer and food(blood) to the dead, they understand perfectly well that they are not 'performing a cult' to the dead, but instead reliving a kinship with them, actualizing such a relationship once again in the living present".

It is through the various acts of rituals described here that African religion provides people with the feeling that God is close to them and they to Him.

Blood symbolizes in its fullest extent the life of the individual (Tlhagale 1995:55). He (Tlhagale) further argues that the ancestor cult (which will be investigated later in this thesis) is at the heart of the African religious experience. He argues that it is time to lift the banning order and welcome them (ancestors) openly into the Christian family of the living and the dead (Tlhagale 1995:58-59).

The African enters the reading and interpretive process of the text with a traditional, cultural and religious importance of blood. What the Old Testament says and the New Testament proclaims in its theology on the use of blood, is not new and strange to Africans but serves to affirm African culture and religion.

2.3.2.3   The blood of reconciliation

Reconciliation has a central role in African religion and practice Oduyoye (1979:113). Reconciliation suggests the mending of relationships that have been strained or broken. Broken relations are never allowed to go unhealed Oduyoye (1979:113). Within the symbolic universe of African people, anything that disrupted the harmonious co-existence of members of a family or society was taken seriously. The misunderstanding therefore that suggests that Africans had no conception of sin, needs to be rectified. (Myaka 1995:92) maintains that Africans did have a conception of sin but did not conceive it the same as in Western culture.

An important subject such as reconciliation would not be known in a universe where the inhabitants had no conception of sin. Sin within the African symbolic universe represented a threat to the wholeness of family. It could therefore, be described as that which disrupts or destroys the mutual and harmonious co-existence of a family or society. What is clear from this concept is that sin is never defined in isolation. It is

defined in terms of community because that is the arena where the interplay of human relationships and behaviour is manifested. Maimela (1985:70) describes it thus:

> "To traditional Africans, then, sin is the destruction of the stability of the community and, therefore, the refusal to love and have fellowship with one's fellows (both the living and the dead). It is the denial of that which makes for life here and now, the anguish to a little child or a weak person".

Blood of sacrifice come into play especially between the living and the living-dead. The living members need to reassure themselves that ancestors, who are believed to be nearer God, are appeased. They are believed to be closer to God because they can sin no more. Their sins are presumed forgiven. An animal is slaughtered and its blood is used to communicate a message of reconciliation. It is used on behalf of the entire family or tribe.

After a death, an animal is also slaughtered. Its blood is used to seal off or heal the wounds or pain of loss. So while the ancestors are reconciled with the 'new arrival' of the late, in the ancestral midst, the living members' wounds heal up from the loss through the sacrificial blood. The entire community comes together as it is the arena for serious personal and group challenges, tension, conflicts and sin as well as the context for

the human quest for forgiveness and the expiation of the torment or guilt and broken relationships (Twesigye 1987:113).

 A biblical text that many African Christians like to appropriate with regard to the blood of reconciliation is Revelation 7:14. The author of Revelation has used this concept metaphorically, and has demonstrated the importance of purification or cleansing wrongs or sins with the blood of Christ. (Rev 7:14)

> "…These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb".

Africans could also use blood of an animal to symbolically cleanse any perceived wrong- doing. And one cannot embark on reconciliation if there was no hurt inflicted upon someone. My submission is that if this concept of reconciliation by blood taken from the Bible to which Africans were introduced and found in it concepts that can be meaningfully applied in their new contexts, why should they not appropriate for themselves?

African traditional culture had such built-in mechanism to free themselves from the bondage of sin. This practice is not in conflict with the gospel message but it recognizes the greatness of God to who we must come clean.

Sin, can also be conceived in terms of breaking the rules of society. Any person who acts contrary to the norms and values

of family or society, who threatens the well-being of society, such as a person who practices witchcraft, does not only sin against society but weakens and harms its unity. When one person commits sin, he or she is actually alienating himself from the community, and if he or she persists, this leads to self-destruction (Myaka 1995:93).

A sinner also jeopardized the good name of the family, the tribe and nation. Just as sin is viewed with such seriousness, reconciliation within the symbolic universe of the African also plays a fundamental role as a means of restoring broken relationships. The pursuit of reconciliation requires that at some point it should be effected through slaughtering and spilling of blood, which are essential in this process. Without blood there can be no proper reconciliation.

African traditional culture used something that is a 'thread of life', something that without, there is no life. When blood is poured out of the body, life is sacrificed. This very substance in life is what the 'Lamb of God' used to take away the sin of the world (Mk 14:24). African traditional culture enshrines this gospel feature of reconciliation.

Other examples of anti-social conduct that could be disturbing in the African world-view or even in the spirit world and human community are theft, lies or cheating and murder. Such anti-social conduct that are, in the world-view of traditional Africans unethical, must be atoned for. Olupona (1991:102) comments on sin as follows:

"(It) had to be atoned for immediately, otherwise, a group of people in the community or sometimes the entire community might come under punitive displeasure or curse of the gods or ancestors thus offended".

Upright Africans never approved conduct that disgraced family and community at large. Special initiation schools were established to teach both boys and girls of conduct expected of them. Therefore, there were no serious incidents of teenage pregnancies, unmonitored conduct where sexual infections that we see today among the youth may occur. Mbiti (1969:205) sums it thus:

"There exists, therefore, many laws, customs, set forms of conduct, regulations, rules, observances and taboos, constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society… Any breach of this code of conduct is considered evil, wrong or bad…"

There were mechanisms in place to ensure that the proper age for marriage was attained. If by any chance, close relatives engaged in sexual activity resulting in pregnancy, which is called incest, an animal would be slaughtered, its blood used to reconcile and appease the ancestors for the mistake and annul the 'undesired' union.

2.3.2.4   Dealing with sinners

African traditional culture also faced social anomalies. Abnormal behaviour disturbed the peace of society. As the culture enshrined gospel features, it had to deal effectively against such behaviour. To cite a biblical text, teachers of the Law and the Pharisees during the time of Jesus brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery (Jn 8:3-5). Africans again enter the reading and interpretive process of texts such as this one with their cultural background where issues of sin were dealt with.

Traditional African culture had social mechanisms to deal with sinners. The seriousness of transgressing or sinning against family or society has already been intimated above. Depending on the nature of the sin, society had devised various options for people who have committed acts of transgression. First, the person would be confronted and made to see how disruptive his or her actions are to the 'well-fare' of the family or society. If he/she shows co-operation and humility, he would be asked to make the necessary reparation aimed at achieving catharsis and reconciliation (Myaka 1995:94).

There are many ways of effecting these. Either the person would be asked to publicly apologize or to pay a prescribed fine. The purpose of the fine, as Myaka (1995:95) argues, is

not to discredit a person but to uphold community values and restore the dignity of the sinner. The judgement of whether a transgression is serious or not, becomes a matter of the particular community and its values. This is another aspect where inculturation hermeneutic comes in, that we do not use a universal yardstick. We need to look into the social context. Thorpe (1991:34) puts it as follows:

> "The Zulu life view is far more holistic than that of Western orientated societies where religion, work and home are often compartmentalized. The Zulu world is integral, with a supernatural dynamic power pervading all aspects".

If the person refuses to show penance, he/she is either ostracized or stigmatized. Wilson (1980:75) describes this act as 'witchcraft accusation'. Witchcraft accusation could lead to the expulsion of the individual concerned. Ndwandwe (2000:214) maintains that among the Zulus, people who were accused of witchcraft were expelled '*babedingiswa*' from that particular society.

For most Africans, ostracizing an individual or group that has fragrantly disobeyed the community is thought to be the most severe punishment that could be meted to any body. Ejizu (1986:12) argues that it is like death for anyone so punished since such a person is regarded as an outcast. He would not be allowed to share in the life of the community. There would be no visits to the family, no exchange of greetings, no one would

sell or buy from members of the affected family. So severe is the punishment of ostracization, that every member of the community highly dreads it, and would do everything possible to avoid it.

In cases of abomination, grave offence or defilement against the community like murder and incest, the moral pollution has to be cleansed or expiated by special ritual experts in order to appease spiritual beings and ancestors. Those ancestral spirits were offended by such a conduct. Until the expiation is done, the entire community (and not only the individuals directly involved) stood a real and imminent danger of suffering a disaster (Ejizu 1986:12; Ubruhe 1996:15; Mngadi 1982:144). The serious moral breach has destabilized the fundamental peace, balance and harmony that should prevail between the visible world of humans and invisible world of spiritual beings and forces. The affected community could therefore, expect severe punishment from the supernatural custodians and guarantors of morality.

2.3.3. The role of traditional doctors

This is one of the areas in which the question of terminology is extremely difficult, in describing either collectively or individually what the researcher chose to call 'traditional doctors'. Mbiti (1969:166) chooses to call them 'specialists', in virtue of their specialized office, knowledge and skill in religious matters. Other terms are used, such as 'sacred personages', 'special men', 'sacred men' or 'sacred

specialists'. As it will be seen, there are different terms for each of the specialists and some of these terms overlap just as the nature and role of some specialists also overlap.

Written information varies widely from good and thorough studies to unreliable and worthless material. It needs to be pointed out also, that since specialists or traditional doctors belong to a special category of their own, they have a language, symbolism, knowledge and skill of their own which are not known or easily accessible to the ordinary person. As such, there still remains a great deal of inner information to be gathered or researched. Traditional doctors play an important role in the life of African villages and communities. In this thesis, the investigation will be limited to their religious significance and the African context.

To African societies, the 'medicine men' are the greatest gift, and the most useful source of help. Mbiti (1969:166) maintains that these are the people who suffered most from European and American writers and speakers who so often and wrongly called them 'witch-doctors' – a term which should be buried and forgotten forever. Every village in Africa has a 'medicine-man' within reach, and he /she is the friend of the community. He/she is accessible to everybody and at almost all times. He/she comes into the picture at many points in individual and community life.

There is no fixed rule governing the 'calling' of someone to become a traditional doctor. This may come when he/she is

still young and unmarried or in his/her middle or later life. There are traditional doctors who believe that spirits or the living-dead 'called' them, in dreams, visions or in waking, to become traditional doctors. There are both men and women in this profession. Their personal qualities vary, but traditional doctors are expected to be trustworthy, upright morally, friendly, willing and ready to serve, able to discern people's needs and not to be exorbitant in their charges.

The training of traditional doctors vary from one African community to the other. Some have intensive training while others have less formal training. This discussion of the training is different from what Westerners would expect of modern priesthood training in seminaries and theological colleges. And the tendency is to dismiss the legitimacy of traditional doctors on the basis of their training. Gospel features would be enshrined and evaluated on the basis of the services that they rendered to society. Was there any good that they contributed to the lives of their clients?

 Mbiti (1969:167-168) lists some of the activities that the training offers. Candidates acquire knowledge in matters pertaining to the following areas: the medicinal value of herbs; the quality and use of different herbs, leaves, roots, fruits, barks, grasses and the various objects like minerals, dead insects, bones, feathers, powders, smoke from different objects. They are taught of the causes, cures and prevention of diseases and other forms of suffering (such as barrenness, failure in undertakings, misfortunes, poor crop yield in the field); magic,

witchcraft, the nature and handling of spirits and the living-dead.

In African villages, disease and misfortune are religious experiences, and it requires a religious approach to deal with them. An inculturation hermeneutic may be an appropriate methodology for interpreting the context, as other approaches may be misleading or may not make comprehensive meaning. The reader of the context need to analyze the African setting and know the world-view in operation and will be able to appreciate the gospel features that are enshrined in the African traditional culture. The 'medicine-men' are aware of this, and make attempts to meet the need in a religious (or quasi-religious) manner – whether or not that turns out to be genuine or false or a mixture of both.

Obviously some of the activities involved in dealing with illness may not have any overt value, but they are psychologically vital and no doubt play a great role in healing the sick or helping the sufferer. In this case the means are less important than the end, and that is how both the 'medicine-men' and the patient see and experience the situation which brings them together. If in the biblical stories, demons were driven out from people, the lame could be made to walk and the blind were made to see, and Africans learnt of these happenings. Why would they not accept similar help from their own people, the 'medicine-men'? To put it differently, can't people see the works of Christ through the works of other people?

These (The traditional doctors) however, do not in any way compare to Jesus of the Gospels. This thesis does not equate them or their work to that of Jesus. But the daily problems that Africans come across are essential to interpret and analyze. It is in such a context that the reader may understand the African mentality. And it is important to apply the inculturation hermeneutic approach so that a better understanding could be reached.

On the whole, the 'medicine-man' gives much time and personal attention to the patient, which enables him to penetrate deep into the psychological state of the patient. Even if it is explained to a patient that he/she has malaria because a mosquito carrying malaria parasites has stung him/her, he/she will still want to know why that mosquito stung him/her and not another person. Crafford (1996:17) maintains that the symbolic role of Africans perceives the countryside as filled with supernatural powers, with demons or spirits inhabiting mountains, forest trees, stones, rivers and fountains. Within the framework of such a world-view, the reality of demons, spirits and powers is a phenomenon that needs to be taken seriously. It has to be taken seriously as well as life directing forces.

The only answer which people find satisfactory to the question of malaria sting, is that someone has 'caused' (or 'sent') the mosquito to sting a particular individual, by means of magical manipulation. Suffering, misfortune, disease and accident, are all 'caused' mystically, as far as African peoples are

concerned. The researcher has to apply a relevant hermeneutic approach to interpret the context.

To combat the misfortune or ailment the cause must also be found, and either counteracted, uprooted or punished. This is where the value of the traditional 'medicine-man' comes into the picture. So long as people see sickness and misfortunes as 'religious' experiences, the traditional 'medicine-man' will continue to exist and thrive.

Modern hospitals may deal with the physical side of disease, but there is the religious dimension of suffering which they do not handle. For that purpose a great number of patients will resort to both hospitals and medicine-men, without a feeling of contradiction, although if they are Christians or 'educated' they might only go secretly to the medicine-man or follow his treatment. This is because of previous experience where traditional 'medicine-men' were despised by Westerners and regarded as 'evil-doers'. The 'educated' blacks would not like to be seen associating with traditional doctors because of their stigma from Christians or people of other faiths. This kind of response is possible if readers look at African traditional culture from another perspective that prevents or denies views different from their own. It could also be due to little education on the subject.

2.3.3.1   Some duties of traditional doctors

(a) An important duty of 'medicine-men' is to take preventive measures. It has been pointed out that people experience suffering as being caused by mystical forces applied or used against them by their enemies or by those who hate them. This is often magic, witchcraft, sorcery, 'evil-eye' or bad words. The 'medicine-men' must therefore supply people with counter-measures (Crafford 1996:16). These are generally in form of charms, performing rituals at the homes or fields of those in need, or applying medicines that are swallowed or rubbed into the body.

(b) 'Medicine-men' also give aid to increase productivity or give good results. They advise and assist on how a man may win more love from his wife. They give help to impotent men. They 'treat' people in order to prosper in business or succeed in politics. They supply various aids to students to 'enable' them to pass their examinations. They perform various rites to increase the fertility and productivity of the fields or livestock and barren women (or their husbands and relatives) continually consult them in search of being able to bear children.

(c) It is also the duty of 'medicine-men' to purge witches, detect sorcery, remove curses and control the spirits and living-dead. They have access to the force of nature and other forms of knowledge unknown or little known by the public. Therefore the public entrusts them with the duty of removing

what may harm the community. This is an area that goes deep into the beliefs of people, whether these are objective realities or not.

In short, the traditional doctors symbolize the hopes of society: hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when harm or impurities have been contracted. These men and women are not fools. They are on the average intelligent and devoted to their work. Those who are not devoted to their calling as 'servants' of people simply do not prosper or get too far.

As in any country or profession, there are those who deliberately cheat their fellow men for the sake of gain and publicity. Some genuine 'medicine-men' are also involved in harmful practices in the course of the performance of their duties. This makes them ordinary human beings with weaknesses. Mbiti (1969:171) argues that whatever abuses may be apparent in the activities of 'medicine-men', it would be extremely unjust to condemn their profession. Traditional doctors are the friends, pastors, psychiatrists and doctors of traditional African villages and communities.

Even in modern towns one still finds or hears of traditional doctors or 'medicine-men' some of them are quite prosperous both professionally and economically. The strain of urban life has precipitated new situations of need. These men are no doubt making a contribution towards the solving of the new problems by means of traditional methods.

One gets the impression, however, that urban 'medicine-men' are less trustworthy than those in the 'country-side.' Mbiti (1969:171) ascribes part of the reason for this to be the more impersonal life of the urban society, and the other part to be the more economy that encourages quick gain by either honest or dishonest means.

The 'medicine-man' is one of the specialists whose profession is likely to continue in Africa for several generations, especially since people's needs continue to increase through modern change. He/she is moving his practice into the urban centres where these needs are most concentrated. Mbiti (1969:171) maintains that leading politicians in a number of African countries are known to consult medicine-men, just as do university students, which no doubt gives the medicine-man quite a high status and ensures the continuity of their profession.

Undoubtedly, careful research into traditional medicine and medical practices will one day yield great benefits for all 'mankind'. Perhaps cures for strange diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Human Immune Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) that is currently affecting and infecting many people around the world, especially in Africa, will partly be found with the help of traditional medicine. Not only is such a disease a physical ailment, it is also a psychological problem. Young adults die and leave parents behind in a state of shock. Parents also die and leave orphans behind. Therefore, every

effort must be pulled in from modern and traditional doctors. The moral traditions of life found in the African culture may help regenerate the societal morality.

It could be concluded that African traditional culture had 'people' that mediated messages and goodwill from the ancestors. It is this grid which made them appreciate the mediatorship of Jesus and other religious workers such as pastors, prophets and apostles (Eph 4:11-12).

Traditional doctors deserve to be respected both as persons and for their profession. It is by approaching them an attitude and a spirit of humility that scholars or scientists may hope to have access to their specialized knowledge. For this to can happen researchers need to apply relevant research methods such as the inculturation hermeneutic to have proper knowledge of the different social context.

2.3.4. Marriage

In this section, the researcher intends to deal only with the religious side of marriage in order to demonstrate the cultural embodiment of this gospel feature in African traditional religion. It should however, be borne in mind that there are other dimensions that contribute to a fuller understanding of African concepts and practices of marriage.

Mbiti (1969:148) maintains that for traditional Africans, marriage is a religious duty and responsibility. It forms the focal point where departed, present and coming members of society meet. It is the point of hope and expectation for the unmarried and their relatives. Once it has been reached and procreation has taken place, the individual may now drift slowly into the *Zamani:* his/her solemn duty is performed. *Sasa* and *Zamani* are Akan concepts of time or periods of a person's life. The *'Sasa'* is the entire period after birth and the *'Zamani'* is the period after physical death.

The physical sides of choosing the partner, preparation for marriage, actual wedding ceremony and marriage gift, are the outward expression of a religious happening which says: "We are making a sacred undertaking". This confirms that to traditional Africans, marriage is an institution 'designed' by God. The African traditional culture embodies this gospel feature, and it was observed over many years.

The African marriage, more like the Western practice, is a contract or association between two persons for mutual support and the furtherance of the human race and rearing of children. But in Africa marriage has a wider aspect of an alliance between groups of kin.

Any marriage is a matter of interest not only of the "family unit" but also to a wider circle of relatives, particularly the members of the lineage of each. Every marriage requires the

consent of some senior person, sometimes not even the nearest male relative but the lineage head (Mair 1969:4).

Mbiti (1969:133) maintains that in the African culture everyone must get married. He endeavours to highlight the dimensions of an African marriage when he says that:

> "Marriage is a complex affair with economic, and religious aspects which often overlap so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another".

For African people, marriage is the focus of their existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Mbiti (1969:26) points the religious significance of marriage in African culture by drawing in the concept 'personal immortality'.

> "This concept of personal immortality should help us to understand the religious significance of marriage in African societies. Unless a person has close relatives to remember him when he/she has physically died, then he/she is nobody and simply vanishes out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished. Therefore it is a duty, religious and ontological for everyone to get married. If a man has no children or only daughters, he finds another wife so that through her, children (sons)

may be born who would survive him and keep (with the other living-dead of the family) in personal immortality".

In addition, and particularly in societies where there are no initiation rites, parents and other relatives gradually educate their children in marital affairs. Girls are taught how to prepare food, how to behave towards men, how to care for children, how to look after the husband and other domestic affairs. The boys are taught what most concerns men, like looking after cattle, behaving properly towards one's in-laws, how to acquire wealth which one would give to the parents of a girl as part of the engagement and marriage contract, and how to be responsible as the 'head' of the family.

 We see a lot of meaning in these marriage procedures. Mbiti (1969:140) maintains that the custom of presenting a gift to the bride's people is practiced all over Africa, though in varying degrees. Different names are used to describe it, such as 'bride-wealth', 'bride-gift', 'bride-price', 'dowry' (wrongly in this case) and *'lobola'*.

Most of these terms are either inadequate or misleading. The gift is in the form of cattle, money, foodstuffs and other articles. In some societies the families concerned may exchange brides. In others, the bridegroom (and his relatives) must in addition contribute labor; and in matrilocal societies the man lives with his parents-in-law working for them for some years in order to 'earn' his wife.

This marriage gift is an important institution in African societies. It is a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom's people to those of the bride, for their care over her and for allowing her to become his wife. At her home the gift 'replaces' her, reminding the family that she will leave or has left and yet she is not dead. She is a valuable person not only to her family but also to her husband's people.

Lobola itself is a kind of marriage in African culture. It cements the bond between the husband and the wife and it 'registers' this union with the ancestors to which the offspring of the couple will belong. As *lobola* becomes the crux of marriage in African culture, it enshrines gospel features in that it accentuates the institution of marriage that even Christ regarded important. In Matthew 25: 1-13 the author uses a metaphor where Christ is portrayed as the bridegroom that the ten girls were to meet. He takes the role of a husband that only marriage would accord. The book of the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament demonstrates the importance of a good wife in marriage. The bond that should exist through marriage is well explained. These are just analogies that highlight the significance of marriage. African culture emphasizes *lobola,* the 'glue' that makes the marriage bond meaningful. The man becomes husband after he has paid *lobola.* Other biblical texts that portray Jesus as husband to his church on earth are (Rev 19:7-9, Eph 5: 21-33). African traditional culture embodied similar gospel features by emphasizing marriage through the practice of *lobola*.

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At marriage she is not stolen but is given away under mutual agreement between the two families. The gift elevates the value attached to her both as a person and as a wife. The gift legalizes her value and the marriage contract. The institution of this practice is the most concrete symbol of the marriage covenant and security.

Under no circumstances is this custom a form of 'payment', as outsiders have so often mistakenly said. African words for the practice of giving the marriage gift are, in most cases, different from words used in buying or selling something in the market place. Furthermore, it is not only the man and his people who give; the girl's people also give gifts in return, even if these may be materially smaller than those of the man. The two families are involved in a relationship that, among other things, demands an exchange of material and other gifts. This continues even long after the girl is married and has her own children.

Mbiti (1969:141) explains some marriage activities that are a custom of the '*Batoro*' tribe in East Africa. This traditional African custom is brought in this discussion to highlight the deep religious significance of marriage that has lost meaning among many modern people. Marriages break up very easily partly because no much value is attached to them. The *'Batoro'* custom involves carrying the bride on the shoulders, which is a very comfortable means of conveyance. It is one way of showing the value of the bride. But its major purpose seems to

dramatize the fact that the girl is now being cut off from one family and being joined to another.

It is also a symbolic act of breaking her completely from the state of unmarried life. She now becomes a full and mature person. To be unmarried is childhood, to be married is maturity and a blessing. Should an unmarried person die, the *'Batoro'* beat up his body with a thorny bush to show that an unmarried person deserves and receives no respect in the eyes of society. So marriage conveys a status which is valid not only in this life but also in the hereafter. The girl celebrates the new status by being carried. Before this rite she is 'nobody', but afterwards she is 'somebody'.

Sitting on and off on the parents' lap is a rite of the 'new birth'. The two of them, the bride and the bridegroom are being born anew, they are made twins. They enter ritually into the stage of maturity. This is also a rite of handing down the torch of life. The parents pass on the 'drum-beat' of life, and a new rhythm starts.

It is now up to the couple to reproduce, to have their own children on the lap, to nurture them and keep the stream of human generations flowing. When this rite is over, the couple may now go into their special house and consummate their marriage. The blood of virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives have preserved the sanctity of human reproduction. Only marriage

may shed this sacred blood, for in so doing it unlocks the door for members of the family in the loins to come forward and join both the living and the living-dead.

Would such an African traditional culture not curb present day problems of sexually transmitted infections (STI) because of irresponsible sexual conduct?   Abstinence from sex before marriage, is what is encouraged by many churches today in an effort to combat teenage pregnancies. African traditional culture had been thinking ahead regarding this important cultural practice.

Virginity at the wedding is greatly respected in some African societies, while in others it is more or less that the couple would have had sexual intercourse before marriage. Virginity symbolizes purity not only of the body but also of moral life. A virgin bride is the greatest glory and crown to her parents, husband and relatives. The rite of bathing together is a solemn way of binding the husband and wife into one, just as the marriage gift binds the two families together and also sanctifies the new state of responsible maturity and intention to procreate. It makes the couple 'ready'. The washing also removes the stains of the blood of virginity. The seclusion of the couple for a few days symbolizes their departure from unmarried life. It is their death to the life of immaturity, childhood and unproductive state. Their introduction to the public is an act of resurrection to the new life of maturity and procreation.

Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. This institution in the African traditional culture and religion enjoyed the same status in ancient Near East and Judaic societies. Archer (1990:123) maintains that in the ancient Near East, marriage was regarded with some degree of seriousness and it occupied a central position in the lives and thoughts of all peoples, the Jews included.

Kalir (1980:53) indicates what a norm marriage was to Jews:

> "Since the beginning of time man and woman find each other in marriage. It is the union that permits them to do their expected share for the future of their people. Judaism could be unthinkable without this bond. The ceremony is called in Hebrew Kidskin, the "holying", of a sacred relationship.

The African traditional culture embodied similar gospel features and valued marriage dearly. African culture considered marriage as having been established by God. It was the acceptable human mechanism for procreation and bringing up children. Roth (1966:67; 102) rightly puts it when he says:

> "Marriage is the ideal human state and is considered a basic social institution established by God at the

time of creation. The purpose of marriage in the
Bible is companionship and procreation".

Other interesting thoughts about marriage in the Bible is the New
Testament letter of Paul to the Ephesians 5. Husbands are exhorted to
love their wives just as Christ loved the church (v.25). Here, a
metaphor of marriage is used to describe the relationship that should
be maintained between the entire people of God (believers) and Christ.

In the Old Testament, according to Mays (1969: 25-28) the author of
the book of the prophet, Hosea, uses the marriage metaphor to describe
the hurt that occurs when a wife is not honest to her husband. But here,
the author uses the metaphor of the husband (vv. 2,7) to stand for
Yahweh, the wife representing the corporate people of Israel.
Sometimes the people are spoken of as though they were the land
(v.3). The entire exercise stresses the significance of marriage and its
responsibilities. If African traditional culture also embraced marriage
in this manner, then one can conclude to some extent that it embodied
gospel features. African traditional culture honored marriage and
regarded it as holy.

The centrality of marriage in African traditional culture can be
appreciated as a gospel feature if it is placed in context of the African
setting. And for a meaningful interpretation to take place, researchers
need to apply relevant methods of study such as the inculturation
hermeneutic.

2.3.4.1 Celibacy and childlessness

Archer (1990:123) says that celibacy was never considered as a virtue in Jewish thought. This means that the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) excluded the possibility of celibacy. Marriage and of course the raising of a family were regarded as duties to be fulfilled by all adults.

 Mahlangu (1999:104) rightly observed that the one who does not participate in marriage, especially with Africans, may be regarded as a curse to the community. He is a rebel and a law-breaker. He is not only abnormal but also 'under-human'. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return.

Having children is considered as a validating factor in the African marriage. In Africa a married woman who does not produce children feels very much miserable. The agonies of being childless are so immense that the woman stops at nothing to help herself to bear children. Some traditional Zulu sayings for bragging and despising childless women go thus: "*Ganu! Ganu*! *mfaz' ongazalanga*", which means 'envy, envy, you woman that never had children'. At times sayings of 'self-praise' read thus: "*Kuhle kwethu*!" which means 'our things are

wonderful'. The childless woman would simply break into tears on hearing such words. This indicates the magnitude of the pain of childlessness. It means a lot to African people. To other nations (Westerners) there are couples who decide to stay without children even though they were fertile, such a problem is no pain at all. Therefore, children are not a validating factor for marriage. This is a question of choice and should be left to the discretion of the people concerned.

Mbiti (1975:86) captures the depth of such misery, pain and despair in the prayer articulated by a childless woman in Rwanda:

O Imana (God) of Rwanda

If only you would help me!

O Imana of pity, Imana of my father's home (country)

If only you would help me!

O Imana … if only you would help me just this one!

O Imana, if only you would give me a homestead and children!

 prostate myself before you …

 I cry to you: Give me offspring,

Give me as you give to others

Imana what shall I do, where shall I go!

I am in distress: where is the room for me

O merciful, O Imana of mercy, help me once.

This passage confirms a belief among Africans that children are a gift from God. Tradition teaches Africans to pray to God for children.

A case similar to this of Africa is found in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel 1. Hannah was a woman who had no children. She went to pray to the Lord and the priest Eli, saw her lips moving as she prayed. She was very bitter. The priest thought she was drunk and asked with disgust, as to when she would stop making a fool of herself. But she was pouring her heart out to the Lord. She wanted a child. The Lord answered her prayer by giving her a child. She named him Samuel, which means that she asked him from the Lord. Both these communities, the African and ancient Hebrew, in spite of being far apart in time and proximity, believed that children were a gift from God. Each in its own unique way, and context, exhibits features that embody the Gospel.

2.3.4.2 Monogamy and polygamy

Mbiti (1969:142) indicates that technically the term 'polygamy' should mean what its Greek components imply, and that is, marrying 'many' (wives, husbands or times). But in popular usage it is applied to mean the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives. This should be referred to as 'polygyny', and where one wife has two or more husbands this is 'polyandry'. Monogamy refers to

a marriage where one husband has only one wife. In this section, 'polygamy' will be used in the popular sense, even though it is realized that linguistically that is only partly correct.

Getting married to two or more wives is a custom found all over Africa. In some societies it is less common than in others. The custom fits well into the social structure of traditional life. It also fits into the thinking of the people, serving many useful purposes as will be demonstrated in the following sections of this work.

Mbiti (1969:142) maintains that if the philosophical or theological attitude towards marriage and procreation is that these are an aid towards the partial recapture or attainment of the lost immortality, the more wives a man has the more children he is likely to have. The more the children the stronger the power of 'immortality' in that family. He who has many descendants has the strongest possible manifestation of 'immortality'. He is 'reborn' in the multitude of his descendants, and there are many that 'remember' him after he has died physically and entered his 'personal immortality'. Such a man has the attitude that 'the more we are, the bigger I am'.

Children are the glory of marriage, and the more there are of them the greater the glory. This kind of thinking may not be appreciated in the Western life-style, which may prefer smaller nuclear families than large extended ones of Africa. Therefore,

researchers have to broaden their perspectives when dealing with Africa. They must apply a research method that is relevant to the specific context.

Adeleru (1999:5) argues that Westerners who believe that their system (of marrying one wife) is better, ignore the plural nature of Western marriages of progressively marrying and divorcing spouses and ending up with many (divorced) living spouses. He examines the biblical basis for advocating for monogamy in Christendom. He concludes that the biblical evidence cannot sustain such an exclusive practice. He then explores the sociological dimension and finds that monogamy more than anything else came to be regarded as one of the Ten commandments in the church not because the church wanted it to be biblical as is spuriously claimed, but was an appendage of European culture.

He then makes a final submission that monogamy, like many other aspects of life, should be left to the discretion of the parties concerned. The enforcement of monogamy on the church membership is not only unbiblical, it hampers the cause of Christ by preventing men from obtaining salvation in Christ which is more serious.

I am not discussing whether polygamy is right or wrong, good or bad. I am simply presenting a hermeneutical exercise that attempts to appreciate the thinking and experience of those involved in polygamous situations. The debate over polygamy

has and still is a bone of contention. It is also an issue broad and may deserve a thesis of its own to can be discussed satisfactorily in this one. The hermeneutical question remains to be whether this African cultural practice is opposed to gospel teachings or not. My submission on polygamy is that it should be left to the discretion of those who practice it. It would enshrine gospel features where and when it discourages practices such as promiscuity and adultery. Polygamy should go with responsible ownership of the relationship between the parties concerned.

Adeleru (1999:5) indicates that it may surprise some scholars that Western missionaries in Africa did not initially oppose polygamy. The Western opposition to polygamy that is now so 'familiar', was preceded by a period of accommodation and attempts to make allowances for cultural differences. The example of Bishop Colenso, in Natal, southern Africa, whose ministry covered the middle of the nineteenth century, who stated that to ask a person to put away all but one of his wives was to ask him to commit one sin, to put an end to another. To the Bishop the practice was both unnecessary and without Scriptural backing.

Polygamy helps to prevent or reduce unfaithfulness and prostitution, especially on the part of the husband. Polygamy is not a form of adultery, where the activity is done in secrecy and is not approved or agreed upon between the parties. It is a form of marriage in a particular context. This is particularly valuable in modern times when men generally to live and work

in the cities and towns, leaving their wives and children in the rural area.

If the husband has several wives, he can afford to take one at a time to live with him in the town while the other wife remains behind to care for the children and family property in the countryside. Later on the wives exchange their positions. In such cases, the husband is unlikely to take and keep concubines or go to female prostitutes. The practice may seem very uncomfortable to modern life where 'morality' from other religious persuasions may be questioned but it may also be better than open 'concubinage' or prostitution. Polygamy is not 'shacking' together. It is an agreed upon form of marriage.

Hillman (1975:114) claims that sheer polygamy is culturally accepted and practiced as a form of marriage. It is usually done on the grounds of its socio-economic functions. Polygamy has therefore the economic, social and religious functions that we now examine.

2.3.4.2.1 Economic function

If a man has more wives, and consequently more children, there could be more people to help with work, the tilling of the fields, the herding of the livestock, and the caring for the bigger household. This is of course in the light of the traditional African subsistence economy where every family was responsible for producing its own food. The changing economic situation in Africa may change this practice.

2.3.4.2.2 Social function

Hillman (1975:115) maintains that "where the desire for as many children as possible is paramount, as it is in the family units of almost every African society, the practice of polygamy may be seen as an efficient means of realizing socially approved goals and social ideals". The family's status is elevated. The family members are able to support each other in social functions such as when there are weddings, deaths, community gatherings and festivities.

Theron (1996:534) claims that the practice of polygamy fulfils important social function in the sense that the continued existence as well as the stability of the family is dependent on many descendants. It fosters the solidarity of the family, an integrating function in the kinship system. The extended family nurtures the unity of the whole community, tribe or clan.

A spinster who has passed a marrying age carries with her a negative stigma of not being married. Her family also shares in the shame of her singleness. In a society where polygamy is practiced, chances of having unmarried women are limited. Women stand the chance of self-fulfillment in marriage and also bearing children. In a polygamous household, the woman

who does not have children of her own can fulfil her motherly instincts towards other children in the household.

Furthermore, due to the several sexual taboos, such as refraining from sexual intercourse at certain times, such as during menstruation, before and after childbirth, there is no need for the husband to turn to prostitutes or have extra-marital affairs. Most of Africa has been affected by a migrant labor system. Husbands left their homes and families (in rural areas) for a very long time. These men would have two families. One in the urban area and the other one at home (at the village) (Mbiti 1969:143; Hillman 1975:122-126; Theron 1996:54)

2.3.4.2.3 Religious function

Polygamy also plays a role in the ancestor cult. It is essential to have a great posterity in order to be remembered and venerated as an ancestor. If there are no descendants, then the ancestor is forgotten and not venerated as an ancestor. Mbiti (1969:134) maintains that the ancestor enjoys a state of personal immortality as long as his descendants remember him.

2.3.5 Concept of God and attributes

Mbiti (1969:29) maintains that the African knowledge of God has been that of a Supreme Being. This is the most minimal and fundamental idea about God found in all African societies. God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life, there are no atheists. This idea is summarized in an *Ashanti* proverb 'No one shows a child the Supreme Being'. This means that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct, and even children know Him.

Everything begins with God. The African world-view that explains how everything in the universe came to be in existence, makes this belief quite clear. Opoku (1993:71) maintains that while everything in the universe had a clear beginning, God has no beginning, and hence the Akan name, '*Tetekwaframoa*', meaning He who is there now as from ancient times, makes it clear that God has always been in existence and will continue to be.

A Pygmy hymn quoted by Mbiti (1969:34) expresses the same faith:

> In the beginning was God,
> Today is God,
> Tomorrow will be God.
> Who can make an image of God?
> He has no body,
> He is as a word that comes out of your mouth.
> That word! It is no more,
> It is past, and still it lives!

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So is God.

African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, in short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in African traditional societies. The inculturation hermeneutic requires that researchers should place these African traditional societies in a social context that will better express their concepts of God. On closer analysis of the African culture, using this method of study (Inculturation hermeneutic), it may be demonstrated that the African traditional culture enshrines gospel values.

Tempels (1959:20) maintains that the African people have been having the most pure form of the concept of God, the Supreme Being, Creator and dispenser of the universe. In articulating this desire Mbiti (1969:229) claims that:

> "Historically, Christianity is very much an African religion, but also that as a Christian faith, is capable of being apprehended by African terms without being made difficult".

Tutu (1978:366) maintains that the African has a genuine knowledge of God:

> "It is reassuring to know that one have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communion with the deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others".

These are some of the scholars that the researcher concurs with in submitting that gospel features are embedded in African traditional culture. There are however some African scholars epitomized by Nyirongo (1997:10) who maintain that prior to the coming of the Christian missionaries to Africa, the Africans did not worship God but gods. Nyirongo's submission is unpopular with many African scholars.

2.3.5.1 The eternal and intrinsic attributes of God

These attributes of God are difficult to grasp and express, since they are concerned more to the realm of the abstract than concrete thought forms. Broadly speaking, African thought forms are more concrete than abstract. The thinking in concrete terms forms one of the basic assumptions of the African world-view. Pobee (1978: 55) says that it is important to place African traditional religion in its proper place among the religions of the world.

Although many books on 'world religions' hardly contain a single reference to the religious heritage of Africa, it is pertinent to point out that the religion of Africa does not live in the pages of books on 'world religions'. It lives in the hearts and lives of African people who practice it. Opoku (1993:68) is correct when he warns that a word of caution needs to be thrown in about the temptation of looking at African religion from the side of doctrine rather than from the side of practice. It is necessary, therefore, to endeavour to approach it through the inner life of its practitioners.   One, however, cannot completely ignore its externals.

We find considerable examples of how African peoples conceive of the external nature of God. Mbiti (1969:30) maintains that a number of societies consider God to be omniscient, that is, to know all things. They consider God to be simultaneously everywhere (i.e. omnipresent), and to be almighty (omnipotent).

These are essential aspects of His being. They are part of His unique nature and no other being can be described in the same terms. It is these and other eternal attributes which distinguish God from His creation and which make Him not only the genesis but also the sustainer of all things.

When African people consider God to be omniscient, they are at the same time conferring upon Him the highest possible position of honour and respect, for wisdom commands great respect in African societies. In so doing, people admit that

man's wisdom, however great, is limited, incomplete and acquired. On the other hand, God's omniscience is absolute, unlimited and intrinsically part of His eternal nature and being (Busia 1971:5; Anyanwu 1981:163; Tempels 1959:20).

The metaphor of seeing and hearing explains the concept of God as omniscient in a concrete way that is easy to grasp. So we find examples from many areas of Africa, in which God is said to be able to see or hear everything.

The attribute of God's transcendence must be balanced with that of his immanence, since these two are paradoxically complementary. This means that He is so 'far' (transcendental) that men cannot reach Him; yet, He is so 'near' (immanent) that He comes close to men.

Mbiti (1969:33) maintains that for most of their life, African peoples place God in the transcendental plane, making Him seem as if He is remote from their daily affairs. But they know that He is immanent, being manifested in natural objects and phenomena, and they can turn to Him in acts of worship, at any place and any time. The distinction between these related attributes could be stated that, in theory God is transcendental but in practice He is immanent.

In spite of these characteristics attributed to God, demonstrating that African traditional culture conceived of Him, it must be indicated that certain authors such as Nkulu

(1998:5-29), differ with this view. He is of the opinion that to accept African theology is to bring confusion amongst believers and to rebel against the Lord who revealed Himself clearly in the Scriptures. African Traditional Religion (ATR) cannot be integrated in a unified vision of Christian religion. He maintains that there is no compatibility between ATR and Christian religion. It would be a fallacy and wrong to admit that the African Traditional religion in Africa has been a real preparation for the Gospel. According to Nkulu (1998:5-29) ATR creates danger, for Africa, or 'repaganizes' Christianity. He however turns around, and says that there is room for dialogue in order for the approaches to be corrected. Inculturation hermeneutic helps to direct such views so that balanced studies and interpretations are done in spite of our different religious persuasions.

2.3.5.2 The moral attributes of God

The majority of African peoples regard God as essentially good. There are many situations in which He is credited with doing good things to His people. Mbiti (1969:36) indicates that many African peoples such as the *Akamba, Herero (in Namibia)* and others, consider God to be merciful, showing kindness and taking pity over mankind. For that reason he is referred to as 'the God of pity', 'God is kind' or 'God is merciful'. The mercy or kindness of God is felt in situations of danger, difficulty, illness and anxiety, when deliverance or protection is attributed to Him. God is called upon to help.

Even when sorrows have struck, God may be called upon to comfort the people.

For some, the goodness of God is seen in His averting perceived calamities, supplying rain, providing also fertility to people, cattle and fields. Thus, the *Langi* consider rich harvests to come from God; the *Vugusu* believe that material prosperity comes from god; and the *Nandi* invoke God daily to grant fertility to their women, cattle and fields.

2.3.6 Summary

In chapter 2, 'the Gospel, an African perspective', has been investigated. A very short history of Christianity in Africa has been investigated as well. It was established that the 'transmission' of the gospel message to Africa came with the Western culture or garb. There were several cases when culture and the gospel message were not clearly distinguished. European culture would be interpreted as part of the gospel message. It was used as a 'vehicle' to convey the gospel message.

The African traditional culture was simply dismissed as being incompatible with the gospel message. This was mainly because the African context was not properly examined and analyzed. The researcher suggested the use of 'inculturation hermeneutic', a method that required the analysis of the culture

and context of the recipients of the gospel message in Africa. The method of inculturation hermeneutic also demands that the messenger of the gospel message does not only 'take the message' to recipients and disregard the culture of the indigenous people. He/she also learns from the new situation.

Using the inculturation hermeneutic, certain features in the African traditional culture and religion were investigated to establish their embodiment of the Gospel. Some of the features investigated included the concept of birth, marriage, the role of traditional doctors, sacrifice and attributes of God.

Birth is a concept that Africans considered a gift from God. When a child was physically born, rituals would be performed to integrate him into society. This symbolized his/her 're-birth' into society. The child now becomes a social being. This concept of birth in African traditional culture indicated a dynamically equivalent concept as found in biblical texts where naturally born Christians are required to be 'born again' or 'born of God'. This means that after Christians are naturally born, they have to be born again or born spiritually (repent) and become children of God.

This is metaphoric speaking in both African and biblical communities. It needs to be analyzed, contextualized and interpreted by scholars of religion.

This concept of birth in Africa indicates a realization that natural children have to be 'converted' into societal beings. After this has been done correctly, they can participate in societal institutions. They can perform religious functions. They do only what is 'required' of them. Their normal, 'new' conduct then become that which is approved. They become responsible adults and form part of a 'new people'.

In the Christian life, born-again Christians also do what is 'expected' of them. They conduct their lives according to specific acquired guidelines that are taught by the church. They have to uphold certain values. They are children of God and they do what God wants them to do. The resemblance in the two communities, the African and the one from biblical times, indicate how both viewed the birth concepts as gifts from God and that children must be initiated (converted, baptized, born again, rites performed, and so forth.) to be able to serve God properly.

Each community operated in its own setting and milieu. This on its own will have an influence on how the cultural tools are employed to express the gospel feature of birth. The rituals pertaining to birth will be different and yet point to the same idea or point to the immanent referent. Researchers and scholars need to look broader into the culture and social situation so that they do not dismiss the African setting or way of life. The inculturation hermeneutic approach has been applied to interpret the traditional African culture in its context.

Marriage is another feature that is examined to illustrate how it embodies gospel features. African traditional culture regarded marriage as very central for procreation of human species. But for couples to start reproducing young ones, they must be married or joined together in an approved manner. Marriage ensured that God 'approved' the union of couples. Children would be brought up properly and be proper participants in human affairs and in the 'eyes of God'.

In the biblical texts cited, the concept of marriage is also 'sanctioned' by God. Couples 'stick' together when God blesses their union. A new way of life is expected of married couples. They have specific responsibilities of raising children. An inculturation hermeneutic approach is employed to interpret this concept of marriage in the African traditional context.

Sacrifice is also a feature that has been investigated using the inculturation hermeneutic to examine how gospel features are enshrined in African traditional culture. The examination of the social context indicated that Africans directed their offerings to God. It is through the sacrifices and offerings that they begged for mercy, or asked for help from God. Even though intermediaries played a role, the ultimate recipient of sacrifices is God.

The significance of blood in effecting communication was examined in depth. The significance of blood in symbolizing reconciliation was also examined in detail. It was then

demonstrated how the gospel message is enshrined in these African traditional practices.

The important role that was occupied by traditional doctors in the African traditional culture was investigated and analyzed. Using the inculturation hermeneutic paradigm, the world-view of traditional Africans is studied and a better understanding of the context in which 'medicine-men' operated is established. It is concluded that they do or did their work well. They are very important elements of society. If their works are studied in context, then their contribution can be appreciated.

The chapter is concluded with an investigation of the attributes of God. The notion of God that Africans expressed, demonstrate that they knew God. They described Him as near and at times as far away. These complementary ideas required an understanding and interpretation of their (African) world-view.

Africans utilized all resources at their disposal to express their knowledge of God. They used their cultural rites in marriage, at the birth of their children, at death, and so on. They enlisted the help of traditional healers in their everyday cultural activities. All these were not intended to harm each other but to promote healthy 'community-living'.

Chapter 3

The cult of ancestor veneration

3.1 Introduction

The question of the ancestors in the traditional African setting was and remains a controversial one in theological circles. But take the ancestors away from the Africans, then you destroy their roots in the past, their culture, dignity and their understanding of the *communion sanctorum*. Nyamiti (1984: 35) maintains that in many African societies ancestral veneration is one of the central and basic traditional and even contemporary forms of cult. The ancestral cult is deeply rooted in the African traditional world-view.

Mahlangu (1999:39) maintains that the cult of ancestors is to the African what Jesus is to Christianity and what Mohammed is to Islam. It is the main focus of the African traditional religions. It is therefore in the everyday activities of people that one observes the interaction of people with their culture and religion. Setiloane (1986:17) says that the interaction of one's spirit with those of other people in the community does not terminate with death. Even after death, the "vital participation" of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and also in the home and clan circles in particular.

Mosothoane (1973:86) argues that even some African Christians are involved in this practice:

> "Despite the concerted effort on the part of at least some church leaders in at least some parts of Africa to eradicate any remains of the traditional ancestor cult among black Christians, African believers continue to reverence their departed for-bears".

There is no uniform system of beliefs and practices of this cult in black Africa. In fact one may find differences of detail even in the same ethnic group. Moreover, the ancestral veneration to be discussed in this thesis is not found in each African traditional community. Nevertheless the cult belongs to the majority of the peoples. Besides, notwithstanding the differences referred to above, there are many elements shared in common by many ethnic societies. The exposition that will follow will attempt to indicate how the ancestral cult enshrines the gospel message.

Mention has already been made that ancestral veneration in Africa is intimately linked with the traditional world-view. In this world-view, life understood as sacred power (vital force), is a central element. The ideal of African culture is coexistence and strengthening of vital force in the human community and the world at large. This ideal is one of the basic motivations of ancestral cult.

Shorter (1983:197) remarks that when his article on ancestor veneration was published, it took issue with those who saw ancestor veneration as bound up with the idea of evil or as attributing power erroneously to the deceased. Without offering a strictly coherent analysis of the traditional practices, the objections were met by general observations and arguments from both anthropology and theology. The article concluded that there was a place for a purified form of ancestor veneration within Christianity. In such an inculturation Christianity, love should drive out traditional elements of fear. What the article neglected to take into account was the variety of theological functions exercised by ancestors in African traditional religious systems.

The variety of theological functions exercised by ancestors requires a paradigm shift. This will mean that the church is not being expanded, but being born anew in each context and culture. Africans have to rediscover and rehabilitate the cultural heritage of the past. Therefore one cannot simply expect that two religious systems in different contexts will exhibit similar characteristics.

Martey (1993:73) cites an important remark of Mbefo in support of the argument that Africans must rediscover their cultural heritage:

> "There is a widespread conviction that our ancestors had a certain self-understanding, a view of their world and their place within it. They had a

life-style that was their own making and in which they felt at home. They had a religious attitude that responded to their experience of the transcendence and that satisfied their expectation of the transcendent in the immanent … they possessed a self-contained and independently developed cultural integrity that was sufficient for coping with realities of their world of experience".

A definition of the ancestors will be attempted, and from the concept, examine if gospel message is not enshrined in the African traditional culture. The 'world' of the ancestors, the nature and functions of ancestors will also be examined in the light of the world-view of the traditional African. The act of libation, the controversial question of ancestor veneration or worship and the different rituals will be investigated using the inculturation hermeneutic. Do these practices in the cultural context enshrine gospel features?

3.2. Who is the ancestor?

Shorter (1983:197 – 199) argues that since the concept of the traditional African ancestor is sometimes suggested as a Christological parallel, the question of the theological functions of ancestors deserves greater attention. This theological function of the African ancestors, may shed light on ancestor veneration as an expression of the Communion of Saints.

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 Son to the Father. The difficulty could arise when claims of the Son's equality with the Father are made. This claim as Lwandle (1996:42) asserts, upsets Zulu social values by teaching that the son is equal to the father. The Zulu social system extols old age. According to the Zulu custom, the son is not equal to the father but is an extension of the father's name. As soon as the parallel is more closely defined and a specific form of ancestor veneration is used to illuminate the doctrine of redemption in Christ, the problems are multiplied.

Christ has been likened to a deceased lineage head. In one case, in order to evade the 'untheological' notion of Christ as a progenitor, the image of a deceased common ancestor of a descent group is re-interpreted mystically, with reference to traditional African blood-pacts. Christ's sharing of his divine life through the shedding of his blood is compared both to the transmission of life in a lineage and to the ritual exchange of blood which generates special ties between two individuals and their families. However, in reality, the social effects of blood-pacts are different from the obligations and prohibitions that regulate the relationships of blood relatives. This can be seen at once from the frequent duty of a 'blood-brother' to give his daughter in marriage to the man who has made a pact with him. Lineage head and 'blood-brother' are incompatible images.

Since what matters is the continuity of the lineage, it is perfectly possible for the living to venerate non-progenitors and even persons whose kinship is putative or fictive. If the phrase "Christ our Ancestor" is to be given this recondite meaning, we may well question its value to Christian theology. But whose word is this term "ancestor"?

Shorter (1983:199) maintains that lineage head and elder brother are excellent Scriptural images for Christ. Do they gain anything from a consideration of the way deceased lineage heads and elder brothers are venerated in traditional African religion? If this practice can illuminate in some way the person and salvific role of Christ, can it do so without so circumscribing the underlying socio-religious reality as to falsify it altogether? One must, after all, be true to anthropological fact, if the theological exercise is to be valid. Everything depends on the theological functions attributed to the spirits of the dead in traditional African religion.

Mbiti (1969:83) describes the ancestors as the departed of up to five generations and are in a different category from that of ordinary spirits. They are still within the *Sasa* period. They are in a state of personal immortality. Their process of dying is not yet complete. We have called them the living-dead. They are the closest links that men have with the spirit world.

Some of the things said about the spirits apply also to the living-dead. But the living-dead are bilingual beings. They

speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to who they are drawing nearer ontologically. These are the 'spirits' with which African peoples are most concerned. It is through the living-dead that the spirit world becomes personal to them. They still are part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them.

The two groups are bound together by their common *Sasa* that for the living-dead is, however, fast disappearing into the *Zamani*. The living-dead are still 'people', and have not yet become 'things', 'spirits' or 'its'. They return to their human families from time to time, and share meals with them, however, symbolically.

The IMBISA Standing Committee (1996) attempted a short description of an ancestor in African traditional religion. It wrote that it is not possible to speak of traditional religion without touching on the subject of ancestors. Because they are nowhere and yet everywhere, it is difficult to speak of them comprehensively. However, an ancestor is a person:

- who died a good death after having faithfully practiced and transmitted to his descendants the laws left to him by his ancestors.
- Who contributed to the continuation of the line by leaving many descendants.

- Who was a peacemaker, a link that fostered communion between the living and the dead, through sacrifices and prayers.
- A person who is the first-born is a candidate 'par excellence' to become an ancestor because he is able to maintain the chain of the generation in a long genealogy. The right of the first born is thus an inalienable right.

From these few definitions, it is evident that ancestors are not equated to Christ or to God. They are dependent on God for their various functions. For one to be an ancestor, one must have had a good life. If the ancestor must have transmitted to his descendants the laws left to him, then he/she must have been qualifying for participation in societal institutions. One must therefore be exemplary in almost all respects. This encourages harmonious 'community-living'.

Ephirim-Donkor (1997:129) explains an ancestor this way:

> "To be an ancestor the deceased must first have been an elder, and upon his or her demise become one of the eternal beings. The ancestors are thus a distinct group of eternal saints apart from other spiritual personalities who are also endowed with immortality but are not ancestors".

Ethical existence and generativity as a teleological quest are described as having two phases: the beginning and the end. In the beginning the young adult often finds ethical existence and

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generativity carelessly liberating and yet difficult, as one begins to grapple with ethical issues. Here is precisely the ethical dictum, that the end is what is really important. In other words, the beginning must be lived in anticipation of the end. The individual must therefore have accrued material opulence as well as virtues that are extolled by the matrikin. This is what the individual will be judged by at old age and upon his or her demise.

At old age an elder is apt to reminiscence as to whether or not he or she has successfully integrated all successive states of existence. The reflexivity of this period is spurred largely by the imminence of death, the race against time and accountability before the ancestors. In this way the end has more to do with continual physical and mental atrophy in the face of death. Even though this state is the prelude to a life of immortality, it does not make death easier to accept by the living. Death, as Nketia states:

> "… is not regarded as a happy or welcome event. The pathos of mortality and the vanity of some of these beliefs are expressed in some dirges and songs. To be in the hands of Death is to be in the hands of someone indeed. If the departed could send gifts, they would surely send something to their children. But this does not prevent mourners from saying to the dead: 'Send us something when someone is coming this way.'''(Nketia 1955:6-7)

There are a few examples of what the journey to the next world is thought to be or involve. There are many African peoples who do not visualize any geographical separation between the two worlds, and as soon as a person is physically dead he arrives 'there' in his spirit form. This means that a person is thought to be composed of physical and spiritual entities. This concept is also expressed in some of the New Testament books. Such concepts promote a life of upright living. Each person lives with the objective of being accepted in the future 'world'. Therefore life has a purpose. People or believers live in 'waiting' for better and everlasting future.

3.3 The 'world' of the ancestors

But where is this world of the ancestors? There are different views that express this 'world' among traditional Africans. A few explanations will be discussed here. In the final analysis, they imply a future life. Some biblical writings describe this kind of futuristic thinking as 'eschatology'. There seems to be a similar line of thought here with traditional African culture and religion. The significance of this is that it creates a purpose for life. People lived by a faith that they needed to keep and live by.   Ephirim-Donkor (1997:138) writes that *Samanadze*, or better yet the path to the ancestral world, is first below and beneath. The earth must receive the corpse in the same manner the mother brought forth the neonate into the world. It is thus crucial that the corpse be interred. Where circumstances prevent the matrikin folks from locating the corpse, certain rites are enacted to propitiate the spiritual personality to find its

way to *Samanadze*. Or in other instance, where the matrikin folks are unaware that one of their own has died out, the spiritual personality of their ward cannot make its ascent. Consequently, it becomes an evil, restless spirit in limbo, menacing the matrikin folks in their dreams.

Another evidence that the ancestral world is beneath is the fact that libations are poured onto the ground or earth. Libations are aimed at offering drinks to the ancestors. The elders always make sure that the ancestors drink first before they partake of their own. Moreover, every elder, indeed all visitors when offered water to drink after a journey or visit, must pour some of the water on the ground for the ancestors. The same ritual is true of every food eaten by the elders.

Secondly, *Samanadze* is above and beyond. This is because it is a spiritual realm and the abode of the ancestors. Everything tangible is below and beneath, while the intangibles are above and beyond human perception. Ephirim-Donkor (1997:138) maintains that he had witnessed priests pour libations and upon completion, threw the remainder of the liquor up into the sky. When he asked the priests why this was so, they told him that God, the divinities and the ancestors were above.

The ancestors, like God, are immortal and endowed with omniscience and ubiquity. They could not have such characteristics still buried in the grave and unable to resurrect as spiritual personalities. It is only when the corpse has been

interred that the spiritual personality embarks on the homeward journey above and beyond the human realm of tangibility.

Mbiti (1969:160) adds to this concept in saying that by some societies, the hereafter is thought to be underground, probably because dead bodies are buried. The ground on which people walk is therefore the most intimate point of contact between the living-dead and their human relatives. It is the ground (grave) which 'buries' them from the sight of their kinsmen, and which in effect erases their physical existence as far as human beings are concerned. Yet paradoxically it is the same ground through which offerings, libation and even divination enable human beings to contact the living-dead.

It is therefore common that family shrines for the living-dead are found generally at or near the spot where the head or oldest member of the homestead is buried. The cult of the living-dead is carried out within a close proximity to the actual burial place of the family. The land keeps together the *Sasa* of the living and the *Zaman*i of the departed. For African peoples, the ground has a religious charge, mystically uniting past and present generations, the *Zaman*i and the *Sasa*.

Mbiti (1969:160) maintains that a number of peoples, including the Basuto, Lozi, Lugbara, Shilluk, Turkana and Yoruba, believe that at death the soul of the person goes to the sky or near to God. This does not, however, cut it off from its own human relatives who continue to hold that the living-dead is

near to them and can be approached through prayer, libation and offerings.

It is debatable whether traditional Africans believed that there is reward or judgement in the hereafter. Mbiti (1969:161) maintains that the majority of Africans do not expect any form of judgement or reward in the hereafter. There are a few exceptions to this statement. The *Yoruba* believe that after death the person presents himself before God and gives an account of his earthly life. So the people say that:

> *"All that we do on earth,*
> *We shall account for kneeling*
> *in heaven…*
> *We shall state our case at the feet*
> *of God"*

(Mbiti 1969:161)

So also the *Lodagaa* fear that suffering awaits all 'bad' people at the crossing of the river of death; and on arrival in the next world, everyone must endure punishment from older spirits. This kind of thinking of this traditional African tribe seems to capture the idea of hell as expressed in the New Testament books. There may be not exact correlation in the two contexts. This however deters conduct that is undesirable to members of communities. Africans longed for purity of heart, and such ideas visualized this purity of heart.

These ideas of traditional Africans can be appreciated if the researcher used a method of study that will allow for an analysis of the African context. Certain religious concepts in African culture and religion will not fall into place like a jigsaw puzzle into the concepts expressed in the Bible. The various 'ways of life' of the practitioners of African religion, have always been interpreted by non-practitioners. Both the outsiders as well as Africans have tried. They sought to explain the religious life of Africa from external criteria. Scholars may look at African religion from the perspective of their own religious persuasion. The inculturation hermeneutic requires that the reader be understood as 'reader-in-context' that is, reader who consciously takes his/her socio-cultural context as a point of departure in the reading, and who is part and parcel of the community whose world-view and life experience he/she shares.

3.4 Conception of omniscience

The whole conception of the omniscience of the ancestors has its ontological basis in the notion that they are above and beyond. In this way, they overlook and watch over everything in which their descendants are engaged (Ephirim-Donkor 1997:139). What better place to have a panoramic view than from up high. Moreover, the invisibility of the ancestors offers them locomotion and omnipresence.

Specifically, in pouring a libation, the ground becomes the focal point because that is where they would emerge to take

their respective places among humans. The infant spiritual personality, even though it is thought of as originating from the ancestral world above, emerges from below via its physical mother.

The name *Samanadze* (Asamando) itself is illustrative. It points to the location of the ancestral world as above and beyond. The suffix *adze* or *do*, denotes a place. This place may be a city, a kingdom, or a world utterly different from this tangible world. Yet, even while different, it is similar to the world of tangibility except that it is the ideal world where the impermanence of the mundane is nonexistent. The only way to gain entry into and become a citizen of this intangible world is by becoming a spiritual personality: hence, *Samanadze,* the place of the *saman*.

Finally, the ancestral world is within and without, because the location of the ancestral world is an innate phenomenon prevalent wherever the individual is found. For example, when the individual throws a morsel to the ground, the efficacy of the ritual is the same irrespective of where it is performed. More than being an intrinsic quality, it is a shared phenomenon ritualized to convey clearly defined meanings for the individual in relation to the ancestors.

A thesis for the theological motive behind this search for ancestors is, if we could reclaim such a cultural originality, we could be able to develop within its structural parameters a theology that is authentically Christian and equally

authentically African. The justification of this is grounded in natural theology. God has spoken to African ancestors before the arrival of Christianity. In other words, for Christianity to have a meaning and relevance, it cannot come as totally alien and unconnected with the word of God spoken to African ancestors through creation. The task is to discover how this word was heard and its repercussions in life of African ancestors. This is the reasoning behind the inculturation hermeneutic.

3.5 The nature and functions of the ancestors

A significant dimension in the role played by the ancestors is how they are believed to transmit and safeguard life. The ancestors are models for the living. The words of Max Seckler, cited in Bujo (1992:30) are appropriate that:

> "… time and history are real, irreversible and unrepeatable. They can be posed the question of the meaning of life. But there is more to it than simply imitating the behaviour of the ancestors. Traditional actions and formulas really bring strength to the living, enabling them to live better in the future".

The recalling of 'the past', effects what it signifies. Health, wealth and the enjoyment of life, may be rooted in the past, but

it is the past that has meaning for the present and the future. The present is shaped by the past. Indeed, the final consummation, when all things will come to their perfection, is already present in the beginning.

Tradition then, in the African way of thinking, is not to be regarded in deterministic, much less in a fatalistic way. It is to be regarded rather as a potency, which the individual may choose to actuate or not. Success or failure depends on a personal choice: in freely recalling the life-giving actions and words of ancestors, a person is choosing life; but in neglecting these things, that person is choosing death. In that sense, the individual is responsible for what happens, by deciding whether or not to follow the path which he or she knows leads to life.

 It is in such thoughts and belief systems that Africans understand the nature and functions of ancestors. Daneel (1970:112-124) examines the thinking of the *Shona* of Zimbabwe among whom his principal work has been done. The *Shona* acknowledge a properly differentiated hierarchy of ancestor spirits. Just as the position of every living member of a lineage is established by seniority or subordination, mutual interaction and established obligations. The spirit world is ordered according to similar principles. The world of the ancestors is in a certain sense a prolongation of the lineage, a continuum that embraces the dead, the living and the unborn.

At the bottom of the hierarchy of spirits we find the family ancestors *midzimu yapamusha*, consisting of the individual and his departed father, mother and patrilineal grandparents. These ancestors are in intimate contact with their living relations, and it is said on them: "They are near us" (*vari pedo nesu*). Although the Shona lineage groups are organized patrilineally, the matrilineal spirits also play an important role inasmuch as the spirit of a woman's mother or grandmother can influence her procreation powers.

Over and above the family spirits, the patrilineal patriachal spirits of the different generations form a unity. The special guardian spirits of a family belong to the seniors in this category. More superior still in the hierarchy we find the tribal spirits *mhondoro or marudzi* that represent the tribe. The recognized founders of a tribe or clan and the exceptional *mhondoro* spirits, which have with the passage of time developed into a multi-tribal (virtually national) position with a consequential extension of their sphere of influence, belong to this group.

The ancestors are dependent upon *Mwari,* the traditional Supreme Being, for the exercise of their various functions. This distinguishes them from being equated to God or Christ, a misconception that has troubled readers for many years. Therefore, ancestors are representatives of *Mwari* and act as mediators between him and their living relatives. Although the family ancestors sometimes direct petitions of their survivors through the hierarchy of spirits to the Supreme Being, it is

especially the tribal spirits, who are understood to be close to *Mwari*. The tribal spirits play the most prominent role as mediators between God and man. The tribal spirits are expected to act as advocates before *Mwari,* the god of fertility.

The gap of approach that results from the observance of seniority in Zulu culture has been pointed out. This makes the role of the ancestors necessary. The gap is not only between the living and the living-dead but it exists also between the living and God. As is also evident in African mythology this gap is due to people's sinfulness. God being first to appear as well as the custodian of all life, the gap is not in terms of age but of being and nature.

This yawning gap necessitated the creation of a bridge between the living and the dead. Ndwandwe (1982:22-23) maintains that the Zulu people believe that ancestors constitute this bridge. A few functions of ancestors are mentioned here. The functions of ancestors overlap in certain respects with gospel features that have been discussed earlier. This is because there is no water- tight compartment between ancestors and cultural practices. The veneration of ancestors is accomplished in the culture of the people.

3.5.1 Mediation

Mbiti (1975:62) explains the intermediary function better when he says that people feel themselves to be very small in the sight of God. In approaching him they sometimes need the help of

someone else, just as in social life it is often the custom to approach someone of high status through someone else. For that reason, some African peoples make use of helpers in approaching God, although they also approach him directly.

These helpers may be called intermediaries. Some are human beings, while others are spiritual beings. The human beings include priests, kings, medicine men, seers, oracles, diviners, 'rain-makers' and ritual elders. These are often the ones who conduct acts of worship, whether formal or informal, and attend to the needs of their community. People go to them and tell them their needs, and it is then their duty to approach God through prayer, sacrifice, offerings and the interpretation of visions or dreams.

Among the spiritual beings who are believed to help people in their approach to God are divinities, some spirits, especially those of former national leaders and heroes, and those of the dead who are still remembered in the family. When people make prayers, sacrifices and offerings, they sometimes address members of their families who died recently. For national or communal needs, the people may address departed kings, chiefs, clan founders, or the divinity or spirit of the area.

The intermediaries are a link between God the Creator and human beings. It is believed that they have easier access to him than ordinary people, although anybody can approach God directly if they have need to do so. The idea of intermediaries fits well with the African world-view of the universe, which

holds that the invisible world has its own life and population. I maintain that this kind of thinking projects a futuristic life beyond this present. It is a kind of eschatology, which gives people hope and meaning in this life in preparation for qualifying to the future.

The life of this invisible world is in some ways higher than that of man, but God is higher still. In order to reach God effectively it may be useful to approach him by first approaching those who are lower than he is but higher than the ordinary person. The notion of intermediaries also helps people to feel protected from the greatness of God that might otherwise crush the individual. The author of the book of Matthew 17:1 – 9, relates a story of the transfiguration of Jesus. His greatness made Peter, James and John to fall on their faces, overcome with fear. This incident is cited only as a contact point of the African thought system with the First Mediterranean World as indicated in the book of John especially as regards to the greatness of God which Africans accord to Him.

Besides the greatness of God that is shown here, mention is also made of Elijah and Moses. These are personalities from the Old Testament. They must have long passed away, but they are 'brought to life' here. This particular incident corresponds well with the African philosophy where ancestors (who have long passed away) are 'brought to life'. Their presence is seen and felt today. They are being revered by the living. The apostle Peter exclaims in Luke 9: 33

> "…Master, how good it is that we are here! We
> will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses,
> and one for Elijah".

The idea of building tents or shrines suggests that the place and quality of ancestors will be respected. The African culture is home to respecting and venerating ancestors. Luke 9: 30 says that the two men Moses and Elijah were 'talking' to Jesus. Ancestors are not just dead persons, but they 'talk' to Jesus. The mediatory function is also emphasized here, in a similar way that African culture understands the concept.

This biblical message proclaimed in the Bible points to an immanent referent, so too is it also maintained in this thesis that African traditional culture enshrines the gospel message as it points to an immanent referent. The message of life contained in African traditional culture and religion points to God.

People fear to come alone too close to God. By using intermediaries, they feel that someone speaks on their behalf, taking their message to God. The departed, are used as intermediaries because it is felt that they speak both the language of the invisible world and the language of human beings (Mbiti 1975:63).

Although African peoples use these intermediaries in performing some of their acts of worship, they do not worship

the intermediaries themselves as such. Africans simply use them as 'conveyer belts', as helpers or assistants. By speaking through intermediaries they feel that they show more respect, esteem, honour and courtesy towards God, who must be approached with reverence and humility.

This system of mediation indicates among other things that the *Shon*a Supreme Being, remains in a much closer relationship with his creatures than the theory of a *deus otiosus* allows for (Daneel 1970:112-124). The direct involvement of *Mwar*i with his people is presupposed. Actually his apparent separation which makes mediation necessary is principally a projection of that social custom of the *Shona* according to which an ordinary person never approaches one of high status in any way except through an intermediary. Conversely, that *Mwari* represents the concerns of the ancestor spirits is reflected in the fact that he encourages the *Shona* to adhere to their custom when he gives oracular utterances at the cult caves near Bulawayo. Neglect of the ancestral spirits, is frequently indicated by *Mwari* as the cause of drought.

The ancestors' mediatory functions are dependent upon the activities of their living relatives. Reciprocity is of cardinal importance. The favourable action of the ancestors is determined by them being honoured and remembered by their relatives according to the norms of the lineage. Before the wandering spirit (*mweya*) of a departed adult (who was married and had children) can act as a mediator, his living relatives

must carry out a sort of initiatory rite (*kugadzira*) which elevates him to the status of a proper ancestor spirit (*mudzimu*).

The mediatory function of the living with respect to the dead is thus a precondition for the eventual mediation of the dead with God on behalf of men. It should be noted here though, that the former mediation is in the nature of a manipulative ritual. The living relatives who are responsible for the rite do not approach Mwari for the departed in order to bring about the advanced state of ancestorhood. Although the responsibility of the living for the dead is thus strongly motivated amongst the traditionalists, we do not here discover a clear parallel with the idea of mediation in some Christian churches in which the living intercede on behalf of the departed.

The mediatory function of the ancestors and their dependence upon Mwari should not be over-emphasized, however, since they are always regarded as possessing "great power" *(simba guru)*. If they are correctly honoured, they meet the needs of their dependants directly without any idea of a relationship between God and man. Basically, the patrilineal spirits function as the guardians of the family and the matrilineal spirits function as the maintainers of the fecundity of their female relatives.

Here, the African cult of ancestor veneration, the respect given to deceased people, who have attained a certain degree of sanctity is brought to completion. The biblical text (Lk 9: 28-36), where characters of old are 'brought to life' with respect

and dignity meets this African quest for glory. Another biblical parable that strengthens the African cult of ancestral veneration as embodying gospel features is mentioned in Luke 16: 19-31. In the parable, Lazarus dies and is carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. Abraham, of many generations in time, is 'brought to life'. Not only is he a 'dumb' and helpless figure, but is imbued with authority. The rich man requests Abraham in verse 24 to 'take pity' on him. These are characteristics that African cult of ancestor veneration accords to ancestors. Ancestors are able to influence course of events and special sacrifices and rituals are performed to ensure protection (procreation, success, destruction, and so forth).

The rich man in this parable asks Abraham to mediate or communicate on his behalf (Lk 16: 24):

> ".. send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water
> and cool my tongue…"

Abraham can save him from pain (destruction). This is another characteristic that the cult of ancestor veneration believes ancestors are able to perform.

In verse 27 he asks Abraham to send a warning to others, so that they do not go for pain as he does. Abraham is asked to do a mediatory function, something that African cult of ancestor veneration upholds. This again strengthens the idea of the

gospel being enshrined in the African cult of ancestor veneration.

These biblical sayings or parables are said to have been told by Jesus himself. Abraham is not portrayed as competitor to Jesus. African ancestors too are not competitors to Jesus. They do not replace Christ in the minds of Africans. The inculturation hermeneutic assists the researcher to delve into the culture so as to interpret its salient features.

3.5.2 Procreation

Procreation is another function that ancestors are believed to provide to living relatives. Mbiti (1969:26) maintains that this is related to the concept of personal immortality that should help us to understand the religious significance of marriage in African societies. Unless a person has close relatives to remember him when he has physically died, then he is nobody and simply vanishes out of human existence like a flame when it is extinguished. Therefore it is a duty, religious and ontological, for everyone to get married. If a man has no children or has only daughters, he finds another wife so that through her, children (or sons) may be 'born', who would survive him and keep him (with the other living-dead of the family) in personal immortality.

Procreation is the absolute way of insuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality. Ancestors ensure such a function and that is why, Dyrness (1990:35) noted that in Sierra Leone, a family would visit a cemetery to tell the ancestors about the impending marriage: Is everything in order? Are the prospects propitious? They pour drink on the ground and scatter cola nuts. If the cola nuts land in a proper way, all will go well. If the nuts do not land as desired, they are thrown again. In this way, for generations Africans have played their fears and faith at every crisis point of marriage, childbirth, illness, crops, rains and harvest.

And it is in such a setting, 'this-worldly', yet faith-filled – that Christianity has confronted Africans. Because traditional religion permeated all departments of life, it is noted that there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material area of life. Every area of life raises religious questions. An approached that needs to be used in interpreting the context should take into account such a setting.

3.5.3 Protection

Daneel (1970:147-152) maintains that virtually all Shona believe that "the family spirits protect the family" *(midzimu yapamusha inorinda musha)*. While this protection becomes visible in the attainment of success in all aspects of life, the basic concept here is that the ancestral spirits keep guard at the doors of the family homes during the night. Whenever the evil powers, sorcerers and witches are at their most active and

create a menace, the guardian spirits stand at the door (*kumira pamukova)* to avert the danger. In all such activities God is not abandoned, but researchers need to go deeper into the context to understand that God is implied. On the surface, everything seems to be centred on the ancestors, yet the ultimate protector of life is God.

3.5.4 Destruction

In contrast with the positive functions, stands the destructive power of the ancestors. Daneel (1970:48) maintains that if they are neglected, they can kill (*uraya*), cause grief (*kurwadza*) or inflict trouble (kunetsa). Sickness, death and accident are thus frequently connected with the displeasure of the ancestors. They do not destroy their relatives by direct mortal blows but they withhold their protective function and expose the family member to the powers of evil. The opposite pole of *kumira pamukova* is therefore *kuzarura mukova* (to open the door), thus giving the family enemies a free hand. To obtain some measure of security in this existence or regaining of the guardian functions of the ancestors is of the utmost importance.

3.5.5 Communication

As with most other Africans, the Shona live in continuous contact with their ancestors. Communication from the side of

the ancestors take place through dreams, the causing of sickness, or periodical revelation of their wishes through a recognized medium. Here, a communication function is being performed. The living are told what is expected of them from the 'other' world. In their turn the living relatives address their ancestors in a number of symbolic ways. For example, to 'give' the ancestors some food during meals; by private talk with an object – frequently a beer pot or blanket – that represents the ancestors is addressed; or in the wider ritual context when a recognized official of the group addresses the ancestor spirits concerned.

Sometimes the *mudzima* speaks a clear language during a dream. Whenever serious illness or misadventure has occured a traditional 'doctor' *(nganga)* is consulted. The *nganga* (inyanga, in Zulu), in his turn, uses divination to discover which spirit is at work and what ritual deeds are necessary to put the spirit concerned to rest. There is a large number of more or less 'standardized patterns of conflict between ancestors and their kinsmen who are under duress. Infertility, for example, it is maintained to be frequently caused by a matrilineal spirit. This spirit is laying legal claim to a specific sacrificial animal that has not yet been made available by her in-laws. In short, this means that *lobola* (cattle for the bride) has not yet been properly delivered so that the ancestors can accept the pact or agreement between the parties and bless them with children, hence infertility. This is another function that ancestors oversee.

3.5.6 Lack of success

Lack of success is ascribed to a wandering spirit of a dead person who is dissatisfied because his or her official incorporation in the realm of the ancestors (*kugadzira*) has been unnecessarily delayed by the kinship group concerned. Some people perform the rite of re-integration of the dead into the community of the ancestors after a year or two. The rites are intended to ensure that the community of the living and the dead is disrupted. Neglect of such rites can only spell misfortune. It means that the whereabouts of the soul of the deceased is unknown.

Commenting on these rites, Crafford (1996:15) writes:

> "Hiervoor is daar 'n spesiale seremonie wat deur die Zoeloes '*ukubuyisa ekhaya*' genoem word (die terugbring huis toe-seremonie) wat 'n paar maande na die begrafnis plaasvind en selfs nog belangriker as die begrafnis is. Dan word die hele familie na 'n feesgeleentheid uitgenooi waar 'n bees geslag word en die voorvadersgees in hulle midde terugverwelkom word. Nou word die rouklere afgehaal, want die aftstowerne is nou nie meer afwesig nie, maar deel van die gemeenskap".

> "A special ceremony that the Zulus call '*ukubuyisa ekhaya*' (the bringing-back home) and

that is more important than the funeral is done a few months after the burial. The entire family is invited to a feast where a beast is slaughtered. The ancestors are welcomed into the peoples' midst. The clothes for mourning are removed because the deceased is no longer absent but, part of the community".

From now onwards, offerings, food and beer are put aside for him. Van Niekerk (1996:8) comments on this continuity of life this way:

"Omdat lewe en dood albei in die sirkelgang opgeneem is, is dié wat heengaan het nog steeds wesenlik by die lewendes teenwoordig. Hieruit volg die intieme verbintenis met die voorvaders wat so sentraal staan in die tradisionele geloof dwarsoor swart Afrika".

Because both life and death are taken to be in a circular passage, those who die are in reality still present. Out of this follows the intimate interconnectedness with the ancestors who are so central in traditional belief throughout black Africa.

3.5.7 Sickness

The patrilineal guardian spirit *(tateguru)* causes sickness because the customary sacrificial bull has not yet been offered to him. The claims of the troublesome ancestor spirit thus usually rests on established and recognized inherent rights that have not been fully met by the living. Since the *nganga's* prescriptions in such cases almost always imply a type of natural legal obligation in which the concerns of the entire kinship group are involved – there is considerable pressure on the 'guilty' persons to make good their obligations. The suffering party frequently knows or guesses which spirits are responsible for their condition, but the authoritative verdict of the *nganga* is necessary before a key position as activating authority in the practice of the ancestor cult.

The ancestor cult has, in a certain sense, supplied the African with his requirement for a continued existence after death. Present and future salvation is determined by the preservation of the unity between the living and the dead. The ancestors act as the champions of this inner unity whenever it is threatened. In other words, they sanction the moral code of good conduct to which the living are subject, and are justified in exercising their mystical power whenever this code is transgressed.

According to this view of life, sin is primarily a trespass against the community because the inner harmony is brought into peril and with it the welfare of the group. This again calls for an inculturation hermeneutic to interpret the context in which sin is defined. Neglect of the ancestors is consequently an almost unforgivable evil because it is tampering with the mystical foundation of the wellbeing of the community.

Daneel (1970:46) concludes that the ancestor cult plays a central role in the religion of the African. It is directly linked with traditional belief in a Supreme Being and also influencing magic practices. Although the Supreme Being's dealings with the individual are experienced only indirectly or sporadically, magic is practiced by 'specialists', interchange with the world of spirits pervades the existence of the traditionalist. The mutual influence of the living and the dead is so deeply rooted in African culture that it lives on even in educated African Christians (see also Olowola 1993:7). For this reason the Church in Africa has continually to reflect upon both the ancestor cult and the general belief in spirits.

All too often the Christian practice has been to judge the ancestor cult as heathenish idolatry without considering the psycho-social factors which are at work in this belief. Ela (1988:19) puts it this way:

> "Over the years, what is no more than anthropological reality has been too quickly

labeled as 'pagan' or 'idolatrous'. This serious misunderstanding must be resolved".

Inculturation hermeneutic seeks a sound interpretation and solution to this problem. In so doing, (labeling the African ancestor cult as pagan) we did no do justice to the holistic approach to the traditional African. There is, therefore, every inducement to make the empirical survival of the ancestor cult and its nature and influence its scope before a responsible theological approach can be made to the existing problems.

We have already established that the elders are sages, counselors, mediators and ultimately judges. These distinguishing characteristics are immutable upon their death. However, they undergo 'etherealization' in concert with their new spiritual personalities and realm of existence. As transformed entities, their essential attributes are the same as their earthly counterparts. The reason for this is that when the spiritual personalities materialize, they do so in the same form and shape, wearing the same identifiable clothing, and engaged in the same work they were known to have done while they were on earth.

Ephirim-Donkor (1997:140) maintains that the ancestors, having lived, died, and been resurrected and vindicated, have achieved something that no human being has – immortality. They have reached the highest state of existence, comparable to God, though not God. This is because they cannot create or

alter the created order. However, they have achieved eternal existence after first achieving perfection as elders.

Like their earthly counterparts in relation to the king, the ancestors, function in like manner in relation to the ultimate King, God. Yet eternity should not be construed as a 'finality' or a state of stagnation. Rather, it is a dynamically active state due to the phenomenon of reincarnation. It is believed that the ancestors may be reincarnated (via their spirits) as many times as possible to help people. Those who die without fulfilling their purpose of being also reincarnated to accomplish their God-given existential purpose.

Ephirim-Donkor (1997:140) believes that when the recently arrived spiritual personality gets to *Samanadze*, it is welcomed, given a stool to sit on, given water to drink and asked to give account of his or her ethical life. The system of justice is based on aggregation. The ancestors listen carefully and render their decision based on whether or not the spiritual personality before them did more good than evil. If the good outweighs the evil, then it is admitted into ancestorhood. But if found to have done more evil than good, then it is found guilty as a *saman bon* (evil spiritual personality) and membership into ancestorhood is denied it. Thus denied, the evil spiritual personality will reincarnate to undo its evil deeds in the same way a childless couple may reincarnate for the sole purpose of having children. We must understand that the ultimate goal in the world is to lead the ideal life and become an ancestor.

This gives researchers a challenge to study and try to interpret what traditional Africans understood by ancestors. It seems to be somehow the same as 'saints' in the modern Christian churches. There may be differences in the expressions but the main idea is to encourage an ethical and moral life on earth. Africans conceived of this and embodied it in their culture. Inculturation hermeneutic would require that the context should remain African. That is, one would not need to change culture in order to be the child of God. But one would use and study the culture in depth to realize gospel features embodied in it.

3.6 Is it ancestor veneration or worship?

Setiloane (1976:18-19) submits that:

> "… Africans, unless they have grown to internalize the 'Westerners' views of themselves, strongly resent the suggestion that they 'worship' *Badimo* (ancestors). They argue that the European word 'worship' does not properly convey the same meaning as that 'service' (*tirelo)* which they perform in relation to their ancestors. The 'service' that is rendered to *Badimo* is in fact of the same quality and level as that rendered to one's parents while they are living. In SeTswana: '*Re direla Badimo'*: We serve (fulfil all proper duties towards, that is, provide them with the

necessities of life, food, clothing, etc.) but *'Re rapela Modimo'*: We pray to *Modimo*".

The logic of this is that *Badimo* are merely our 'deceased parents'. But it needs to be noted that parenthood in the African concept is not limited to the physical relationship. It spells authority over one that originates beyond the two parties concerned.

Parenthood, even while the parent is living, is an intermediary rank. It is also a channel of forces which span the various levels of being in this life, across the homes and clans in the total community of village and tribe as well as with the unseen world of *BoModimo* (Divinity) which is strongly inclined to be identified with the underground. *Mosima*: the Abyss from whence the first people came and to which all go.

The language terminology is again of importance here. It expresses the deeper meaning that can only be captured in that particular culture. Therefore, language becomes a vehicle of thought. If the thought is not properly translated, it may lead to misunderstanding or misrepresentation and subsequent 'labeling' of African religion and culture as incompatible with the gospel message.

It would, on the other hand, be untrue to represent the concept of *Badimo* as so human as to strip them of Divinity. *Badimo* are as the word suggests '… *of Modimo'* and therefore share in

the essence of *Modimo, BoModimo* (Divinity). Setiloane (1976:19) indicates that in Rudolf Otto's terminology they also share in the quality of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Actually the experience of their presence is exactly that: Numinousness. But this quality of *et mysterium tremendum fascinans* can be experienced also when one comes into contact with people alive in the flesh. Indeed with some, for example a chief, a *ngaka* (traditional doctor), etc. more than with others, one feels the dignity. Hence the expression '*Motho ke Modimo'*. In *Badimo (ancestors)* this quality of being is, as it were, distilled, and therefore the experience thereof intensified.

Mbiti (1969:26) explains the concept and understanding of ancestor worship among Africans as follows:

> "… the act of pouring out libation (of beer, milk or water), or giving portions of food to the living-dead, are symbols of communication, fellowship and remembrance. They are the mystical ties that bind the living-dead to their surviving relatives. Therefore these acts are performed within the family. The oldest member of the family is the one who has the longest *Sasa* period and therefore the one who has the longest memory of the departed. He performs or supervises these acts of remembrance on behalf of the entire family, addressing (when the occasion demands it) the symbolic meal to all the departed (living-dead) of the family, even if only one or two of the departed

may be mentioned by name or position (e.g. father, grandfather). There is nothing here about the so-called 'ancestor worship', even if these acts may so seem to the outsiders who do not understand the situation".

It is true that on the surface, an untrained mind may interpret such practices as worshipping ancestors. This could be because someone of a different faith, for example, a Christian may expect the name of Christ to dominate the discourse. Once that is not pronounced, a conclusion would most likely be that God is not known. The inculturation hermeneutic requires a deeper interpretation of the setting or context in which such acts take place. Even though the name of God is not pronounced, the ultimate recipient of offerings and sacrifices is God. Ancestors are only honoured. The context is not identical to one of another faith, such as Christianity. Therefore one cannot 'Christianize' the African culture. One can however investigate how the gospel message is embodied in this culture.

Commenting on the offerings that African give to ancestors, Crafford (1996:16) argues:

"Dit is verkeerd om te praat van vooroueraanbidding. Hulle word nie as gode aanbid nie, maar word vereer as lede van die gemeenskap, nou net met hoër status en magte".

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> It is incorrect to speak of worshipping of forefathers. They are not worshipped as gods, but are only honoured as members of the community, now only with higher status and power.

Funeral rites give expression to the belief that the dead person becomes a guardian spirit who shares life with the early family. In some tribes, the deceased may ask 'for a little fire to warm himself', he or she demands a cult. For some days after the death, the late departed may be given a place at meals. The meal especially makes the dead present, and so has a sacramental character.

Bujo (1992:24) correctly cites Hans Haselbarth saying:

> "The deceased takes part in the common meal, at which he is still accepted as relative. The clan eats with its dead as well as with its living. It is above all the common meal that unites people in Africa, and no one questions the real presence of the deceased, in spite of the separation wrought by death. The holy meal is an effective sign of the communion between the living and the dead".

Here too, eating together seals the continuing bond with the dead, while also strengthening the bond between the living. The sacramental dimension of the ritual increases the faith of

the participants, in spite of some elements that may seem to the outsider to be very human and even profane.

It is not only the funeral feasts that an inchoate communion between the living and the dead is experienced. People are conscious of the presence of the ancestors whenever they enjoy fullness of life. (see Asante 2001:361). Good health, numerous progeny, healthy cattle, an abundant harvest in crops: all these are felt as signs of the ancestral blessings. Van Niekerk (1993: 108) observed that black theologians explain that the ancestors are buried in the earth, so that people are intimately linked to their ancestors through the earth. Without that they have no roots and no identity. The cattle kraal is at the centre of the traditional North-Sotho world, because this is where the ancestors lie buried. This gives meaning to cattle dung, and the head of cattle is "the god with the wet nose".

It is through the various acts of 'worship' described here that African traditional culture and religion provide people with the feeling that God is close to them and they to Him. Every cultural practice however needs to be taken in context and the inculturation hermeneutic approach is suggested as appropriate.

Éla (1988:20) makes this conclusion:

> "If the relationship with the ancestors consists of the belief that the deep communion established among the members of a family is not broken, but is maintained despite and beyond death, then

> nothing in this relationship is contrary to the Christian faith".

My submission in this thesis is that not only is the relationship with ancestors 'complementary' to the Christian faith, but also embodies the gospel message in that it encourages honor, respect and constant prayer for the departed. It also encourages the living to remain faithful in the knowledge that the departed 'are with God'. In other words, there are lots of elements of the 'Good News' in traditional African culture and religion, just as there are such elements in the Bible. Many readers tend to condemn traditional African culture and religion because of the 'one-sided' view of life and faith in which they are grew up. Once a person sees one side of life, it is difficult to see the 'other side' of things. People tend to justify only their own religious view of life. Their subjectivity 'blinds' them from exploring other philosophies of life.

The inquiry at this point is into Christianity and other religions of mankind. It is to be understood that the intention here is to argue that African traditional religion, like every religion, challenges the Christian theologian to gain a broader understanding of religion in order that he may realize the full implication of the Gospel of Christ.

Gottwald (1993:239) concludes that what we can no longer do in good conscience is to isolate the religious factors from the total social setting as though, once the historical and social

'accidents' are noted as 'background', we are free to move on the self-contained religious essentials.

Even though most Africans believe in the resurrection of the dead, they also strongly believe in their own culture. In fact, the 'dead' who are ancestors are not interpreted as dead. They are believed to be 'alive' and therefore, they are venerated. Some Christian churches honor what they call 'Saints' in their services. They invoke them in prayers. Some sodalities are named after such saints (St. Mary's, St. Joseph's, etc). They are taken to have been of good examples while they lived and walked on earth as of how we should conduct our lives in the community of faith. Among many blacks, the most solemn oath is the one made over a grave. Status and masks are representations of a human and not divine level of the spiritual presence of the ancestors. They are not worshipped but honored.

3.7 The act of libation

I have decided to single out the act of libation to demonstrate further what could be understood under the 'African ancestor veneration'. If neither ancestors nor their relics (in the case of royal ancestors, their stools or throne are 'worshipped' as divinities), it is in the act of libation that their true significance is understood. The act of libation is commonly held to be a purely religious act, virtually the traditional equivalent of

Christian prayer. Bediako (1995:220) cites Nana Addo Dankwa disagreeing as follows:

> "Libation originally, was never intended to be a completely religious act. Libation consists of three separate acts, the first two being purely cultural acts, and the last one being a religious act".

> The three separate acts of libation according to Bediako (1995:220) are as follows:

> *First,* an act of *invitation* to the ancestor to enable the ancestor to feel free to actively participate in whatever activity that the living are engaged in or (are) about to commence at the time that the invitation is issued.

> *Second*, when the ancestor is presumed to have responded to the invitation or the person pouring libation gives a *welcome* address during which the purpose of the invitation is explained. From that point onwards, the ancestor is presumed to have joined the living in taking part in whatever activity that is about to take place.

The point of the welcome address is that since ancestors are considered as the heads, both of the living and the dead within the community … the fatherly address of welcome and

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greetings as is normally made to the living head of the family, is also extended to the ancestral head.

The understanding of the act of libation demonstrates that the traditional culture of Africa never allowed the worshipping of ancestors and consequently never in contradiction to the gospel message. Bediako (1995:220) again cites Nana Addo Dankwa as saying that these customary preliminaries are at times mistakenly considered as prayer to the ancestors. JH Driberg's view is recalled:

> "What we mistake for religious attitude is nothing more than a projection of the African social behaviour … for no African prays to his late grandfather anymore than he prays to his living father". Bediako (1995:220)

It is only after these 'purely cultural acts' of invitation, welcome and information have been completed that the *third act*, the properly 'religious act' of *prayer* is performed.

When the roll has been called, that is, when the ancestor has been welcomed and everybody is present and all is set, prayers are made to introduce the particular act for which the invitation has been issued.

Bediako (1995:220) further cites Nana Addo Dankwa commenting thus:

"It means therefore that the ancestor, who at the moment, has joined the living, also takes part in offering prayer. Under the circumstances, therefore, it is not correct to say that the prayers are made to the ancestor and that the ancestor has been deified".

The above-mentioned citations negate the idea that ancestors are worshipped or prayed. Scholars need to delve into the cultural aspects of the community and social setting that they study. Instead of condemning African traditional culture and religion, we could appreciate it and realize that it embodies gospel message in a unique way.

To illustrate this interpretation of the libation acts, Nana Addo Dankwa is further cited in Bediako (1995:220) where he gives a sample text to accompany the act of libation appropriate to the occasion of the 'outdooring' of a new-born baby:

"Here is water, our revered ancestor. We have invited you this morning to come and help us in outdooring your own grandson. As you know, we cannot undertake such an important customary rite without your participation. You are therefore welcome to assume your role as *Abusua Panyin* (head of family) to supervise this rite. *O Busuburu*, on behalf of our ancestor, I am calling you as the clan god to bless this family. We ask

for long life and prosperity. We commit this child,
about to be named, to your care. Give him long
life and let him be a good man to the glory of this
family. Long life for all the members of the
family; blessing to our ancestor(s)".

Since, on this interpretation of the acts of libation, the prayer is
strictly addressed to the deities, *Obosom* or divinity, *Suman* of
non-personal spiritual force, or Supreme God, depending upon
which one the person offering the prayer subscribes to. Nana
Addo Dankwa, cited in Bediako (1995:220) also felt able to
add:

"If therefore the families concerned are Christians,
instead of *Busumburu,* Christ's name could be
used".

Not everybody will agree, and Nana Addo Dankwa himself
would not claim to be speaking for all of Africa. So insistent is
he that ancestors are never worshipped, that he even disagrees
with the designation of ancestor as a Christological title.
Reacting to J.B. Danquah's portrayal of God as the great
ancestor in his Akan doctrine of God, Nana Addo Dankwa
quoted in Bediako (1995:221) states:

"God and Christ are not ancestors in the sense that
we Akans consider our forefathers. The Akan will
consider any entity as an ancestor only in the

situation where the entity concerned during the 1st degree of existence had all the human qualities of the Akan. He must have interacted with others in the normal way before passing on to the 2nd degree of existence as a mortal being".

God has never stayed physically in this world even though he is said to be omnipresent and yet he cannot be considered to be part of the living community. He is our creator. Christ, even though he stayed physically with us, the difference is that his body never saw corruption in the grave. So unlike an ancestor, his spirit is not part of the living community in the sense that we consider our ancestors who saw corruption in graves. The spirit of Christ that is part of the Trinity cannot be considered as an ancestor.

The inculturation hermeneutic is about the interpretation of the past in a way which shows that the present experience and knowledge of the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been truly anticipated. It has also been prefigured in the quests and responses to the transcendent in former times, as these have been reflected in the lives of African people.

3.8 Rituals and festivals

3.8.1 **The meaning and importance of rituals**

A rite or ritual is a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. It is a means of communicating something of religious significance, through word, symbol and action. Therefore a ritual embodies a belief or beliefs. The ritual word is powerful since it is spoken in seriousness and solemnity, and it is repeated every time that ritual is done. In the previous sections of this thesis, it has been shown how certain rites were performed with regard to birth and marriage. The rites were a way of expressing thanks, praise and appreciation to God.

Some rites are done or observed to preserve nature that God has given to man. They are done to respect fellow men and to show love. The embodiment of the gospel message in these rites or rituals can be fully appreciated if a method of studying the African context is properly selected. This thesis employed the inculturation hermeneutic, which is one of the Third World approaches to religious study.

There are innumerable rituals and ceremonies in African religion. Since there are no sacred books in African religion, it remains an oral culture. It is a living religion that is written in the lives of the people (Magesa 1997:22). Africans celebrate life. They celebrate their religion. They dance it, sing it and act

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it. A lot of the visible demonstration of African religion occurs in rituals and festivals. These embody what people believe, what they value, and what they wish to apply in daily life. Through rituals, African people not only act their religion, but also communicate it to the younger generations.

3.8.2 Different kinds of rituals

There are a wide variety of rituals in African religion. Some concern the life of the individual from before birth to after death. Some of them have already been discussed to demonstrate their religious significance and how the gospel message could be embodied in them. Others are specifically for the wider community, embracing its total life and activities. These cover the rhythm of the year with its seasons and the activities that people carry out.

There are other rituals that are performed occasionally, as when there is a war, raids, a locust invasion or a natural calamity. Rituals generate a sense of certainty and familiarity. They provide continuity and unity among those who perform or attend them (see Bujo 1992:24). In turn, people find a degree of identity through its common observance and experience. For example, the young people who go through the same rite of circumcision are bound together into a unity, and each finds his own identity within the unity of that group.

Through the ritual action and word, people feel able to exercise a certain amount of control over the invisible world and the

forces of nature. In this way man feels himself to be not just a passive creature in the universe, but a creative agent. For the purpose of ritual he uses almost everything at his disposal, including symbols and colours, incantations, oral formulas – especially invocations and prayers – and the help of mystical powers if necessary (Dyrness 1990:35).

Because there are so many rituals in African religion and culture, I shall not describe them one by one in the scope of this thesis, but shall look at different types and the role they play in the life of the individual and the community. Over and above, how the gospel message is enshrined in the activities of the culture. In other words, how is the life of the practitioners of the religion enriched within the expectations and parameters of the Gospel.

3.8.2.1 Personal rituals

We have already come across most of these. They are the rituals performed along the life's journey of the individual. They begin during pregnancy (cf. Dyrness 1990:35). They continue at birth, naming, teething, during puberty, at circumcision or clitoridectomy, in other forms of initiation, at engagement, marriage, childbearing, eldership, old age, death and when one has become a living-dead (cf. Mbiti 1969:25).

These demonstrate that life journey of the individual is accompanied by rituals. In addition to personal rituals, he also takes part in communal rituals of other individuals. Obviously

rituals are not observed at each one of these stages listed above in each African society. For some peoples, only birth, initiation, marriage and burial are considered sufficiently important to be marked by rituals and ceremonies. In other societies, naming, 'title-giving', and eldership may be the most important.

Personal rituals draw attention to the uniqueness of the individual. They tell him and the world that he matters. He or she is valuable and that he/she is a member of the wider community. He/she therefore has to live harmoniously with others. He/she has to care and love his/her neighbor. This is also an important gospel message.

Personal rituals also separate one from one status and introduce him/her to another. For example, the initiation rites terminate a person's status as a child, and confer on him/her the status of adulthood. This calls for responsibility, personally and to the community. The rituals separate one from one phase but link him/her to another. This links up with the idea of continuity. The new status brings new responsibilities and rights, and these are ritually handed over to a person.

Therefore, psychologically, the ritual concerned gives the individual confidence in oneself, and stimulates him/her to conduct himself/herself with courage in his/her new status. For example, it is good that a person takes up parenthood at the right age, when he/she is grown up to can take care of the young. An appropriate ritual would limit the rate of teenage

mothers and fathers, which seems to be a social problem of today.

Pregnancy rituals are for the purpose of blessing and protecting the mother and 'fetus' (unborn baby). Birth rituals announce or recognize the arrival of the child and its separation from the mother, and provide an opportunity to bless her and the baby. At death, the rituals send off the departed and normalize life for the survivors. The death/funeral rites have a mentally healing effect so that the survivors can go on with life again. African traditional culture addresses depression effectively in a communal way. The individual is not left alone. Loneliness is fast becoming a problem of modernity. Berglund (1976: 102) observed a comment by someone in Zululand that the Christians are lonely people. They have big windows in their houses and the light chases all the ancestral spirits out of the house. Africans see the 'interconnectedness' of all things.

3.8.2.2 Agricultural rituals

African peoples have through the centuries lived by farming, stock-keeping, hunting and fishing, as well as by 'food-gathering' in some cases. Opoku (1993:77) maintains that fishermen in Ghana observe a ritual of returning a portion of their catch into the sea to ensure that it replenishes itself. This maintained the equilibrium in nature in which God has provided to man. Many rituals have been evolved to cover all these means of livelihood, incorporating what people believe,

the values they attach to those activities and the right procedures or conduct required to make them run smoothly. Inculturation hermeneutic requires that researchers investigate how a practice of observing and preserving agricultural products impacted religiously on the lives of the people.

3.8.2.2.1 Farming rituals

These are the rituals that have to do with the earth, the soil, the crops and the seasons. There are many of them among every African people. The most common and most important of all is the 'rain-making' ritual. Mbiti (1975:129) maintains that in many countries of Africa there are specialists who look after this ritual. They are 'well trained' in matters of the weather. In some places, their office is hereditary; and they may have additional responsibilities like the famous 'rain-making' queen of the *Lovedu* in southern Africa. 'Rain-making' ceremonies are at the heart of the people's welfare since much of the life in African countries depends on the rain.

The term 'rain-making' is perhaps a wrong name for this ritual. The ceremony is chiefly an occasion for praying for rain. 'Rain-makers' do not produce rain as such. They perform rituals including sacrifices and offerings, in order to pray publicly for rain especially when its start seems to be delayed. I submit that African people have a deep faith in God, as provider and sustainer of life.

'Rain-makers' know their weather secrets well. They time their rituals carefully to coincide with the period when the rains should be starting. Their expectations are therefore realistic. They would not ask for rain at a time when it is known that the season is off. This would be to ask for the impossible or expect 'magic'.

The seasonal coming of the rains renews the activities of the community, as well as reviving the life of plants, insects and animals. African traditional culture and religion made provision to mark and celebrate this special season. They gave thanks to God for this gift of life. It is through a scientific interpretation of this cultural practice that one may understand its religious relevance and gospel values.

3.8.2.2.2 First fruits

The first fruits at the end of the cultivating season are in many African societies regarded as holy and sacred. They open up the way for the ripening of the fields and the harvest. Therefore there are rituals to mark this consideration. The rituals take away any dangers that could be incurred in eating the new harvest. This idea may be thought of as 'cooling off' the crops, or blessing the harvest, tasting the food or taking away bitterness.

The rituals of the first fruits are like religious signals to people that they may now safely eat the fruit of their labor, because by blessing the first fruits the whole harvest is consequently

blessed and made holy (sanctied) or ritually clean for human consumption.

3.8.3 Festivals

There are many occasions when festivals add to the grandeur of both personal and communal rituals. Festivals for individuals and families may accompany birth, initiation, marriages and funerals. In the life of the community there are harvest festivals, planting festivals, hunting and fishing festivals, victory festivals, coronation or accession festivals, and many others. Mostly, they have religious significance.

3.8.3.1 The benefits brought by festivals

Through festivals the life of the community is renewed. People are entertained, and their tensions find an outlet. Festivals also bring together the people as a group, thus strengthening their unity and cohesion. Religious and social values are repeated and renewed through communal festivals. People seize such occasions to solicit blessings from God or the departed, and there is a general feeling that the visible and the invisible worlds co-exist for the benefit of man who is at their centre.

Rituals and festivals are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of society. Without them, African life would be dull. Human life needs some relevant rituals and festivals to give it both solemnity and laughter.

3.8.4 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has investigated the cult of ancestor veneration. This has been a bone of contention among scholars and lay people. Using the inculturation hermeneutic, researchers are able to delve deeper into the interpretation of African culture in context. The definition of the word 'ancestor' brings to light that ancestors are the departed ones who are still respected by the living.

For one to be an ancestor is a long way or process. One goes through stages and must have been morally good and contributed to the welfare of society. One must have been exemplary in many ways. While the 'world' of the ancestors is thought of as being from below and above, the idea is to give ancestors a state of purity. They are conceived of as being omniscience. Every individual longs for such an ultimate life after death.

Ancestors perform various functions in the lives of African people. They served as mediators between man and God. When man has defaulted, ancestors would be asked to mediate so that stability and peace return. Life or broken relationships become normal again.

Ancestors also ensured procreation. When everything had been done and still couples would not beget children, ancestors

would be approached for help. They also provided protection of individuals and communities alike.

If they are neglected, they could cause destruction as a way of punishment. This was avoided at all costs. However, it happened, people would consult their 'specialists' to establish where they went wrong.

Communication, is another important 'function' that ancestors did to serve people. The African ancestors, were a channel of communication. They showed themselves to living people in dreams and visions.

Ancestors were also believed that they contributed to the lack of success. Again this would be due to neglect of certain rites or rituals. All these rituals made people feel nearer to God and He nearer to them. If these rituals are taken out of context, they may seem very irrelevant and irreligious. Without the proper methods of study, they may be condemned as against the gospel message, hence the researcher employed the inculturation hermeneutic so that a better understanding could be reached.

It has been argued that Africans did and do not worship ancestors. They only venerate and honor them. Many African scholars of religion mentioned in this study support this view. Although the actions of traditional Africans may seem mundane and secular, they are in essence religious.

The act of libation is one aspect that needed special attention. It is in this act that Africans pour beer or food on the ground, 'talk' to the ancestors and yet the ultimate recipient of the prayers is God. Africans do not pray to ancestors.

The significance of rituals and festivals has been discussed. These also have religious value. They offer people with the opportunity to be together. They offer the occasions for laughter and solemnity. Community values are passed on from one generation to the other during festivals.

The different kinds of rituals were mentioned. These included personal rituals that had to do with the life of individuals from before birth through to after death. Agricultural rituals concerned the preservation of nature. Farming rituals gave expression in thanking God for providing food, harvests and crops. So also were the first fruits rituals. They showed respect of the community for the first fruits so that more could follow. God could give more if the very little is appreciated.

African traditional culture had all the built-in mechanisms of communication. The culture had ways of ensuring that unity is maintained. The cult of ancestor veneration provided Africans with a feeling of security. It was a way of remembering the kindness of God. The gospel message could be transmitted through these African cultural practices.

Chapter 4

The concept of salvation in African traditional religion and culture.

4.1 Introduction

My purpose here is to investigate the nature and meaning of man's salvation in the traditional African milieu. The specific material for study is the formal expression of man's religiousness characteristic of Africans especially as it is visible in worship. This section of the thesis attempts to address the unique challenges and opportunities the African cultural contexts presents in the articulation of the gospel message. While upholding the truth and integrity of the Gospel in its articulation in any cultural context, we must exercise flexibility and circumspection in adapting cultural forms to proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel, understood as universally significant, must critically confirm, broaden, judge, and enrich the socio-cultural tradition within which it is proclaimed. The concept of salvation in the traditional African culture and its embodiment into the gospel message is investigated.

The involvement of the ancestors, play a very vital role in the way Africans understand salvation. Many Africans would ascribe salvation to ancestors, be it living elders or late relatives. This is extended to chiefs and kings who are taken to be sacred or divinely installed. The ancestors are however the

embodiment of salvation. Adamo (2001:47) has recently observed that

> "In the African indigenous culture, the means of dealing with traditional problems like diseases, sorcerers, witches, enemies, and the lack of success in life experience, have been developed. Western missionaries taught African Christians to discard these indigenous ways of handling these problems without offering any concrete alternative".

In the African view of reality, the sacred and the secular are taken as a unified whole. In the same way salvation may not be split into a physical or bodily and the spiritual dimension. If for instance, an African would be asked the question, "salvation from what?" The answer would most likely be, "from all that diminishes life". Bujo (1992:27) maintains that in their ancestors, Africans find wisdom and the future of life. It is therefore crucial that the rites, actions, words and laws, which the ancestors have bequeathed to the descendants, be scrupulously observed in order to attain salvation. They are the indispensable instruments of salvation.

On the other hand, Asante (2001:335 – 366) indicates that the overriding purpose of the Gospel is to bear witness to Christ, to proclaim the good news that Jesus has brought salvation to humankind, and to persuade people to trust in Jesus. At the

heart of the Gospel is the concept of salvation, which points to newness and fullness of life through Jesus Christ. The two statements seem to be contradictory. I must again at this stage add that what constitutes salvation can hardly be defined a-culturally (Kalu 1999:1; Holter 1999:1; Mugambi 1999:1).

 The world-view of a people concerns the basic assumptions regarding ultimate things on the basis of which they organize their lives. Through the process of socialization, this world-view is imposed upon individual members of the society. Every individual brought up in a given cultural milieu is conditioned to interpret reality in terms of this world-view.

Since there are diverse world-views, peoples' conceptions of the good will also be diverse. An African perspective on the goodness of the Gospel will be different from other socio-cultural perspectives. I am not asserting that a shift in perception of reality or conception of the good is impossible. Nor am I espousing a cultural relativism that asserts that any culturally dominant conception of the good is as good as any other. Socio-cultural factors must be taken into account as we think of salvation, the good that the Gospel presents.

The discussion of the place of ancestors in the African world-view in relation to Christian discipleship has tended to be stumped over the question as to whether Africans 'worship' their ancestors or 'venerate' them. When the problem is approached from this angle, then ancestors are cast in the role of rivals of Christ. It is ancestors in themselves, as our 'natural'

ancestors, so to speak, and not as possible rivals of Christ, who interests us.

By making room among the 'living-dead' for the Lord, the judge of both the living and the dead, it becomes more evident how the ancestors relate to Jesus Christ, and He to them. Because ancestors even in their realm of spirit existence, remain in African understanding essentially human just like ourselves, though with a sharing in the essence of *BoModimo* (Divinity) (cf. Setiloane 1976: 17 – 18). They cannot therefore ultimately be rivals of Christ in Christian consciousness.

As for any other people, the African's appropriation of the good, presented in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is informed by their world-views and socio-cultural contexts. This line of investigation is prescribed in terms of one of our main preoccupations: the relationship of Christianity and other ideologies. How should Christianity operate in independent Africa, indeed, in any given historic or cultural context, to make life meaningful. The inculturation hermeneutic approach is proposed and used in this thesis to investigate the cultural embodiment of the gospel message in the African context.

In this chapter, the researcher investigates the rationale and the challenge that confronts theological hermeneutics: salvation in the African context. I examine some health profile in some African communities to highlight their plight for salvation. In Traditional African societies, mechanisms were and remain in place to address these problems. My submission is that these

mechanisms as enshrined in the African culture are not contradictory to the gospel message of saving lives. I investigate the interpretations the concepts of evil and sin in Africa. Lastly, two typical examples of African communities are examined on the issue of salvation. In all these instances, I attempt to demonstrate how the gospel message is enshrined in these African traditional practices.

4.2 The rationale and challenge

Anyone who affirms the universality of the Gospel and seeks to contextualize it, confronts the challenge of presenting the truth of the Gospel without falsifying the message or rendering it unintelligible. This is what confronts theologians who have to contextualize the gospel message so that the church is born anew in each new situation or context. Asante (2001:356) maintains that the contextualization of the gospel message lies precisely in the interaction among the different cultures, the Gospel communicator and those who receive the Gospel from the communicator.

It has been stated earlier that Africans found in the gospel message a Jesus who healed the sick, made the lame to walk and the deaf to hear. They expected that some of these ailments be practically cured among their people. They valued bodily health equally as well as spiritual health. These problems were solved in traditional ways. In the African traditional context, the good news, the news of salvation, is conceived almost entirely in terms of concern for the ills and successes of

community life. For those who have achieved success in society, salvation is understood in terms of divine blessing, the 'sacralization and sanctification of success' (Asante 2001:359).

There were 'medicine men' among them that interpreted the causes of illnesses, misfortunes, and disasters. They needed salvation from all perils of life. African culture and tradition had different values from those of westerners who brought the gospel message to them but from their own cultural persuasion.

Luzbetak (1996:193) cites Robert Redfield in this regard as follows:

> "For as one comes to understand people who live by institutions and values different from one's own, at the same time one comes to see that these people are, nevertheless, at bottom quite like one's own people. The alien culture at first appears to us as a mask, enigmatic or repugnant. On closer acquaintance we see it as a garment for the spirit; we understand its harmonies and appreciate them. Finally, as acquaintance goes deeper still, we do not see, or for a time forget, the culture, but look only to the common humanity of men and women beneath".

This observation is valid when one examines African traditional culture and the context in which it takes place. My

submission in this thesis is that African traditional culture embodies gospel features as most of the practices are to promote healthy-living. The African concept of salvation is compatible to gospel values. All that researchers need is the employment of appropriate method of investigation such as the inculturation hermeneutic, to be acquainted with the culture of Africa. In the traditional African context, the good news, the news of salvation, is conceived almost entirely in terms of concern for the ills and successes of community life (Gaba 1978:389; Asante 2001:357).

African people seek solutions for their problems from the African perspective or world-view. Whether the problems pertain to material, spiritual or are of a social nature. It again confirms the assertion of Olowola (1993:7) that the African traditional thought, as pointed out in the statement of the problem remains valid even to this day. Van Niekerk (1993: 18) recalled his experiences on the African beliefs and made this observation:

> "In 1984 I became a lecturer at Turfloop, where I had grown up. At Turfloop I saw how the resistance by our theological students was increasingly exhibiting features of the traditional mythological thinking of Africa. The power of empirical proof, the interpretation of events according to natural cause and effect, a sense of personal responsibility and the like were going completely by the board. If these thought patterns

reveal themselves to be still so potent in theological students at university level, I thought there was little likelihood that Africa would develop along Western lines. Put it this way: Western culture is not the answer to Africa's problems".

My argument here is for a need to develop strategies that will address Africa's needs and not dismiss her problems when Western solutions and theologies fail. The gospel message is not only enshrined in Christianity. The Bible remains a book of faith, but African traditional culture and religion exhibits or enshrines gospel features too because it points to the immanent referent who is above human culture.

Some further discussion and comparison of the concepts of salvation in both biblical and African communities may be appropriate for future research. A thorough comparative analysis of the two experiences may be beyond the scope of this thesis at this stage. Christianity is not used as a yardstick for evaluating the authenticity or validity of African traditional culture, for that will amount to 'Christianizing' or 'secularizing' African traditional culture and religion.

My purpose here is to investigate the embodiment of the gospel message in African traditional culture and religion in as far as salvation is concerned. There could be some differences or correlation of ideas (concepts) of salvation between traditional African culture and biblical concepts. They are taken here as

useful points of contact in presenting one's message of the Gospel. These are then highlighted, as both communities (the biblical and African) express their knowledge of God and His presence in their lives through cultural media.

4.3. The biblical concept of salvation

Salvation is a concept that runs through almost all the books of the Bible. The central message that is preached is about salvation. Asante (2001:357) points out that the New Testament word *sõtéria* (salvation) relates to the verb *sõzõ*, which can carry a variety of connotations: make sound, heal, save, preserve, and save from death or keep alive. In the Septuagint, *sõzõ,* and its cognates are used to translate the Hebrew verb *yãšã*, the central idea that is freedom from what restricts and binds. The word '*yasa*', has various aspects: deliverance, salvation liberation and wholeness.

Thus, in the Old Testament, the supreme example of salvation is seen both in God's act of delivering Israel from Egypt and in protection and provision for Israel as the people journeyed through the wilderness to the promised land (Deut 6:21-23). In the New Testament, both God and Christ are presented as Saviour, as agents of salvation.

God the Father expresses his love for the world by sending the son to redeem sinners (Jn 3:16). The New Testament's conception of salvation then, points to redemption from sin and from the dominion of Satan. It also points to freedom to love

and serve God and humanity in newness of life. Newness of life presupposes 'being born again' (Jn 3:3).

Asante (2001:358) maintains that salvation is marked by polarity. Salvation effects liberation or release, which in turn presupposes a danger or a threat facing an individual or group of people (Compare the book of Esther chapters 1 – 10). Salvation, however, can hardly be understood as mere escapism. It is something more than deliverance from danger to a safe place. Salvation bestows the power to stand fast and not be shaken in the midst of danger, the power to serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness.

Salvation points to fullness of life (John 10:10). It is the experience of deliverance from one's sinful selfhood and bondage into newness. In the experience of salvation, the human is freed from all oppressive and dehumanizing conditions and realizes the fullness of authentic humanity. The fullness of life that results from the experience of salvation finds concrete expression in an uncompromising commitment to god and compassionate dedication to one's fellow humans (Asante 2001:358).

Bosch (1991:393) maintains that salvation is indeed a fundamental concern of every religion. For Christians, the conviction that God has decisively wrought salvation for all in and through Jesus Christ stands at the very centre of their lives. After all, the very name Jesus means "saviour". It follows from this conviction that the Christian missionary movement has

been motivated, throughout its history, by the desire to mediate salvation to all. Bosch (1991:393) realized that there have been paradigm shifts in the understanding of the nature of salvation that the church had to mediate in its mission. His reflections on mission in the early church has revealed that salvation was interpreted in comprehensive terms. This is not to suggest that all New Testament authors have exactly the same understanding in this respect.

Luke, for instance, uses "salvation language" in respect of a very wide spectrum of human circumstances – the termination of poverty, discrimination, illness, demon possession, sin, and so forth – or even in respect of economic, political, physical, psychological and spiritual suffering. Moreover, for Luke salvation is, above all, something that realizes itself *in this life, today*. For Luke, salvation is *present* salvation (Lk 8: 26 –39).

In Paul the accent appears to be elsewhere. He puts a greater emphasis on the inchoative nature of salvation – it only begins in this life. Salvation is a process, initiated by one's encounter with the living Christ, but complete salvation is still outstanding. The Holy Spirit is the only God's first gift to us (Rom 8:23). We are saved in hope (8:24). Reconciliation (a key concept in Paul) indeed occurs here and now, but Paul normally refers to salvation in the future tense: 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God … much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life' (Rom 5:10). These delicate nuances certainly have to do with the fact that Paul thinks in apocalyptic categories and wishes to

emphasize that comprehensive salvation is reserved for the coming triumph of God.

Bosch (1991:394) maintains that for the moment, Paul still *awaits* Jesus Christ as Savior (Phil 3:20). This does not, however, detract from the reality of radical renewal – both personal and social – which believer may already experience in the here and now (Rom 8:14 and 2Cor 5:17). Neither does this only hold good for the believer's 'religious' life. The experience of reconciliation with God and the new birth has far-reaching social and political consequences (Christ is called *Kyrios* and *Soter* in the face of the public confession that Caesar is lord and savior). But all of this remained within the framework of a fervent eschatological expectation.

In the Greek Patristic period, however, the eschatological expectation waned. Salvation now took the form of *paideia,* of a gradual 'uplift' of believers to a divine status (the *theosis*). The emphasis was on the 'origin' of Christ. The incarnation stood at the centre, as instrument of the divine *paideia* (Lowe 1982:200).

The understanding of salvation in biblical times to this day has not been exhausted in this discussion. It is only being mentioned here to offer insight on areas where there could be 'similarities and differences' with the African traditional understanding of salvation. It is interesting to note that traditional Africans also 'lifted' their ancestors to a divine

status. Ancestors were taken as instruments of salvation. I have however indicated that ancestors were never competitors of Christ in the African minds.

4.4 The African concept of salvation

Asante (2001:361) maintains that salvation, in the traditional African setting, includes "getting answers for the problems of life and overcoming the agents of evil and the hard realities of life". Salvation in this sense, is 'this worldly' as opposed to 'other-worldly'. This is not to say that in the African context salvation is reduced to the enjoyment of time, public esteem, prosperity and health and has nothing to do with a moral conscience. The African also values a moral conscience. Africans hold to a belief that God, who is the all knowing, hates evil. God punishes individuals for their wicked acts.

Evil becomes then an obstacle in the attainment of salvation. Asante (2001:358) argues that evil is a privation, that is, the absence of some good that should be present. To the traditional African, the primary causes of evil-doing in society are, spirit-beings. This of course does not absolve the human from culpability or complicity in the privation.

Evil is also attributed to the activity of witches and malevolent spirit beings. Witchcraft, in the African context, points to a supernatural power believed to be possessed by certain individuals, who employ it to harm others, particularly those of

their own family. The witch is regarded as having a seared conscience and no moral compunction, as one that can kill his or her own children. The witch is believed to plan spiritually and act extraordinarily. Banished from the community to ensure the community's 'well-being', identified witches live in so-called witch villages in some parts of Africa (Wilson 1980:75; Ndwandwe 2000:214; Asante 2001:359).

The African world-view demands that we identify the elements in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that correspond to the felt needs of the traditional African. The African reality demands a Saviour who has the power not only to deliver the believer from evil powers but also to transform the lives of the bewitched and the dehumanized, enabling them to live actively in the community.

Sin in the African context, is hardly a private matter. The African's 'theory of existence is *cognatus ergo sum* – I am related by blood, therefore, I exist' (Asante 2001:361; Kysar 1986:70; Guthrie 1981:932). In the context of this communal theory of existence, sin, among other things, creates disharmony and brings about the disintegration of the society.

Sin also has spiritual implications. It is an act against God and the ancestors who provide the sanctions for a good life. Understood as deliverance not only from one's sinful selfhood but also from evil forces, salvation must address the concepts of evil and sin in the African context. Salvation leans heavily on the African's conviction that his or her world, is controlled

by certain spiritual forces. As a result, salvation becomes meaningful to the African, when he can be sure that the evil forces involved in his sickness are taken care of.

Here, the concept of salvation is essentially instrumental. It is understood purely as that which enables one to make successful adjustment in the face of day-to-day economic, social, spiritual and psychological problems.

Theology, if there is to be continuity with traditional religion, must be responsive to African cosmology and a world-view centred on a concern for survival, for, unless any given 'truth' leads to or enhances survival, it cannot be deemed crucial for the African. The average African is not concerned about abstractions Insights established in the light of God's grace and justice must have practical significance.

Africa and her people have over the years, been plagued by diseases, hunger and wars. These conditions affect the way that they will interpret the gospel message. It has been pointed out that in their encounter with the Bible, Africans had found a Jesus, who healed the sick, made the lame to walk again, a Jesus who opened the eyes of the blind. Jesus did not only concern himself with spiritual salvation. He took care of the physical or bodily ailments as well.

Traditional doctors or healers played an essential role in ensuring the attainment of salvation in Africa. Some of the functions of 'medicine men' have already been discussed in

this thesis. These are mentioned here, only as they relate to salvation, something so crucial to Africans.

In disturbing health situations in Africa, traditional priest-healers stand up to the challenges and become the main source of health services, especially the rural population. They are the first contact whenever any trouble or crisis occurs in the community. They provide health 'needs', social comfort and spiritual solace for the sick, confused and the lost individuals in the community.

In the light of the health problems in Africa, an investigation into the traditional African healing practice is put alongside the western medicine. These are done as means of attaining salvation. A healthy mind is normally in a healthy body. The Traditional African, does not separate or compartmentalize a 'human being' into body and spirit. The two parts form a unified whole.

4.5 Traditional African healing versus western medicine: Motivation and support

The statistics that are indicated here, are only a 'highlight' of the investigation of the plight of Africa, the continent whose people are in need of salvation as examined in this study. Their social conditions make them seek for help from whoever can help. Mechanisms in their culture came in handy when other

means were not easily available. The traditional mechanisms employed to save lives and ensure its continuation could not be evil or incompatible with the gospel message.

Appiah-Kubi (1993:97) sketches a health profile in Africa that sets a scene for traditional healers to execute their duties towards ensuring the salvation of people's lives:

- About 100 million people in Africa have no access to adequate good drinking water.
- Almost 70% of Africa's population is not getting enough to eat.
- About 73 million suffer from serious malnutrition.
- The African population continues to be exposed to endemic diseases such as malaria, aids and other diseases caused by poor sanitation, malnutrition and poverty.
- Such water-borne and water-related diseases as intestinal parasites, gastro-intestinal illness and respiratory infections are number one killers of the children.

In fact, modern medical services exist for those who can afford it and who happen to live in urban centres. Most adequately equipped medical facilities are located in the regional centres, with a few ill-equipped health posts scattered through the rural areas. The majority of Africans who live on the farms and in rural areas where health hazards or problems are more serious are often 'denied' the basic health needs. In such areas, maternal and child mortality and morbidity are very high.

Thus, the minority urban population enjoys the best of the existing health services. Modern health workers (medical practitioners, nurses, oral hygienists, dentists, and so on) are often attracted to working in the urban areas where the 'back-up' or the supporting services are readily available. Traditional healers have proven to be helpful to the rural population. In some many respects, they have also helped educated urban dwellers that share a common world-view and a similar concept of health and disease.

The services of priest-healers have full cultural meaning. They have satisfaction for the question and needs of the people who utilize their services. They have adapted some modern techniques in order to meet the needs of their clients. Oosthuizen (1997:56) might be describing it better:

"Here the spirit of the traditional extended family finds expression in the ecclesiastical context, as well as the basic aspects of traditional culture and religion, excluded by more western-oriented churches. The western ideological system and scholarship has also under-evaluated African cultural heritages".

At times, diseases were 'believed' to have been caused by failure to perform the right religious act at the correct place and time. (see Asante 2001:359). The healing process is holistic. Any one-sided approach to healing, whether physical or

spiritual is incomplete. Therefore healing rituals include social, psychological, physical and herbal medication. They are all used to ensure continuity of life.

4.5.1 The **strengths** and **limitations** of traditional healing practices

- The realization that the 'whole person is ill' and not only part of him, makes the emphasis on holistic healing process a great asset and success.
- As an integral part of the people's culture, it is very effective in dealing with culture-related problems such as witchcraft, sorcery and ancestral powers as agents of causation in disease.
- The ability to deal satisfactorily with the problems of mental illness in which modern medical system is still groping in 'the dark', makes the traditional healing quite viable to the community.
- The lower charges for the services rendered compared with modern medical system make the traditional healing system more acceptable and reasonable to the rural poor.

These are some of the mechanisms that ensured survival of people, in the culture of Africans. Life, both physical and spiritual, which is a gift from God, could be elongated through these efforts.

Undoubtedly, the traditional healing system has many **limitations**. The following are easily identifiable:

- The traditional practitioners tend to be secretive in revealing the sources of the power and the efficacy of the type of plant and herb they use in healing. The 'nature' of mixtures they use do not readily yield themselves to scientific test.

- Because most of the traditional healers or practitioners in African communities are not literate and are untrained in the scientific research data collection, there is a paucity of scientific evidence supporting many of their practices.

- Critics have also pointed out the unhygienic nature of their surroundings and practices. For example, traditional birth attendants have often been accused of using contaminated tools in cutting the cord, thus causing tetanus. The same applied in many instances where circumcision procedures became disastrous to young initiates.

- The TAB's inability to deal with complications is often highlighted by the health personnel

- As illiterates, the traditional healers are unable to keep record on their patients.

4.5.2 The **strengths** and **limitations** of modern scientific medical practices.

The hospital-based modern scientific medical care has been undergoing very critical evaluation the world over. Its benefits should not be readily overlooked. The following are therefore

considered some **strengths** and **contributions** of modern scientific medical practices among many:

Curative:

- The use of chemotherapy for such infectious diseases as yaws, syphilis, measles and pneumonia is recognized.
- The introduction and use of antibiotics.
- Modern surgical techniques.
- Technologies like foetus monitors have helped save some fatal situations to mention but a few.

Prevention:

- Intensive immunization programmes have helped to reduce infant mortality rates in the country.
- Through the proper use of family planning methods and especially spacing, mothers have been helped in delivering healthy children.
- In emphasizing personal hygiene in such areas as (1) washing hands, and (2) sterilizing materials used for cutting umbilical cords, Western medicine has significantly lowered mortality rates for mothers and children.

4.5.3 **Limitations** of modern scientific medical practices.

The limitations of modern scientific medical practices have included among others:

- The critics of modern medicine strongly question the cost effectiveness of the modern technologies. The introduction of new technologies is often associated with increased health cost, which makes it impossible for the poor to benefit from the facilities. This makes them the monopoly of the rich and elite who alone can afford them.

- The harm caused by the medical system itself in administering the treatment that is referred to as 'doctor-caused disease' or 'iatrogenic disease' is seen as a weakness of modern medicine.

- Examples of iatrogenic diseases include among others: (1) post-operative complications or infections or reactions to drugs. (2) cultural or social iatrogenic system is that of making the population dependent on health personnel for their health.

- In concentrating on disease, the critics feel that modern medicine has tended to ignore healing processes.

African traditional culture as indicated earlier in this thesis does not compartmentalize health into body and soul or spirit. The religion of Africa embraces both body and spirit. It is in such areas that traditional culture embodies gospel features in that it cares for its own kind. It caters for the survival of all her people. Dickson (1984:47) supports the African religio-cultural reality as follows:

> "Religion is a regular accompaniment in a person's life; the chief's role, the relations between members of a society, morality, the stages

in a person's life (birth, puberty, marriage and death), the practice of medicine, architecture, warfare, traditional education, and so forth. All these areas are not dissociated from religion in traditional African society".

The holistic approach to salvation and to life as such in Africa requires an inculturation hermeneutic method that will delve into the social and religious contexts. The following sub-section examines case studies of specific African communities.

4.6 Man's salvation: its nature and meaning in African traditional religion.

Two typical examples of African traditional societies (The *Anlo Ewe* of West Africa and the *Ndembu* of North Western Zambia) are examined to illustrate further the concept of salvation as enshrined in African traditional culture and religion.

4.6.1 The Anlo Ewe people of West Africa.

Gaba (1978:389) explains that the Anlo Ewe word *'Dagbe'*, translates in English as 'salvation'. This word belongs to the ritual rather than the ordinary sphere of life. It may, however, sometimes appear outside ritual circles. Even here the ritual connotation is never absent because it always expresses a prayerful wish for the promotion of human 'well-being'. Abundant life rather than salvation is also used to translate

Dagbe. This is mainly because in the milieu of those for whom *Dagbe* has existential relevance, abundant life is a more expressive rendering of the concept than the word salvation.

Idowu (1969:46) observes that the Hebrew concept of *Shalom*, understood as a total 'well-being' in body, mind and soul in relation to personal, domestic and societal issues, is a goal of African traditional religion in general. Total 'well-being', thus understood, best conveys to the inquirer what the word Dagbe seeks to express.

To gain an insight into the Anlo view of man's salvation, one requires a good grasp of the concept of Dagbe. Gaba (1978:390) cites ritual utterances from Scriptures of an African People that demonstrate that in Anlo thought, Dagbe comes from God.

> Take them (the offerings) to the abode of Mawu,
> the Creator and in return bring to us everything
> that makes for abundant life. LIX, 18,
> 20.(cp.XXI,34-35).

Other ritual utterances seem to suggest it is rather the deities and the ancestors that grant man *Dagbe*. One example of prayer offered in the shrines of the deities illustrates this view.

> O Grandfather *Nyigbla*; today we have gathered in
> your sacred grove. Give life to all your male
> servants. Give life to all your female servants too.

> Grant abundant life and prosperity so that we continue to serve you. LXXIII, 10-13.

These passages from *Anlo* sacred utterances present some uncertainty in the thoughts of the investigator as to the real source of *Dagbe*. Gaba (1978:391) argues that this does not seem to be so with the *Anlo* people. Admittedly, the sacred utterances make both God and the lower spirit powers that operate through the deities and the ancestors the origin of *Dagbe*. This is because the object of any direct and organized cultic attention in *Anlolan*d is either the ancestors or the deities and never God.

Then also, even though God is regarded as the Creator of everything that exists, and is in personal relationship with all men, yet he has appointed the deities and the ancestors as his representatives in the world of men. So then, even though the Anlo people are aware that God is the real source of Dagbe and that the ancestors and the deities receive it from him before passing it on to men, they explicitly address the deities and the ancestors at times as the 'owner of abundant life'.

It should be remembered that the sacred utterances from which the above passages are quoted do not constitute reasoned and clear theological statements but extempore expressions of religiousness. Therefore the *Anlo* concept of Dagbe reveals that in the thinking of this African people God is the source, the ultimate source precisely, of man's salvation.

4.6.2 Qualification and Participation in *Dagbe* (salvation)

Gaba (1978:391) maintains that the *Anlo* traditional thought holds that God offers *Dagbe* to all men regardless of their moral standing. Every form of formal worship in *Anloland* involves the sharing of a communal meal (see Asante 2001:363). It is however, to festival communal meal that special attention is drawn at this point. These meals are of two types – the general and the special. The general meal is taken by all the people that are present during the sharing of the meal. To partake of this meal, one does not need any serious self-examination on the moral grounds. In fact one does not need it at all.

It is intended to convey the idea that, regardless of their moral condition, all men in the world are God's children and therefore qualify automatically for the enjoyment of *Dagbe* which worship, as it is visible in the sharing of this particular communal meal, confers. By this humanity, then, every human being in *Anlo* thought qualifies to participate in the salvation that god offers to men.

However *to qualify for participation* in *Dagbe* is one thing and *actually to participate in it is yet another thing*. Even though the good that *Dagbe* is believed to unleash on humanity as a whole, is within the reach of every man, yet to appropriate *Dagbe* in one's life demands a personal decision. This is the concept that the second type of the festival communal meal ritualizes.

The 'meal' may be a special beer brewed personally by the priest himself or a blood meal that is prepared with pieces of the sacrificial meat cooked in the blood of the sacrificial animal. This special communal meal is shared only by those among them who have done serious self-examination and have come to the conclusion that they have satisfied the moral demands of the *Anlo* society. It is unlawful for and, therefore extremely dangerous to the 'well-being' of a person who realizes that he is morally unhealthy but participates willfully in this meal.

Gaba (1978:392) maintains that the prelude to a typical *Anlo* prayer is intended to remind worshippers of this cardinal requirement for effective communion with one's object of worship and, for that matter, for full participation in *Dagbe*. With the sharing of this special meal, then, goes a personal appropriation of the benefits that *Dagbe* brings to man. So another important element in the *Anlo* concept of salvation, as this is revealed by their concept of *Dagbe*, is that salvation is intended for all people that on earth do dwell. But the individual's realization of salvation demands a personal decision. A personal response to one's object of worship is indispensable to man's salvation in *Anlo* life and thought.

On a closer analysis of what is expected from members of the *Anlo* community, to can qualify and participate in salvation, is a personal decision. One may by virtue of birth qualify to be a

member of community. However, for one to participate in *Dagbe*, demands that a certain conduct be a requirement.

The line of thinking here seems to concur to what I have indicated earlier regarding the concept of birth in both traditional African culture and First Century biblical community. Under the aspect or feature of birth, rituals were performed so that one moves from one phase of life to another. Under salvation too, requirements have to be satisfied or complied with, and this dynamic equivalence is brought up again to demonstrate gospel features embodied in the African culture.

4.6.3 Qualification and participation in salvation

It is only those who are 'born of God' who have the Spirit of God instilled in their hearts (Klauck 1991:194). They have made a moral and personal decision. They have a 'Godly identity' and have communion or fellowship with God. They live righteously and do not commit sin (1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7).

What is distinctive here is the moral quality of life that determines one's ability to belong. The biblical requirement for belonging to the family of God, is also a requirement for the *Anlo* community's members to belong or participate in salvation. Those among them who, knowingly participate in *Dagbe*, and yet they are not morally justified, are punished.

Anyone who sins or deviates, challenges the symbolic universe as originally defined and constituted. When the symbolic universe of any society is being threatened, society devised a variety of ways by which it deals with sin and any kind of force that threatens its wholeness.

In short, a very concrete expression of man's religiousness is a *sine qua non* that makes salvation meaningful in the *Anlo* milieu. It must be remembered that for a personal appropriation of salvation the sinful must not only publicly denounce his sins but also solemnly promise to pursue henceforth what is of good report in the thinking of the *Anlo* people.

And when a person in search of salvation is required to observe that which is of good report constantly in his life before his salvation is assured, then morality is given a central place in this African religion. It has been made a prerequisite for the realization of man's salvation. It also makes the one who ultimately grants salvation and his representatives in the world of men moral beings as well.

It is therefore unknown to the *Anlo* man that it is the pure in heart that shall realize salvation. Finally this analysis of the concept of salvation exposes a scheme of salvation that is quite meaningful for those who belong to the milieu of which the salvation forms part. Salvation here is not only concerned with bodily health, but it addresses spiritual health as well. If morality is what is questioned, then it the conscience that must be sensitive and alive.

4.6.4 The Ndembu of North Western Zambia.

Kwenda (1999:1) argues that, despite the widely held view to the contrary, the traditional religions of Africa do have an elaborate system of salvation which, unfortunately, is often lost sight of by scholars owing to the difference from the Christian theological norm. The locus of salvation in African traditional religion (ATR), it will be maintained, is in the cults of affliction and healing, about which much has been written, and much continues to puzzle scholars.

In this short investigation of the Ndembu people, we attempt an interpretation of some rituals of affliction and healing that is based on a general model of African theodicy according to which the goal of life is to become an ancestor (Ephirim-Donkor 1997:35; Magesa 1997:22).

This spells out what it means to be human, namely to travel the road of the life cycle, reach the portals of ancestorhood, enter the latter's courts, and exercise its privileges and responsibilities. Kwenda (1999:1) maintains that this is so important that both the living and the living-dead will do everything in their power to ensure its achievement. It has been mentioned earlier that ancestors are the embodiment of salvation. The phenomenon of affliction and the response of

healing it elicits, represent a corrective element of this do-or-die battle for ancestorhood.

In other words, the cults of affliction and healing signal that something has gone terribly wrong. It is serious enough to debar someone from entering ancestral bliss, from attaining salvation. But they are also heralds of hope, declaring that all is not lost; that those excluded from the pale of ancestral fullness may still be included by all means necessary.

4.6.4.1 Saved from what?

Kwenda (1999:1) argues that if any spirits are feared, it is on account of their capacity to effect the terror of all terrors, the end of the world, extinguish of the person. Mbiti (1969:26) is correct in intoning that the greatest tragedy that could befall an African is to be cast away from the community both of the living and the living-dead. This would mean failure to achieve personal immortality, that is self-perpetuation through offspring who carry one's spark or imprint and remember one through ritual enactment. Salvation in non-dogmatic African traditional religion refers to preventive as well as remedial strategies in relation to one's prospects of attaining ancestorhood.

Kwenda (1999:1) finds it strange that after outlining the meaning of salvation in African traditional religion (ATR) in

these terms, Mbiti (1969:23) turns around and declares that there is no notion of salvation. Yet behind these fleeting glimpses of the original state and bliss of man, whether they are rich or shadowy, there lies the tantalizing and unattained gift of the resurrection, the loss of human immortality and the monster of death. Mbiti (1969:99) declares that:

> "African religions, and philosophy must admit defeat; they have supplied no solution. This remains the most serious *cul-de-sac* in the otherwise rich thought and sensitive religious feeling of our peoples".

Mbiti (1969:99) goes on to conclude that the indigenous religions of Africa do not offer for mankind at large, a way of escape, a message of redemption. Mbiti must be approaching African traditional religion from a Christian perspective. He wants to see similar philosophies in both religious faiths or uses Christianity as a 'yard-stick' to measure African traditional religions. As soon as they do not meet the 'requirements' of Christianity, they are discredited. The social contexts of the two faiths (Christianity and African traditional religion) are different. Therefore each should be treated in its rightful place. The inculturation hermeneutic approach demands that the researcher must contextualize or deal with the social and religious aspects of each community objectively. Kwenda (1999:2) argues that Mbiti is wrong in thinking that salvation can or must only take the form of an 'escape'. This

assertion of Kwenda is also confirmed by Asante (2001:358) when he says:

> "Salvation, can hardly be understood as mere escapism. It is something more than deliverance from danger to a safe place. Salvation bestows the power to stand fast and not be shaken in the midst of danger, the power to serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness".

In traditional religions, salvation can, and does take the form of courage to face the harshness of the reality of mortality. Obviously, this is different from the prescriptions of the world religions, but is by no means either an absence or an absurdity.

Kwenda (1999:2) further objects the thought of Mbiti that rescue from the monster of death can only be achieved through a mythology of future bodily resurrection. For the existential embodiment posited by the notion of reincarnation, whether partial or complete, is no less serious a proposition than future bodily resurrection. Nor can it, by any reckoning, be dismissed as a mythology of the deep past (*Zamani).

A theory and interpretation of the cults of affliction that challenges Mbiti's view by showing how African religionists refuse to be enslaved by the arbitrary power of the past, while building on and upholding the past is demonstrated by Kwenda (1999:2). He maintains that Africans resort to the preventative

and remedial strategies in order to ensure redemption. Preventative strategies include the whole way of life. Observing the norms and living by the values of one's society is the first line of defense against the dreaded monster of total annihilation. But this must be reinforced by way of the fortifications that underlie rites of passage. In other words, the life cycle celebrates not only advancement towards ancestorhood, but the distance this puts between the traveler and the abyss of being extinguished.

What makes the corrective measures necessary are the numerous accidents, miscarriages and sabotage that occur to frustrate progress towards ancestorhood. We should say that the accidents are those occurrences and factors for which the individual concerned may not be held responsible, such as dying as an unmarried adult, or married but childless. To this category also belong those who die 'a bad death', that is, an unnatural death or, in times gone by, dying from such diseases as smallpox. Miscarriage may refer to damnation by default, due to a technical error, such as failure by the living to carry out the bringing back ritual.

A great injustice seems to loom at this point. Is it moral, one may ask, victims and perpetrators end up in the same lost condition? How can people be punished for being in the wrong place through no fault of their own? Surely, African ontology may seem lacking in justice.

The answer is that on the surface, there indeed is a gap in African ontology. This is in the sense that there seems to be no provision for the redemption of those who are cut off from the sources of life (community of both living and living-dead and nature) and cast away to inherit oblivion. If salvation means achieving a complete and fulfilled life (in terms of life cycle experiences) and, despite all the preventative and remedial efforts to secure success, many still fall by the wayside, then there ought to be a *'net'* to catch those who fall through the cracks.

Kwenda (1999:2) maintains that the 'net' is there in the form of the *cults of affliction and healing*. These cults make it possible to address the inequalities of the ancestral economy. The argument is that whatever else they may be doing, cults of affliction are there primarily to create ancestors out of otherwise disqualified candidates. However, these are not normative ancestors (normances). Ancestorhood is such key to salvation that if one cannot attain it by the normal channels, one struggles for it through protest.

4.6.4.2 The healing ritual.

The affliction healing in the *Chihamba* cult among the *Ndembu* of North-Western Zambia, is investigated to understand the cults of affliction as a means of securing salvation (Kwenda 1999:3).

Family members consult a diviner when one of their members falls sick. They are told that the patient has been 'caught' by the spirit of an ancestress in the 'mode of Chihamba'. In order to be healed, the patient must be initiated into the cult of the afflicting agent, which is an alliance of the spirit of the said ancestress and a male nature spirit called *Kavula*, which means lightning. The healing ritual takes place partly in the village and partly at a shrine in the bush, where a white image of *Kavula* is erected. Officiating at the ritual are doctors (usually male) and female senior adepts. After the preliminaries, the candidates for initiation (patients) are introduced to *Kavula.*

The first thing to note is the structure of the afflicting agent: an ancestress afflicting a descendant 'in the mode of Chihamba'. What does 'in the mode of Chihamba' mean? Kwenda (1999:3) submits that this is the key to understanding affliction and healing among Africans. He is of the view that this refers to a spirit carrying out the desires of another spirit, often under duress. Those wishes are also stereotyped, centering on the particular (driving) spirit's quest to achieve ancestorhood, a status which, is the essence of salvation. The spirit could for one reason or another have failed to attain ancestorhood. It would follow that such a reason would be not of the spirit's own doing. In other words, in order to manifest in the mode of Chihamba, the spirit should be an innocent victim of circumstance. Those qualifying would be victims of any of the things that cut one off from the web of community, the cord of life.

The centre of Chihamba is the quest of a victim that is deprived of the immortality of ancestorship through no fault of its own. This quest manifests itself as protest. It is experienced as affliction.

4.7 Summary

From this discourse, it has been shown that salvation to the African is not something that happens to an individual only but to the whole community of beings (the living and the living-dead) who have different problems and interact across ontological boundaries.

The challenge has been to use an appropriate methodology when researching and studying human behaviour so that the definition and interpretation of concepts are placed in context. The current study proposed the use of the inculturation hermeneutic method of. This is because the culture of Africa is materially and otherwise different from that of Europe or America, and as a result it influences the way things are done.

The biblical concept of salvation has been investigated to understand how Africans appropriated the Scriptures. What did Africans discover in the message of the Bible? What traits of

Jesus did they desire to follow? The physical salvation of opening eyes of the blind, making the lame to walk and healing the sick captured their belief in the Lordship of Christ. So, not only the spiritual needs were met but the material and bodily health were satisfied as well.

The traditional healing practices with the traditional priest-healer at the centre of it all were investigated. The strengths and limitations of traditional healing were examined to evaluate its relevance today. The holistic approach to healing became an effective way of saving body and spirit.

The modern medical practices of health treatment were also investigated. The advanced technologies were discovered to be very effective and saving lives. The main 'concern' of critics, however was that the modern medical health practices concentrates on health rather than healing the whole person. This limitation paves a way for the African traditional healers to take centre-stage in the daily lives of Africans and fulfil the spiritual needs.

The two examples of African traditional communities (The *Anlo Ewe* of West Africa and the *Ndembu* of North Western Zambia) demonstrates the significance of attaining salvation in a person's life. The qualification and participation in *Dagbe* (salvation) called for personal decision for the *Anlo* people. This concept of salvation was 'compared' to the biblical concept of 'being born again', to can enter the Kingdom of God. If one enters the Kingdom of God, one attains salvation.

And if one qualifies and participates in *Dagbe*, one attains salvation. The thread of the gospel message runs through the cultures of these communities. It is along these lines that I submit that the gospel message is embodied in African traditional culture.

The healing rituals of the Ndembu people of North Western Zambia also attempt to ensure the attainment of salvation. Although these rituals may seem very secular to scholars of faiths other than African traditional religion, on closer scrutiny, and with the help of the inculturation hermeneutic, a better understanding is achieved.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Several significant findings have emerged from this study. The main submission being that there are salient gospel features that are embodied in the African traditional culture and religion. It came up from the investigation that those theologians, who understood and interpreted the *Sola Scriptura* slogan (the Scripture only) in an absolute and exclusive sense and believed that African culture should not be used in theology, missed the fact that the gospel message is received in a cultural context.

The inculturation hermeneutic approach served as a tool at investigating and interpreting the gospel message from the African perspective. This is because the nature of the theological enterprise is hermeneutical, by which is meant that theology is based upon a search for a scientific understanding and therefore in need of interpretation.

In the first chapter of this thesis the statement of the problem is stated. The hypothesis that while many Africans today are being exposed to modern education, traditional thought is still the source of the basic word-view for most of the people, raises questions as to why Africans would not be satisfied with the world-view presented by the Westerners. A remarkable observation by scholars that one of the ever-present anxieties

of the Zulu (Xhosa, Swazi, Pedi, and so forth) would be to make sure that he is right with his ancestral spirits is worth investigating to find out why Africans still revere ancestors.

The Gospel in the African perspective is investigated by first outlining a short history of Christianity in Africa. The transmission of the gospel message by Western missionaries in the nineteenth century A. D. was garbed in Western culture. The good 'intentions' of its transmitters is discussed. The damage that was done to the culture of Africa is also interpreted. And a possible solution to the problem is proposed. This includes the use of the inculturation hermeneutic approach. A number of gospel features enshrined in the traditional culture of Africa are discussed.

The aspect of birth, played a pivotal role in African traditional culture was discussed. This is considered a God-given phenomenon. By being born, a child belonged to a family and community. He/she has to be taught the rules of that community. The child has to behave in a manner approved by the community where it was born so that acceptance can be granted. Therefore initiation rites were performed at different stages of the life of the child. Rites would be performed at birth, naming, puberty, at marriage and at death. Possibly even after death, rites were performed to ensure a smooth transition from mortality to immortality.

In biblical times as well, birth was considered very important. The aspect of birth from a biblical community was brought in

only to indicate similar lines of thought. It was not to make a direct comparison. Each community had its own tradition, culture and setting. To be born, automatically made one to belong naturally into a group. The biblical term 'born again', indicates an initiation where one learns and accepts a newness of status. Therefore, a born again person belongs to a community of God.

The aspect of sacrifice was also discussed. This served to effect communication between the living and the living-dead. Sacrificial animals were discussed and the symbolic use of blood to effect reconciliation were investigated. These rites were performed and they made people have a feeling that they were right with God and God was right with them.

African traditional culture also had ways of dealing with sinners. They had clear concepts of sin and evil. These were discussed within the context of Africa. And they could be appreciated if a method such as the inculturation hermeneutic is employed. Also it is under such contexts that one realizes that the gospel message is embodied in the traditional culture of Africa. Africans needed a harmonious community existence.

The role of traditional doctors sometimes referred to as 'medicine-men' was examined. These were regarded as friends of the community. It was also indicated that traditional doctors were the misunderstood people. The 'outsiders' mistook them as witches. They then suffered accusations. The duties of

'medicine-men' in the African setting are explained in detail. They were friends of the people.

Marriage is another feature that was investigated. It was taken very seriously and regarded as key to procreation in both African culture and in biblical communities. Most of the rites associated with marriage in the African traditional culture were investigated. Examples of the rites were drawn from different African communities around the continent of Africa. These too embodied gospel features in that they encouraged for example faithfulness of partners to each other. Continuity of the human species was ensured through marriage. The institution of marriage as such was honoured, respected and kept holy.

Mechanisms of dealing with problems of childlessness and celibacy were discussed. African traditional culture had an acceptable way of solving its problems in a manner that enshrined gospel values. Heartless divorces because a couple could not beget children of their own were avoided at all cost. Monogamy and polygamy as forms of marriages were also discussed in detail. The different views of scholars of religion regarding polygamy in Africa were examined.

The investigation found that there are 'consecutive' polygamy, mostly practiced by Westerners. This happens when one person marries a partner, divorces and marries another and possibly 'end' up having divorced several times. The 'simultaneous' polygamy involves marrying many partners at the same time. The proposal was that the issue of polygamy and monogamy

should be left to the discretion of the parties concerned. It should not be a prescription that will 'condemn' people and deny them salvation.

The concept of God and his attributes in African traditional culture were also investigated. The eternal and intrinsic attributes indicated that God was the creator of the universe. He is the sustainer of life. And this is a gospel feature enshrined in the culture of Africa. The moral attributes of God indicated that God is kind. God is merciful. Africans therefore had a reason to hope for mercy from God. African traditional culture made provision for the cleansing of sin. It was through the performance of rituals and sacrifices that they could realize reconciliation with their fellow neighbours and with God.

The different rituals have been discussed and they included among others personal and farming rituals. They also included festivals. All these had theological significance for African people. The use of inculturation hermeneutic, in studying African traditional culture, illustrated that these rituals and festivals did not constitute a practice that is incompatible with the gospel message. The intention had been to express gratitude to God.

The cult of the ancestor veneration was investigated in detail. It emerged from the investigation that Africans never worshipped ancestors. They only venerated them. They honoured ancestors and regarded them as intermediaries. Ancestors were never regarded as equal to Christ or God. The

definitions of an ancestor showed that it was a state of purity that everyone wanted to attain. Good and moral life was a necessity for one to be an ancestor. Ancestors were also endowed with omniscience and divinity. They were however not prayed or worshipped. Africans drew clear distinction between their ancestors and Christ. Ancestors are therefore not even competitors to Christ who is the Son of God.

The functions of the ancestors mentioned in the study included: mediation, procreation, protection, destruction, communication, lack of success and sickness. These have been explained as they concerned ensuring harmonious community existence. The gospel message would demand that people love one another and live peacefully and that is what the African culture would strive to achieve.

The act of libation has been given special attention as it caused a lot of concern and at most misunderstanding among scholars opposed to African traditional culture that Africans only knew ancestors and not God. God was too 'remote', and this has been demonstrated otherwise. The whole cultural exercise of libation is directed to God. God is the ultimate recipient of praise, thanks and worship. Where God is not mentioned openly, it is out of respect, an aspect very inherent in African culture and the name of God is implied.

Rituals and festivals mentioned earlier remain even to this day, part of African existence. These were ways that Africans used to celebrate life. There is a lot of symbolism in African rituals.

The most celebrated of these rituals was the 'rain-making' ceremony. Here it was discovered that the term 'rain-making' is actually symbolic. Africans did not make rain. They prayed to God for rain. They knew the possible time or season for rain to fall. Therefore, they would not pray for rain when the season was off. They would be asking for the impossible. After that, they celebrated the gift of rain that God provided.

Salvation became the last aspect investigated in this study. Analysis of the concept of salvation exposes a scheme that is quite meaningful for those who belong to the milieu of which the salvation forms part. Objectively and passionately considered, this analysis of salvation reveals that the religion of which it forms part, is a culturally conditioned form of man's universal experience, response and commitment to ultimate reality which deals with universal human themes.

The Anlo Ewe people of West Africa were taken as typical example of a Traditional African community where this concept of salvation is extracted for demonstration of the embodiment of the gospel message in the culture of Africa. Salvation is interpreted as a gift from the ancestors to ensure the survival of people. The *Anlo* Ewe used the word '*Dagbe'* instead of the English word 'salvation'. And this word belonged to the ritual rather than the ordinary sphere of life. It reveals that abundant life rather than salvation is used to translate *Dagbe.*

A very striking feature with this group, is an utterance in its prayer that conveys the idea that regardless of their moral condition, all men in this world are God's children. They therefore qualify automatically for the enjoyment of *Dagbe,* which worship, as it is visible in the sharing of this particular communal meal, confers. By this humanity, then, every human being in the *Anlo* thought qualifies to participate in the salvation that God offers to men.

However to *qualify for participation* in *Dagbe* is one thing and *actually to participate* in it is yet another thing. Even though the good that *Dagbe* is believed to unleash on humanity as a whole is within the reach of every man, yet to appropriate *Dagbe* in one's life demands *a personal decision*. The biblical text of 1 John, reveals a similar idea that individuals are *automatically born into families* but for them to be members of the family of God, becomes *a personal decision*. It is through natural birth that they join the human family, but have to believe in God to be members of the heavenly family.

One easily discovers striking similarities with the biblical message that provide useful points of presenting one's message. It is precisely these points of contact which make an agent in the Christianization process ponder seriously over the whole missiological and evangelical enterprise. The agent needs to think whether, in the light of his present knowledge of the religion of those he is to Christianize, dialogue rather than an impatient attempt to convert all his hearers should not be his

guiding principle. He needs to think whether it is still right for him to consider all those who want to remain in their own religious persuasions as eternally damned. This is the challenge that this thesis presents to scholars of religion as it maintains that the gospel message is embodied in African traditional culture and religion.

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Summary

In Africa, as everywhere else in the world, the interpretation of the gospel message takes place in a particular and unique context. This means that in doing theology one should take into account the spirit and the gospel message, but also the culture of the people the message is communicated.

During the Graeco-Roman period (First century Mediterranean world) the proclamation of the gospel message could not ignore the culture of the Romans, Greek and Jews. It is therefore argued in this study that the reading and interpretation of the gospel message in Africa should seriously take into consideration the African religio-cultural cues. Therefore, the current researcher calls this hermeneutical paradigm, inculturation hermeneutic.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the problem posed is that while many Africans today are exposed to modern education, traditional thought is still the source of the basic world-view. Even though a greater majority of Africans are Christianized, they still adhere to their traditional religious customs and practices such as the veneration of ancestors and visiting traditional doctors. These questions are investigated using the inculturation hermeneutic approach.

The gospel features embedded in the traditional African culture are examined. Some of the features are the aspect of birth, marriage, attributes of God, the role of traditional healers and

sacrifice. These features show that African traditional culture respected the birth of a child. This was considered to be a gift from God. Therefore all necessary rituals were performed to ensure that the child learns all what is expected of it. The child becomes a member of society and is able to live harmoniously with other people and with God. Marriage became an institution respected as basis of procreation, another gift from God. The attributes of God in African culture show that African traditional people knew God as Creator and sustainer of life. The researcher manages to demonstrate that these aspects of African traditional life have embedded or enshrined features that are in the gospel message and which could be made explicit and highlighted in proclaiming the Gospel in an African context.

The cult of ancestor veneration has been investigated. Evidence from a variety of scholars indicates that Africans never worship ancestors. The cultural practices that Africans perform aim at demonstrating their faith in God. They are symbolic in nature. However, uninformed readers may interpret these rituals as secular and of no religious value. The different rituals are therefore explained and discussed in detail. The attempt in discussing the cult of ancestor veneration is not to validate this practice. The researcher endevours to show that the cult embodies an important element of the Gospel mediatorship.

Salvation is another concept that has also been investigated. When analyzed and interpreted within the African cultural context, this aspect also demonstrates the embodiment of

gospel features. Salvation is approached holistically, that is, the health of the human body as well as the spirit are taken as a whole.   Some case studies of African communities are examined to establish how these communities understand salvation.

Some biblical texts are cited to illustrate points of contact or similar lines of thinking, where both biblical and African communities express their faith in God. These texts are in no way intended to compare the two religions or put them on equal footing. This would result in one being used as a yardstick for the other. I think scholars should interpret each religion in its own context and evaluate its embodiment of gospel features. This means that each religion has its own unique way whereby it embodies the gospel message. And in this thesis, the submission is that African traditional culture and religion embodies gospel features.

Opsomming

Die interpretasie van die Evangelieboodskap vind in Afrika plaas, net soos elders in die wêreld, binne 'n besondere en unieke konteks. Dit beteken dat in die bestudering van teologie, 'n mens nie net die gees en boodskap van die Evangelie, maar ook die kultuur van diegene aan wie die boodskap gekomunikeer word in gedagte moet hou.

Gedurende die Grieks-Romeinse periode (Eerste Mediterreense eeu) kon die bekendmaking van die Evangelie nie die kultuur van die Romeine, Grieke en Jode ignoreer nie. Gevolglik word in hierdie studie geargumenteer dat die lees en interpretasie van die Evangelie boodskap in Afrika moet plaasvind met die ernstige inagneming van religiese-kulturele konsepte. Daarvoor die huidige navorser beroep die gebruik van die kulturele hermeneutieke metode van bestudering in hierdie geval.

In die eerste hoofstuk van hierdie tesis, die probleem wat gestel is, is dat terwyl baie Afrikane vandag blootgestel aan moderne opvoeding is, tradisionele denke bly steeds die bron van die wêreld-beskouing. Alhoewel n' groter meerderheid van die Afrikane, die Christelike geloof aanvaar het, bly hulle steeds verbonde aan hulle tradisionele godsdienstige gewoonte soos die voorouersverering en tradisionele dokters te besoek.

Die Evangelie verskynsels wat in tradisionele Afrika tultuur beliggaam is word ondersoek. Sommige van die verskynsels is aspekte van geboorte, huwelik, eienskappe van God, die rol van tradisionele dokters en opoffering. Hierdie verskynsels vertoon dat Afrika kultuur die geboorte van 'n kind eerbiedig het. Dit was beskou as 'n 'geskenk' van God af. Daarvoor was alle rituele gedoen om te verseker dat die kind geweet het wat van hom verwag is. Die kind word dan as 'n lid van die gemeenskap aanvaar en kan ooreenstemmend teenoor ander mense en teenoor God leef.

Die huwelik word as 'n instigting van voortbrenging eerbiedig. Die eienskappe van God in Afrika vertoon dat tradisionele Afrikane van God geweet het en hom as skepper en lewensmiddelaarder aanvaar het. Die navorser kry dit reg om te bewys dat hierdie aspekte van Afrika se tradisionele lewe die evangelie beliggaam en dat die evangelie boodskap wat uitdruklik gemaak is met die aankondiging van die evangelie in die Afrika konteks.

Die verering van voorouers is ondersoek. Bewyse van 'n verskeidenheid skoliere vertoon dat Afrikane nooit voorouers aangebid het nie. Die kulturele uitvoeringe wat die Afrikane beoefen bewys dat hulle aan God geloof het. Hulle is simbolies van aard. Swak ingeligte lesers kan hierdie rituele as sekulêr beskou en nie van religiese waarde is nie. Die verskillende rituele word dan verduidelik en in breedte bespreek. Die poging om die voorouer verering te bespreek is nie om hierdie gewoonte te verdedig nie. Die navorser bewys slegs daarmee

dat die erediens belangrike elemente van die evangelie bemiddelaar insluit.

Verlossing is nog 'n konsep wat ondersoek is. As dit binne die Afrika kulturele konteks ontleed word, vertoon dit Evangelie eienskappe. Verlossing word holisties benader, dit wil sê, die liggaamlike gesondheid so wel as geestelike gesondheid word tesame of as geheel geneem. Sekere Afrika gemeenskappe word as voorbeelde bestudeer om te verkry hoe hulle die konsep van verlossing verstaan het.

Sekere bybelse teksverse word aangehaal om soortgelyke denke van beide gemeenskappe te illustreer waardeur hulle hulle geloof aan God vertoon het. Hierdie teksverse is nie bedoel om vergelykkings aan die twee gelowe (Afrika tradisionele geloof en Christilike geloof) te maak nie. Hierdie sou lei dat een geloof gebruik word as 'n meetskaal vir die ander. Ek dink dat skoliere moet elke religie of geloof afsonderlik op sy eie konteks interpreteer en evalueer ten opsigte van die beliggaaming van evangeliese boodskappe. Dit beteken dat elke geloof sy eie unieke wyse het waarmee dit die evangelie boodskap beliggaam.