

CHAPTER 3: CHRISTIAN MISSION AND THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

(1) Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis it was shown how AIDS disrupts and threatens every level of society. Gow and Desmond have shown how the pandemic has consequences at the demographic, health, welfare, educational and household levels.¹ Their analysis has not, however, dealt with the religious or spiritual dimension of the crisis.

I showed in that chapter that there are definite theological questions raised by the pandemic. The questions mentioned were raised on the levels of systematic, ethical and pastoral theology. It is on the systematic level that this research will proceed. More particularly, the research will focus on the eschatological and soteriological questions raised by the pandemic. What does it mean to say one is 'saved' in the context of the pandemic? Are there any more hopeful eschatological systems than that of traditional Western Christian theology, which for example, do not have a moment of judgement?²

The cult of the ancestors in traditional Southern African religious thought presents alternative responses to both of these questions. At least as a point of comparison, the cult helps to clarify a Christian response that is appropriate to the context. At a first glance, the conditions for entry into the ancestral world of eschatological fulfillment and perhaps 'salvation' seem less rigorous than those of Western Christianity.³ This might

1. Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond, eds., *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and UNICEF, 2002).

2. For example, John Mbiti writes of the Akamba understanding of the afterlife: "But [God] neither punishes [the departed] nor rewards them for whatever they did in this life. On their part they do not thirst for His holiness or righteousness; nor do they have spiritual 'communion' with Him." See John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 138.

3. This is not to say that the ethical demands the ancestors make on the lives of their descendants are less rigorous than Christian ethics. But ancestral belief sees reward and punishment in the present life, and not projected into an afterlife after a moment of judgement. The cult of the ancestors requires that one remains in good relationship with one's family, neighbours and ancestors, and does not breach certain traditional taboos.

offer hope to people living with HIV or AIDS. This was my motivation for considering the cult of the ancestors in the second chapter.

The Church is commissioned to make disciples of all nations, baptising and teaching all the commands Jesus gave.⁴ It is my belief that this evangelical mission of the Church requires us to use all resources at our disposal. People who are affected by the AIDS pandemic need to access their deepest religious and spiritual resources, in order to find healing, consolation and resolution. Theologically and spiritually reflective Christians should help others to find and employ these resources, even if they do not come from a traditional Christian source.

In the second chapter I considered the African cult of the ancestors as it is practised in South Africa. I outlined those aspects of the cult that have survived a history of suppression, as well as the present manifestations of the cult. I used contemporary material to attempt to provide a definition and description of the cult. I also demonstrated that the cult is not an isolated set of ideas and practices, but that it forms part of a larger, living worldview, which has survived the introduction of Western scientific reasoning to Southern Africa. With the use of data collected by anthropologists, I demonstrated how the cult is now perceived and practiced by South Africans.

It is clear that the cult of the ancestors is a profound, culturally-located African spiritual resource. As such it has an important role to play in the approach to the AIDS pandemic. The second chapter approached the cult of the ancestors with this outlook. I showed that the cult is a vital reality in the South African religious scene. It is neither an irrelevant relic nor a *recherché* romantic re-invention of the past. It is a reality that cannot be wished away, even if one should want to do so.

This present chapter will consider the history of the relationship between the Christian missionaries, and subsequently indigenous Christians, and the cult of the

4. See Mt. 28:19-20.

ancestors. Examining the Church's attitude to the cult of the ancestors, I will show that there have been two distinct stages. In the initial stage of the mission to Southern Africa, there was an all-out effort to eradicate the cult. Missionaries came with a mindset of 'conversion' to Christianity, which implied the abandoning of all that was not perceived to be Christian. It will become apparent that the cult went 'underground' and that Christians practised their cult of the ancestors in secret, or abandoned it altogether. In the second stage, there is a resurgence of the cult of the ancestors in the late-twentieth Century. I will present evidence for this assertion, and explain this revival in its ecclesial and social context.

Following a wider trend in Southern Africa, there is a rediscovery of the cult of the ancestors in the Catholic Church, accompanied by a semi-officially sanctioned exploration of its use in some liturgical settings. This is not without considerable and understandable resistance on the part of many Catholics, as the Church has had a particularly ambiguous relationship with this cult. People have learnt that the ancestors are demonic, that Christians may not venerate their ancestors, that such behaviour could result in exclusion from the Church. Now they are confronted with a new reasoning that allows them to approach their ancestors. Little wonder that they are confused at the new openness within the Church.

(2) Preliminary Notes

The first preliminary note concerns methodology. I explain why I have used the Basotho as a case study for the demise of the cult of the ancestors among Christians during the 19th and early 20th Centuries. I will trace the history of the suppression of the cult, making particular use of 19th Century missionary correspondence and early catechisms, which I have been able to find in Lesotho.

The second preliminary note explains why it is necessary for this chapter to take a diachronic approach, illustrating the interaction between adherents of the cult and

messengers of the Gospel. I will establish that it is not possible to give a synchronic ‘snapshot’ of a ‘pure’ or ‘original’ cult before the arrival of white people, and consequently of Christian influence.

(a) The Basotho as Case Study

I believe it is justified to take one group as a representative case of the way in which the cult of the ancestors was suppressed among Christians in Southern Africa, because this was a general and widespread occurrence in the development of the church. To try to detail the demise of the cult across the entire subcontinent would be too complicated, and a much larger task than our present study requires. Thus, for the sake of defining parameters, this section will focus largely but not exclusively on the Basotho, using them as a representative sample of the general situation of the ancestral cult in South Africa.⁵

Another reason for using the case of the Basotho has to do with the limitations of the present author. Of the nine official African languages in South Africa,⁶ I am only sufficiently familiar with the (Southern) Sotho language and culture to make sense of documents written in this language.

A further reason for using the Basotho case as a study is that the early evangelisation of this people was done mostly by two groups: The Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS)⁷ and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). The relevant

5. See N.J. van Warmelo, “The Classification of Cultural Groups,” in *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 72–78. Van Warmelo makes the point that the Southern Sotho are not a homogeneous group, and are made up of numerous clans and remnants of smaller tribes. In van Warmelo’s classification, the Western Sotho (or Tswana) and the Northern Sotho (or Pedi) also call themselves *baSotho*. One must be wary of accepting uncritically the racial classifications that were advanced during the years of apartheid, and which served the ideology of separate and irreconcilable ethnic differences.

6. These are in addition to English and Afrikaans, both of European origin.

7. In this thesis, I use the English form of “Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS)” for the *Société des Missions Évangéliques chez les peuples non-chrétiens à Paris (SMEP)*.

The Society was formed in Paris in 1822 by people influenced by the evangelical revival movement which gave rise to the London Mission Society and the Basel Missions. Correspondence from

documents are thus not too dispersed, and are neatly contained in two archives, which were accessible for this study. The first is in Morija, Lesotho, and belongs to the Evangelical Church of Lesotho. It houses a complete set of the documents of the PEMS, which was the first and major Protestant society to evangelise the Basotho. Access to the archives was very generous and open. The second archive is that of the French Canadian OMI Province housed at Deschâtelets Residence, in Ottawa. Again, this archive has a complete set of documents and published material relating to the Roman Catholic mission to Lesotho, including a full set of *Extraits des missions des O.M.I.*, and is accessible in Ottawa.

The case of the Basotho is atypical in one important respect: their political unity during the early missionary period. The people of Basutoland were under the stable reign of a single king (Moshoeshoe I) from 1823 to 1870. Beginning in 1818 Moshoeshoe forged the nation from a number of groups that had escaped the tribal wars of the subcontinent (*difaqane*) by taking refuge in the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosiu in the present Lesotho. Moshoeshoe welcomed the missionaries to the territory under his influence, which included expanses of the present eastern Free State. The missionaries' presence would lend prestige⁸ and, Moshoeshoe hoped, some degree of protection

Eugène Casalis in Lesotho, one of the first three members of the Society to be sent to Africa, dates back to 1827. Casalis and Adolphe Mabile were advisers to King Moshoeshoe of the Basotho for about 20 years.

In Africa, members of the Society evangelised in Lesotho, Congo-Gabon, Cameroon, Madagascar, Senegal, Togo, Zambia and Algeria. Publications of the Society were: *Bulletin*, which was founded in 1825 and *Journal des Missions Évangéliques*, founded in 1826.

In 1935, the Society ceased work in Lesotho, with the establishment of the Basotholand Evangelical Church. The PEMS ceased to exist in 1971, with the creation of its successor, the *Département Évangélique Français d'Action Apostolique (DEFAP)*. This latter seems now to be known as the *Service Protestant de Mission*.

The ethnographic documents of David Frédéric Ellenberger as well as his history of the Basotho from early times to 1854 are important resources of one of the members of the Society. The archives of the society are housed by the *MUNDUS* project at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Further information on the society can be found on the website of the *MUNDUS* project: www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/1060.htm consulted on 17 January 2005.

8. Claude-Hélène Perrot, "Premières années de l'implantation du christianisme au Lesotho (1833–1847)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* IV #1, no. 13 (1963): 100.

against the British, Zulu and Dutch neighbours who were gnawing away at his territory. The Basotho welcomed the introduction of schools, Western clothing and technology such as the hoe, rifles, ox wagons, and particularly books, reading and writing.⁹

(b) The Impossibility of Describing a 'Pure' or 'Original' Cult

Since the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa relied on oral tradition to convey their cultures from one generation to the next, there are no written accounts of the cult of the ancestors before the advent of the white agriculturalists, explorers, missionaries and settlers.¹⁰ However, attempts have been made to reconstruct the worldview and religion of Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans in 1487.

One such attempt, by Krüger, claims to offer '*das Weltbild der Sotho-Chuana, unbeeinflusst vom Weißen*' and several pages later, the contrasting '*unter dem Einfluß der Weißen*.'¹¹ It is unfortunate that Krüger was unable to give the sources of his insights into the ancestor cult of the Sotho-Tswana people before the influence of the white people. Other parts of his work are better documented. So we must take with a great deal of scepticism his claim to offer a historical snapshot of the ancestor cult before the advent of white influence.

Having made that caveat, let us examine what Krüger has to say. Two paragraphs, give an overall description of the cult, as he understands it, before the influence of white people:

For the Basotho, the ancestors are the most important representatives of the spiritual world. They are the gods on whom their wellbeing and woe are mainly dependent. The most significant and particularly the most recently deceased chiefs are prayed to. These live in the holy groves in which they were buried. In

9.Perrot, "*Premières années de l'implantation*," 108f.

10. There may be records written by Arab traders operating along the East coast and interior of Africa as far south as the present province of the Eastern Cape, between the 12th and 16th centuries, but the present writer has no access to these.

11. Ferdinand Krüger, "*Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana-Gruppe der Bantu in Südafrika*," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, Dritte Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien* 38 (1935): 98ff., edited by Diedrich Westermann (Berlin).

addition, each family honours its familial ancestors who are buried in the cattle kraal (enclosure).¹²

Krüger draws a contrast between knowledge of a Creator God and of the ancestors:

The Basotho know a Creator God, to whom they have not given a name. He,¹³ the creator of the above and the below, is also the final cause of death. Because he thus is to be feared, the Basotho are reluctant to speak his name. Pronouncing his name makes this infinitely distant one angry and he causes the death of the person who uses the name. So there are only very few ancient prayers which invoke this Creator God on specific occasions. He plays no role in the religious life of the people.¹⁴

Early European observers, who make no claims of access to 'uninfluenced' religion among the Bantu of Southern Africa, paint the general picture much as Krüger has described it: a distant Creator God and much more proximate ancestors. The ancestors, who are either familial or of the tribe at large, are the objects of veneration (some say 'worship', as we shall consider in the second section of this chapter), while the God is accorded no place in religious practice. It should be noted here that Krüger does not say that the ancestors play any intercessory or intermediary role between living people and the Supreme God. The attribution of this intercessory role seems to be a subsequent Christianization of the cult, as we shall see later.

Poems and praise songs render an impression of what the original religion might have been like, but do not constitute historical documents. Despite its great accuracy and reliable transmission from one generation to the next, oral tradition does change, and oral texts are modified in the course of history. Anthropologists and missionaries have reduced many of these texts to writing, so they give an account of what the tradition held at the time of writing.

12. Krüger, "*Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana Gruppe*," 99. See Appendix 1 for all non-English language texts which have been quoted at any length. In the main body of the thesis, I will provide my own English translations of these texts.

13. I will use the masculine pronouns: he, him, his, etc. for want of a more fluent means of pronominal reference to this God. This does not imply that the Basotho or I attribute gender to the God.

14. Krüger, "*Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana Gruppe*," 98. See Appendix 1.

I would conclude that it is not possible to access ancient pre-colonial religion. Nor is it essential for our purpose to do so, because we are concerned with the present state of the cult of the ancestors. We are neither involved in a project in archaeology, nor trying to reconstruct a practice that does not meet today's perceived needs. It is more important for present purposes to see the interaction that took place between the cult and the missionary proclamation beginning in the 19th Century.

(3) History of the Cult of the Ancestors and Christianity

This history is presented in two clear and distinct stages. The first traces the demise of the cult of the ancestors among Sotho Christians. In the second stage, I will examine evidence for a re-emergence of the cult into mainstream Christianity from the 1970's onwards as well as reasons for this re-emergence. Finally, I will examine the minimal use to which theologians have put the cult in the face of the present AIDS crisis.

Stage One: The missionary movement and the ancestor cult

The first missionary work among the Basotho began with the arrival in 1833 of Eugène Casalis, Thomas Abrousset and Constant Gosselin of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS). Moshoeshoe, king of the Basotho was very quick to offer place to the missionaries in his kingdom. He saw the advantages of having Europeans in his territory, and hoped they would lend some protection from invasions. The PEMS set up its first mission station at Morija. De Clark says that the mission was relatively successful, in that approximately 1.5% of Moshoeshoe's subjects had become church members within the first 15 years of the arrival of the missionaries.¹⁵

15. See S.G. de Clark, "The Encounter Between the Basotho and the Missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, 1833–1933: Some Perspectives," *Kleio* XXXII (2000): 5. In 1863 some of the mission posts were handed over to Basotho, and in 1872, the local Evangelical Church of Basutoland was established, with a presbyterian, synodical polity.

Bishop Allard and his companions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were similarly welcomed by Moshoeshe when they arrived in 1862. The Catholic missionaries arrived with the promise of schools to teach literacy and skills. They too received a large tract of land (which was to be called 'Roma') from the king and were able to establish a mission and begin evangelisation among the very receptive Basotho. In 1865 the arrival of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux meant that the mission could establish a school for boys and girls.

Both the Catholic and the Evangelical missionaries took pains to learn the language and customs of the Basotho, and to come to understand their people. From the outset, the missionaries of both denominations were very intolerant of the Sotho worldview which had the ancestors as its cornerstone. It was maintained that the ancestors were false gods, and that their veneration was equivalent to worshipping false gods and thus not permissible to Christians.

This intolerance of the cult of the ancestors might be explained, at least on a certain level, by a misunderstanding of the etymology of the words for 'God,' 'ancestors' and for 'false gods.' These are nowadays translated as '*Modimo*,' '*badimo*' and '*medimo*' respectively. The distinction was not always so clear, as I demonstrate in the following example.

Maeder gives an early example of this confusion.¹⁶ He writes: "*Après leur mort, ils sont changés en merimo (ancêtres, décédés, mais existant encore en esprits.) . . . La langue sessouto n'a pas d'autre mot pour exprimer le nom de Dieu que Morimo, qui est le singulier de Merimo.*"¹⁷ Thus, *Modimo* (or God), is thought to be the singular of the plural *medimo* (or the ancestors.)

In my opinion, Maeder is mistaken on two counts:

16.It will be noted that Maeder was writing in 1855, before even the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in 1862.

17.Fr. Maeder, *Journal de la Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris* 30 (1855): 44.

(i) on dying, people change into *badimo*, (not *medimo*) which is the correct term for ancestors, and

(ii) *Modimo* is not the singular of *medimo*. In fact, the word *Modimo* is in a linguistic category of its own, with no plural, and does not take the same euphonic concords as would the singular of *medimo* and *badimo*. These latter are ‘false gods’ and ‘ancestors’ respectively, and are almost invariably used in the plural.

Thus the Basotho do not put God in the same category as either the ancestors or false (other) gods. *Modimo* has an independent and unique existence. If this had been better understood from the beginning, and the etymological mistakes not made, the churches would perhaps not have opposed the cult of the ancestors as virulently. This speculation may, of course, be quite mistaken, given the conception of their religion held by the earliest missionary, Eugène Casalis: “*C’est en effet aux mânes de leurs ancêtres que ces peuples adressent leurs prières. Un prophète a décrit leur religion d’un seul mot: ‘Ils vont aux morts pour les vivants.’*”¹⁸

(a) Forbidden Practices

I shall demonstrate here how anything to do with the cult of the ancestors was systematically eliminated from the lives of members of the churches. In the Evangelical Church, Christians were explicitly forbidden to partake in the consumption of beer, in dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage arrangements (such as *lobola*, polygamy, levirate marriage, etc.) traditional healing, etc., all of which had close connections with the cult of the ancestors.

The problem is that the social aspects of beer consumption, dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage, traditional healing, etc., all form part of a wider social and

18. Eugène Casalis, *Les Bassoutos ou vingt-trois années d’études et d’observations au sud de l’Afrique* (Paris: Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1859). This early history was re-edited in 1993 for the centenary of the mission to the Basotho, and the quote is taken from p.304 of the re-edition.

cultural web. By attempting to eliminate them, the missionaries were undermining and weakening the cultural integration of the Sotho Christians. Many Christians were unable to, or unwilling to forgo these dimensions of normal social life, so continued them clandestinely. As Robert Schreiter says: “For too long, embracing Christ and his message meant rejection of African cultural values. Africans were taught that their ancient ways were deficient or even evil and had to be set aside if they hoped to become Christian.”¹⁹

By 1887, the Evangelical Church of Lesotho had developed a sufficient knowledge of the Sotho culture to instruct each missionary to combat every type of superstitious practice. The *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* lists exhaustively these superstitious practices to be combated: sorcery, belief in reincarnation, in spirits which haunt the living in their sleep, in bones, in divination, in amulets, in contamination by touching a dead person, in lustral ablutions, in purification with chyme or gall, in prayer to the ancestors, in prophylactic incisions and finally exorcism performed by people under hallucination.²⁰

The *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* continues with a list of practices which are forbidden to any Christian or person attending class to become a Christian. This list includes eating meat sacrificed to ancestors, as well as using charms to drive the birds off the fields, or leaving charms in the paths of enemies, or praying to the gods to increase the crops, to avoid hail, to send rain, and participating in ritual hunts in times of drought, and using incense, etc.²¹

These two lists are repeated in the *Status et Règlements* of 1895,²² a more digestible version of the *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale*. Thus the synods

19. Robert J. Schreiter, “Introduction: Jesus Christ in Africa Today,” in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), viii.

20. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* (Moriija: Moriija Sesuto Book Depot, 1887), 18f.

21. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution presbytérienne*, 19.

22. Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements: Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Conférence* (Moriija: Moriija Sesuto Book Depot, 1895), 41f.

repeatedly declared a whole range of normal social activities off bounds to Christians. I shall now consider five of these activities in greater depth.

(i) Beer Consumption

It is clear that the consumption of alcoholic beverages in Southern Africa predates the arrival and influence of Europeans. The earliest records of beer consumption come from the survivors of the shipwreck of the *Santo Alberto* off the Natal coast in 1583. The link between beer drinking and the ancestral cult is made in writing in the early 17th Century. "Dos Santos, writing in 1609, . . . points out that it [*pombe*] was used in feasts and rituals in honour of royal ancestors."²³ Beer-drinking was, and still is, an important part of the social and ritual life of many South African peoples. However its ritual associations and leading to licentious behaviour made this activity the target of prohibition by missionary bodies in the subcontinent.

In 1895 the Conference of the (Evangelical) Church of Basutoland forbade its members to participate in any activity intimately associated with the cult of the ancestors. They were to refrain from the consumption of beer (*joala*).²⁴ This *Verbot* was strengthened by the leading body of the Church in 1900, when it forbade even the participation in the preparation of the beer.²⁵

This stance was softened when, in Chapter XIV on 'The Church and Heathen Customs' of the *Constitutions and Regulations* of 1927, the consumption of light beer was permitted, with the provisos that it did not lead to drunkenness, and that members of the

23.P.A. McAllister, "Indigenous Beer in Southern Africa: Functions and Fluctuations," *African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993): 71f.

24. "2. *Il convient aux chrétiens de s'absentir en tout temps et en tout lieu des chants païens et des danses païennes.*" and "6. *Les chrétiens doivent s'absentir de toute boisson enivrante, telle que l'eau de vie et le yoala.*" See Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements*, 42f.

25. "**Joala ba Sesotho.** - *Seboka se tiisa hore balumeli ha ba na ho noa joala, leha e le ho bo etsa (1900).*" ("**Sesotho beer.** - The assembly confirms that believers are not to drink beer, or even to make it.") See Church of Basutoland, *Litaba tse reriloeng ke seboka sa baruti le synodo* (Moriya: Morija Printing Office, 1909), 4.

Church were not to own premises on which alcohol was sold.²⁶ However, the same chapter had begun by forbidding members to attend any “heathen feasts” and strongly disapproving of “all heathen practices such as divining bones, purifications, charms, circumcision, prayers to ancestors or to gods, etc.”²⁷

It is possible that the permission for Christian women to continue to brew for their ‘pagan’ husbands comes from situations similar to that of a story told by Chere. A husband was not going to stand in the way of his wife (Sekamotho) becoming a Christian. But he said: “. . . but what I will not let her give up is helping me in my heathen practices and in making strong beer.”²⁸

By 1979, the *Law Book* had softened its stance on the consumption of alcohol to: “Drunkenness is a great annoyance to the life of men, and the word of God states in no uncertain terms that habitual drunkards cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”²⁹ Thus, it seems that the prohibition of the consumption of alcoholic drink was no longer as strictly enforced.

One of the many AIC’s which had its constitutions printed at Morija has also forbidden its members to drink beer. The reason given is that the consumption of beer is associated with vice (*bohlola*).³⁰ Thus, it is not because of its association with the cult of the ancestors that beer is forbidden.

26. “To prevent drunkenness, Church members are not allowed to consume brandy, whisky or strong native beer, or any intoxicating drink. They shall not frequent beer drinking parties.

“Women shall not brew Kaffir beer either for home consumption or for people doing any work for them in the fields or otherwise. But a woman compelled by a heathen husband to do so and who does not drink herself, shall not be subjected to any blame. She shall however try to be relieved from such obligations.

“Christians may use light native beer, but in small quantities, to avoid drunkenness.

“There shall be some punishment in case of drunkenness.

“It is forbidden to all members of the Church to keep canteens for the sale of strong or light Kaffir beer or any other intoxicating drinks.” *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1927), 35f. Chap XIV, article 3.

27. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 35.

28. Lysiase Chere, “The Conversion of Sekamotho,” *Gospel Work in Basutoland - by Native Agency Report for the year 1913*: 9.

29. Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1979), Ch.19, article 235.

30. “Ha re noe joala hobane ke moo bohlala bo leng teng.” See *The Apostles and Christian Brethren*

The consumption of traditional beer was a bone of contention among those being admitted to the churches. Whether it is true or not, the perception among Protestants was that Catholics were not forbidden to drink beer, and thus to participate in some dimension of the ancestor cult. Competition between the Catholic and Protestant churches was strong,³¹ and encounters such as the following were commonplace:

“When we went about evangelising the people would answer ‘Go away, we do not want you; we want the Roman Catholics who allow us to drink as we want and to marry as many wives as we want.’”³² It is clear that this report in the mission magazine, written by a Mosotho for a European (mostly Scottish) Protestant audience, is entirely incorrect about polygamy in the Catholic Church.³³ But while it is wrong in this major detail, it

Church of South Africa, Church Constitution (Pretoria: Morija, 1954).

31.I will cite only one instance of many tensions in the 19th Century between the Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Basutoland. Joseph Gerard writes on 4 February 1864: “*Je vous dirai, mon bien-aimé Père, que les ministres [Protestants] ne cessent de nous calomnier dans leurs prêches d’une manière affreuse. Marie, notre bonne Mère, a aussi sa part dans ces blasphèmes horribles dignes de Luther et de Calvin. . . . Chaque fois que j’en ai l’occasion, je suis heureux de venger l’honneur de notre Mère Immaculée, et les Basutos, même ceux qui ont été pervertis, ne peuvent s’empêcher de reconnaître combien il est juste d’honorer et de prier la sainte Mère de Dieu.*” See Joseph Gerard, *Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* 17 (March 1866): 22.

The correspondence on both sides of the Catholic / Protestant divide is peppered with accounts of such rivalry. This is not surprising, as it is a reflection of the religious tensions of the time between Catholic and Protestant in Europe. The age of ecumenism had not yet begun.

In a 20th Century missionary encyclical, we see this suspicion of and competition with the evangelising work of Protestants. In 1926, Pius XI writes in *Rerum Ecclesiae*, encouraging Catholics to be more generous to the work of the foreign missions: “. . . the Catholic people shall never permit themselves to be outdone in generosity by non-Catholics who are wont to assist so liberally the propagators of their false beliefs.” (R.E. 17.)

32.Everitt Sehoète, “Missionary Work at Kueneng, Basutoland, 1899–1906,” *Gospel Work in Basutoland by Native Agency Report for 1906–1907*: 6 The Evangelical Church, as well as all the others had forbidden its members to practice polygamy. Their Constitutions and Regulations say: “Polygamy is absolutely prohibited by the Church.” in *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

33.Mgr. Allard, Vicar Apostolic and Superior of the OMI mission in Basutoland, writes on 5 November 1865, to the Superior General: “*Nous apprenons que bien des personnes, surtout parmi les femmes, sont touchées de la grâce et manifestent le désir d’embrasser la religion chrétienne, désir qu’elles n’osent pas mettre à exécution par crainte de leurs maris, qui redoutent de se voir abandonnés par leurs femmes. Combien de conversions ne compterions-nous si la polygamie n’y mettait obstacle!*” See François Allard, *Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* 21 (March 1867): 83.

Joseph Gerard writes in 1864 that polygamy was widespread and part of the economy of Basutoland: “*Nous le voyons, il règne parmi eux [les Basutos] une grande crainte de devenir chrétiens: ils redoutent la séparation de leurs femmes, car tous sont polygames. . . . La polygamie*

conveys the underlying tension over alcohol. I have not come across any prohibition of Catholics to use alcohol.

McAllister shows how important beer and dancing are for people in Southern Africa. In his survey of the records concerning beer, McAllister shows that it is central to the cult of the ancestors, and that beer was more often brewed and consumed as an indispensable part of ritual, than for purely social or nutritional reasons. He asserts that “The ritual significance of beer, common throughout Africa, seems to have been greater among Sotho-speakers and Venda than among Nguni.”³⁴

Bosko notes how important beer is to the Basotho, when he says that its preparation is linguistically patterned on the “making of a human being and the re-making of a person in changes of status.”³⁵ “Basotho praise sorghum beer’s nourishing quality and often refer to it as Sesotho, i.e. they identify it with their life.”³⁶ This means that it is so much part of the Sotho culture, that it is considered part of what it is to be a Mosotho. To separate a Mosotho from the beer is an assault on his or her identity.

Correspondence from 1907 shows that members of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) were aware of this close association between beer and the ancestor cult. H. Dieterlen writes of two rituals associated with harvest.³⁷ In the first, one or two handfuls

pratiquée non-seulement par passion, mais par intérêt: c’est la seule source de tous leur revenus, et presque l’unique commerce du pays.” See Gerard, Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 20.

While Gerard was still in Natal, before he was transferred to open the Sotho mission, he had already perceived polygamy to be an obstacle to the Zulus embracing the Christian faith. Interestingly, in a letter of 29 September 1856, he reckons polygamy to be more of a problem than the cult of the ancestors: “*Cependant, Monseigneur, ces pratiques superstitieuses, [le culte des esprits de leurs ancêtres, les sacrifices], auxquelles les Cafres sont fortement attachés, ne sont encore qu’un petit obstacle comparées à celui qu’offrent la polygamie et leurs mœurs dépravés, dont on peut difficilement soupçonner en Europe toute la corruption.*” See Joseph Gerard, “Correspondence de R.P. Gerard,” in *Afrique du Sud: Extraits de missions de la Congrégation des O.M.I. (1862–1881)* (Rome), 335.

Thus, from the outset of the Catholic mission to Southern Africa, polygamy was an obstacle to conversions, and it cannot be said that Catholic converts were permitted to “marry as many wives as we want.”

34. McAllister, “Indigenous Beer,” 74.

35. Dan Bosko, “Why Basotho Wear Blankets,” *African Studies* 40, no. 1 (1981): 25.

36. Bosko, “Why Basotho Wear Blankets,” 24.

of grain are buried in the fields for the ancestors (*pha-balimo*). In the second ritual, beer is brewed, neighbours come for the party, and the ancestors are thanked by the libation of some beer in a special place in the principal hut of the homestead. Then all the members of the family drink from the calabash of beer, while reciting the praises of the ancestors. Therefore, when the Evangelical Church forbade its members to partake in beer and singing and dancing, this was a direct, conscious prohibition on partaking in any ancestor-related ritual.

Besides being ill-considered from the point of view of the Christians' social and cultural integration, prohibiting them to drink, was also dietetically ill-advised. The weak beers of Southern Africa were major sources of nutrition, particularly of vitamins B and C, mineral salts and proteins. Brewing was also an important method of utilising produce not suitable for cooking or consumption as solid food.³⁸

It is not my purpose to deny that drunkenness did become a problem as the people of Southern Africa were exposed to stronger and stronger alcoholic beverages in the 19th Century. This is adequately recorded by McAllister, who indicates the dissatisfaction of employers whose labourers did not arrive for work on Monday mornings.³⁹ Drunkenness may also have been a cause of scandal in the community of the Evangelical Church. But this church made a blanket prohibition of the use of any alcoholic beverage, thereby preventing the members from partaking in any ancestor rituals.

(ii) Dancing

To restrict further Church members' participation in any ritual associated with the cult of the ancestors, the Evangelical Church forbade its members to participate in singing and dancing. The *Constitution* of 1887 says among its *Articles de Discipline: Coutumes à*

37.H. Dieterlen, "La fête des récoltes," *Journal de la société des missions évangéliques de Paris* 82 (1907): 334–41.

38.On the nutritional value of the beers, see McAllister, "Indigenous Beer," 72f.

39.See McAllister, "Indigenous Beer," 81 ff.

*combattre: "Il convient aux chrétiens de s'absentir en tout temps et en tout lieu des chants païens et des danses païennes, ainsi que du stapo."*⁴⁰ Apart from the consumption of beer, the cult of the ancestors was accompanied by singing and dancing. To deny members permission to join in the celebrations, was a means of ensuring their distance from the cult of the ancestors.

(iii) Rites of Passage

As the ancestors are intimately involved in the lives of their descendants, it is clear that they are present at the important rites of passage. The rituals of birth, initiation, marriage, death and returning the spirit to the homestead, are all accompanied by invocation of and conversation with the ancestors of the family. To forbid the participation of Christians in these rites of passage, therefore, is to forbid their having anything to do with the cult of the ancestors at these crucial moments in their lives.

Thus, when members of the Evangelical Church of Lesotho are forbidden to have their children circumcised - the fundamental rite of initiation into adulthood - they are denied an important encounter with their ancestors and their tradition.

The 1887 articles of discipline of the church read: "*La circoncision des enfants de chrétiens, filles et garçons, est défendue. Les parents coupables d'avoir directement ou indirectement favorisé cette pratique seront punissables.*"⁴¹

The 1927 *Constitutions and Regulations* enforce the prohibition with the threat of excommunication: "The Church condemns the circumcision of boys and the initiation rites for girls. It shall exclude any one submitting himself to such rites. The Church shall exclude members who submit their children or let them be free to submit to such heathen practices."⁴²

40.Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution prebytérienne*, 19.

41.Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution prebytérienne*, 19.

42.*The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 37.

This prohibition remains in force up to the present, with a softening of the threat of excommunication in the case of children: In the 1979 *Law Book* “The Church rejects circumcision. All Christians who deal in it will be regarded as having left the Church.”⁴³ However it seems that excommunication does not apply to the children of the Church schools who go for circumcision. They may not return to school for six months, unless they were forced to be circumcised, in which case their ban from school is only three months.⁴⁴

Clearly there is some reason for Christians to be wary of the traditional initiation schools. Boys and girls go off to these schools separately, and are ritually initiated into adulthood in the tradition. That includes having elder people teaching the young about the traditional, ancestral ways of the people, including gender roles and expectations. The boys are often treated very harshly, and made into ‘men’ in the eyes of their elders. They have to learn songs that are considered unchristian because they are very demeaning and offensive to the dignity of women.

Occasionally there are serious medical problems, as the initiation schools were traditionally isolated huts in the remote countryside. On occasion a boy might die from the harsh treatment he received. What is particularly odious to the Christians, is the secrecy surrounding the whole process, and particularly when an initiate dies. Nowadays more parents are opting to have their pubescent sons circumcised in Western-style medical facilities, in order to avoid the danger of sepsis and shared blades at the initiation schools, with the attendant dangers of contamination and infection.

Initiation schools often play an important role in bringing together members of a cohort of men or women, and traditionally the king’s battalions were made up of the various cohorts at the school. The cohort could claim a person’s primary allegiance, and this would mean that the Christian communities would not be the men’s first concern.

43.Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book*, Ch. 19, article 237.

44.Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book*, Ch. 22, article 259.

Often men who had not been initiated would be treated as boys or immature, or as sub-adult. As an indication of the social importance of circumcision, Sechefo says: "Of all the observances to be complied with by the families and the different clans in general, circumcision by far stands foremost and above any other performance, it being the backbone of the nation itself."⁴⁵

To oppose the initiation altogether was seen as the only Christian response to the schools. There was very little attempt to offer alternative, Christian initiation schools, or to try to engage constructively with this key dimension of Sotho culture.⁴⁶

(iv) Marriage

Marriage in Sesotho is not only about the happiness of the couple involved. It is an arrangement that takes place in a wider social context. It involves bringing together and establishing permanent ties between two families. It is thus not undertaken lightly or without the consultation of the wider family, including the ancestors, who are the guardians of the fortunes of their respective families. Marriage is traditionally contracted with many negotiations, and celebrations at various stages, including the transfer of goods (most commonly cattle) from the family of the groom to that of the bride. In that way, the families are merging their fortunes, getting to know each other, sharing hospitality, and ultimately, sharing a member of the family, when the bride goes to live at the home of her husband. The transfer of cattle (called *lobola*) is a way of ensuring that the prospective groom is able to support his wife and future family.

The 1897 Synod of the Church of Lesotho judged *lobola* to be a bad practice and condemned it.⁴⁷ The *Status et Règlements* of 1895 prescribe what may take place at a

45. Justinus Sechefo, *Customs and Superstitions in Basutoland* (Mazenod: The Catholic Centre, n.d.), 14.

46. I am aware of some attempts in the 1970's and 1980's of Catholics, such as Fr Sylvester Pheku OMI to offer alternative initiation schools teaching Sotho Christian morality and customs. I have not had access to information about why these attempts were soon discontinued.

47. Synod of the Church of Basutoland, *Litaba tse reriloeng ke seboka sa baruti le synodo ea kereke*

marriage: Firstly, parents of the bride are not permitted to demand one or several cattle for the marriage feast. Secondly, no pagan custom which binds the families of the bride and groom, or which involves the exchange of any cattle or other object are tolerated in the church. Thirdly, the parents of the bride and groom respectively are recommended to provide the marriage clothes of their child. Finally, in order to make the celebration a really joyous occasion, “*Que les fêtes du mariage se fassent avec ordre, sans chants, de nuit et sans la danse dite du stapo.*”⁴⁸

In its *Constitutions and Regulations* of 1927, the same church “forbids absolutely marriage where cattle have been given to the girl’s parents according to the native custom.”⁴⁹ It takes a full page to underline this prohibition, making allowances in very exceptional cases. The main rationale for the prohibition is that on the death of the husband, the widow would have to remain at the home of the late husband’s relatives and “become the concubine of one of them.”⁵⁰

In forbidding Christians to participate in the practice of *lobola*, the Church of Basutoland was demanding a completely countercultural stand, which few Christians were able to take. It was requiring that the traditional considerations of the families’ combined wealth and fortune not be taken into consideration and that the ancestors not be included in the marriage process of the couple.

ea Lesotho (Morija: Morija Printing Office, 1909), 7.

48. Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements*, 40.

49. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

50. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

The exchange of cattle at the time of the marriage would be seen to have made the wife somehow the “property” of the husband’s family. In a society where widow-headed households were not considered viable economic units, levirate marriage was a matter of the family of the deceased husband continuing to care and provide for the widow, as well as to maintain the relationship that had been forged between the two families when the marriage was originally contracted. The duty of the surviving brother to marry the widow of his deceased brother was a way of ensuring the continued survival and protection of the widow.

However, the Church saw this arrangement as a restriction of the right of the widow to freedom. It would be particularly odious in cases where a Christian woman would be expected to remarry a ‘heathen’ brother-in-law. See Michael C. Kirwen, *African Widows: An Empirical Study of the Problems of Adapting Western Christian Teachings on Marriage to the Leviratic Custom for the Care of Widows in Four Rural African Societies*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979). Kirwen concludes that levirate

(v) Healing

The ancestors are intimately involved in the practice of healing and the calling of diviners and traditional healers to their *métier*. However, Casalis says that the commandments given by Moses forbid the participation of Christians in this kind of practice. The religious law commands the people of Israel to fear and serve Jehova alone. Sorcery, calling the dead, becoming a diviner, using charms, or other such things, must be left well alone, because they call God's judgement and anger upon people who live by them.⁵¹ Christians are thus not to receive the call to be traditional healers or diviners.

Forbidding Christians from "being present at heathen feasts" and strongly disapproving of "all heathen customs such as divining bones, purifications, charms, circumcisions, prayers to the ancestors, etc."⁵² means that Christians could not follow the vocation of a traditional healer. It also prescribed that Sotho Christians were not allowed to receive traditional Sotho medical treatment. If a Mosotho were to follow this law strictly, it would mean he or she would be obliged to seek help from Western medical sources. Given that these were not readily available, it is inconceivable that many Sotho Christians conformed closely to the law not to seek traditional healing.

(vi) Conclusion

We have seen that the Evangelical Church in Lesotho forbade Sotho members to partake in the following social activities: beer drinking, dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage and healing ceremonies. In so doing, they effectively proscribed the participation of the members in any aspect of the cult of the ancestors.

marriage is less in conflict with Christian theology than with Western Christian marriage custom.

51. Alfred Casalis, *Histori ea sechaba sa Israele, ho tloha mehleng ea Bapatriareka ho isa tšenyehong ea Jerusalema 70 AD* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1926), 74.

52. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 35.

(b) The Ancestors and the Commandments

Different churches used the commandments differently in their teaching against the cult of the ancestors. The common ground is that it is seen as a breach of the first or second commandment to practice the cult of the ancestors. I shall examine here the use made of the commandments by the Lutheran and Catholic churches in their respective catechisms.

The Lutheran catechism of 1905 forbids dealings with the ancestors under the aegis of the second commandment. It says “This law tells us that we must fear God and love him by hating and despising any service of false gods and other enemies; and heathen ways, such as laying charms to scare away birds, or trusting in divination, or ancestors when a person is sick, or sacrificing to them, etc.”⁵³ The instruction continues that we should pray to God alone when in need of assistance. This is a very brief but to the point renunciation of the cult of the ancestors in the Lutheran Church.

(i) Ancestors and Sins

As we have seen above, the Evangelical Church of Lesotho (Basutoland) made many *ex tempore* synodical rulings concerning the behaviour of Christians with regard to the cult of the ancestors, and elements of the Sotho culture intimately connected with that cult. During the same period, the Catholic Church had a different way of dealing with the question.

The Catholic Church used its catechisms as a way of dealing with the cult. These catechisms are presented as doctrine, usually with an imprimatur or other ecclesiastical authority. They deal with the cult of the ancestors under the first commandment: “There

53. *Katekismanyane e nkiloeng ho ea Luther*, 9th ed. (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1905), 9f “*Molao oo o bolela hore e ka khona re tšabe Molimo le ho o rata ka ho ila le ho furalla tšebeletso efe le efe ea melimo ea bohata le ea liila tse ling; le ea mekhoha ea bohedene e kang oa ho upa linonyana leha e le ho tšepa bonohe, kapa balimo mohla motho a kulang, le ho ba hlabela, etc.*”

shall be no other gods for you before my face.”⁵⁴ Anything to do with the cult of the ancestors is identified as superstition or idolatry, and therefore a sin against the first commandment.

The earliest such example I found was that of 1888, or twenty-six years after the Catholic missionaries arrived among the Basotho. It has the imprimatur of Bishop A. Gaughran, the Vicar Apostolic of the Orange Free State and Basutoland. In its examination of the first commandment, the following series of questions and answers occurs:

What are the sins opposed to religion?

The sins opposed to religion are superstition, idolatry and sacrilegium.

What is idolatry?

Idolatry is to serve other creatures with the respect that is due to God alone.

Who commits the sin of idolatry?

Those who commit the sin of idolatry are the heathens who say that their relatives who have died are ancestors.

...

What is superstition?

Superstition is to believe that creatures, actions, and certain words have powers which were not given them by God.

What are the sins of superstition?

The sins of superstition are to wash oneself with bile, to be circumcised, to protect a place with charms, to scarify or make incisions, to divine, to wear charms, and many other things that the heathens do.⁵⁵

54.Ex. 20:3 and its parallel in Deut. 5:7 “You shall have no gods except me.”

In the Evangelical Church this is most often translated into the Sotho: “*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng pel’a sefahleho sa ka.*” or “Do not have other gods before my face.” See M.R.L. Sharpe, *Lipaki*, translated by Mosebi Damane (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1950), 41 and *Lipolelo tse ling tsa bibebe ho qala ka popo ho qetella ka Jesu Krete* (London: Religious Tract Society, for the Sesuto Book Depot, 1905), 108. F. Coillard translates it: “*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng mahlong a ka.*” or, “Do not have other gods in my eyes.” in Kurtz, *Matšohlo a lentsue le halalelang la Molimo tse khetiloeng: Testamente ea Khale*, translated and edited by F. Coillard (London: Religious Tract Society for the Paris Evangelical Mission Society, 1907), 78.

The Lutherans translate the commandment: “*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng pel’a sefahleho sa ka.*” See *Katekismanyane e nkiloeng ho ea Luther*, 9.

The Wesleyans translate the commandment: “*U se ke ua ba le medimo e meng pel’a ka.*” or “Do not have other gods before me.” See Wesleyan Conference, *Katekisima ea bobeli ea ba-Wesele* (Johannesburg, 1907), 61.

In Catholic catechisms the commandment is usually rendered: “*U khumamele Molimo a le mong feela hammoho ka tumelo, tšepo le lerato.*” or “Worship God alone with faith, hope and love.” See Bernard Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre, 1975), 18 and Bernard Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo: Tumelo e Katholike, Katekisima 3* (Maseru: Archdiocese of Maseru, 1991), 256.

55.A. Gaughran, *Katekisima ea lekhotala le leng* (Bloemfontein: Express, 1888), 45 See Appendix 1.

According to this catechism, it is thus the sin of idolatry to say that one's deceased relatives are ancestors. It is the sin of superstition to participate in any traditional healing ritual. As these were invariably associated with the cult of the ancestors, Catholics were told that anything that they did in this regard was sinful.

The catechism for children and catechumens printed in 1900 is much more direct. It has the following dialogue:

What does the first commandment forbid us?
The first commandment forbids us many heathen ways such as circumcision, divination, drugs and charms, washing with bile.⁵⁶

The catechism of the same name, but in its 1975 version, with the *imprimatur* of Bishop Des Rosiers, has the following dialogue:

93 What are the sins opposed to the first commandment?
The sins opposed to the first commandment are kneeling down before (worshipping / adoring) images of false gods, dishonouring holy things and superstition [*tumelo-masaoana*.]

. . .
95 What are the sins of superstition?
The sins of superstition are heathen ways, such as circumcision, divination, charms, washing with bile, putting out pegs to protect a place, scarifying and many others.⁵⁷

Thus almost a full century later, the condemnation of the sin of superstition of the 1888 catechism is repeated almost verbatim. There appears to have been no movement in the understanding of the cult of the ancestors in any positive light.

An interesting catechism is *Tumelo ea Baapostola*.⁵⁸ It does not follow the normal question and answer pedagogical method, but rather has short chapters on matters of the faith. It is a very positivist presentation of the faith, through discussion of the articles of the Apostles' Creed, written for a more educated audience. While it has a developed

56. *Katekisisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mariannahill: Trappist Press, 1900), 12.

"Molao oa pele o re hanelang?

"Molao ao pele o re hanela mekhoha e mengata ea bohetene, yualeka lebollo, litaola, meupello, hlatsuo ea nyoko."

57. Mohlalisi, *Katekisisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 20 See Appendix 1.

58. Henri Lebreton, *Tumelo ea Baapostola* (Maseru: Mazonod Institute, 1948).

demonology,⁵⁹ it has almost no discussion of Sotho culture or the traditional religious dimension of Sotho life.⁶⁰ One might regard this as a step in the right direction away from criticising deep cultural traditions.

However, the 1991 catechism, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*⁶¹ more than makes up for the lack of cultural critique in *Tumelo ea Baapostola*. It also uses a developed demonology, as seen in *Tumelo ea Baapostola*, to present as demonic any participation in the ancestral cult. There is, for example, the following dialogue:

- 479 How does a person give created things the respect and service that is due to God alone?
 A person gives created things the respect and service due to God alone'
 1. by worshipping created things or their images: this is the sin of idolatry;
 2. by wanting to know hidden or lost things in ways that are not worthy, like by consulting the bones: this is the sin of divination;
 3. by hoping in or fearing things or certain ways, too much, as if they had power to help or endanger him, while they don't have this power: this is the sin of superstition.
- 480 Who incites people to the sins of idolatry, divination and superstition?
 Satan incites people to the sins of idolatry, divination and superstition, he who is the enemy of our souls, who is hidden in the ways, customs and traditional medicines, by which he deceives people, because 'he is a liar and the father of lies' (Jn 8:44).
- 481 What are the acts of superstition by which Satan frequently deceives people?
 The acts of superstition by which Satan frequently deceives people are: leading people in a state of possession, sorcery, circumcision, killing in order to use flesh for medicinal purposes, divination, planting pegs to protect a place, cursing, making incisions, anointing children with red ochre, wearing charms, spells and many other things (Deut. 18:9-16).
- 482 How does a Christian find the helps for body and spirit he needs?
 A Christian find the helps for body and spirit he needs from the Lord God, through sacraments, sacramentals, prayers and advice from spiritual guides.⁶²
 Thus it is clear that it is a demonic power that leads people to all kinds of actions

associated with the ancestors, to traditional diagnosis and healing. Traditional healers and diviners are thus agents of Satan and of deception.

The following page⁶³ of the catechism gives ways in which people can take this

59. See pp. 54-63.

60. There is, on p.320, a discussion of the Sotho tradition of burying a person in preparation for a resurrection of the dead. But this is dismissed as unchristian, because it is understood to anticipate only a bodily resurrection.

61. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*.

62. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 259f See Appendix 1.

63. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 261.

knowledge home and into their ordinary lives. They resolve to avoid all heathen things and to encourage their neighbours to drop these bad ways. They pray that God will help all of Africa, and in fact, the whole world, to serve God alone and the throw away all bad heathen ways. They resolve to use and to encourage their neighbours to use, instead, sacramentals like holy water, blessed candles, the crucifix, the rosary, the scapular, and images representing the Lord Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the saints. Thus Christians are encouraged to replace the traditional Sotho set of aids to psychological health, and coping with perceived evil, with the Catholic set. Replacing the traditional healers and diviners, are the spiritual guides. The sacramentals like holy water and candles are to replace the charms and amulets and rubbing medicines into incisions, or smearing with ash or ochre. Holy pictures are to substitute for protecting a place from evil by putting ritual pegs in the ground.

The catechism indicates that there is a major struggle going on for power and influence in people's lives. There are two conflicting worldviews: in the first, from Sotho tradition, evil is caused by human individuals, and can thus be predicted, understood and controlled through recourse to the ancestors. In the second, God is supremely powerful, and calling on his assistance and that of the saints, is enough to overcome evil. The task is to convince Basotho to replace the first with the second.

Traditional Sotho ways, which rely on physical, rather than metaphysical connections, are to be replaced with (Western) traditional Christian ways, which are perceived in some way to be universal. The Christian helps are based on the universal symbols of purity (holy water), light (blessed candles) and images of holiness and having overcome evil. The Sotho helps are more immediately physical in the sense of wearing charms and amulets and applying medicines to protect a path, a place, a human body.

(ii) Ancestors and Saints

Along with the instruction to worship God alone, and therefore to regard the ancestral cult as idolatry and superstition, the Catholic catechetical discussion of the first commandment touches on the cult of the ancestors in a second way. The catechisms instruct on the appropriate cult of the saints, angels and the Virgin Mary. This is of relevance because of the religious similarity of the cults of the saints and ancestors.

In this consideration I shall deal only with the two more recent catechisms at my disposal: *Tseleng ea Leholimo* (1991) and *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (1975). I shall look at the reasons they give for respect and prayer to the Virgin Mary, the saints and angels, and conclude that they are no more compelling reasons than venerating and praying to the ancestors. At the outset, it is important not to equate the saints and the ancestors. Nobody says that these two groups are coterminous, and there are significant differences between the cults in the mainstream Catholic Church and in popular religion.

The lesson of *Tseleng ea Leholimo* dealing with the worthy respect of the Virgin Mary and the saints, as well as relics of saints, follows immediately on that dealing with the “heathen practices”.⁶⁴ The reasons given for the respect due to the Virgin Mary, angels and saints and their relics and images are in the rather slim dialogue:

487 Why do you respect and pray to the angels and saints?

I respect and pray to the angels and saints because they are friends of the Lord God, and my protectors and interceders.

488 Must you respect relics of the saints?

Yes, I must respect relics of the saints, because they are already in heaven, and their bodies were the temple of God.

489 Must you respect images of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints?

Yes I must respect these images because they remind me of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints.⁶⁵

64. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, lesson 25, pp. 262–67 See Appendix 1.

65. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 264.

In *Katekisima ea Bakatekumena le ea Bana*, the teaching on Mary and the saints immediately precedes that on the ancestors.⁶⁶ Reasons for respecting and praying to the Virgin Mary and the saints are given in the following dialogues:

90 Must we pray to them [the Virgin Mary, saints and angels]?

Yes we must pray to them, because they have been given power to help us.

...

92 Must we respect them [images of the Virgin Mary, saints and angels]?

Yes we must respect them, because our respect is directed to Jesus Christ and to the saints who are represented in them.⁶⁷

The catechisms thus encourage the invocation of the saints, but forbid seeking any help from the ancestors. The reasons given that the saints and angels are to be respected are that they are God's friends, my protectors and intercessors, and have been given power to help us.

However these are precisely the reasons adduced for the veneration of the ancestors. They are said to be closer to God, and to have power to protect and intercede for their descendants. This is most probably a later Christianisation of the cult of the ancestors, modelling it more on the cult of the saints. There is little evidence to suggest that the ancestors were initially perceived as fulfilling the primary role of intercessor with *Modimo*. That the ancestors are now perceived as having the power of intercession with God, rather than power in their own right, is an indication that the cult, as all cultural constructs, changes and is modified when it comes in contact with aspects of another culture. This is perfectly consistent with the notion of 'interculturalisation' as recorded by e.g. Shorter.

If the argument were whether the ancestors or the saints are one's primary protectors, it would be reduced to an intractable argument over authority: The Church would say that it is the saints. Sotho tradition would say that it is the ancestors. In the absence of some kind of material *proof* of which system is better, each side would be

66.Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 19.

67.Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 19 See Appendix 1.

equally strong, and the argument would result in a stalemate.

Catholic theology speaks nowadays of the *community of the Saints* who are all the deceased who are in the presence of God. Not all the saints have been officially canonised in a church, or “raised to the altar.” In fact, the majority of saints are anonymous, good people who have died. It is sometimes not even considered necessary to have been an explicitly Christian or God-fearing person to be a member of this saintly community.⁶⁸ It might be argued that the terms ‘saints’ and ‘ancestors’ refer to the same group of deceased.⁶⁹

However, while there appears to be at first glance a convergence of the understanding of the identity and roles of the saints and ancestors, there is still the very clear understanding that they are two distinct groups. Tlhagale illustrates conclusively that the two groups are not to be confused.⁷⁰ He outlines many differences between the two cults, of which I shall mention only two here:

(i) The saints relate to any Christian who relates to them, while the ancestors are concerned only with the affairs of their descent group, and with their family obligations.⁷¹

(ii) The ancestors’ power derives from their attaining a supernatural status on their death, and is not dependent on their relationship to God. The saints’ power is perceived entirely in terms of their proximity to God.⁷²

68. For a broad, inclusive reading of *Lumen Gentium* 16, See Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” in *Theological Investigations VI: Concerning Vatican Council II*, translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 390–98.

69. Alternatively it is argued that since saints and ancestors occupy similar functional positions (assuming that of the ancestors’ is the more Christianised version of intercession with God, rather than intervention on the basis of their own power) the ancestors can be seen as “stepping stones” to the saints:

This communion of the living and the dead, once it is transformed by faith in the risen Christ and the power of his resurrection, can, I believe, give new and vital expression to the doctrine of the communion of saints.

See Aylward Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” *AFER* 25, no. 4 (August 1983): 202.

70. See Buti Tlhagale, “Saints and Ancestors: A Closer Look,” *Entre Nous*, no. 2:18–22, 3:9–17 (1999).

71. Tlhagale, “Saints and Ancestors,” 2:19.

72. Tlhagale, “Saints and Ancestors,” 2:19.

Further, as I illustrated in the previous chapter there are criteria for incorporation among the ancestors, and these are quite different to those normally understood for saints. It would thus be a false harmonisation to say that the saints and the ancestors are the same, or that there is thus no qualitative difference between the two cults.

(iii) Conclusion

The catechisms were the means used by Catholics to discourage any contact with the ancestors. Catholic Christians are catechised that having dealings with the ancestors is a breach of the first commandment. Catholics are to replace their cult of the ancestors with the phenomenologically similar, but theologically different cult of the saints.

(c) The Missionary Motivation

Van der Walt does an “analysis of the prevailing *Zeitgeist* in South Africa, Europe and elsewhere early in the 19th century, and of the concomitant philosophical and theological trends at the time.”⁷³ He also scrutinises the “personal motives and circumstances of the individual missionaries”⁷⁴ to show that “[t]he main aim of the missionaries in their contact with the blacks was to Christianise them and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the heathen.”⁷⁵ Often, he says, the missionaries were from the working class, and unable to afford the training to become pastors in their own congregations, so joined the missionary societies.⁷⁶ Van der Walt continues that they were fired by great benevolence, and an analysis of their correspondence shows the overwhelming desire to win converts, or in the words of Benedict XV, to “snatch a soul from the mouth of hell.”⁷⁷

73.J.L. Van der Walt, “The Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances of Some 19th-Century Missionaries Teaching in South Africa,” *Koers* 57, no. 1 (1992): 75.

74.Van der Walt, “Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances,” 75.

75.Van der Walt, “Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances,” 77.

76.Van der Walt, “Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances,” 80.

77.Benedict XV, “*Maximum Illud*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 11 (1919): under “Missionary Virtues.”

In order to show their gratitude for the grace of their own faith, missionaries were encouraged to offer their brotherly assistance to “the Gentile races which, in ignorance of God, are enslaved to blind and unbridled instincts, and live under the awful servitude of the evil one[.]”⁷⁸ This was frequently done with great insensitivity to the culture of the people receiving the missionaries, as we have seen in the case of the outright suppression of the cult of the ancestors and all that went with it.

The 19th and early 20th Centuries were marked by European expansionism and cultural imperialism. That the missionaries studied and wanted to comprehend the people they were sent to evangelise, is not disputed. It is evidenced by titles such as Eugène Casalis’s *Les Bassoutos ou vingt-trois années d’études et d’observations au sud de l’Afrique*.⁷⁹ However, it is not surprising that the missionaries were men and women of their time, and that they failed to appreciate the values and meanings in the cultures they encountered.

Often the cultural attitudes with which they came to the mission dominated their perspective. Setlaba notes three unhelpful attitudes in a paternalistic Europe:

- (i) Africa was the ‘dark’ continent;
- (ii) Africans were the descendants of the biblical Ham and thus shared his curse;
- (iii) “Africa’s culture was ‘inferior,’ her religion far from attractive and her people’s way of life generally barbaric.”⁸⁰

There was often an identification of the spread of the Christian message and the prorogation of a ‘superior’ Christian culture. Even until the second quarter of the 20th

English translation taken from *The Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters* (London: Sword of the Spirit, 1958).

78. Benedict XV, “*Maximum Illud*,” under “The Support of the Missions.”

79. (Paris: Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1859).

But Gray suggests that many of the studies conducted by the missionaries were essential ordnance in the cultural colonisation of South Africa. See Stephen Gray, “Missionary Researchers and Researching Mission: A South African View of Cultural Colonisation at the Millennium,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 105 (November 1999): 17–27.

80. Seth Tšeliso Setlaba, “One Hundred Years of the French Protestant Mission’s Effort Among the Ba-Sotho (1833 - 1933),” Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) project (University of the Witwatersrand,

Century, there seems to be an equation of these two tasks. In 1926, Pius XI wrote of the history of papal involvement in the missions: “. . . the Roman Pontiffs . . . might spread the light of the Gospel and the benefits of Christian culture and civilisation to the peoples who ‘sat in darkness and in the shadow of death’.”⁸¹ Is there a greater love, he asks “than to assist [our neighbour] in putting behind themselves the darkness of error by instructing them in the true faith of Christ?”⁸² Thus mission was perceived to introduce a complete Christian ‘package’ in which the truth of the Gospel was combined with Western clothing, skills, education and worldview, and most importantly the rejection of ‘heathen’ customs and religion.

This rejection of heathenism can be seen in terms of three ‘struggles’ in Magnan’s history of the beginnings of the (Catholic) Church in Lesotho. In his third chapter on methods of the apostolate, he lists the struggles against (i) polygamy, (ii) sorcery and superstition and (iii) Protestantism. Evidently the way to combat sorcery and superstition was with the solemnity of the Catholic ceremonies of adult baptisms and the opening of missions. Splendid religious ceremonies with vestments, processions and solemn receptions gave Catholics the advantage over Protestants, because “[*]es noirs sont sensibles aux démonstrations grandioses. Ces déploiements extérieurs satisfaisaient leur besoin d’expansion.*”⁸³

This Gospel ‘truth’ was considered to be incompatible with African traditional religious outlook. Inspired by the Greeks, Western philosophy is pervaded with the law of the excluded middle, the notion of binary opposites: “either ... or ...” This is reflected in titles such Nürnberg’s “The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your

1987), 18.

81.Pius XI, “*Rerum Ecclesiae*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 18, no. 3 (1 March 1926): 1 English translation taken from *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, compiled by Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981).

82.Pius XI, “*Rerum Ecclesiae*,” 6.

83.Louis de Gonzague Magnan, “*Les Débuts de l’Église au Basutoland (1862–1894)*,” M.A. dissertation (Faculty of Arts: University of Ottawa, 1951), 83.

Mind”⁸⁴ Although he is a contemporary missionary, I use the example of Nürnberger to illustrate this school of thought. After drawing what he regards as the distinction between fear of God and fear of the ancestors, Nürnberger challenges his readers to make what he regards as an exclusive choice: “Now make up your mind in freedom. Are you in your deepest heart, a Christian or a traditionalist? Whatever your answer be honest about it. Follow *Badimo* or follow *Modimo*, but do not confuse the two.”⁸⁵

(d) Conclusion

As a result of the missionary targeting of the ancestor cult, it seems not to have been practised openly by members of the mainline Christian churches. This does not mean that the cult disappeared altogether from public life. There are many people in Southern Africa who are not members of the mainline churches and who do practice the cult openly. They are either not Christian, or are members of the AIC’s, where it is permissible, if not mandatory, to practice the cult of the ancestors.⁸⁶ In addition, De Clark

84.Klaus Nürnberger, “The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!” in *The Church and African Culture: Conference Papers*, edited by Mhloni Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 158–62.

85.Klaus Nürnberger, “Ancestors and Christ: The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!” *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1996): 11.

An equally eloquent reply to this argumentation can be read in Buti Tlhagale, “Christianity and Tradition Compatible,” *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1995): 12–13. Not written in the heat of this particular controversy is Adam Michalek, “*Christ et ancêtre - Médiateurs en compétition? Approche théologique de la religion traditionnelle africaine*,” *Verbum SVD* 42, no. 2 (2001): 189–213.

A Zulu priest, subsequently bishop, writes: “This faith in Christ is not in conflict with what is performed by the family in relation to the deceased.” He appreciates having been invited to family houses to celebrate with them the rites of the dead, and judges these rites to be “. . . not incompatible with Christian faith. They were just gestures of respect towards the dead.” See Jabulani A. Nxumalo, “Christ and the Ancestors in the African World: A Pastoral Consideration,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 32 (September 1980): 12.

86.The seminal study on the practice of the cult of the ancestors in the AIC’s is Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1948). Written in the mid-20th Century, it illustrates the multiplicity of these churches, as well as the similarities in their style of worship. Sundkler shows that frustration in their attempts to bring more authentic African worship and ministry into the mainline churches, led many potential leaders to abandon the missionary churches and to found their own AIC. In these they could synthesise (syncretise?) African and traditional Western theology and forms of ministry. The first AIC began in 1872 in Lesotho. See Martin Prozesky, “Important Events in the History of South Africa’s Religions,” in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky, John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 232.

shows that the Sotho converts did not generally acknowledge a binary opposition between the religion of the missionaries and their own cultural practices:

Although many Basotho adopted several Evangelical tenets, other Christian notions were largely rejected, even by converts. This was especially true of the idea that Christianity constituted a set of beliefs incompatible with 'traditional' ones, and which consequently required that converts should reject their previous world-view. From the outset, the Basotho regarded the missionaries' religious notions as compatible with their traditional ones, the validity of which were beyond doubt.⁸⁷

As we have seen from the *Constitution Presbyterienne*, the *Law Book* and the *Constitutions and Regulations* of the Evangelical Church, any church member involved in the cult of the ancestors, was subject to severe penalties, not excluding excommunication. Catholics learnt that it was a sin against the First Commandment to venerate their ancestors. Wesleyans and Lutherans were also not permitted to continue the cult of the ancestors. Thus those members of the mainline churches who did practice the cult of their ancestors did so clandestinely, and did not bring the cult to church along with other dimensions of their everyday lives. Church authorities were aware that practicing members had this dual life and continued to venerate their ancestors. The authorities discourage it in the strongest terms.⁸⁸

It was not possible for African members of mainline churches to explore in a public ecclesiastical forum the possible benefits of the cult. When white members of the churches studied the cult of the ancestors, it was often with a view to affirming its theological inadequacy.⁸⁹ Some missionaries wrote from an anthropological perspective and maintained a strict neutrality. An example of such a writer is François Laydevant OMI

87. de Clark, "The Basotho and the French Missionaries," 16.

88. The bishops of Lesotho write:

"Let us face facts: there are many baptized Catholics, who have not renounced their pagan traditions fully, and who still try to reconcile them with their Faith, because they have not understood its profound exigencies. Some Christians have two moral codes, one based on their ancestral custom and the other as witnesses of Christ."

See Emmanuel Mabatoana, Joseph Delphis Des Rosiers, and Ignatius Phakoe, "Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Founding of the Church in Basutoland," *Vinculum* 18, no. 1 (January-March 1962): 7.

89. See Klaus Nürnberger, "The Sotho Notion of the Supreme Being and the Impact of the Christian Proclamation," *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, no. 3 (1975): 174–200.

writing from the second to the sixth decades of the 20th Century. His work at the popular and academic levels is remarkable in not carrying a judgmental tone.

Stage two: The resurgence of the ancestor cult

There has been a newfound interest and acceptance of the reality of the cult of the ancestors among Catholic Christians in recent times. It is difficult to trace exactly when this gradual reacceptance began, or whether it began with local initiative or in response to some central authority. Without doubt the mid-20th Century witnessed a softening of attitudes in Rome towards the cultures of recently evangelised peoples. Included in this softening of attitudes is an apparent reversal of the condemnation of the cult of the ancestors in Africa. Indeed, there seems to be a positive esteem of the cult.

In evidence of this changing attitude, I will present Roman documents permitting the cult of the ancestors, initially in Asia, but then later in Africa. I will also show how two important later papal documents deal explicitly with the cult. To explain this change in theology, it is necessary to examine changes in the sociopolitical and ecclesial context. I shall show that the end of direct colonial domination of African countries (and in South Africa in particular, of white minority rule) and the changes around Vatican II represent significant contextual changes which allowed a rethinking of the value of the cult. I will show that there has been a move away from the theology of adaptation prior to Vatican II, to a theology of inculturation. This has been enthusiastically taken up in South Africa as theologians reclaim the ancestral dimension of indigenous culture as a factor in local theology.

(a) Documents Indicating a Changing Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors.

In this section I will examine two sets of documents of Roman provenance which point specifically to a major change of attitude towards the cult of the ancestors. The first

set deals with the lifting of restrictions on Catholics participating in civil ceremonies honouring the ancestors in Asia and Africa. The second set is from popes Paul VI and John Paul II, where they deal explicitly with the cult of the ancestors in Africa. The positive and permissive tone of these documents gives reason to believe that there has been a re-evaluation of the significance of the cult, and that official Roman Catholic teaching has brought the ancestors into the Church.

(i) Ancestor Cults Permitted in China, Japan and Congo

The 1930's saw a number of moves on the Vatican diplomatic front to resolve theological and pastoral disputes that had been pending since the missionary expansion of the 17th and 18th centuries. In China, Japan, Korea, and significantly for our study, Africa, bans on Catholic participation in civil ceremonies were revoked. These bans had arisen in most cases due to an unwillingness to recognise the values represented in the indigenous cultural practices. The value most closely identified with the cult of the ancestors in Asia and Africa is respect for the elderly and the moral tradition which they represent. It was thought that veneration of the ancestors was superstition and idolatry, as I have demonstrated in the consideration of the first commandment, above.

In 1935, the government of Manchuria declared that the ceremonies honouring the ancestors and Confucius were part of a civic duty and did not represent a religious adherence. This declaration paved the way for the granting of ecclesiastical permission to Manchurian Catholics to attend these ceremonies. The Chinese Rites controversy was settled in 1939, when this permission was extended to all Catholics in China.⁹⁰

In 1936, similar permission was granted to Japanese Catholics to attend the Shinto ceremonies, since the Japanese government did not attach religious significance to these

90. Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "*Instructio circa quasdam caeremonias et iuramentum super ritibus sinensibus*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32, no. 1 (22 January 1940): 24–26.

ceremonies.⁹¹ However, the distinction between religion and culture (in this case, civic duty) is now understood to be not as clear as it was presumed to be in the 1930's. Particularly in the case of the ancient religious cultures of China, Japan and Korea, there is a close relationship between the two.⁹²

Less well known, but of great significance for our study, was the lifting of the ban in 1938 on Catholics attending funeral rites in Congo.⁹³ The letter permits Catholics to participate in traditional funeral rites when they have been well instructed in the meaning of their participation, and when any superstitious or immoral elements have been removed. In a good example of subsidiarity, the Roman letter does not state which "superstitious" elements are to be removed, but rather leaves it to the discretion and prudence of the Apostolic Delegate and ordinaries to apply the principle.⁹⁴

91. Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "*Instructio Ad Excmum D. Paulum Marella, Archiepiscopum Tit. Docleensem, Delegatum Apostolicum in Iaponia, Circa Catholicorum Officia Erga Patriam*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 28, no. 12 (15 October 1936): 406–09.

92. Indeed, of the cult in Vietnam which was covered by the Chinese permission of 1939, Phan writes:

. . . [T]here is little doubt, at least with regard to ancestor worship, that it is a deeply religious act, indeed the most religious act in the everyday life of the followers of indigenous religions in Southeast Asia."

Again, he evaluates the cult as deeply religious:

Given the undeniably religious nature of ancestor worship, its liturgical inculturation can no longer be legitimated on the basis of its alleged 'merely civil and political' character. Such a view, while making things easier for theologians and liturgists empties the rituals of ancestor veneration of their deepest meanings and transforming power.

See Peter C. Phan, "Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case," *Worship* 76, no. 5 (2002): 419f. He insists that religious significance of the cult should not be downplayed in the interest of Christian religious purity.

93. Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "A Sua Eccellenza Revma Mons. Giovanni Delle Piane, Delegato Apostolico del Congo Belga," in *Sylloge praecipuorum documentorum recentium Summorum Pontificum et S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide necnon aliarum SS. Congregationum Romanarum ad usum missionariorum.*, edited and compiled by J. Dindinger (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1939), 576–78.

94. Whether or not this letter of permission had any effect in Southern Africa, I have not been able to discover from a reading of the documents of the SACBC. In the series *The Bishops Speak*, a compilation of the statements of the SACBC from 1952 to the present, there do not appear any references to the 1938 letter.

(ii) Papal Documents on the Cult of the Ancestors

Paul VI's *Africae Terrarum*

Written in 1967, on the tenth anniversary of *Fidei Donum*, *Africae Terrarum* is Paul VI's expression of good will towards "future religious and civil prosperity" in African countries as they moved towards independence.⁹⁵ In addition to being words of "greeting, advice and encouragement,"⁹⁶ the words are an affirmation that Africans should "become the artisans of their [own] destiny."⁹⁷

But more than a message of goodwill, the message recognises that in the light of developing human sciences, aspects of African culture that were once considered unacceptable, are now better understood and command respect in the Church. "Many customs and rites, once considered to be strange, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect."⁹⁸ In particular the pope mentions the spiritual view of life, the respect for human dignity, the sense of family and community, and respect for authority in Africa.⁹⁹ These are co-incidentally some of the key notions of the cult of the ancestors. These are respected by the Church in their own right, and regarded as providential for the spreading for the Gospel.

In terms of the cult of the ancestors, what Paul VI has to say is noteworthy:

Another characteristic element of African tradition is the sense of family. On this, it is significant to note the moral and also the religious value, seen in attachment to the family, evidenced further by the bond with ancestors, which finds expression in so many widespread forms of worship [*veneratione*]. For Africans the family thus, comes to be the natural environment in which man is born and acts, in which he finds the necessary protection and security, and

95. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59, no. 17 (28 December 1967): 2. English translation taken from *Afer* 10, no. 1 (January 1968): 71-84.

96. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 22.

97. Paul VI, "*Populorum Progressio*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59, no. 4 (15 April 1967): 65. English translation taken from *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981*, compiled by Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981).

98. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 7.

99. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 8-12.

eventually through union with his ancestors has his continuity beyond earthly life.¹⁰⁰

Thus Paul VI locates the cult in terms of attachment to the family and eschatological hope. These are seen as a source of moral and religious value, and are not condemned as contrary to Christian faith. Absent are the judgement and condemnation of the ancestral cult we saw in the first stage of this history. Indeed Paul VI admits that the missionaries were men and women of their time who did not always appreciate sufficiently the value and truth of local customs:

Sometimes, the missionaries of the past are said to have lacked understanding of the positive value of customs and ancient traditions, and we must frankly admit that, although they were inspired and guided by the highest motives in their unselfish and heroic labours, they could not be wholly free of the attitudes of their time.

However, although they were not always able in the past to understand the full significance of the customs and unwritten traditions of the people they evangelized, . . . Many of them also became famous for their original and important contributions to the anthropological sciences. But, above all, it should be recognised that the action of the missionaries was always disinterested and animated by the charity of the Gospel. . . .¹⁰¹

The "African Synod" and John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Africa*

From April to May 1994, Pope John Paul II convoked the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. Much enthusiastic consultation across the continent had gone into the preparation for the synod, and the proceedings were followed with great interest. Many hoped, and were not disappointed, that inculturation would be one of the major topics of discussion. Others were profoundly disappointed with a restrictive understanding of inculturation in the *Lineamenta*.¹⁰²

100. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 10.

101. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 24. In this regard, I have mentioned the excellent anthropological work done by Fr F. Laydevant.

102. See Aylward Shorter, *The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document* (Nairobi: St Paul Publications - Africa, 1991), 68. "That the *Lineamenta* can so clearly define the ideal, and in the same breath, toss it on one side, is profoundly disappointing." The ideal described was the vision of *Ad Gentes* 22, of particular churches each with its own tradition having its "own place in the ecclesial communion." But this vision was circumscribed with the statement that until this vision is able to be realised "each Church should constantly speak a language common to all and remain open to fraternal correction." (*Lineamenta* 51.) Shorter believes this is giving with one

The post-synodal *Ecclesia in Africa* was published in 1995. For an exhortation specifically addressed to the Church in Africa, this document makes remarkably little reference to the cult of the ancestors.¹⁰³ In fact, the word “ancestor” appears only four times in the 149-page document.¹⁰⁴ Of these, only two mention the cult of the ancestors *per se*. However, these two references to the cult represent a new line of thinking with respect to ancestor veneration.

The first mention of the cult of the ancestors is in paragraph 43 of *Ecclesia in Africa*, where the pope quotes from his homily at the opening liturgy of the synod. He praises the veneration of the ancestors as an indicator of Africans’ belief that life cannot be destroyed, and that the dead remain in communion with the living. This intuitive belief is seen as an affirmation of a life-affirming ethic, in the face of “so-called ‘progressive civilizations’” whose economic systems are hostile to life. It is also seen as “in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints.”¹⁰⁵

This is the theological methodology of *preparatio evangelii*, which reduces the significance of an aspect of indigenous culture to that of a means towards an end. The African worldview of survival after death is seen not in its own right, but as a preparation for the Gospel. It finds its fulfillment in belief in the cult of the Saints, to which it is perceived to be a pointer.

In paragraph 64 of *Ecclesia in Africa* - the second mention of the cult - the veneration of the ancestors is listed as one of three areas (along with marriage and the

hand and taking back with the other. The vision is spelt out, but the Church in Africa is said to be insufficiently mature to embody the vision.

103. Of the interventions of the bishops from Southern Africa alone, four specifically mentioned the cult of the ancestors as a matter of note. These were by the bishops of Harare, Inhambane, Windhoek and Witbank. The bishop of Maputo referred to Christ as the first Ancestor.

104. See John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in Africa*,” *Origins* 25, no. 16 (5 October 1995): 249–76. “Ancestor” appears in paragraphs 32, 35, 43 and 64. In the first two instances, it does not refer to the cult of the ancestors, but rather in the generic sense of “[y]our ancestors heard the message of the Good News. . .” and “the debt of gratitude which their Continent owes to its ancestors in the faith.” Thus the role of the Christian ancestors is recognised as the Africans who accepted the faith.

105. Emphasis in the original.

spirit world) that call for an application of inculturation. Episcopal conferences are exhorted to establish study commissions to examine these areas of culture which have proven resilient to a long history of evangelisation, and in which “justice and true pastoral sensitivity” are required. The single principle enunciated in this paragraph is that “fidelity to the Church’s teaching must be maintained.” The appropriate paragraph of *Ecclesia in Africa* reads:

The Synod also reaffirmed that, when doctrine is hard to assimilate even after a long period of evangelization, or when its practice poses serious pastoral problems, especially in the sacramental life, fidelity to the Church’s teaching must be maintained. At the same time, people must be treated with justice, and true pastoral charity. Bearing this in mind, the Synod expressed the hope that the Episcopal Conferences, in cooperation with Universities and Catholic Institutes would set up study commissions, especially for matters concerning marriage, the veneration of ancestors, and the spirit world, in order to examine in depth all the cultural aspects of problems from the theological, sacramental, liturgical and canonical points of view.

The suggestion to establish this study commission on the cult of the ancestors can be traced back to three sources. Firstly, individual bishops requested that the cult be studied more deeply. For example, in his intervention at the synod, Mogale Paul Nkhumishe said:

My strong recommendation to this Synod Assembly is that there is a great deal of richness and potential in this cult. Let us not allow this to get lost. Let us set up a commission of experts to study this cult in its totality and report its findings to our various conference regions for decision and action. Finding an appropriate solution to this problem will not only enhance and accelerate inculturation on the continent, it will indeed unlock the door to the African heart.¹⁰⁶

A second, probably more important reason for the establishment of commissions of study about the cult of the ancestors is the list of “Propositions Submitted by IMBISA

106. See “Chapter 3: The Interventions of Bishops” in Theological Reflection and Exchange Department of IMBISA, *IMBISA Speaks as the African Synod: The Contributions of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa to the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops 1994* (Harare: IMBISA, 1998), 57. Other IMBISA interventions mentioning the cult of the ancestors can be found on pages 15, 30f., 39, and 43f.

Concerning Inculturation”¹⁰⁷ Their first proposition recommends that “[t]he role of ancestors in African tradition should be the object of special consideration with a view to integrating it into the Christian vision of life.” This does not amount to requesting the establishment of commissions of study, and even less to listing the practice of the cult as a serious pastoral problem. Rather, the aim of the propositions is the integration of the cult into a unified Christian vision.

A third impetus for the pope’s recommendation that the cult be studied is the thirty-sixth in the final list of propositions submitted to the pope by all the bishops gathered at the synod. It should be noted that after their reflections, the bishops did not list the cult of the ancestors among those areas of serious pastoral concern for which they recommended the formation of study commissions. Instead, they had a much more positive evaluation of the ancestral cult:

In many African communities, the ancestors occupy a place of honour. They are part of the community together with the living. In many cultures, there are clear ideas of who merits to be called an ancestor. Were many of these not seeking God with a sincere heart? The ancestors are venerated, a practice, which in no way implies worshipping them.

We therefore recommend that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God or to play down the role of the saints, should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorized, and proposed by competent authorities in the church.¹⁰⁸

Thus, in the context of the synod, *Ecclesia in Africa* 64 is not identifying the practice of the cult of the ancestors as an area that poses serious pastoral problems. Rather, if the pope is following the assembled bishops’ proposition thirty-six, with the positive ceremonial role it proposes for the veneration of ancestors, he is calling for an exploration of ways that the cult might be incorporated in Christian liturgy. I regard this as a major change in the official position on the cult of the ancestors, which is not sufficiently recognised in considerations of this post-synodal apostolic exhortation.

107. See “Propositions Submitted by IMBISA Concerning Inculturation” in Theological Reflection and Exchange Department of IMBISA, *IMBISA Speaks at the African Synod*, 3.

108. Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa, “Propositions,” in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, compiled and edited by Africa Faith and Justice Network,

It is important not to foreclose the discussion prematurely in the name of fidelity to the Church's teaching, particularly as we have seen in the first part of this history, what has passed as the Church's teaching has been unduly negative and not untainted by 19th Century Western supremacy. Much theological reflection of this possibility of including the ancestors in the liturgical action of the church is still necessary.¹⁰⁹ Where the cult of the ancestors might be of pastoral benefit, it is not to be dismissed lightly.

These two sets of documents - the permissions of the 1930's and *Africae Terrarum* and *Ecclesia in Africa*, coming from the Synod discussions - represent a major change of fortune for the ancestor cult in the official Church teaching. The cult of the ancestors has come a long way since its outright condemnation by the early missionaries. It remains to be seen how this shift will be implemented in practice.

The shift, however, did not occur in a sociopolitical and theological vacuum. The context of which it is a product was of changes taking place in the wider church and society. We shall examine these contextual changes in the next section.

(b) A Context of Social and Ecclesial Changes

Ideas arise within a context, and what was unthinkable in one era may become the new orthodoxy of another era. It would seem that this has been the case with the cult of the ancestors. The context in which the new thinking on the cult of the ancestors has

under the direction of Maura Browne SND (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 99.

109. Plastow has shown how recent Roman liturgical documents tend to interpret in a restrictive, rather than a broad sense, the recommendation for liturgical inculturation in Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 40. As one example, he cites the instruction: Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation: IVth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy (Nn. 37-40)* (1994). This instruction, published ten days before the opening of the synod, makes the *editio typica* the normative liturgical text, with very little leeway for adaptation, never mind "creative assimilation." See Thomas Plastow, "Differing Views on Liturgical Inculturation: Conflicting Agenda for the Church," *Grace and Truth* 17, no. 2 (August 2000): 5-21.

It seems to me evident that a pontifical post-synodal exhortation carries more weight and authority than an instruction from a Roman congregation. As the exhortation was published more recently than the instruction, this is another reason for considering it to be worthy of greater consideration if there should be a perceived conflict between it and the instruction.

arisen, is different to the context of the 19th and early 20th Centuries which saw the outright condemnation of the cult. The new context is that of decolonisation, the recognition of indigenous cultures and a new demographic profile of the Church. We shall briefly examine these three elements here.

(i) Decolonisation

The initial encounter between the European missionaries and the cult of the ancestors in Southern Africa was during the period of rapid colonisation of the subcontinent. Whether they desired it or not, the missionaries shared much of the mentality of their colonising compatriots, which held scorn for the cultures of the indigenous people, comparing them with those of Europe.

During the Second World War many soldiers from the colonised parts of Africa and Asia contributed to the liberation of Europe from the threats of Nazism and fascism. Some of these soldiers returned home, inspired to work for the freedom of their own countries. 1951 saw the beginning of the large-scale political decolonisation of African countries.¹¹⁰

With independence came a move to reappropriate and reintegrate traditional African ideas and worldviews. It was no longer assumed that Western epistemologies were the only way of understanding how the world works. However, the complete decolonisation of the thinking on the continent has not yet been achieved.¹¹¹ As more

110. Some countries, like Egypt and South Africa had political independence since the early 20th Century.

111. Underdevelopment (or dependency) theorists maintain that education systems help to perpetuate unbalanced economic, intellectual and social relations between developing and developed nations. See, for example, Bade Onimode, *A Political Economy of the African Crisis* (London: Zed Books with the Institute for African Alternatives, 1988).

Without subscribing to this theory in its entirety as it is stated by Onimode, I was interested to see whether the same applies in the case of theological education in seminaries in South Africa and Lesotho. Surveying 29 of my fellow undergraduate theology students from Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, I discovered a varying scale of awareness of the appropriateness or otherwise of the seminaries' dependence "on expatriate staff and curricula prescribed by outside agencies." Many of the students mentioned that the theological formation in their respective

African thinkers discovered the freedom of thinking outside of Western categories, it was inevitable that the traditional African cult of the ancestors - a mainstay of historical African societies - should receive critical attention. Christian laity and theologians were also involved in this reappraisal.¹¹²

The Church has had to take this postcolonial world as the reality in which it operates. No longer can it be assumed that what is decreed in the metropole will be accepted meekly and obediently in the periphery.

(ii) Recognition of and Adaptation to Foreign Cultures

Between the First and Second World Wars, with improvements in communication and transportation, there was an expansion in missionary work. Improved means of communication between missionaries and their superiors in the sending countries, allowed for a greater correspondence and exchange of information and experiences. The missionary exhibition in Rome commissioned by Pius XI in 1925 gave a vision of the universality of the Christian Church. It was no longer possible to say that the Church's engagement in evangelising peoples was peripheral and shrouded in mystery. It also became necessary to acknowledge that the peoples with whom missionaries were engaged had deep cultural traditions of their own, which were not going to be replaced by

seminaries is highly theoretical, and that there is a "corresponding de-emphasis of practical skills and training." See Peter Knox, "Students' Perceptions of the Education in the Catholic Seminaries in South Africa and Lesotho in the Light of Underdevelopment (or Dependency) Theory," B.Ed. research rept. (Faculty of Education: University of Natal, 1992), 13.

112. In the project of development, Cosmao says it is incumbent upon the church to help the people of developing nations to reinterpret their traditional religions. The church so often accompanied the process of colonisation, which destroyed the epistemological systems by which people made sense of their world and experience. Justice demands that the church attempt to redress the cultural and social disintegration left in the wake of colonisation.

Here, then, the church has a duty to perform. By paying respectful attention to traditional attitudes and mores, and by trying to understand them, the church must help peoples to envision the possible perdurance of their religious life amid the societal upheavals that they can do so little to control.

See Vincent Cosmao, *Changing the World: An Agenda for the Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 46f, Thesis 15.

European mores and behaviours. As more and more laypeople began to travel as tourists after the Second World War, they too became aware of different cultures and realised that these were as ancient and venerable as their own, and warranted respect.

Written with an unconscious revisionist history, Pius XII enunciates in his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, that customs and usages in varied civilisations had *always* been understood, sponsored and developed when they were not bound up with religious error:

Pioneer research and investigation, involving sacrifice, devotedness and love on the part of her missionaries of every age, have been undertaken in order to facilitate a deeper appreciative insight into the most varied civilizations and to put their spiritual values to account for a living and vital preaching of the Gospel of Christ. All that in such usages and customs is not inseparably bound up with religious errors will always be subject to kindly consideration, and, when it is found possible, will be sponsored and developed.¹¹³

What is important in this statement is not the accuracy or otherwise of its reading of missionary history, but its recognition that local spiritual values can be employed in the preaching of the Gospel.¹¹⁴ The idea here is not to employ these “usages and customs” as the vehicle for carrying the Christian message, but to adapt them and fit them to a ready-formed message from outside.

In his 1944 discourse to the directors of the Pontifical Missionary Society (PMS), Pius XII said that as Apostles of Jesus Christ, missionaries are not required to transplant specifically European civilisation on foreign soil.¹¹⁵ It is their task to teach and form people

113. Pius XII, “*Summi Pontificatus*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 31, no. 13 (28 October 1939): 548f. English version.

114. Of course, something like this happened in the early centuries after the Resurrection, when the Christian faith was developing from a Jewish sect and spreading in the Graeco-Roman world. The categories of Greek philosophies were employed in the expression of the faith to a wider audience than its original Hebrew hearers. This articulation of the Christian faith became the norm for the Western Church for the subsequent centuries. But were these philosophies the “spiritual values” of which Pius XII writes?

115. Pius XII, “*Allocutio ac officialibus Pontificiarum Operum Missionalium*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36, no. 7 (28 July 1944): 210. For Italian original, see Appendix 1.

Of course, this is a reiteration of the famous instruction to the first vicars apostolic to Indochina in 1659:

What would be more absurd than to try to transplant France, Spain, Italy, or some other part

freely to accept the principles of Christian life and morality, which principles fit into any good and sound culture, and render it stronger in safeguarding human dignity and happiness.

In 1951, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pius XII published the encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*. In it he recognises that local customs are worthy of respect and should not be damaged. In another instance of revisionist history he writes:

The Church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful.¹¹⁶

While he believes that all human nature is tainted by original sin, he says that it retains something that is “naturally Christian” and with divine illumination and grace can be changed into “true and supernatural virtue.” Therefore the Catholic Church has not rejected, but rather purified and perfected pagan philosophies, and similarly appropriated, encouraged and perfected native art and culture.¹¹⁷

Again, the point of these citations is not to discuss the veracity of the claim, but rather to illustrate three principles of adaptation that Pius XII was enunciating. These principles show an openness to adapt local cultures to fit the Christian message, rather than an attempt to replace them entirely. And conversely, some Church practices might be adapted to fit some elements of local traditions.

(1) Proclamation of the Gospel does not imply the destruction of what is good, just and beautiful in a society. Rather, the Gospel can in some way ‘perfect’ native

of Europe into China? It is not these that you have to introduce but the faith, which will never despise or violate the rites and usages of any people provided they are not perverse but instead intends to safeguard and strengthen them.

See: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith: *Collectanea*, Rome, 1907, I, 42f.

116.Pius XII, “*Evangelii Praecones*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 43, no. 11 (6 July 1951): para 56, English translation taken from

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_02061951_evangelii-praecones_en.html viewed on 5 January 2004.

117.Pius XII, “*Evangelii Praecones*,” 57f.

philosophies, culture and art. (*Evangelii Praecones*.)

(2) Christian life and morality can fit into any sound culture, not only the European (Allocution to the directors of PMS).

(3) The Church is to build on spiritual values and to develop customs and usages that are not erroneous, using them in the proclamation of the Gospel (*Summi Pontificatus*).

(iii) Growth of the Church outside the Western World

Bühlmann shows how there has been a major demographic shift in the membership of the Christian Churches, and of the Catholic Church in particular.¹¹⁸ He projected that by the year 2000, some 70% of the Catholic Church would live in the southern countries. This new Catholic geography would have an inevitable effect on the Church's identity, as proportionately more and more laypeople and members of the hierarchy would be in the southern countries.

Bühlmann notes that at the same time as the world of the "South" (Africa, Asia, Latin America) was being decolonised, more people than ever before were travelling as tourists from the "North," and encountering other cultures on their own terms. It was apparent that the cultures of the South were robust enough to survive on their own terms, and were not going to be homogenised into some pan-Christian culture rooted in Europe.

(c) Major Theological Changes at the Second Vatican Council

The new social and ecclesial realities had deep consequences for the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). The most visible sign of the new ecclesial context was on the demography of the Council participants. For the first time since the ancient Church, there

118. Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church*, translated by Ralph Woodhall and A.N. Other, from the third Italian edition (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1976), 20f.

was an audible minority of bishops who were not from Europe or North America. The Council participants were more reflective of the changing demography of the world-wide Church. However, Karl Rahner cautions that one should not overestimate the modest but real contribution made by the bishops from outside of Europe and North America.¹¹⁹ Bosch maintains that the Council was run along traditional lines with most of the control in the hands of the Roman authorities. It is only at the subsequent synods “that the bishops of local churches in the Third World really began to influence Catholic thinking in a profound way.”¹²⁰

Much more profound changes of the identity of the Church are reflected in the discussions and documents issuing from the Council. Rahner believed that the Council was the first truly universal act of the Church in the sense that precisely its international composition had effects to be felt in Europe and North America.¹²¹ He wrote that the Council ushered the Church into a third age, which represents a rupture as deep and significant as the change from its being a Jewish sect to being the Church of the Gentiles. “. . . it is incontestable that at Vatican II the Church appeared for the first time as a world Church in a fully official way.”¹²²

The council enabled the Church to develop outside of the Western world, taking root in indigenous cultures, rather than merely having an institutional presence in these lands. The significance of Vatican II for the cult in Southern Africa can be seen in three conciliar documents in particular, which we shall discuss here. They are *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and *Ad Gentes* (AG).

119.Karl Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future*, edited by Lucien Richard, with Daniel Harrington, and John W. O’Malley, (New York: Paulist, 1987), 12.

120.David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 380.

121.Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation,” 10.

122.Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation,” 11.

(i) *Lumen Gentium*

The dogmatic constitution on the Church, opens by locating the Church within the mystery of salvation wrought by Christ. The members of the Church are nourished in Christ by their participation in the sacraments. The Church is thus a mystical body, a pilgrim People of God. It is not primarily understood in the hierarchical mode of Vatican I. Only in the third chapter is the hierarchical nature of the Church discussed. The bishops are spoken of as a 'college,' each responsible in his own right, and not as a vicar of the Pontiff, for the pastoral care of the people assigned to him, his 'particular church'.¹²³

. . . Bishops have a sacred right and duty before the Lord of legislating for and of passing judgement on their subjects, as well as of regulating everything that concerns the good order of divine worship and of the apostolate.¹²⁴

Bühlmann writes that the great ecclesiological step of the Second Vatican Council was the rediscovery of the (local or) particular Church with legitimate autonomy and particular characteristics.¹²⁵ No more is the paternalistic language of mother and daughter used, but there is talk of partnership between local churches of equal stature. The Church retains one centre, but at the same time is polycentric, with subsidiarity of authority of the local bishops. Tillard writes of this as a "Church of Churches"¹²⁶ and is convinced that "communion" is the best way to understand the nature of the Church as a community of communities.¹²⁷

This is of significance for the Church in Southern Africa, because in principle it accords the local bishops the authority to make decisions on issues of local theological

123. LG 23. Unless specifically stated otherwise, all citations from the documents of Vatican II in this thesis will be taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1975).

124. LG 27.

125. Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, 272.

126. Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

127. He works out this ecclesiology of communion in *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001).

significance. In other words, it makes room for local contextual theologies. At the same time, bishops have the responsibility to maintain the 'unity of the faith' in order that local churches not become too different and unrecognisable as members of one universal Church. So the bishops of Southern Africa have the responsibility and freedom to develop a local understanding of the cult of the ancestors. In my opinion, they have not yet fully exercised their authority in this respect, such as in pastoral instructions, the development of catechisms or liturgical rites reflecting local understandings.

(ii) *Gaudium et Spes*

The pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world includes teaching on the relationship between the Church and culture.¹²⁸ It represents a recognition of humans as cultural beings, influenced by and able to influence the culture of which they form part. The relationship between Church and local cultures is seen as potentially positive for both the Church and the culture concerned: ". . . [The Church] can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves."¹²⁹ There is thus a mutual enrichment of Church and culture, whereby the Church benefits from the manifold cultures in which it is present.

This second chapter of Part Two of *Gaudium et Spes* represents a new cultural consciousness in theology, and forms the basis of the theology of inculturation, which we will examine in brief in the following section. GS 54 analyses 'modern' scientific culture, which significantly specifically includes the social sciences, and the paragraph uses

128. Jaouen notes a shift in *Gaudium et Spes* between an elitist and an anthropological understanding of culture. The anthropological understanding is evident in GS 53, but tends to waver throughout the chapter. It is noteworthy that culture is not understood only as the fine arts, architecture and higher education, but is what ordinary people live in their everyday encounter with their social and physical environment. A elitist understanding implies that the poor and people with few resources have no culture of their own, whereas an anthropological understanding recognises the wealth of what they have. See René Jaouen, "*Le concept de la culture dans la constitution pastorale 'Gaudium et Spes' du concile oecuménique Vatican II,*" M.A. Thesis (Faculty of Theology: St Paul University, 1983).

129. GS 58.

sociological tools to analyse and predict a greater human solidarity. It reflects a very optimistic notion of technological society and does not recognise the exclusion of billions of the world's population from this culture.

What is significant for our purposes is that an anthropological hermeneutic is brought into the realm of theology. In effect, theology can only be done with an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which it is being done. So no theology of AIDS or the ancestors in Southern Africa can be done without taking into account the other.

(iii) *Ad Gentes*

The decree on the Church's missionary activity carries enormous weight in missionary tradition. As one of the four final documents published by the Council on 7 December 1965, *Ad Gentes* benefits from the reflections and theological innovations of the previous conciliar documents.

It declares the earthly Church as missionary by its very nature, participating in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of the Father.¹³⁰ It is imbued with the conviction that the Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation" according to the ecclesiology of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* 48.¹³¹ *Ad Gentes* speaks of "young churches" or "particular churches" rather than "missions," because the distinction between those sending and those being sent was losing its former clear geographical definition.

Ad Gentes 22 recognises that the young churches "borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of their peoples everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, . . ." That is, the Council had a vision that ". . . the Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture. . ." and "new

130. AG 2.

131. See AG 1, 5, etc.

particular churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the community of the Church.” The unity of the universal Church would be guaranteed by the primacy of the pope. It is to be noted here that *Ad Gentes* has a vision of the Christian life being adapted, or made to fit, or accommodate itself to the local mentality and culture. There is thus scope for diversity in many aspects of Christian life, and uniformity is neither necessary, desirable nor possible.¹³²

(iv) Conclusion

Thus, the renewed attitude towards the cult of the ancestors has taken place in the context of major changes in the latter half of the 20th Century. These changes are of a social and of a theological nature, which were felt in the Church, as it opened up to the reality of the time. On the social front, the reality is of a world with its postcolonial politics, its culture of modernity which excludes so many, and a major shift in Christian demography. On the theological front, the Second Vatican Council represents a moment of crystallisation of changes in theological thinking. Most significant among these for our purposes was the rediscovery of the local church with the local bishop responsible for matters of faith and pastoral care. This allowed for legitimate differences between the local churches with communion among the churches and the papacy being the visible sign of unity. A cultural awareness has come into theology, as it became apparent that theology can only be done with reference to the context in which it is being done. The Church's identity has changed to include both its institutional presence and its part in the mystery of salvation.

However, the council is not the final word in the changes in theology that were to open the way to a greater openness to the cult of the ancestors. The council theologians

132. Bosch writes of a changing theology of mission over twenty centuries of Christian history, akin to a paradigm shift. He maintains that this transformation of mission is continuing today, and is not ended. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, xv. I believe that Vatican II and particularly the document *Ad Gentes* will be recognised in retrospect as one of the most significant steps in the change of the

were still thinking in terms of *adaptation* of the Christian life and message to local circumstances. A more profound recognition of the interplay between theology and culture was to issue in the theology of *inculturation* which had its roots in the council. It is to *inculturation* that we now turn our attention.

(d) Inculturation

While the writing of Pius XII and the reflections of Vatican II had prepared the way for a more positive appreciation of the role of culture in evangelisation, an important hermeneutical realisation had not yet been made. During the pontificate of Paul VI, it was realised that all people live within a culture, and that their culture effects every aspect of their lives. Consequently, the Gospel is necessarily lived within a culture, and so culture is an inevitable vehicle in the transmission of the Gospel. Put in another way, the Gospel cannot be lived in a cultural vacuum. Even Jesus Christ, the ‘content’ of the Gospel, lived within a cultural milieu - that of first-Century Palestine. This realisation led to a flourishing of reflection on the relationship between faith and culture, and a new branch of theology emerged, that of ‘inculturation.’

(i) Transitional Text: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

I believe that the transitional texts between the theology of adaptation in *Ad Gentes* and the theology of inculturation, can be found in key passages of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The world synod of bishops on Evangelisation in the Modern World was convened by Paul VI in 1974. On the tenth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, Paul VI published the post-synodal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which addressed many of the more practical aspects of the new theology of mission since Vatican II.

A notion of holistic evangelisation pervades the document. “[T]he church may be truly said to evangelise when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she seeks

missionary paradigm of the Church.

to convert both the individual consciences of men and their collective conscience, all the activities in which they are engaged and, finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them.”¹³³ This does not admit of reduction to a political agenda or temporal liberation.¹³⁴ Nor is evangelisation to be superficial, but it is to penetrate to the very core of human existence, as well as transforming cultures where this is necessary. Thus there is not a necessary incompatibility between the Gospel and human cultures.¹³⁵ But the Gospel is above all cultures and cannot be subservient to any. Therefore while evangelisers use the resources of a particular culture, they are to do so critically, transforming and converting those aspects understood to be incompatible with the Gospel.

The encyclical encourages individual churches to express the Gospel in their own idiom, but it urges extreme caution that the message (the ‘truth’) not be lost in the process. In their adaptation of secondary ecclesiastical structures and theological principles, the churches must exercise judgement and care combined with competence and reverence so that the unity of the universal Church not be damaged.¹³⁶

(ii) A Description of Inculturation

It is not my purpose here to give a full description and history of inculturation. These have been amply covered in the works of Carrier,¹³⁷ Peelman,¹³⁸ Shorter,¹³⁹ Starkloff¹⁴⁰ and many others. However, it will be helpful here to offer at least one

133. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68, no. 1 (31 January 1976): 18. English translation in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1982), 711–61.

134. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 32.

135. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 20.

136. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 63.

137. Hervé Carrier, *Guide pour l’inculturation de l’Évangile* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1997).

138. Achiel Peelman, *L’Inculturation: L’Église et les Cultures*, (Paris / Ottawa: Desclée / Novalis, 1988).

139. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

140. Carl F. Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 66–81, 274–94.

understanding of the neologism, 'inculturation.' As a seminal description, I use that of Pedro Arrupe, who says inculturation is:

the incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation.'¹⁴¹

Arrupe has a very optimistic understanding of the transformative power of the Christian life and message.¹⁴² These two are able to alter a culture radically, becoming the guiding principle of that culture, and in fact, creating a new culture, a new way for people to understand themselves and their relation to the universe. At the same time, the Christian life and message do not replicate the way they are lived elsewhere. They are 'incarnated' anew in each culture, as 'the Word became flesh'¹⁴³ in first-Century Palestine. Thus people give flesh to the Gospel using elements proper to their culture.

(iii) John Paul II and Inculturation

One might, however, distinguish between what is essential or "core" and what is accidental, such as the particular culture in which the Christian life and message are enfleshed in any one incarnation. It is the challenge of inculturation to make this discernment. It has been a particular concern of Pope John Paul II that in the process of inculturation, none of what is 'essential' to the Church, the Gospel, the Christian life and message be lost. I believe that while he enthusiastically embraces the language of inculturation, John Paul II is generally cautious that inculturation should not compromise

141. Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation," in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe SJ*, edited by J. Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 172.

142. Here the second sense of the title of Bosch's book is revealed: Christian mission has the power to transform persons, situations and cultures to which it is directed. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, xv.

143. Jn. 1:14

the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith¹⁴⁴ I have argued elsewhere that he is reluctant to accept the greater diversity in expression of the Christian life and message necessarily implied by inculturation.¹⁴⁵

An example of how he embraces the language of inculturation, and is at the same time reticent to accept the full implication of inculturation can be read in *Redemptoris Missio*. In this major encyclical on evangelisation, written on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, the pontiff is quite realistic about inculturation. He is aware that it is not a process that happens overnight. It is holistic, profound and difficult, involving the Christian message and life, neither of which may be compromised.

The process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation "means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."¹⁴⁶ The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.¹⁴⁷

It is interesting to note that for John Paul II, as for Arrupe, a transformation takes place. It is not to be assumed that anything in a culture remains unaltered by its integration into the Church. At the same time, the culture remains as a visible, distinct, identifiable vehicle. It is not the intention of inculturation to make a pan-Christian lowest common denominator culture. Nor is it acceptable that the interaction of Christian faith and culture produce a *tertium quid* which cannot be recognised as distinctly Christian. Living the Christian life and message within the context of the ancestral cult should respect the identity and integrity of both.

John Paul II appears to associate inculturation with some potential threat to the

144. John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83, no. 4 (8 April 1991): 52.

145. See Peter Knox, "Appropriation and Domestication: Inculturation of the Christian Life and Message in the 'New Evangelization,'" L.Th. seminar paper (Faculty of Theology: Saint Paul University, 1995).

146. Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (December 7, 1985), Final Report, II,D,4.

147. John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," 52.

unity of the Church. For example:

. . . [T]he difficulty of finding a balance between the need for the inculturation of the Gospel and the unity of the message contained in it, . . . threaten[s] to compromise the very foundations of your presence and evangelical activity in many countries.¹⁴⁸

In response to this suggestion, I would maintain that this balance between inculturation and unity of the Church is a creative one. Firstly, unity does not require uniformity. There are numerous Oriental rites in the Catholic Church which do not compromise the unity of the faith. It should not be presumed that an African rite will do so. The demise of the Tridentine Mass with the celebrations of the Eucharist taking place in the vernacular was a major blow to uniformity in the Church. But in itself, I can only see how this move made local churches stronger and more deeply rooted, rather than undermined the unity of the Church. Secondly, I believe that true unity can only be attained when local churches have so appropriated and inculturated the Christian life and message, that they are on an equal footing, with equal respect due to them. It is divisive to maintain distinctions between those churches that have inculturated the Gospel over many centuries and those that are at the beginning of this process. Nor is inculturation as a missionary paradigm unique in its potential ability to wreak disunity. One has only to look at the history of political expediency that accompanied the *plantatio Ecclesiae* in South America for an example of disunity being sown.¹⁴⁹

(e) Local Changes in Christians' Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors

It is difficult to determine cause and effect in attempting to relate why there has been a growth in the awareness of the cult of the ancestors in the Church in Southern Africa. Is it because 'permission' has been granted from above? Or is it that the greater

148. John Paul II, "Allocution to the Delegates of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus," in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 247–54.

149. Further instances of where the John Paul II associates inculturation with potential disunity in the Church can be found in *Familiaris Consortio* 10, *Redemptoris Missio* 54 para. 1, "Fully Christian and Fully African," Address to Zairean Bishops in *Origins*, vol. 10 (1980), 7, etc.

openness at higher levels is a response to the what is happening at the popular level? Of course, as these processes have been happening simultaneously from the 1970's onwards, they may have been happening independently of each other, or there may have been a mutual causation. Perhaps understanding the exact causal relationship is not so crucial in this context.

The openness to indigenous cultures and traditions witnessed in magisterial teaching of Vatican II and encouraged in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* allowed for a change in theological mood in the Church in Southern Africa. Christians were encouraged to explore the ways in which their cultural heritage might contribute to the life of the community. Paul VI's explicit endorsement of the cult of the ancestors in *Africae Terrarum* opened the way for a more concerted effort to understand this central part of the South African culture in the light of Christian faith. His explanation of the earlier missionaries' failure to appreciate the positive value of the cult made way for a new assessment of the cult with less fear of censure.

Pius XI's command that seminaries be built in the mission territories for the formation of indigenous clergy with an equal ministry¹⁵⁰ had the benefit of training priests who understand not only the local language but also the culture.¹⁵¹ Thus we have today in South Africa prominent priests, bishops and archbishops who write encouragingly and with confidence about the cult of the ancestors. Many of these writings have already been cited in the previous chapter, and will form the substance of our discussion in the following two chapters.

At the same time as the struggle for liberation from oppressive political structures was being waged, there was also a movement away from foreign intellectual constructs.

150. Pius XI, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*," 21–26.

151. However, an understanding of the local language and culture does not necessarily imply a sympathy with, or natural desire to see elements of the culture installed in the Church. It is even likely that local clergy have a greater reluctance to take up issues of local culture because they know precisely how sensitive these points are.

Well educated local clergy and laity¹⁵² were manifesting greater confidence in formulating theological concepts in terms of African cultural ideas, and applying them to the task of evangelisation. Other Africans, however, were studying in the West and learning and appropriating Western intellectual tools, or perhaps gaining confidence to engage with Western theology on their own terms.

The movements of black consciousness¹⁵³ and black theology¹⁵⁴ reflected a newfound confidence in the cultural and intellectual heritage of Africa, and recognised similar situations of oppression across the globe. The African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM) was established in South Africa.¹⁵⁵ African priests and archbishops began to write on the ancestor cult,¹⁵⁶ traditional religious symbols,¹⁵⁷ mortuary rites,¹⁵⁸ African traditions in general,¹⁵⁹ etc.

The fruits of reflection on the Gospel and African traditions have been published, recognising that it is useless to try to oppose traditions that are so deeply rooted in

152. There has been an insistence on the formation of excellent local clergy in many of the missionary documents we have considered, from Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud* to Pius XI's *Rerum Ecclesiae* 19ff., etc. To this is added the appeal to address the formation of local lay people for evangelisation, in Pius XII's *Evangelii Praecones* and *Fidei Donum*, John XXIII's *Princeps Pastorum*, Vatican II's *Ad Gentes* 20 and Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, etc.

153. In South Africa, this movement arose in the 1970's under the leadership of the charismatic Steve Biko. His thoughts on black consciousness can be read in the posthumous collection, Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, edited by Aelred Stubbs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

154. For an overview of black theology in South Africa, and its roots in the liberation struggle, written by a white academic theologian, consult Louise Kretschmar, *The Voice of Black Theology in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986).

155. This group of priests formed initially to address the perception of racism within the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa. The group wrote of cultural and racial marginalisation within the church. See African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM), *A Call to Action*, A Memorandum Addressed to the Bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) (Pretoria, 1999).

156. See Augustinus Lekhotla Pula, *Tšabo ea Balimo: Maemo a litaba tšabo ea balimo le boloi har'a Basotho "A shejoa ke Mosotho oa Mokriste"* (Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works, 1988) (Fear of the ancestors: The situation regarding fear of the ancestors and sorcery among the Basotho as seen by a Sotho Christian.)

157. See Thomas Lesaoana Manyeli, *Religious Symbols of the Basotho* (Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works, 1963), M.Th. Thesis at the University of Ottawa.

158. See Buti Tlhagale, *Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel* (1998), privately circulated monograph.

159. Buti Tlhagale, "Seafrika le Evangelii," *Moeletsi oa Basotho* (2000–01) This weekly column on African custom and the Gospel has examined the dimensions of rites of passage, remembering the dead, ancestors, Easter, divination, etc.

people's traditions.¹⁶⁰ Seminars have been held on the theme of Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa.¹⁶¹ The cult of the ancestors has formed essential subject matter in seminars on pastoral practice¹⁶² and inculturation.¹⁶³

Experiments have been conducted which include the ancestors in Christian liturgy,¹⁶⁴ not always entirely in keeping with the guidelines proposed by the conference of bishops¹⁶⁵ or the instruction *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation*. I have attended three significant celebrations of the Eucharist in which the ancestors have been invoked, one of them concelebrated by a bishop, in which a sheep was led through the sanctuary at the offertory, with the suggestion that this was to be sacrificed to the ancestors.¹⁶⁶ At the same celebration a number of traditional Xhosa healers (*amaqirha*) were blessed by the clergy and in turn prayed over those members of the congregation who wished to approach. Another celebration invoking the ancestors was at the annual national conference of the Association of Catholic Tertiary Students (ACTS) in 2000. A third was at a workshop on inculturation for the youth of the Archdiocese of Cape Town in 1996.

160. See Lesotho Catholic Bishops Conference, *Boithatlhobo ba Kereke: Pastoral Letter* (Maseru, 1988, 25 March).

161. See Kuckertz, Heinz, ed., *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief* (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981).

162. See H. Slattery and H. Bucher, eds., *Pastoral Orientation in a Changing World: Lectures, Recommendations of a Seminar Held at Lumko Institute 11–16 March 1974 and Repeated at Mariannahill Mission Centre 5–9 August 1974* (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Institute, 1976).

163. See Mohlomi Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya, eds., *The Church and African Cultures: Conference Papers* (Lumko, Germiston: Mazonod Institute, 1995).

164. See for example, Kaizer Ngwenya, "Enjoying Mass with Your Ancestors: Welcome to the Catholic Church Where the Congregation Prays with Their Dead Relatives," *Drum*, 13 May 1999, 12f and Archdiocese of Cape Town, "Order of Mass According to the Roman Rite in the Proposed African Expression," Conference on the Theme: "African Customs in the Light of Our Faith" (Montana, Cape Town, 1996).

165. See SACBC, *Statement on Inculturation: Our Journey Towards Wholeness* (Pretoria: SACBC, 2002). The SACBC has appointed a committee for liturgy, one of whose principle tasks is to consider liturgical inculturation.

166. Archbishop Buti Tlhagale caused much consternation in South Africa (and abroad among animal rights activists, and evangelical Christians) when he suggested that there might be place for the sacrifice of animals to the ancestors in the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist. One response among many was United Church of God - British Isles, "Africa's Catholics in Row Over Sacrifice," *Good News Magazine* (2002), [Http://www.goodnews.org.uk/articles/wnr0003.htm](http://www.goodnews.org.uk/articles/wnr0003.htm) viewed on 2 December 2002.

These celebrations are by no means unique, and are happening more frequently, often on the inspiration of an individual pastor or at special events.

In these celebrations there is always a tension between the domestic and the public dimensions of the cult of the ancestors. The cult is traditionally a domestic affair, invoking the ancestors of a particular family as it is gathered for an event of significance to them. In times of unusual crisis, a clan or nation might invoke its collective ancestors. Thus to invoke the ancestors of all those gathered for a liturgical celebration of the Eucharist is a significant deviation from the familiar familial practice of the cult. Indeed it is often the case that some people gathered for the liturgy are not from a domestic culture which celebrates the cult of their ancestors. It cannot be assumed that everyone feels at home with the invocation of the ancestors of the whole congregation. This is an area for further study and catechesis.

(4) Conclusion to Chapter

In this chapter I have illustrated the changing fortunes of the cult of the ancestors among Christians in Southern Africa. Because of the availability of material and my knowledge of the language, I concentrated primarily on the cult among the Basotho, using this as a case study for the generalised suppression of the cult. I divided the history into two stages.

In the first stage, I showed how the Protestant missionaries, forbade the participation of Sotho Christians in anything to do with the cult of the ancestors: drink, dance, rites of passage, marriage and healing. I have also shown how Catholic missionaries thought that participation in the cult of the ancestors was in contravention of the first commandment, and how they encouraged the Sotho Catholics to turn rather to the cult of the saints. I looked at what motivated the missionaries in their contemporary outlook on the religions of others.

In the second stage of the history, I traced the resurgence of the cult of the ancestors, and this time particularly among Catholic Christians. The first step was to show with explicit evidence from two papal documents, *Africae Terrarum* and *Ecclesia in Africa* that there has been a change in attitude to the cult of the ancestors at the highest level in the Church. I then traced some reasons for this change of stance. I showed how there have been new social and ecclesiastical circumstances since the second half of the twentieth Century. These include the lifting of colonial rule in the developing countries, recognition of the cultures of peoples outside of Europe and North America, and a changing demography in the Church. The changing circumstances have been accompanied by changes in theology, which were evident at the Second Vatican Council, and especially visible in documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*. A new vision of the Church has been accompanied by a new understanding of mission, and the use of culture as a theological category. I showed how the theology of inculturation was a development from that of adaptation, and how Pope John Paul II has a cautious approach to inculturation, insisting that it should in no way compromise the integrity of the Universal Church. Finally I showed how the changes of attitude evident at the hierarchical level of the Church have also been seen at the level of the laity and theological writers. There has been an explosion of energies surrounding the cult of the ancestors in South African Catholic circles.

This explosion of writing has accompanied a gradual political and mental decolonisation of South Africa. From the late 1960's onwards, there has also been an explosion of energies to rid the country of its odious apartheid rule. This has generated its own body of theological reflection. In the following two chapters, I will use arguably the most famous document of this industry, the *Kairos Document*, as a pattern to examine how local theological writing can be applied in an appropriate systematic and pastoral manner to the AIDS crisis. I will demonstrate how the resurgent cult of the ancestors enhances the possibility of "salvation" in the context of the AIDS pandemic.