AFRICAN SPRITUALITY SET IN A CONTEXT OF BATSWANA CHRISTIANS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that *African spirituality set in a context of Batswana Christians* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

_____Signed

_____Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Vivian Tshegetso Segami and the Segami family, living and dead. I thank the Segami ancestors (*Badimo ba-Rra Segami*) for having journeyed with me during my period of loneliness and the frustration of sleepless nights; and I believe that through them I was able to persevere until the end of my research. I hope the readers will be captured by the faith and spirituality of the Batswana Christians.

ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches.
AFER	African Ecclesiastical Review.
AG	*Ad Gentes Divinitus* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity Vatican II).
AICs	African Initiated Churches.
EN	*Evangelii Nuntiandi.* Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, "On Evangelization in the Modern World," released December 8, 1975.
GS	*Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, December 7th, 1965.
ITC	International Theological Commission. Commission theologique internationale, "L'Unique Eglise du Christ" (Paris: Le Centurion 198, 29.
RM	*Redemptoris Missio*. Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, December 7 1990.
RN	*Rerum Novarum.* An Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, published on May 15, 1891.
SACC	South African Council of Churches.
SECAM	Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar.
WCC	World Council of Churches.

All biblical quotations and references have been taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible, Standard Edition*, published 1985.

SUMMARY

In transmitting the Gospel, Western missionaries passed on their portrayal of Christ as a European. Conversion to Christianity was aimed more at promoting Western cultural, moral and spiritual issues. Western culture has thus been an obstacle or hindrance to effective cross-cultural communication of the Christian message. Batswana believers are challenged to peel the Western cultural layers off Christianity, in order to reclaim Christ. Batswana Christians will have to dress Christianity in the Tswana cultural heritage if it is to be of any lasting significance to them. Christian spirituality is centred on Jesus Christ, in the worldview of all Christians. Jesus joins faith and culture together. If Christianity is truly universal, then every culture should surrender to Jesus Christ and not to any other culture. Jesus' question "*who do you say that I am*?" (Mk 8: 29), challenges Batswana Christians to write their own fifth Gospel.

KEY TERMS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2. JESUS' UNDERSTANDING OF HIMSELF AND HIS MISSION IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL……………………………………………... 30

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stating the problem

At the heart of Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the core of Christian theology is Christology. Mbiti (1971:190) acknowledges that "Christian theology ought properly to be Christology, for theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ, at a given time, place and human situation". African theologians stress Jesus' central place within African Christianity and the critical need to articulate the reality and significance of Christ in relation to the lives of African Christians. As Mugambi & Magesa (1989:x) write: "… theology is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest".

However, the ideology of colonialism and the limited nature of Western theology and its missionary approach in the past ignored or suppressed many values of African cultures (Taylor 1963:7; Schreiter 1991:viii; Shorter 1982:133-37). African theology and its presentation of Jesus thus now face new challenges, which will be dealt with in chapter six. If Christ is to be relevant for Batswana (and indeed all African) people today, this challenge will have to be met. The human experience and the Christian tradition relate to each other; therefore they are to be studied together (Bevans 1992:15,22; EN=*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20). The crisis of inculturation illustrates that African Christianity goes beyond academic institutions and Western theology. Bevans (1992:17) alerts us to the fact that during the Middle Ages and from the beginning of scholasticism, the main focus on theology has been in the academic institutions, in other words ignoring the pastoral field. The said crisis expresses what Bevans (:17) has suggested, that "theology does not necessarily have to be verbal" nor Western either. Theology has always been embodied in ritual, and some of the most eloquent faith-seeking-understanding the world has ever known is expressed in art works (Magesa 2004:223;

Bosch 1991:447; Harris 1993:126) such as those of Michelangelo (Bevans 1992:17). The trouble has been that, historically, a gap has too often existed between what is proclaimed in words and what is lived concretely by those proclaiming the message. The recipients of mission invariably notice this discrepancy and inconsistency, and the confusion that ensues in their mind has always been detrimental to the goal of mission, namely conversion. As Pope John Paul II writes in (RM=*Redemptoris Missio* 47), "we cannot preach conversion unless we ourselves are converted anew every day."

Udoh (1986:2, 10-11) states that "the traditional way in which Christ was introduced in Africa, was largely responsible for the prevailing faith schizophrenia among African Christians". He further defines the problem as a "dilemma of combining the Christian principle with African traditional religion without being fully African or completely Christian" (:64). His work develops the hypothesis that this African "faith pathology" is fundamentally Christian. The origins of the problem lie in the nature of nineteenth-century European mission. Analysing the Church of Scotland's mission to Calabar, Udoh (:74-73) concludes that "Christ entered the African scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant". Bad theology leads to bad spirituality (Schneiders 2001:12).

As Schreiter (1991:viii) writes, "for too long, embracing Christ and his message meant rejection of African cultural values". Furthermore, Africans' reception and articulation of the Christian faith was often restricted to models from the Christian traditions of Europe. Africans were taught that their ancient ways were deficient or even evil and had to be set aside if they hoped to become Christians. Thus Gittins (2002a:29) claims that some missionaries' efforts were intended to make other people more and more like themselves, including their cultural method of dealing with things. Does this mean that by becoming a Christian, you have to stop being African? Or is it that being African, you cannot be a Christian? The answers to these questions will be answered in chapter 6. Schreiter (1991:viii) points out that "the process of Christianisation was too

often a process of Europeanisation". This indicates the absence of normal processes of intercultural communication. Without such processes there may be imposition, but not communication. Magesa (2004:19) observes: "in Christian terms, imposition has no cultural roots; communication makes the message part of the culture". For effective communication in a cross-cultural set up, missionaries needed to take part actively and critically analyse the cultural context in which they witnessed (Kraft 1979:37).

Schreiter's view is that colonial domination has undermined African Christians in two ways: firstly, by demeaning their own sense of worth and dignity as Africans, and secondly, by interposing European cultural values between them and the Gospel message. Schreiter (1991:viii) argues,

> thus a style of Christianity needs to emerge that does not bifurcate the African Christian – making the African Christian reject a cultural heritage and identity in order to become a Christian. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have reiterated the theme of being authentically African and authentically Christian in their visits to Africa.

For, as Magesa (2004:18) writes: "the gospel as proclaimed is not a disembodied reality, a pure emanation from God. It is essentially a cultural reality. What Christian missionaries do, rather, is to transmit to their listeners their own understanding of the gospel." In other words, Christian missionaries preach their interpretation of Christ's message as it has developed in their own situation. Their context during a particular time influences their interpretation (Bediako 1995:118; Pobee 1992:9-10; Stinton 2004:29).

This is an understanding that is necessarily situated within the missionaries' original cultural experience. In order for missionaries to be understood by their hosts, especially people from a different culture, they must take into account key issues (Hesselgrave 1991:29). These consist in at least some of the religious ideas and practices of the new culture (Bevans 1992:45). This effort takes place either deliberately or unconsciously. It is a necessary process of human communication.

1.2 The statement of purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine and evaluate efforts at contextualisation. The themes: first, Jesus' understanding of himself and his mission in Matthew's Gospel; second, Tswana traditional religion's encounter with Christianity; third, African(s') spirituality; fourth, incarnation as God's commitment to cultural pluralism; fifth, "Who do you Batswana people say I am," the perceptions of Jesus Christ "through Tswana eyes," and lastly, the relevance of Christology in Tswana spirituality. Many Africans are often confronted with both biblical and traditional beliefs and practices concerning their way of relating to God through Jesus Christ. Hence, some African Christian writers are calling for a greater recognition of traditional practices in Christian life.

The primary objective of the dissertation is to lead Batswana people to discover, assimilate, and deepen their religious identity according to Tswana culture. What seems important is to conceive theology in terms of a constant dialogue between people – who are subjects of culture and cultural change and so occupy a pre-eminent place in the enterprise of seeking to understand the Christian faith in a particular context (Bosch 1991:448; Gittins 2002a:24, 88-89; Nolan 1988:25-26).

The basic appreciative awareness of the importance of culture as a theological source is an imminently true and valid way of doing theology in a particular way (Bevans 1992:25). Given the diversity of African theologies – because "each cultural context has come up with its own understanding of who Jesus is for them in their own cultural, religious and political reality" (Nasimiyu Wasike 1998:18) – one could therefore maintain that historical contacts with other cultures and many other factors do influence culture (Michael 1994:16). It is important that Batswana Christians (and indeed all African people) be once again exposed to the positive values of their cultures and traditions. An ideal Christian is one who is in tune with the culture and traditions of

his/her people. Berger (1977:13) is right when he remarks: "every human being knows his/her own world better than any outsider", but this statement also has its limits. By definition an outsider is a person who is not a member of some group. Gittins (2002a:125) concurs that a stranger does not become an insider but is brought across the boundary that previously separated an outsider and insider. There is also an interpretation from outside that comes to us with an unmistakable authority: the biblical interpretation of human reality is relevant for humans, if it is the truth. That can only be revealed by God.

According to Mugambi (1989:44), "African cultural and religious heritage" was never completely "abandoned by the African Christians" nor "was Western culture completely accepted". Shorter (1988:107) says that many African writers are actively seeking their "roots" in an effort to discover their identity and in the process recover their "self-respect", to take control of their own life, and they are using cultural tradition "as a point of departure for invention and creativity". It is impossible to initiate an individual into Christian life without knowing and understanding his or her culture. The first step is to realise that Africans (in particular Batswana people for this study) have to know and understand the culture that has been passed on to them by their ancestors.

Shorter (1988:107) avers, "Africans have no wish to be passive consumers of Western goods, the goods intended to replace what colonialism has destroyed". Christianity should find appropriate ways of transmitting the good news, so that it can be understood and assimilated for conversion to take place. Hence the challenge of local people's behaviour and belief, or life-giving transformation (Gittins 2002a:29), which Christianity gives to Batswana people today, does not have much impact on their lives. Batswana Christians must reconcile the differences between the teachings of the church and the practices of their cultural traditions, and effective contextualisation of the Gospel message is essential if Batswana people are to understand and practise the message of the

Gospel in their own cultural settings. The only way to interpret Batswana Christians' life is in a more Tswana way.

The culture of any given person plays a major role in that person's faith (Niebuhr 1951:83); when "*the Word became flesh*", the Son of God entered human culture (Niebuhr 1951:193). We all develop different images of God, depending on our cultural and personal backgrounds. One must bear in mind that culture embraces the full range of behaviour in a group: not only its literature, music, language, and dance, but also the structure of its society, its rituals, and many other elements. One's cultural expression of Christian life is not a complete expression, nor can it be normative for others – that is, become a standard against which all others are measured. Sometimes African Christians display a tendency to follow non-African cultures, and shun their own, hence losing their self-identity. The reason advanced by Schreiter (1991:viii) is that Christianity obliged African Christians to reject their cultural heritage and identity in order to become Christian and to be more like the missionaries (Gittins 2002a:29), if they hoped to become Christians.

In this study I take the view that "the world provides the agenda". Such an approach is valid if one wants to bring the Gospel into relation with daily, secular life. Our context influences our knowledge or interpretation of God and the way(s) in which we express our faith (Kraft 1979:300). According to Walls (1996:39) the Christian faith becomes "culturally infinitely translatable". Therefore theology is culturally conditioned (Bosch 1991: 448). The Gospel makes us new within the framework of our culture and not apart from it. Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. The Gospel challenges each culture differently. Christians are called again and again to discern what the "essentials" of the Gospel are as we share and compare our faith and culture with others who are different. As Mbiti (1987:389) strongly asserts, "no single form of Christianity should dominate another".

The incarnation of God in the Christian Scriptures meets the God who is already present in the values of African culture and in the history of African people (Bediako 1995:110; Nyamiti 1991:6; O'Murchu 2002:154-155). This is Christology from above; it possesses a strong but realistic cultural identity that really speaks to a context in its particularity. It is not culture but the Gospel which has the final say over us as human beings, since culture is human and the Gospel is divinely inspired.

1.3 The relationship between religion and spirituality

A religion begins with the religious experience of someone, who had some profound sort of vision. Spirituality is "our way of being" (McBrien 1981:1057; Gittins 1993:15) with the Ultimate. This person lives her/his unique relationship with the Ultimate and inspires others to the extent of wanting to live the life the person lives; already this is the creation of a small community. Religion makes use of rituals, symbols, sacred texts, holy places. Theology is a reflection on the whole as well as its organised formulation into teaching or doctrines. Thomas's (2000:268) contribution is that "all people are spiritual". He further corrects the misunderstandings of perceiving spirituality as dealing with one's inner or interior life, therefore being concerned with private life, while religion deals with outer life, therefore concerning itself with public life. His strong conviction is that spirituality and religion are together concerned with both the outer life and inner life; and both have an effect on the private and public life of people (Thomas 2000:268).

Using Thomas's words (2000:267), "spirituality and religion are practically synonymous". Schneiders (2000:340) concurs by stating that as regards people who reject religion but accept spirituality, their lived spirituality to some degree is located within a religious tradition. It would be important for the person to "embrace" a religion, since religion has the necessary tools to sustain or nourish spirituality. The places of worship of

different religions are fountains of spirituality which people visit for their spiritual sustenance (Schneiders 2000:341; Hart 1999:43).

1.3.1 Religion as a fundamental life stance

Religion refers to any social, cultural and institutional forms of engagement with the transcendent reality that is believed to embrace the world and human existence (Mc Brien 1981:247). Religion can also be a "private" matter, in that a person constructs and follows a system of beliefs and practices that are analogous to the culturally and socially established religions. A person makes a choice by joining what s/he is attracted to. This is what Schneiders (2000:340) calls the "fundamental life stance" of the one who has faith in the Transcendent. As Mueller (1988:33) writes, "faith is to lean on something with all one's weight", while Schneiders (2000:341) further states that: "it is recognition of the absolute dependence of the creature on the Ultimate Being".

Religion analyses human attitudes and behaviour. On the other hand, religion explains why spirituality is a factor in human affairs by analysing the motives behind human attitudes and behaviour. Nigosian (1990:4) concurs, accepting religion as an invention or creation of the human mind for regulating all human activity; this creative activity is a human necessity that satisfies one's spiritual desire and is inherent in human nature. Boyer (2001:5) strongly affirms that the human mind demands explanations, human hearts seek comfort, and human society requires order.

The spirituality of a religious tradition has an impact on a person's life. In a process of living that spirituality, it forms us – whether we are aware of it or not (Dorr 1990:269). The effectiveness of such traditions depends on lived experience. Experientially the spirituality of the tradition interprets how one understands the stories

of the "founder", and also how one should respond to God or to the call of the Transcendent. Therefore, though one could contend that religion in its most basic sense is a deeply personal matter, both the personal and the social sides of spirituality are closely related. Kourie (2000:13) concurs that spirituality is not a purely personal affair; it is expressed in all levels of existence, social, economic and political. People belong to one another. Without this sense of belonging a human is more than half dead (Alt 1995:116). *Ubuntu* means to participate in a common humanity (Shutte 1993:46-51).

1.3.2 Religion as a spiritual tradition

Schneiders (2000:341) suggests that a religion can also be the spiritual tradition of a particular religious institution, be it Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, inspired by the religious founder's experience of living out a relationship with the ultimate reality. The more one lives the spirituality of the particular religion, the more influence the spiritual tradition exerts on the person's religious attitudes in accordance with the spiritual tradition of that religion (Dorr 1990:269). Dorr's view is that a person could either be born into a spiritual tradition such as Christianity or Islam, or freely choose a spiritual tradition. For instance, some people within Catholicism may choose to live in a religious community because they are attracted to it, like the Benedictine, Franciscan or Oblate spiritualities.

Nonetheless, before there ever was a Christian tradition of spirituality there was Jesus, trying to live an authentic human life and to be open to God (Hart 1999:45). If we wish to understand what spirituality is, it is not enough to look at the traditions. We have to consider the personal stories and dramas of founding figures, which will be undertaken in the next chapter. These are the individuals who stand at the source of different traditions of spirituality.

1.3.3 Religion as institutionalised spirituality

Organised religion originates in the imaginative projection of a religious founder, as pointed out in 1.3.2. This "founder" enjoys a relationship with the Ultimate; naturally anything good attracts other people (disciples) who want more of what he or she has. Hart (1999:43) regards the places of worship of different religions (that is, churches, mosques, temples and synagogues) as spiritual wells; one can conclude that religion sustains spirituality, though religion as an institution ultimately institutionalises spirituality. We institutionalise whatever is sufficiently valuable enough to us that we desire to preserve it (Dulles 1974:34). The process is gradual; at first we do not realise we are doing it. The original inspiration can die, and the group carries on more by constitution and rules than by spiritual roles (:40,183). Leadership can become corrupt, enjoying the personal advantages of power more than serving the common good (:32). If that happens it clearly demonstrates that tradition easily ossifies, and the community keeps doing things simply because "this is the way we have always done it".

Nolan's view (2001:163) is that Jesus did not found an organisation; he inspired a movement. Its growth led it to becoming an organisation but originally its members were simply people who came together. The beginning of a small community is, however, the beginning of institutionalisation (Hart 1999:45; Dulles 1974:32). A spiritual tradition can therefore be institutionalised by religion (Dulles 1974:32; Schneiders 2000:340). Religion has increasingly come to be seen as that which is institutionalised, for example, Catholicism. This involves creeds (providing a normative standard by which to measure the orthodoxy of teaching on specific but fundamental elements of Christian Faith); prescribed forms of public worship; dogma; and a *Magisterium* ("official teaching"), as regulated and transmitted by religious authorities (Schneiders 2000:342, Woodhead 2002:358, Dulles 1974:32). For many, religion has also come to be associated with the formal, the dogmatic and the hierarchical (Dulles 1974:35, Schneiders 2000:257), if not the impersonal or patriarchal.

1.4 What is spirituality?

For Gutierrez (1983:37), "at the root of every spirituality, there is a particular experience that is had by concrete persons living at a particular time". The concept of spirituality encompasses all religions: Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. Fr. Bede Griffiths remarked, "the fingers are the religions, but they all come together in the palm, their source. This is the distinction between religion and spirituality" (Hart 1999:43). Therefore we are people of different religions but we have one thing in common: spirituality (Thomas 2000:267; Hart 1999:43).

There are some traditions which use the term "spirituality", but we should also acknowledge that other traditions do not employ the term "spirituality" or its equivalent. For the purpose of this dissertation we will make use of the following description which is borrowed from Dupre & Sailers (1989:xii):

> The series focuses on that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions "the spirit." This spiritual core is the deepest centre of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality. The series explores the discovery of this core, the dynamics of its development, and its journey to the ultimate. It deals with prayer, spiritual direction, the various maps of the spiritual journey, and the methods of advancement in the spirit ascent.

Spirituality encompasses the entire life of faith. Therefore it is holistic in its approach to its inquiry into human spiritual experience and is not limited to explicit religion. The concept of spirituality has now become inclusive and is used to indicate a search for direction, meaning and spiritual values. Therefore spirituality does not necessarily imply Christianity (Wakefield 2001:2).

Lombaard (2003:450) proposes that spirituality consists of four "levels"/ "spheres". The first level comprises the existential quest(ion)s, the depth dimension of all

human existence. The second is that of religion and philosophies. On the third level one finds expressions of commitments (in various social spheres of differing size and importance) within each of the religions and philosophies. Lastly, holistic spirituality is the personal experience and expression of faith, thus including society, politics, church, etcetera. Schneiders (1993:11) has described spirituality as "that dimension of the human subject in virtue of which the person is capable of self-transcending integration in relation to the Ultimate, whatever this Ultimate is for the person in question". In this sense, every human being possesses a capacity for spirituality or is a spiritual being (Rolheiser 1998:6; Schneiders 1993:11). Spirituality is something vital and non-negotiable lying at the heart of our lives. Rolheiser (1998:6) observes:

> Hence, spirituality is not about serenely picking or rationally choosing certain activities like going to church, praying, or meditating, reading spiritual books, or setting off on some explicit spiritual quest. It is far more basic than that. Long before we do anything explicitly religious at all, we have to do something about the fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality. Thus, we all have a spirituality whether we want or not, whether we are religious or not.

Spirituality is about that which moves and shapes our actions; basically what shapes our desire (Dorr 1984:20, Rolheiser 1999:7). Our spirituality is living out what we desire. In the process we will either internalise or fall apart – and come to the strengthening or deterioration of our relationship to God (in the Christian view), others, and the cosmic world (Bacik 1997:1). The habits and disciplines we use to shape our desire form the basis of spirituality, regardless of whether these have an explicit religious dimension or even whether they are consciously expressed at all. Spirituality is about what we desire.

1.4.1 Spiritual insights and practices

Hart suggests that there are three crucial factors in various spiritualities. Firstly, spirituality seems to be the discipline which gives meaning to people's life. People want to live a meaningful life, which is the driving force or desire in humans (Hart 1999:48;

Rolheiser 1998:7). Especially in the face of all life's moral degeneration, its corruption, we crave some sense of how we are to orient ourselves amidst its pain and confusion. Spirituality gives us an orientation in life, a set of values to live by, a sense of direction, and a basis for hope (Rolheiser 1998:10-11; Schneiders 1993:13; Hart 1999:49). Spirituality is thus about that which animates the life of faith – what nourishes it, what people find helpful in sustaining and developing it. It is what a person does with what they believe. The contemporary anthropological approach to spirituality emphasises that spirituality is intrinsic to the human subject (Schneiders 1990:17; King 1997: 7).

Secondly, our relationship with the Ultimate, the I-Thou encounter with the Ultimate, meets a profound need of the human soul. If we do not relate to the Ultimate, we feel empty and disoriented. Therefore spirituality is an attempt to reach God or to find oneself (Callen 2001:17).

Thirdly, it is a challenge to personal transformation within the experience of negative events happening in the world in which we live such as suffering, racism, sexism, addictions, corruption, and abuses. Spirituality seems to be the discipline which offers the most adequate responses for these issues. It contains a vision for personal growth and fulfilment, and a vision for the whole world. A spirituality whose chief concern and lived manifestation is not ethical is a dubious spirituality (Hart 1999:54).

1.5   What is Christian spirituality?

Originally a term from Paul's letters referring to all Christians' life according to the Holy Spirit (Callen 2001:24), "spirituality" gradually came to refer to that life which is the special concern of "souls seeking perfection", rather than the common experience of all Christians. St. Paul's letter to the Colossians (1:15-23) states that in Christ, all was created, and in Christ all things now hold together. If Christians become collaborators

with Christ, then the new life of the Spirit will transform them to enact the deeds of the Spirit (Bacik 1997:11).

Christian spirituality is centred on Jesus Christ (Wakefield 2001:4), though he has been seen from many perspectives. This point will be developed further in chapter 5.1. The important resources for Christian spirituality are: the Bible, the figure of Jesus Christ, the institutions of the church, and tradition. Woodhead (2002:154) considers them as key authorities in Christianity. For Christianity, spirituality concerns the living out of the encounter with Jesus Christ. The term "Christian spirituality" refers to the way in which the Christian life is understood and expressed liturgically to foster and sustain that relationship with Christ. It is the manner in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God.

The development of Christian spirituality is presently going beyond self, others and God, to the nonhuman creation. Such a spirituality is ecological, that is, being sensitive and in solidarity with the earth, perceiving the earth as a symbol of the divine (Kappen 1994: 33). This spirituality embraces the entire life of faith, which includes the social and political dimensions as well (Kourie 2000:13).

1.5.1 Three pillars of spiritual life in Christian spirituality

According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus specifies three clear components of discipleship: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (Mt 6:1-18). These three Jesus highlighted in such a way that one may conclude that they are the pillars of the spiritual life. One could ask: What did Jesus mean by these terms?

1.5.1.1 Prayer

Mc Brien (1981:332) suggests that every action we perform as a way of expressing our sense of relationship with God is a prayer. Prayer is requesting God to reveal to us the mystery of faith in order to interpret and understand the scriptures according to God's agenda, not ours (Kraft 1979:189). Jesus asks us to "pray in secret" (Mt 6:5-6), to enjoy a private, exclusive relationship with him, and through him, with God. Jesus meant more than just a private prayer, which included keeping the commandments and praying in common with others. One of the foundations of the spiritual life is personal prayer, which is a religious conversion in Dorr's terms, and an individual moral conversion (Dorr 1984:15; Rolheiser 1999:63).

Religious conversion means entering into a personal relationship with God. There are two schools of thought regarding such a relationship with Jesus Christ. Rolheiser utters a warning (1999:63):

> There are real dangers in an over-privatization of spirituality. …The danger in not having the proper interiority (intimacy with God) and the personal moral fidelity to back up our faith preaching is that we end up turning Christianity into a philosophy, an ideology, and a moral code, but ultimately missing what Christianity is all about: a relationship with a person.

1.5.1.2 Fasting

The many motivations for fasting all proceed from a basic assumption about the human being's need for and dependency on God. Callen (2001:213) states that prayer is connected by Christ himself with fasting (Mt 6:16-18). Fasting is a means of discipline that one uses to deepen her/his relationship with God. The key in each instance is dependency on a loving God who is faithful and promises action. Jesus' life expressed the epitome of dependency on God. His forty-day fast (Mt 4:1-11), understood in the

light of that of Moses (Ex 34:28) and Elijah (1 Ki 19:8), expresses the inauguration of his messianic mission, which begins with a complete surrender to God's reign (Bosch 1991:32). Jesus' temptation was to exploit his divine powers for his own benefit to seek political kingdom (Riesenfeld 1970:85). Kynes' view (1991:31) of Jesus' temptation is that it is to "misconstrue the consequences of his relationship with God". According to Matthew (4:2-17) Jesus' mission to announce and bring the kingdom of God begins with a complete and total self-gift to the Father, in love, through fasting.

Fasting meant a wide asceticism that included within itself the asceticism demanded by living a life of joy (Rolheiser 1999:53). A strong polarity has developed into a sharp and mutually exclusive dualism, whereby the spiritual is perceived as distinct from, and frequently opposed to, the material, bodily, and temporal (Kourie 2000:12). In Christianity, and also in other religions, the spiritual ideal is often embodied in groups of ascetics, monastics and renouncers with a strong tradition of denying the value of the body and of the world. This idea led to the point of identifying the spiritual with monks (monastics), because they hold to a "tradition of denying the value of the body and the world". This led to an ascetic mystical flight from the world, too centred on self-denial, which could be self-destructive rather than a path to real growth and fuller being (King 1997:10).

1.5.1.3 Almsgiving

By almsgiving Jesus meant that his primary concern, amongst many other matters, was justice as well as charity (Dorr 1984:91; Rolheiser 1999:52). Jesus' concern here calls us to "moral conversion" (Dorr 1984:13), to let go of our self-centredness in order to live for others: "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (Jn 15:13). The call to do justice as an integral part of relating to God is already strong within the Jewish scriptures (Dorr 1983:7). Provision for the needy is a theme found in the prophetic and other Old Testament literature which praises such practices (cf. Pr 3:27,

22:9, 28:27; Tob 4:6-11; Sir 3:30-4:10, 17:22; Dn 4:24). Giving of all one's possessions to the poor is a condition for following Christ as a disciple (Mt 6:24, 19:21). The early Church cared for the needy (Ac 4:32-37; 2 Cor 8-9), and believers will receive ultimate satisfaction, for their gifts of material and monetary goods, from God (Mt 25:31-46). Alms were understood to have sacrificial and sanctifying effects in later rabbinic literature.

Jesus is in solidarity with the poor (Kasper 1976:85; Dorr 1984:94) and tells us that, ultimately, our judgement depends on how we treat the poor. We will either go to God's Kingdom or not, depending on whether we offered food, water, clothing, shelter or did not, and whether we were just to the poor (Mt 25:31-46). In this context the way in which we treat the poor is the way in which we treat God; in other words, how we treat other human beings is how we treat God (Nolan 1988:66; Gutierrez 1983:38; Boff 1986:185). For this reason, Jesus asks us to take a preferential option for the poor (Mt 9:13; Dorr 1984:77-78) and to reach out to them, because this is an essential component of the spiritual life.

The manner in which individuals relate to each other should be fitted into the wider pattern established by social justice as a whole. To "act justly" denotes working for and building a society in which the structures are just. In a situation where marginalised people, for example, HIV/AIDS patients, children, women, etcetera, are discriminated against, we should be able to construct a just society. The struggle to bring justice into society means, practically, "an option for the poor" (Dorr 1984:15). This is not discrimination in return for what the rich have done. It is emphasising what Pope Leo XIII expressed in (RN=*Rerum Novarum* 29)*,* that the wealthy are well able to look after their own interests, but the poor need special protection from society and those in authority. Since almsgiving deals with social issues, Dorr (1984:16) regards this pillar as a political conversion. The call to become involved in helping the poor to find justice is

situated within Christian spirituality. Jesus himself makes this clear: there can be no real relationship with him when the poor are neglected and injustice abounds.

1.6 Contextualisation

The Gospel must be placed in its total context, which includes religions, cultures, worldviews, politics, economics, social conditions, conscious and unconscious processes of thought. It is the aim of this study to try to understand the African context, to understand it on its different levels, and to reflect on the way in which the Gospel must be proclaimed as the light, in this situation too. Until missionaries become familiar with the African worldview and interact continuously with Africans, African images of Christ will remain difficult for them to comprehend (Taylor 1963:35).

However, there is more to Africa than the world-view that Taylor held somewhat idealistically. In Africa also hunger, violence, sickness, dirt, and so forth are rife. The contexts include still more factors. We cannot exclude social circumstances, political tensions, race relations, and the like. In the past, it was one of the aims of mission to plant an indigenous church: this term is primarily concerned with the indigenous culture and worldview of the people.

The process of cross-cultural contextualisation focuses on understanding the biblical message, and then expressing it in cultural settings in such a way that it is understood by the recipients (Bevans 1992:30; Schreiter 1985:7; Kraft 1979:297). Communicating theology in another culture involves both the communicator's understanding and communication of God's revelation and the receptor's interpretation of that communication.

The most effective models of contextualisation are those which consider the importance of cultural dynamics in relating the biblical message to the life of the people (Bevans 1992:30; Schreiter 1985:7). The understanding of cultural dynamics assumes that the communicator will be active in linguistic and cultural studies as he or she seeks to make the Gospel relevant in terms which the receptor culture will understand (Kraft 1979: 265; Gittins 2002a: 31).

1.7 Critical contextual evaluation: methodology

Contextual evaluation is a method of analysing, evaluating, and approaching different situations in different cultural contexts, including the social and political (Law 1996: 68; De Gruchy 1994:9; Bevans 1992:26). The purpose of this methodology is to minimise our ethnocentrisms and be open to the values of other cultures. In studying scripture from its own historical contexts, we will investigate how scripture interfaces with different cultural contexts. The fields of cultural anthropology and communication provide valuable insights which, if properly followed, may increase the effectiveness of the Christian cross-cultural communicator (Hall 1976:85-116). As Hiebert (1985:15) points out, "anthropologists have also examined the problems of cross-cultural communication, and the insights they have gained can help missionaries bring their message to other societies with a minimum of distortion and loss of meaning".

The contribution of cultural anthropology, according to Grunlan and Mayers (1988:21), assists missionaries to understand other cultures, in that it "aids the missionary in entering another culture," "facilitates the communication of the gospel in another culture" and "aids in the process of planting the church in another culture". According to Maletzke (1976:411), the traditional academic disciplines are no longer able to communicate their ideas to a cross-cultural audience alone, and they therefore need to team up with cross-cultural disciplines, especially those concerning communication, to

formulate an interdisciplinary approach. The task of anthropology includes helping a cross-cultural minister to understand. Kraft (1979:13) asserts that,

> Since everything we do and think, plus everything done and thought by those to whom we go, plus everything recorded in scripture, is totally affected by culture, we can at least contend that no one should attempt to work cross-culturally for Christ without a pretty solid understanding of culture.

Magesa (2004:18) adds, "no Christian mission, no gospel proclamation can happen, let alone succeed to any noticeable extent, without this interaction of human communication". Kraft's (1979:147-164) discussion of communication principles is of particular interest to this dissertation. Borrowing from general communication theory, Kraft suggests ten principles which he feels are helpful to the cross-cultural communicator. These ten principles are summarised here along with Matthew's Gospel and employed to form a critical contextual evaluation methodology with which to examine and evaluate how Jesus understood himself in Matthew's Gospel, how missionaries understood Jesus, and how Batswana people could understand Jesus.

1.7.1 First principle: the purpose of communication

The aim or purpose of communication, for both the communicator and any receptor, is to arrive at the same understanding (Gittins 2002a:59, Kraft 1979:147, Law 1996:100). The awareness of different contexts is important, so as to reach a common meaning in order to understand each other. People of different cultural contexts should spend time and energy in establishing a common context and learning about the new culture in this respect (Gittins 2002a:82; Law 1996:101; Hesselgrave 1991:46,146). Gittins (2002a:83) makes us aware that socialisation is important because people absorb religious understandings of what is relevant and intrinsic to their identity. For effective communication the meaning is intimately related to the context and the information given to the receptor (Hesselgrave 1991:1; Law 1996:103). Kraft's first principle is receptor oriented and focuses primarily

on the position of the receptor in the communication event. Receptors can interpret the communicator's message differently. While absolute communication between communicator and receptor is not possible (Kraft 1979:148; Gittings 2002a:38), effective communication is, through the study and practice of intercultural communication (Hesselgrave 1991:146), which can aid us to become more effective communicators and "come to know better who we are in the context of human life and culture".

1.7.2 Second principle: the importance of the audience

As Kraft (1979:148) comments, the audience plays an important role in any communication event, as understanding usually depends on the background and experience of the receptor. Engel (1988:41, 42) argues that the receptor in the communication event employs a filter through which s/he interprets the message and that this filter, sometimes called a world view, is "a kind of window through which we view everything else". Engel (:40,41), referring to the audience's importance in a communication event, remarks that the audience is sovereign and sees and hears what it "wants to" based on its basic values and beliefs about life. Hence, the more we know about our receptors, the more successful we will be in influencing and persuading them.

1.7.3 Third principle: the role of cultural forms and symbols

Kraft's (1979:148) third principle holds that messages are understood in the light of "cultural forms" and "symbols" resident within the receptor's experience and that "meanings are not transmitted, only messages". He suggests, in the light of the fact that meanings are ultimately determined by the receptor, that a "wise communicator" will "settle for a rough equivalence in the understanding of their receptors rather than

demanding exact correspondence" and that they will "give primary attention to their receptors and the kind of stimulus or impact of their message on R's" (:148).[1]

According to Peck (1993:31), cultures are formulated and expressed symbolically and "symbols are the place where meaning is stored" while Nida (1960:65) alerts us to the fact that the meaning of a symbol is not bound by its context. Hiebert (1985:147) also points out that different cultures employ different symbols, requiring "the missionary to use cultural systems of symbols that are appropriate for the communication of the gospel". According to Hiebert (:144), cultural forms or symbols can be denotative, pointing to specific things, or connotative, pointing to an assigned meaning other than the denotative. Connotative meanings are more difficult to learn since an outsider is often unaware of their existence (1985:144). The correct use of symbols can be very difficult and much misunderstanding can result from misuse of symbols, as Nida (1960:69) points out: "the most grievous errors and pathetic failures in Christianity have resulted from a wrong understanding of its verbal symbols".

Luzbetak (1988:239-243) makes three interesting observations concerning cultural forms and functions. Firstly, he holds that function and not form is God's primary concern (Luzbetak 1988:239). Secondly, local forms should take priority over non-local or foreign forms: since they "best express the true longing of the human heart and reflect God's own preference, they provide the normal way to relate to God and neighbour" (Luzbetak 1988:240). And, lastly, in certain situations "non-local symbols have precedence over local" (Luzbetak 1988:240).

Luzbetak (1988:241-243) adds four reasons for the use of non-local over local forms. First, there are certain forms which are universal without regard to culture (:241). For Luzbetak (:241) these include "Baptism," "Eucharist." the "Bible," the "Sacraments,"

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[1] R refers to receptor (Kraft 1979:147).

and the "Church." Second, the universal character of the church signals for local churches the sharing of "common needs, values and goals with the rest of the church" (:242). Third, the "prophetic or countercultural character of the church" may call for the use of non-local symbols to oppose cultural practices which may not be compatible with those of the church (:243). And, fourth, Luzbetak (:243) considers that through intercultural borrowing "foreign symbols can be at times more effective than local forms in conveying a desirable meaning".

Engel (1988:114) calls symbols "signals", and cautions that there are major cross-cultural differences in their use. Van Rheenen (1991:32) argues strongly that it is "only when the cross-cultural evangelist realizes the diversity of culture and how to perceive distinctive thought patterns" that s/he can understand a people's "beliefs and behaviours." As Kraft (1979:97) observes, "we suffer from the tendency to absolutise the forms in terms of which important meanings have to come to us, and to seek, as the Pharisees did, to impose these forms on others for our benefit rather than theirs". For Ela (1986:6,7) the "church takes almost no account of our people's language, toil or symbols" and it is suggested that the church ought to be more open to the use of symbols, as in the Eucharist, which would be more meaningful to the African people.

1.7.4 Fourth principle: receptor orientation

Kraft's (1979:148,149) fourth principle states that the effective communicator will be "receptor-orientated" and will consider the way s/he communicates the message as much as the accuracy and correctness of what is to be communicated, since the final judgement concerning the meaning of the message rests with the receptor. As Kraft (1979:149) adds, "the cultural forms (symbols) that are employed by C to convey M, then, will have to be chosen carefully on the basis of C's best understanding of what their impact on R will

be"[2]. The source must know the audience and make adjustments to communicate clearly (Nida 1960:70-71; Law 1996:101).

1.7.5 Fifth principle: felt needs

Kraft's fifth principle (1979:149) concerns the meeting of the receptor's felt needs as determining the impact of the message. He writes, "if the communicator's message is to influence the receptor(s) it must be presented with an appropriate degree of impact" (:149). For the message to have an impact on the receptor's behaviour, the receptor must be able to relate the message to a felt need (:149). Burke (1969:579) points out, "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his".

According to Kraft (1979:160), the higher the chance that the receptor can predict the message of the communicator, the lower are the chances of making an impact on the receptor. If the predictability of the message is lower then there are greater possibilities of making an impact.

1.7.6 Sixth principle: person-to-person interaction

Kraft's sixth principle asserts that the most impactful messages result from "person-to-person interaction" (Kraft 1979:149; Hesselgrave 1991:147). In other words, the most effective communication results from the personal involvement of the communicator with the receptor over a long period of time (Kraft 1979:149). Kraft (:149) expresses this as follows: "messages are made credible or incredible by the nature of their relationship to

[2] C refers to communicator and M refers to message (Kraft 1979:147).

the life of C, on the one hand, and to that of R, on the other". Lingenfelter & Mayers (1986:11) note that intercultural ministers must be aware of cultural differences and "adapt their personal lifestyle to build effective bridges of communication". For them, missionaries "must become incarnate in the culture and thus in the lives of the people" (:22). They suggest that becoming incarnate requires a new socialisation of missionaries who "must enter as if they are children – ignorant of everything from the customs of eating and talking to the patterns of work, play, and worship" (:23).

1.7.7 Seventh principle: frame of reference

It is important for a communicator to discover that there are various frames of reference (Gittins 2002a:28). Kraft's seventh principle (1979:149,151) states that the most effective communication occurs when the communicator and the receptor are in the same context or frame of reference, which includes the sharing of language and culture. Maletzke (1976:413) writes that "understanding, misunderstanding or non-understanding" between cultures "is determined by the extent of likeness and differences in frames-of-reference, value system, or Worldviews of the cultures involved". Gittins (2002a:28) suggests that the communicator should live in the real world of the receptors so as to familiarise herself/himself with their culture. Law (1996:101) terms this "contexting": the idea is to establish a common context so that the communicator and receptor can understand each other efficiently and effectively.

Sometimes in trying to communicate to someone in another culture the communicator insists on using his or her own frame of reference (Gittins 2002a: 28; Kraft 1979:151), rather than the receptor's, thus creating an "extractionist" position. In the extractionist approach the communicator tries to convert the receptor to his or her way of thinking. In other words, the communicator expects the receptor to accept his or her worldview or terms of reference in looking at reality. According to Kraft (1979:151,152)

the prerequisite for the receptor to convert to Christianity will be to accept the convictions of the communicator's worldview, convert to the communicator's culture without even becoming a Christian; or the former may even reject the communicator's culture and the Gospel.

If a communicator adopts a receptor's frame of reference and operates from within it to communicate a message, Kraft (1979:152) calls his or her position "identificational". The importance of the identificational approach is that the communicator becomes familiar with the frame of reference of the receptor and adjusts "communication to the categories and felt needs of that frame of reference" (Kraft 1979:152). Mugambi (1989:11) concurs and argues strongly that only Africans can articulate African theology and experience.

1.7.8 Eighth principle: source credibility

Source credibility comprises Kraft's (1979:150) eighth communication principle. As he writes, "communication is most effective when C has earned credibility as a respectable human being within the chosen frame of reference". To establish credibility the source may be required to overcome any stereotype in the eyes of the receptor (Kraft 1979:156). The greatest impact will occur when the source becomes identified with the receptors and operates within their frame of reference (Kraft 1979:158). As Hesselgrave (1991:179) puts it,

> More than any other communicator, the Christian missionary should have the incentive to discover all s/he can about the people s/he desires to win for Christ – the way they think, and speak, act, evaluate, and decide – and the remote and contemporary background factors that have moulded their present state.

1.7.9 Ninth principle: identification

Kraft's (1979:150) ninth principle holds that the more specific a message is to the receptor's daily life experience, and the more it relates to felt needs, the more impact it will have. The predictability of a message by a receptor also influences its impact. Kraft (:160) observes that high predictability often results in low impact and low predictability in high impact. It is important for the communicator to relate as much as possible to the receptor. Hence, as Kraft (:161) points out, "credible messages start from where the receptor is". When the communicator speaks with specific reference to the receptor's environment and becomes involved with the receptor, s/he moves toward establishing identity (Kraft1979:161; Hesselgrave 1991:176): an identification which unifies them. Kraft (1979:162) states that "effective communication starts with an attempt on the part of the communicator to relate identificationally with the audience and succeeds best when they are able to relate reciprocally to both the messenger and message". A sharing of common experience with the communicator's audience will lead to higher potential as regards the message's impact. Gaba (1978:400) suggests that bad communication stems from the communicator's lack of knowledge of the hearer, rather than from a lack of knowledge of his or her subject. The communicator must "be" with the receptor.

1.7.10 Tenth principle: discovery of truth

Kraft's (1979:150,163-164) last principle deals with the discovery that the receptor may make, which could be life-changing. In the discovery principle, the effective communicator strives to lead the receptors to discover the real value of the message for themselves. Through the discovery principle receptors begin "to understand the relevance to them of the communication and begin to apply the new insights to their own felt needs" (Kraft 1979:164). Hesselgrave (1991:231) warns us that in the context of the tribal worldview, the power encounter is of primary importance, rather than the truth encounter.

In other words people focus on what the communicator is able to do. In the context of cross-cultural communication, as each cultural group shares its perspective, each group begins to see how God can be perceived apart from its own culture (Law 1993:71). The way God communicates through the scriptures is in a "variety of cultural forms" (Kraft 1979:399). One can conclude that each cultural variety is as valid as the others (:399). This is the opportunity of bringing God into the picture, or "God's context" (Law 1993:71).

1.8 Presentation of material

This study will consist of seven chapters. This first chapter has been a general introduction to the dissertation, looking at the problems in question. I offer a proposal and specify the aims and objectives, and the scope, of the dissertation for Batswana Christians in relation to Jesus of Nazareth. For the investigation it was important to describe what spirituality is; the relationship between spirituality and religion; and Christian spirituality. This general introduction leads us to chapter two, where we will examine Jesus' understanding of himself and his mission in Matthew's Gospel. As mentioned in 1.3.3, in order to understand what spirituality is, it is not enough to look at the traditions. We must consider the personal stories and drama of founding figures. Chapter three will trace the impact of Christianity on Tswana traditional religion while the fourth chapter will explore African spirituality.

Incarnation as God's commitment to cultural pluralism will be studied in detail in chapter five. There are many nations brought together by Jesus; thus, many cultures but one faith. Chapter six will express the Batswana people's answer to Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" (Mk 8:29). The chapter will deal with how they perceive Jesus. Finally there will be an overall conclusion to the discussion in all chapters, as well as certain conclusions that have been arrived at in the process of deliberation. We now proceed to

chapter two, where we will discuss Jesus' understanding of himself and his mission in Matthew's Gospel.

CHAPTER 2 JESUS' UNDERSTANDING OF HIMSELF AND HIS MISSION IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

2.1 Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew starts by presenting Jesus as the focal point of the history of Israel (Mt 1:1-17) and ends with "Jesus commissioning the creation of a new community composed of people from all nations" (Kynes 1991:1). To understand Matthean Christology one must see Jesus as the Messiah destined for Israel (Livine 1992:339, McBrien 1981:408). The domination of Western New Testament scholarship taught non-Western people to be sceptical about the historical reliability of the four Gospels. Bosch (1991:21) writes, "his (Jesus') story was covered under so many layers of *Gemeindetheologie* (the theology of the early Christian communities) that it would be a Sisyphean task to piece it together again". Hannah Kinoti, professor of religious studies at the University of Nairobi, explained that "this kind of face that Jesus has been given to me, is a white face. A white face, Jesus or God, even the images we see of Jesus – and it becomes a struggle" (Stinton 2004:44). Nasimiyu Wasike (1998:18) concurs,

> Therefore, Jesus that the Africans received from the Western European missionaries was a Jesus who had been clothed in many layers of cultural realities. He was imagined as an imperialist, racist, cultural and … religious colonialist, and as hierarchical and patriarchal in his relationship with people.

The Gospel Jesus preached has been changed (manipulated) "to mean anything anyone wants it to mean" (Nolan 2001:5). Jesus' name and Christianity have been used and abused to justify evil actions such as corruption and crime, or to threaten people, as well as for positive actions such as to inspire men and women (*Kairos Document* 1986:3-8; Nolan 2001:5). Jesus has been honoured and worshipped for many wrong reasons (Nolan 2001:5). In this way, many people have misunderstood Jesus; therefore Christianity is not practising Jesus' original intention but an interpretation of what is thought his intention was. Interpreting the scriptural texts of the first century in the

Palestinian context into twenty first century South African contexts is much more "dynamic and multidimensional" (Ringe 1992:8) than static and one dimensional.

In order to let Jesus speak for himself to twenty first century people, we will have to begin by putting aside all our indoctrinated ideas about him, including all images of Jesus, so that people may listen to him with an open mind. There is a need to peel off those many layers which clothed him so as to discover a more authentic Jesus. We may start by looking at what is available about Jesus in his own setting. The sources on Jesus of Nazareth are the scriptures of the New Testament (Kasper 1976:26; Boff 1978:11), particularly the four Gospels. For whatever Jesus said or did comes to us only through the lens of the first Christians. However, as Schillebeeckx (1968:24) writes: "historical objectivity is not a construction of the past in its unrepeatable factuality; it is truth of the past in the light of the present". The only perspectives open to us, are the ones accorded us by the historical situations in which we find ourselves. Hence, it is legitimate too for Africans to go back behind the four Gospels to discover for themselves what Jesus had to offer to the people of Palestine in his time. Africans should seek to know the historical and cultural truths about Jesus in their / our terms. Although the Gospels were written in the early church for a generation later than Jesus' own lifetime, the Gospel writers made use of sources that go back to Jesus and his contemporaries. It is possible, therefore, to uncover in some respects Jesus' original intentions (Robinson 1959:105). Such an endeavour, undertaken by Africans, will encourage African Christians to perceive and respond to Jesus in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own mentalities and experiences (Kraft 1979:271).

An overview of the history of interpretation of Jesus in critical scholarship will suggest some important aspects to consider if we seek to know who this Jesus is, as a Nazarene and a Jew. Such an investigation will help us to look at, for instance, the genealogy and infancy narratives of Jesus with a new eye. Matthew's aim in the genealogy of Jesus is to show that Jesus is of Davidic descent. Not only is Jesus of Jewish

descent, but Matthew also uses Old Testament texts (e.g. Is 26:19, 29:18) to explain Jesus' works (Mt 11:4-5). Matthew furthermore illustrates that the law is being fulfilled in Jesus' teaching (Mt 5:17). Jesus was proclaimed Son of God at his baptism, and was subjected to temptations. Obedience to God is a characteristic of true sonship and of the true Israel. Equally, the temptation narratives would be of help to know who Jesus is. On the other hand, the role of modern translations of these narratives should assist in discovering what has been taken from these narratives, and what has been added to them, in helping local people understand Matthew's Gospel. According to Bosch (1991:57), the purpose of the author of Matthew's Gospel was to help the community to understand its calling and mission. The Gospel portrays Jesus' earthly ministry as exclusively offered to the Jews; only after the resurrection did the mission become inclusive (Levine 1992:339), which will be discussed later. These themes, the authority of Jesus, his celibacy, Jesus' *Abba* experience, and why Jesus chose John the Baptist, who seems to have been the person who had made a special impression on him, should furnish some answers to this question: "*Who do people say the Son of man is?*" Jesus was also a missionary. Among many other things Jesus had said, our particular interest will fall on the inclusiveness of his mission. Jesus engendered some expectations in those who had wanted to collaborate with him in his mission, and indications of these have been passed along in the Gospel traditions.

Matthew's Gospel is written to a very specific group, namely Jewish Christians, expressing a new meaning of Jesus, namely as Son of God, but specifically relevant to their culture. The Christian message could be relevant to a very specific group, the Batswana, in order to investigate the new meaning Jesus (and thus Christian spirituality) may have for them, relevant to their specific culture. These parallels make Matthew the most productive of the gospels for gaining theological insights into the inculturation of the Jesus message, and thus Christian spirituality. Justice is a special Matthean emphasis (Mt. 3:15, 5:6) and refers for the most part to the human response of obedience to the God's will. Jesus' main concern was about ethical precepts, the Ten commandments and the great commandment of love of God and neighbour (Viviano 1990:632). Matthew's

Gospel mentioned concern for the church and nowhere else in the other Gospels are these concerns mentioned (:632).

From the analysis that follows below, it will be indicated that Jesus' ministry of teaching included three factors: A preferential option for the poor, the good news, and the reign of God. Jesus linked the Law (the Torah) and the Commandment of Love. Jesus also uttered challenges to those whom he taught or preached. What are these challenges?

2.2 A history of interpretation

The Gospel of Matthew may be considered as "essentially a missionary text" (Bosch 1991:57). Originally the Gospel of Matthew addressed the Jewish community (Levine 1992:339) and its aim was to provide guidance in how the community should understand its calling and mission (Bosch 1991:57). Ringe (1992:1) warns that interpreting the Bible begins with careful and active reading. The application of such reading helps, firstly, in understanding the context. Secondly, we will come to know the main purpose of the author in writing the particular biblical book by identifying his concern. The Gospels are not historical biographies of Jesus, but are interpretations within the early Christian community of what Jesus did and said (Boff 1978:2; Conzelmann 1973:73; Nolan 2001:13). It is important to note in this respect that what was perceived by the early Christian community is not necessarily what Jesus had intended (Ringe 1992: 1). It is equally important to recognise that no modern interpreter comes to the Bible directly (Gittins 2002b:14, 1993: 6). Rather, the person is influenced (often without being aware of it) by centuries of interpretation, the results of which become nearly indistinguishable from the text itself.

The Batswana people have experienced contact with Europeans for more than two centuries, which has influenced their traditional life. This study will attempt to explain both the survival and the contemporary importance of Tswana traditional religious forms within a Christian cloak. For instance, if the Batswana were able to arrive at a fresh hearing of the biblical traditions as they relate to themselves, an important part of the task would be an awareness of that history of interpretation. Research into the sources of these interpretations will help to unmask myths, the New Testament texts' use of literary forms and imagery and their ideological and theological motivation (Boff 1978:2; Kasper 1976:26; Camp 1995: 27), and will assist one to understand the social and historical contexts in which they were written, namely by Batswana people reading into the same context from which New Testament motifs arose. Kasper (1976:26) alerts us to the fact that "we should not remove the Jesus tradition from the context of proclamation, liturgy and parish practice of the Christian churches".

2.2.1 Genealogy of Jesus and infancy narrative

The infancy narrative represents the coming of Jesus as the climax of Israel's history (Thompson 1989:58; Senior 1997:88), and interprets him as the Messiah who fulfils certain Old Testament promises (Levine 1992:340; Senior 1983:241; McBrien 1981:408). The genealogy in Matthew's Gospel therefore situates Jesus at the heart of Judaism's heritage (Bosch 1991:59). The birth of a child, named Jesus (= Greek; Aramaic = Yeshua) means "Yahweh is salvation" (Senior 1997:89). Mary conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit; this unusual conception is about Jesus, not Mary; he is also called Immanuel, meaning "God is with us" (Thompson 1989:59; Levine 1992:340; Senior 1983:241; Van Aarde 1994:273), which is a sign of God's intervention (Mt 1:21) and prophetic fulfilment of Is 7: 14. The Gospel of Matthew emphasises titles from Hebrew scripture given to Jesus: Immanuel (God-with-us), Christ, Son of David, Son of Man. The assigning of these titles is significant, since they are expressions of the royal messianic line. The Matthean genealogy's main purpose is to show Jesus as (adopted) son

of Joseph and therefore a member of the royal line of David (Van Aarde 1994:272). Jesus' infancy recalls the infancy of Moses; thus Jesus is seen as a new Moses (Hubbard 1974:91-94; Mt 2:16).

2.2.2 The temptation narratives (Mt 4:1-11)

Jesus is led into the desert to be put to the test there for forty days, as Israel was for forty years. Yahweh brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and tested them in the wilderness.

Jesus undergoes three similar temptations, based on assessing his filial relationship with God (Gerhardsson 1966:51). During the first temptation, Jesus refuses to use his power for his own benefit (Hooker 1997:32) and accepts whatever God wills. The second temptation was for Jesus to doubt the faithfulness of God by putting him to the test. Jesus indicates that true Sonship consists in following the scriptural word. His willingness to deny himself comfort (Mt 4:3-4), safety (Mt 4:5-7), and power (Mt. 4:8-10) for the sake of the realm of heaven foreshadows the response to his call by the first four disciples (Mt 4:18-22). The four disciples left everything, and followed Jesus. With the third temptation, Jesus' refusal of Satan's offer, Jesus again demonstrates his loyalty to the God who has declared him to be his beloved Son. Nolan (2001:59) states that Satan opposes the Kingdom of God. The Israelites failed their tests by worshipping false gods (Ex 32:1-6) while Jesus succeeded, confirming that Jesus represents the obedient characteristic of true Sonship, the true Israel, who fulfils all righteousness (Kynes 1991:28; Senior 1997:95; Thompson 1989:64).

2.3 The role of translation in understanding the Gospel

No language can be accurately translated, since translation can never arrive at the deep structure of a language. The nature and expression of African spirituality is practised through the faith of Africans: how they express it, and their living experience, which depends on their worldview. Bevans (1992:38) emphasises that a translation should be one of meanings, not just of words and grammar. Gittins (2002a:30) comments, "translation is betrayal, something is always lost in translation, and the message is always modified or impoverished as it passes from one to another". Bevans (1992:39) concurs that in translation models, "something" must be "put into" other terms, something from the outside must be made to fit inside; there is always something "given" that must be "received". Meaning would be lost, especially when some alterations are made during the translation process. As Nida and Taber (1969:24) state, "a translation of the Bible must not only provide information which people can understand but must present the message in such a way that people can feel its relevance (the expressive element in communication) and can then respond to it in action" (cf. Kraft 1979:271). Gittins (2002a: 29) concurs that a missionary, as is the case with every authentic Christian (AG=*Ad gentes* 1, 5), needs a comprehensive knowledge of human nature and culture and an understanding of meaning in cross-cultural situations. Bevans (1992:31) cautions that a translation model has to take into account "experience, culture, social location and social change". Translation is concerned with rendering texts and meanings into another cultural context; and this translation might make doctrines look and sound quite different from their original formulation. Translation and interpretation are therefore to be used together as a method in understanding the Gospel. Hence, as Camp (1995:26) puts it, "translators have to balance two competing values: first, that of faithfulness to the vocabulary, style, and word order of the original; second, that of readability in a modern language". In Bevans' opinion (1992:39) translation has to be idiomatic.

2.4 Matthew 16: 13 *Who do people say the Son of man is?*

The titles Jesus received portray him as an important figure in the history of humanity (Borg 1987:1). He is the founder of the world's greatest religion, that is, Christianity (Borg 1987:1; Nolan 2001:5). The social context in which Jesus grew up and his teaching reflect the Judaism of his time (Schiffman 1994:39). Jesus, being a law abiding Jew, obeyed the ceremonial laws: he went up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Borg 1987: 40). Jesus gave the impression throughout his life of an extraordinary man who had the courage of his convictions (Borg 1987:79; Nolan 2001:143; Derret 1970:13): one who is independent, yet entirely dependent on the will of God. Religious people were scandalised by the way he associated socially with sinners and the ritually impure, by how he seemed to enjoy their company, and by his forgiveness of sins (Nolan 2001:144; Kasper 1976:66; McBrien 1981:425). He acquired a bad reputation: "look, a glutton and a drunkard" (Mt. 11:19). His friendship with sinners classified him as a sinner (Mt 11:19). Jesus did not seek anyone's approval. Kasper (1976:67) suggests that Jesus' behaviour should be understood in the context of his message of the rule of God and will of God. Jesus' message about God's love, including even sinners, challenged the Jewish concept of divine holiness and righteousness.

Jesus' ministry led people to regard him as a prophet (Dodd 1930:53-60). A prophet is an inspired, conscious deliverer of the message of God, not only regarding the future, but also of God's will in the here and now (Heschel 1969:12; Nasimiyu-Wasike 2000: 179). Jesus taught with authority (Hooker 1997:16) and performed miracles (Mt 14: 33), which were clear signs that Jesus is the fulfilment of prophetic hopes (Hooker 1997:59). In Mt 21:11 people described him as "the prophet Jesus from Nazareth". Schneiders (2000:138) suggests that prophecy entails three things: firstly, the prophet has to see and hear from God's point of view. Secondly, the prophet should be able to protest against marginalisation and challenge the oppressor (Borg 1987:155; Brueggemann 1978:83). Jesus challenged and criticised the leaders who controlled the established and

accepted social structures (Borg 1987:155; Nasimiyu-Wasike 2000:184). Lastly the prophet should be willing to suffer for the sake of justice. Jesus' actions and his violation of some of the social practices conveyed a message contradictory to Rabbinic law (Mt 9:1-8). Therefore Jesus was revealing the ideologies that perpetuated poverty and exploitation (Nasimiyu-Wasike 2000:184). Von Rad (1972:42, 50, 165-166) is of the opinion that prophets did not only share God's knowledge, but also God's feelings (Borg 1987:155) and emotions. Therefore Jesus expressed God's own feeling of compassion.

2.4.1 Authority of Jesus

The authority which Jesus could identify with was the truth, that he is the Messiah, "*You are the Christ, the Son of God*" (Mt. 16:16). McBrien (1981:819) writes that the "New Testament, therefore, sees the authority of Jesus as something central to his ministry". Jesus spoke to his disciples, and to the crowds who accepted him as their teacher, with authority (Mt. 7:29). He presented parables to his opponents who did not accept his authority, intending to persuade and convince them (Linnemann 1966:40). He had the power to forgive sins (Mt. 9:6-8). He casts out demons, effects cures and interprets the law as the rabbis did, but with definite authority (Mt. 12: 27-28). Nolan (2001:149) suggests that the only authority which Jesus exercised is authority over evil, which is the power of faith. What is unique about Jesus is his ability to overcome all forms of authoritarian thinking. Nolan (2001:143) strongly affirms that for Jesus, "no tradition was too sacred to be questioned. No authority was too great to be contradicted. No assumption was too fundamental to be changed". After the resurrection, Jesus' authority has been extended to heaven as well (Meier 1977:413; Matthey 1980:166f): "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me*" (Mt 28:18).

"*Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the*

Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27). Borg suggests (1987:49) that the title 'Son' expresses a relationship of special intimacy with God. Viviano (1990:631) concurs that the use of the title Son of God occurred at crucial moments of Jesus' life: the baptism (Mt 3:17), Peter's confession (Mt. 16:16), transfiguration (Mt. 17:5), and the trial and the cross (Mt. 26:63, 27:40, 43, 54). His use of *Abba* has a connection to the term "son". As Boff indicates (1978:149), "it is not the title that creates his authority, rather his authority gave origin to the titles. The titles explained his authority". McBrien (1981:820) further states that Jesus interpreted authority as a service to others (cf. Mt. 20:25-28).

2.4.2 The celibacy of Jesus

According to rabbinic Judaism, marriage was obligatory (Crosby 1996:25-26); therefore every Jewish male was encouraged to marry early, in his late teens or early twenties (Dufour 1973:635). One of the reasons for marriage was to beget children, to ensure the future of their own family, to propagate the race and to refrain from immorality (Schneiders 2001:224; Crosby 1996:25). Jesus apparently chose not to marry, even though in Jesus' culture celibacy was not an honourable calling. Jesus' very social identity as a celibate was made so by his own initiative for the sake of the Reign of God (Mt 19:11-12). This choice meant that Jesus removed himself from the patriarchal dynamics of family (Schneiders 2001:224): that is, to rule or exercise one's authority as father, accorded to the male as the head of the family (Rakoczy 2004:10). Celibacy is scripturally motivated in sections of Matthew's Gospel and is linked with a notion of compassion (Crosby 1996:192), which is to identify with, and feel with others, regarding whatever seems to make them sense they are alienated from others (Nasimiyu-Wasike 2000:185; Nolan 2001:152).

2.4.3 Jesus' *Abba*-Experience

Through his life experience, Jesus possessed a better self-knowledge about himself being a decisive factor in the breakthrough of the kingdom of God and of enjoying a unique relationship with God (Johnson 1988:28). Jesus felt a special sense of himself, his mission, his God whom he calls *Abba*, and of other people. *Abba* is an intimate and affective form of address within the Jewish family (Rakoczy 2004:105) and expresses God as a tender and loving parent. Jesus' *Abba* thus subverts the traditional male patriarchal images of God as father, king and warrior by presenting God in intimate and compassionate images "which create a community of mutuality" (Johnson and Rakoczy 1997:108). This *Abba* relationship of Jesus with God, Carr (1988:176) suggests, "undermines patriarchal patterns in its offer of a spiritual relation to God that transcends these forms". For Jesus to call God *'Abba*-Father*'* means that he felt himself to be God's son, rooted in his intimate union with God (Bacik 1997:9; Nolan 2001:97). Intimacy with the Father gave him authority to speak and act in the place of God. Jesus experienced God as a compassionate Father, and thus experienced God as *Abba* (Nolan 2001:151). Jesus' extraordinarily unique relationship with the Father created the basis of his awareness of being both the messenger and the inaugurator of the Kingdom of God (Boff 1978:146). Nolan (2001:169) suggests that Jesus must have been aware of the fact that he was thinking and feeling as God thinks and feels.

2.4.4 Jesus chooses John the Baptist

The four Gospels (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1: 29-34) clearly indicate that Jesus chose to be baptised by John. One of the best ways of uncovering Jesus' intention (his *ipsissima intentio*) would be to look for evidence of his decisions and choices (Robinson 1959:67f, 105). Wink (1968: 41) summarised John the Baptist's role in the Gospel of Matthew: "Matthew has made explicit everything in Mark's picture of John

which lay hidden: The Herodian opposition, the fate of the prophet, his identity as Elijah". According to Van Aarde (1994: 73), scholars who specialise in investigating the function of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew all agree that the essence of the role of John the Baptist is as a parallel figure of suffering, foreshadowing and anticipating the passion and death of Jesus (cf. Wink 1968: 27- 41).

As Van Aarde (1994:73) avers, "the function of John the Baptist in the Gospels of both Matthew and Mark is thus essentially that of fulfilment of a *prototype* role". Jesus' baptism implied a decision to link John's ministry with his own (Kynes 1991:21; Nolan 2001:19). The baptism of Jesus by John concerns the relationship of the Messiah's eschatological baptism of judgment with John's preparatory baptism of repentance (Dunn 1970:81-92). In submitting to, that is, in recognising John's authority, Jesus fulfils "all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). Jesus is the "beloved Son" (Mt 3:17) because he submits to baptism even though John would have prevented him from doing so. During his baptism the Holy Spirit appears to acknowledge Jesus' divine role (Mt 3:16-17). Nolan's view (2001:21) is that Jesus' baptism by John was conclusive proof of Jesus' acceptance of John's basic prophecy. As suggested, John the Baptist seems to have been the only person in that society who impressed Jesus. In linking himself with the ministry of John, Jesus appears to embody the Israel John sought to restore. Van Aarde's view (1994:73) is that the image of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew is directly related to the God-with-us theme (Mt 3:11).

2.5 Jesus as a missionary

Bosch (1991:20) considers that Jesus of Nazareth, purely a Palestinian Jew, understood his mission in terms of the authentic Old Testament tradition. Jesus never thought of himself as being a Prophet or a Messiah to the non-Jews (Klausner 1977:159; Levine 1992:339). According to Bosch (1991:20), "Jesus lived, ministered, and thought almost

exclusively within the framework of first century Jewish religious faith and life". He selected the twelve disciples, whose number refers back to the ancient composition of the people of Israel and their mission to the future messianic reign, when "all Israel" would be saved (cf. Goppelt 1981:207-213, Meyer 1986:62). As Jesus sends his disciples away to preach the coming of the Messiah and the imminent approach of the Kingdom of heaven, he says: "*Do not make your way to Gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel*" (Mt 10:5-6; Klausner 1977:159). Jesus is introduced to us, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, as the one who has come to fulfil what had been promised to the fathers and mothers of faith.

His mission was to help people to live fully, to offer a new life, to transform expectations and to offer hope and the possibility of transcendence to those who are bowed down. The best summary of his mission is as follows, in Matthew 4:23-25:

> He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and illness among the people. His fame spread throughout Syria, and those who were suffering from diseases and painful complains of one kind or another, the possessed, the epileptics, the paralysed, were all brought to him and he cured them…

The mission is to "*teach, baptise*", and "*make disciples*". Jesus says "*Go!*" and "*I am with you*" (Mt 28:19-20). In general terms, the disciples' mission was to replicate the work of Jesus. Jesus was sent on an urgent mission to the victimised and those on the margins, both nearby: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel" (Mt 15:24). Jesus' ministry to the poor was all-embracing of the marginalised (Bosch 1991: 436; Gittins 2002a: 153). Jesus had nothing to gain in terms of status or reputation from the people he associated with, and they had nothing to give in return. As Gittins (2002a: 153) writes, "unless we get to the heart of Jesus and his approach to other people, we will never get to the heart of the gospel or transplant it into anybody."

2.5.1 Inclusiveness of Jesus' mission

Dorr (1984:91) regards Jesus' prophetic mission as a continuation of the mission of the Old Testament prophets, yet is also aware of the differences between the teaching of Jesus and those of the prophets. The mission of Jesus embraces all people, regardless of their social status. Gittins (2002a:91) suggests Jesus' ministry could be described as consisting of loving encounters. His mission dissolved alienation and moved beyond familiar points of reference, broke down walls of hostility, crossed boundaries, reached out to all people without discrimination (Gittins 2002a:153; Bosch 1991:28), doing justice, and proclaiming the realm of God. This style of Jesus' ministry disturbed the status quo and challenged the complacent. His ministry was not what many people expected, and he did not flatter civil and religious society. He repudiated the notion that some people are more worthy than others. The essential message of Jesus is one of unification and reconciliation, of outreach and inclusion.

Jesus' practice of compassion raised a direct challenge to the holiness or purity code that governed his society (Neyrey 1990:25; Malina 1981:122-152). Schneiders (2000:70) avers, "the purity code mapped everything from household utensils and food to social relationships according to grades of closeness to or distance from the centre of purity, namely, the Temple". Neyrey (1990:25) concurs that Paul, being an "observant Jew", labelled everything in his world in terms of purity and pollution. The Gospels give no indication that Jesus' love or compassion excludes anyone, though; Jesus even challenges his contemporaries to love their enemy (Mt 5:44). Jesus' compassionate, inclusive love and his call to discipleship did not mean doing away with all boundaries or "homogenising" all relationships. As Schneiders (2000:72) notes, "to love all means to relate to all, but to each in a very unique way". Matthew illustrates the inclusivity of the new community by concentrating primarily on the interaction between Jesus and those who are outcasts from or marginal participants in the Jewish cultic establishment.

2.5.2 Jesus' expectation of his collaborators in his mission

Jesus' mission was preaching, teaching, healing and casting out demons. Thus it involves word, deed and sign. His mission was about human transformation (Myers 2004:93), which he undertook in collaboration with the twelve disciples he chose (Mt 10:1- 16) and later sent to continue his mission. Firstly, Jesus initiates and commands "*Follow me!*" (Mt 8:22). Collaborators are being chosen by Jesus, contradicting the accepted practice of the Judaism of his time, which held that it was a *talmid*'s prerogative to choose his own teacher (Davies 1964:421; Hengel 1981:51; Bosch 1991:37). "Following Jesus" meant leaving "everything", whatever the person was engaged in, so as to be free to respond to Jesus' call. Levine (1992:342) concurs: "the two sets of brothers enter into a new family centred on Jesus; they leave everything" (cf Mt. 19:27, Mt 4: 21-22). Disciples are expected to follow the suffering Jesus and look forward to his return in glory. It is the expectation of the *parousia* which provides the motivation for discipleship and compels it to express itself in mission (Breytenbach 1984:338).

Secondly, the analogy of "fishermen" (Mt 5:19) suggests the theme of his mission. To become a disciple of Jesus meant that one shares in the work of the master, becoming a collaborator (Hill 1972:106). Jesus' commission of the twelve is an extension of his mission (Kynes 1991:75). Commission entails that Jesus endows his disciples with full authority to do his work (Bosch 1991:39). Jesus gathered people to form a new community, to be committed to him by serving others (Levine 1992:342). The disciples had simply to proclaim and do what Jesus proclaimed and did. In Paul's language, Christ's ambassadors are those through whom God is making his appeal (2 Cor 5:20). Jesus' disciples not only shared in his ministry, but also shared in the presence of the Kingdom which is evident in his ministry (Kynes 1991:77; Bosch 1991:31; Senior 1983:144).

2.6 Jesus' ministry of teaching

Matthew 4:17 introduces the public ministry of Jesus by summarising his message: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.*" Kynes (1991:37) maintains that this message echoes that of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2) and suggests continuity with John's ministry to Israel. According to Bosch (1991:69), the text "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*", Mt 28:19, is a sermon on discipleship. The sermon expresses the essence of Jesus' ethics (Bosch 1991:69). All people are called to respond to the word of God as autonomous and free persons. Jesus reveals God to us because he is our source of information about divinity. According to Nolan (2001:167), if we wish to treat Jesus as our God, then we should conclude that our God does not want to be served by us, but wants to serve us, to be recognised in the suffering of the poor, and is committed to the liberation of humankind. God chose to be identified with all people in a spirit of solidarity and compassion.

2.6.1 The preferential option for the poor

For Echegaray (1984:74), "the social milieu of Jesus was provided by the social group that was the largest and most heterogeneous in the Palestine of his day". This comprised people excluded from power, deprived of wealth and privilege, the illiterate and unskilled workers. Therefore they were looked upon with suspicion. Jesus taught "with authority", to the amazement of the people; hence the question, "*Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely?*" (Mt 13:54-55). This text illustrates how people thought about the people of Jesus' class, at least as sketched with the Matthean pen.

Van Aarde (2001: 41) suggests that Jesus grew up without the experience of a father figure; therefore his compassion for social outcasts derived from what he himself experienced (Echegaray 1984:74). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus was moved with compassion (Gittins 1993:160; Van Aarde 2001: 41). What made Jesus different was the unrestrained compassion he felt for the poor and the oppressed. Their suffering had a powerful effect upon Jesus. Compassion is Jesus' response to suffering (Mt 20:34). From the beginning to the end Jesus chose for the poor (Dorr 1984: 91): "I *came to call not the upright but sinners*" (Mt 9:13); this lay at the very root of the liberating mission of Jesus.

All human beings created in the image of God, experience sin and are the focus of God's redemptive work (Myers 2004:55). The poor are the whole community of living human beings. The Gospels show how Jesus called people, irrespective of social status. He identified himself with the lowest of the low (Bosch 1991:33; Nolan 2001:34; Dorr 1984:91). Myers (2004:35) regards the mission of Jesus to the poor as holistic. Poverty is a complicated issue involving all areas of life – physical, personal, social, cultural and spiritual. I concur with Myers (:67) that poverty stems from relationships which are broken and dysfunctional: with God, each other, the community and creation. The poor are poor mostly because they live in relationships which do not work for their well-being (:13): that is, which exhibit selfishness, oppression, racism, ethnocentrism and sexism, to name just a few. Bosch (1991:33) suggests that we can only understand Jesus' ministry to those on the margins, if we understand Jesus' understanding of the reign of God. Jesus' missionary ministry indicates that the long-expected reign of God is being realised among the marginalised (Schottroff & Stegemann 1986:36). God's reign aimed at dissolving all forms of alienation and at breaking down walls of hostility and exclusion (Senior 1983:149).

Jesus was clearly committed to the transformation of individuals and of society (Gittins 1999:10): he challenged them to conversion of life, to address social, political, economic, and cultural relationships, calling into account those that limit the participation of the

poor (Myers 2004:236). The word poor and sinner were used interchangeably (Nolan 2001:29). Therefore poverty had moral connotations as well as being a social condition. Poor people were seen as sinners, and therefore as social outcasts. Jesus preached against such a mentality (Echegaray 1984:75) and rejected this use of religion to perpetuate social control by categorising socially inferior people as sinners (Mt. 23:23-26).

2.6.2 Good news

In Matthew's Gospel, to experience the kingdom is to experience Jesus Christ (Senior 1983:237). The New Testament (Mt. 4:23) uses the word "*euaggelion*" meaning the "good news". Good news or Gospel refers to the entire event of Jesus' coming (Bosch 1991:71). Such news proclaims the entry into the present age of God's reign (Echegaray 1984:80). Echegaray (1984:80) points out that the good news calls upon human beings to accept their responsibilities with history: "for this reason it includes teaching on the ethics and discipline that the kingdom requires". As Gittins (2002b:25) observes, "at the core of the Gospel is a series of reversals, and Jesus exemplifies them all". In Jesus the messenger becomes the message. Jesus is the message because of what he did or what God was doing in and through him at that time. The good news concerns the practice of Jesus, the wonderful work of God that was manifested in it (Luke 4:18-19).

2.6.3 Reign of God

Matthew's Gospel generally speaks of "the Kingdom of Heaven" rather than "the Kingdom of God". Heaven in the time of Jesus was a synonym for God. The kingdom of Heaven denoted the kingdom of God. For the Jews of Jesus' time the Kingdom of God was the essence of the hope for the establishment of the ideal of a just ruler, which was never fulfilled on earth (Kasper 1976:73). The centre and framework of Jesus' preaching

and mission was the reign of God, which is also central to his understanding of his own mission (Bosch 1991:31; Nolan 1988:128; Dorr 1984:94). Firstly, God's reign is understood as both "future and already present". Scholars have reached the consensus that the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's reign in Jesus' ministry belongs to the essence of his person and consciousness, and should not be resolved (Bosch 1991:32). Secondly, God's reign is present wherever Jesus overcomes evil (:32). The reign of God has been drawn closer to humanity in Jesus (:71).

In Nolan's view (1988:128), from what Jesus did and taught about the reign of God one may conclude that in his experience the reign of God is associated with four ideas. Firstly, there is a correlation between the reign of God and the poor or the oppressed and their need to be liberated (Matt 25:31-46). Secondly, there are parables concerning agriculture (Mt 13:4-9, 24-30, 31-32), by which Jesus illustrates that the reign of God is a dialectical responsibility of God and human beings. These images illustrate the relationship between the work of human beings and the work of God. The work of a human being is ploughing, sowing, planting, and harvesting. But the actual growth of the plants or trees is the quiet and invisible work of God. Jesus' point is that the reign of God is a process, not something that arrives only on the last day (Nolan 1988:129). Thirdly, Jesus links total commitment with the reign of God. This, and its justice, must be our first priority (Mt 6:33). Lastly, Jesus associated the community of people with the reign of God (Mt 5:38-48). The work or project of salvation is depicted as the gathering together of people in a household or a city, or round a festive meal (Nolan 2001:55). How they relate to one another is therefore important, being in solidarity (Nolan 1988:131). In Jesus' ministry, then, God's reign is interpreted as the expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life (Bosch 1991:34).

Dorr (1984:95) is of the view that Jesus' proclamation of God's reign entailed, first of all, announcing God's judgment on the present social order. Secondly, by preaching the reign of God, Jesus was affirming that things can be changed. Lastly, the

change has already begun to take place. *Metanoia* meant embracing the reality and the presence of the reign of God. Answering a call to discipleship also meant obeying God's reign (Bosch 1991:37; Schweizer 1971: 40).

2.7 How Jesus linked the Law (the *Torah*) and the commandment of love

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus seems to view the *Torah* in a way that is not essentially different from that of his contemporaries (Klausner 1977:161; Bosch 1991:35). Bosch (1991:37) emphasises that Law, the *Torah*, stood at the centre of Judaism. In spite of this, Jesus expected his disciples to renounce everything for his sake alone, and not for the sake of the Law. The complaint about not observing the Sabbath (Mt 12:2) and despising the washing of hands (Mt 15:2) was lodged against his disciples, not against him. Jesus came to "fill out" the meaning of the law by deepening its meaning, expressing its true intent, or expounding its full significance (Davies 1964:102, Hill 1972:120). The law is essentially prophetic in nature (Meier 1976:71-73), and Jesus upholds it by fulfilling it, through his own life and teaching. Bosch (1991:35) clearly states that the reign of God, not the *Torah*, is the decisive principle of action. In Jesus' ministry peoples' relationships are much more important than rules and rituals (Myers 2004:35; Schweizer 1971:34; Bosch 1991:36). Bosch (1991:35) suggests that Jesus' attitudes toward the *Torah* should be understood in the context of his consciousness of being the inaugurator of the reign of God. According to Merklein (1978:95, 105f), Law should be interpreted in the context of God's reign, which manifests itself in love for all people.

Love for God, in Jesus' ministry, is interpreted by love for one's neighbour. The commandments of love for God and love for one's neighbour are "twin injunctions of a single command" (Myers 2004:55; McBrien 1981:921; GS=*Gaudium et spes* 24). These two commandments (Mt. 22:36-40) are similar to the *Shema* prayed by Jews found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Moule (1967/68:301) describes them as "covenant-promise-

consummation" which involves personal and relational interpretation of God's design. Therefore love does not make Christians unique, but has Jewish roots. Jesus' whole life consisted in identifying love of God and love of neighbour, until his final act of giving his life on the cross in loving fulfilment of God's will for the salvation of his fellow human beings (Borg 1987:40; Myers 2004:153). Pederson (1971:37) writes: "the Jesus People Movement is a movement of love. It isn't a new denomination. It isn't even a church. It's a movement, made up of people who express love when they come face to face with lonely, frightened, completely lost people".

2.8 The challenges of Jesus

Jesus is very consistent in challenging the attitudes, practices and structures that tended arbitrarily to restrict or exclude potential members of the Israelite community (Senior 1983:154). He challenged religious authorities despite their being more highly educated than he was about the details of the law and traditional interpretation (Dorr 1984:93; Nolan 2001:143). In his public ministry Jesus freely chose to live poorly and mix with ordinary people and outcasts (Bosch 1991:33), which must have been offensive to the religious establishment (:27). Jesus ate with social outcasts who were scandalous to "respectable people" (Dorr 1984:91). Yet Jesus did not by any means neglect the people of Israel. Jesus was neither uncritical of, nor was he partial to, the Jews. He compared his own people to children who sit in the marketplaces (Mt 11:16); he was unable to do any miracles because of their lack of faith (Mt 13:58), and to their face he called some of the Pharisees hypocrites (Mt 15:7), warning the people not to follow their lead (Mt 23:1-3).

Jesus came to expose the lie that God had favourites and that some people were to be permanently excluded from any relationship with God. As Gittins (2002b: 117) writes, "but Jesus wanted to show that it was not always necessarily so. He had God's eye view of the world; a view of the way things could be and should be if people would rethink

their relationship with God". Jesus declared that in the Kingdom of God, which was to be in some way a considerable contrast to the reality of contemporary Jewish life, things would be very different. The promise of the Kingdom of God is extended to everyone without exception. God did not endorse the exclusion of people. Jesus came to erase the boundaries between people and to invite everyone equally. All are one in Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19; Gal 3:26-29).

Jesus challenged the established order of his time (Dorr 1984:91). His actions and preaching were perceived as undermining the authorities. Thus Jesus was a threat to power (Dorr 1984: 92): "… you have made God's word ineffective by means of your tradition" (Mt 15:1-6). The way in which Jesus lived and what he taught were perceived as a clear challenge to the power of the religious establishment (Dorr 1984: 92). He was crucified for what were interpreted as his "political" claims (Bosch 1991:34) because he was challenging the misuse of power.

Jesus also challenged those who possessed money: "*it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven*" (Mt 19:24). Jesus' view was that lack of openness to God was caused by wealth and concern for money. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is that the only way we can experience the treasures of God is to share our earthly possessions with the poor (Crosby 1981:56). Jesus was dependent on others for living: he did not own a place so that he could rest (Mt 8:19-20).

2.9 Conclusion

Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus as Christ and on the nearness of the kingdom of Heaven. The Gospel begins by presenting Jesus as royal Son of God and Immanuel, "God is with us", and ends with Jesus being given all authority as Son of Man over the kingdom of Heaven. The theme of the kingdom of Heaven is stressed throughout the Gospel of Matthew. The kingdom is realised because Jesus has come to fulfil the law and prophecy. The kingdom of Heaven is the great object of hope, prayer (Mt. 6:10), and proclamation (Mt. 3:2; 4: 17). It contains God's promise of salvation to redeem humanity socially, politically, culturally, economically and personally. The kingdom of Heaven had moral content, which leads to other two themes: "Justice or righteousness and law" (Viviano 1990:632). Matthew places a special emphasis on justice (Mt. 3:15; 5: 6, 10, 20; 6: 1, 33; 21: 32) and refers for the most part to the human response of obedience to God's will. Jesus mainly speaks about ethical precepts, such as the great commandments of the love of God and one's neighbour.

Jesus' approach directly favoured those who were excluded or who felt themselves to be. Jesus was marginal in that he was living between the realms of the divine and human. His ministry transcended boundaries, such as the invisible boundaries that protected zones of privilege, exclusiveness, or holiness. He challenged the oppressive religious authorities. It is only when, like the Good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel, we discover our common humanity, that we shall begin to experience what Jesus experienced. Only those who value above all else human dignity, are in agreement with God who created the human person in God's own image and likeness (Ac 10:34). Faith in Jesus without respect and compassion for humanity is a lie (I Cor 13:1-2; Ja 2:14-26). To identify with Jesus is to identify with all people. God's revelation through Jesus tends to unite, and includes all of humanity. Jesus can therefore be considered a bridge between cultures.

Jesus identified and worked with the local community. He effectively incarnated and contextualised himself. Jesus experienced what missionaries experienced, that is, linguistic and cultural adaptation, transition and assimilation. The centrality of Jesus to personal formation lies at the heart of the Gospel. The only person who seems to adequately address the issue of human hearts is the person Jesus Christ, and his teachings. In his ministry Jesus evidenced an extraordinary sense of his own mission. He was a carpenter, possessed by the Spirit of God to proclaim the word of God with authority (Mk 2: 10).

Jesus stands before us as a person, autonomous, relating freely and equally to all people. Neither gender nor family, according to Jesus, was the ultimate determiner of social status or relationship (McBrien 1981:425). He insisted that his own followers should practise authority with the attitude of servants, not masters. Jesus' role is as herald, mediator, and promoter of the Reign of God. He did not found an organisation; he inspired a movement. Therefore Jesus had no successor. He was experienced by his followers as a breakthrough in the history of humanity and is the source of our information about divinity. What he preached and practised was openness to God, which involves being willing to give up one's wealth and share it with the poor; he condemned the rich who were not willing to share with the poor.

Having discussed the general background, in the following chapter the researcher considers the particular issue of religion amongst the Batswana.

CHAPTER 3   **TSWANA TRADITIONAL RELIGION'S ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRISTIANITY**

3.1 Introduction

The Gospel was first revealed and preached in the Jewish culture; later it was preached to other cultures, such as the Greeks and Romans (Mbiti 1987:388; Stinton 2004:45; McBrien 1981:271; Nigosian 1990:155). In this manner, the Gospel continued travelling from culture to culture, until eventually it reached African cultures – and it would go still further, to other cultures as well. The fact that in the view of certain people, Gentiles were required to become Jews in order to become Christians (Ac 15:1f), indicates that cultural and religious interaction was already an issue in the historical experience of Israel and the early Christian communities (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:20; McBrien 1981:749). The more the Gospel message spread to other cultures, the more this became a difficulty.

This part of the study will focus on what the missionaries did in evangelising Batswana people. In the Western missionaries' approach, "Jesus remained a foreigner white god and Christianity was a European religion" (Stinton 2004:43) as far as the Batswana people were concerned (Setiloane 1976:98). Therefore it will be important to study their method of evangelising. In this respect, investigating the features of Tswana traditional religion will be helpful in assessing both the successes and failures of missionaries. The focus on inculturation indicates that the missionaries proclaimed the Gospel, but ignored the context of Batswana people. The Gospel suppose to come into a culture to enrich and transform it. Therefore the Gospel is Christianising Tswana culture. The efforts of Christianity are aimed at concretising the life of Jesus and his teaching among local people. Thus inculturation evinces links with incarnation. This study will examine the theme of this encounter and draw a conclusion from it.

3.2 The missionary style of planting Christianity

Western missionaries who travelled to Africa had one thing in mind: to proclaim the Gospel and to win the Africans to Christianity (Kapenda 2000:40). These missionaries perceived their culture as superior to any other culture (Hastings 1976:38). Most Western missionaries did not recognise that African people actually possess a culture (Tlhagale 1995:170; Molyneux 1993:64; Mbiti 1969:232), and therefore did not regard them as fully human (Bujo 1992:39). Tlhagale's (1995:169) view is that Western missionaries deliberately refused to recognise Africans as equals (Kiernan 1995:117), or their worldview and their values. But the proclamation of the Gospel is only effective when human beings live in a dynamic relationship with each other (Setiloane 1976:139). Hence a failure of cultural awareness impinges on any missionary endeavour. Three missionaries are therefore convinced that when preaching in a new environment one should be respectful of the other culture. Barry, Campbell and Dieterle (1990:23) wrote,

> Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Also we may find ourselves treading on peoples' dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.

Hastings (1976: 38) strongly asserts, "many missionaries were extremely ignorant of the societies they had come to evangelise… Moreover they came with an almost impregnable confidence in the overwhelming superiority of the European west …" Kapenda (2000:40) concurs that missionaries came to Africa with ready-made questions and answers. Consequently, as Bujo (1992: 48) writes: "many vital elements were destroyed, and the opportunity of really incarnating the Christian message in Africa was lost." This indicates that Christian missionaries inadequately understood the basic structure of African society. They did not seem to have entered sufficiently into the life of the people to understand what their traditional rituals and celebrations were about and what they meant to them (Schapera 1953:60; Baur 1994:289; Setiloane 1976: 92). African cultures, like any other cultures, are not perfect; therefore they contained certain

traditional elements which had to be challenged, or affirmed, by the Christian Gospel. The Western missionaries failed in this, by not being able to distinguish between positive and negative elements in the Tswana culture.

As noted, African converts were expected to deny their tradition and culture; only then would they be considered truly Christians (Bujo 1992:45). This encounter profoundly and critically impacted on their traditional life (Barreto 2000:57; Gittins 2002b:29-30, Tlhagale 1995:170), and as a result many practices were modified; some eventually disappeared. Hence, in Mugambi's estimation (1995:77), "the Christian missionary enterprise has had the greatest impact in the disintegration of African cultural and religious heritage". Westermann (1937:2) concurs that the transmission of Christianity in Africa meant the elimination of pre-Christian primal religions of Africa: "giving the new means taking away the old". Barreto (2000:57) however suggests that Batswana people did not lose everything; some of the features which survived are traditional belief and thought.

3.2.1 The intertwinement of Christian mission and colonialism

Colonialism normally refers to European expansion in which foreign territories were settled and ruled over by whites (Stinton 2004:20; Magesa 2004:44; Bujo 1992:40) who controlled the populations of indigenous people by legal and political means. Numerically Africans were the majority, but socially, politically and economically they were treated as minorities. The meeting of Europeans and Africans in the colonial era was an unequal one: the Europeans regarded themselves from the outset as superior to Africans whom they had met for the first time (Tutu 1995:151). Bediako (1995:6) alerts us to the fact that the supposed superiority of Europeans and inferiority of indigenous people existed before missionaries arrived in Africa and therefore did not originate with the missionaries. The Europeans' main reason for contacting Africans was for reasons of

self-interest, using them as their labour tools to enrich themselves (Bujo 1992:39-40; Latourette 1939:240).

The fates of religion and colonialism have been bound up together in at least two aspects. Firstly, Christian missionaries collaborated (sometimes unintentionally) with colonialists (Bujo 1992:42; Bediako 1995:6). By not opposing the colonial enterprise they were collaborators of agents of cultural imperialism (Tutu 1995:149; Baur 1994:288; Woodhead 2002:6). Secondly, colonialism exerted a profound effect on religions within colonised territories. The rapid growth of Islam and African Initiated Churches in the post-colonial period was a reaction to this: rejecting Christianity as a "European religion" and Jesus as a "white" god, therefore foreign to Africans (Mugambi 1995:77; Woodhead 2002:6). Kapenda (2000:40) concurs that the attitude displayed by some missionaries toward African cultures and traditions rendered Christianity foreign to many African people. Thus Christianity never helped some Africans to discover the values, hidden in their own cultures and traditions, which could have enhanced their Christian life. Stinton (2004:44) describes a common complaint regarding how Christianity was brought to Africa:

> But the main problem is the way Christianity was introduced, especially coming in and banning so many cultural practices and values. The most serious of these complaints is how the missionary and colonialist worked together to deprive the African of his heritage, especially of his land.

3.3 The method of evangelising Batswana people

Various Protestants were largely responsible for bringing Christianity into Tswana culture, most particularly the London Missionary Society (Schapera 1953:54; Barreto 2000:57-58). Missionaries "imparted much of their culture with the Gospel they preached" (Schreiter 1991:viii; Setiloane 1976:144; Baur 1994:289). As a result the Gospel was compromised (Bosch 1991: 448). The method of evangelising used among Batswana people was tied to education (Barretto 2000:57; Tutu 1995: 151); therefore one

could argue that their literacy is due to the missionaries' work. Illiteracy was perceived by Western Europe of the 18th century as "evidence of stark heathenism" (Setiloane 1976:145); consequently education brought the "Light of Salvation". The way Batswana people were clothed became an identifying factor as to whether they were still uncivilised ("*Mekgwa ya Bo-rra-rona*" – the ways of our fathers), or had converted to the "*Mekgwa ya Makgowa*" (the ways of the white people), which was understood as meaning the same as Christianity. Tutu (1995:151) concurs that virtually everything was uprooted and destroyed in order to help converts to become duplicates of their missionaries. Thus, as Tlhagale (1995: 169) states, colonialism did not create a space for the African culture. One can conclude that the aspiration of the Western missionaries was to civilise the Africans or to assimilate them into their culture.

3.3.1 Erroneous theological assumption

According to Magesa (2004:151), "Matthew 28:19-20 has historically been used by Christians to motivate, confirm and explain their missionary activity throughout the world". The missionary enterprise was intended to proclaim the Gospel in the name of Christ, but unfortunately in their application of evangelisation they preached "Christendom". Western culture was inseparable from Christian faith (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:379; Schreiter 1991:viii). As a result Christianity has failed to be deeply rooted in the African soil (Tutu 1995:152). In contrast, biblically the aim of the mission to the Gentiles was to continue God's plan to save all humanity by their faith (Johnson 1992:268). The Gospel of Luke never connects circumcision to the issue salvation, but considers circumcision as a "custom of the people" (Lk 1:9; Ac 16:21). This was not reflected in the way Western missionaries introduced Christianity to Africans. As Mugambi (1989: 56) strongly puts it,

> One of the most disturbing ironies of the modern missionary enterprise was that the missionaries were biblical literalists, yet they did not take cognizance of the resolution of the first ecumenical council of Jerusalem which declared that it was

not necessary for a Gentile to become an "honorary" Jew in order to become a Christian. Most missionaries insisted that an African must become an "honorary white" as a precondition for becoming a Christian. This was a gross theological error.

3.3.2 Missionaries' Western-oriented approach alienated African people

The Christianity that Western missionaries brought was one developed in Europe over the centuries, in response to and conditioned by the specific situations and people of Europe (Nolan 1988:23). These missionaries lacked intercultural sensitivity, in failing to adapt the Gospel message to the cultural situation of their hearers (Law 1996:47). I concur with Oosthuizen (2000:277) that for theology to be meaningful to people, it should be relevant to their lives. One of the themes from Christianity which was welcomed by Batswana people, and therefore accepted, was the "understanding of Christ as giving refuge and rest" (Setiloane 1976:122). The success of missionary activities became evident in living close to these people and caring for them (:137), which was relevant to their lives. Missionaries freely and sincerely gave themselves for the service and caring of the people. The cruelty and injustice that they suffered as "white" people changed the perception that they were human beings of a different calibre. The missionaries however expected Africans to embrace Western Christianity as though it had been developed within their cultural framework. Western secular and ecclesiastical structures alienated many Africans. There are therefore still two major types of Christian churches found in all parts of Africa. The first one comprises the Western churches founded by Western missionary agencies, which are often referred to as mainline churches or historic churches (Bakare 1997:15). The second one is African Initiated Churches (AICs), established by Africans; the Shembe church (Amanazaretha) will be used for our study. The choice of this church is motivated by its alarming growth at the expense of mainline churches, which poses a serious challenge to the latter in South Africa.

3.3.2.1 Western-oriented Christian Churches

The Western-oriented Christian churches of Africa tend to exhibit the same ecclesiastical structures and doctrines as their mother churches in Europe and North America (Baur 1994:296). The institutionalised model favoured by mainline churches neglected the human needs at the very grass-roots level. An institutionalised community caters for many people; as a result it does not easily bring about "creative and prophetic change" (Gittins 1999: 70). The issues pertaining to the cultures and traditions of African people were thus not paid attention to or ignored (Kapenda 2000:40). Western theology is not rooted in the life of Africans and thus "becomes useless verbiage" (Oosthuizen 2000: 277). Westernising processes have destroyed the African traditional systems of collective values through the influence of individualism on traditional African values. The continuing imposition of Western values and institutions on indigenous African systems can therefore be seen as a major cause of the retrogression of the mainline churches. Bakare (1997:15) states that Africans, to be specific in this case Batswana people, "were taught a new religious language, new forms of worship, new songs, and new doctrines – in short, an entirely new spirituality". Setiloane (1976:121) points out that the impression which missionaries were putting across was to "recreate" Batswana people to be "civilised" people, that is, "developing" them according to Western standards and suppositions (Bosch 1991:294). However, we share a common humanity; therefore we should expect to encounter commonality in different environments (Gittins 2002a: 7). That this was not forthcoming resulted in Africans longing for Africanisation.

Stinton (2004: 45) interviewed a Kenyan pastor, J. B. Masinde, who was lamenting the white images of Jesus in Africa in this way:

> Concerning the Christ that we have to present now, we have to peel off some clothes that he's been packaged in. I don't mean it in a bad way, but those who presented Christ to Africa, say in my area, they presented him packaged in the Western kind of model, in the sense that the perception many people got was not even that Christ was a Jew! The drawing they had in their churches, the pictures

they had in their homes did not even look like Jewish men! 'Cause most of them were drawn in the Italian fashion. So the perception was, "Oh, he must have been a white man! Ah, like the white missionary! He must have been closer to God than we are!"

3.3.2.2 African Initiated Churches (AICs): Shembe church (Amanazaretha)

Most AICs generally broke away from missionary churches because African religious experiences conflicted with the doctrines and practices of mainline churches (Nolan 1988:22; Kiernan 1995:117). According to Kiernan (1995:117) one of the reasons was that white missionaries were hesitant to ordain African pastors and give them responsibilities. According to Oosthuizen (1976:5), of the various reasons for joining the movement, the doctrine of the Black Christ is the most significant. African Initiated Churches originate from the idea of Africanising Christianity (Hastings 1976:53; Bediako 1995:63), by "stripping Christianity of its foreignness" (Martey 1993:76).

There is a traditional, almost inborn sense of fellowship, caring and sharing that is basic to traditional African religions. AICs expressed this aspect of their African culture in worship, healing ceremonies and pastoral counselling. The AICs also make use of music with African rhythms and idioms. In other words, the cornerstone of the spirituality of these churches is the African worldview, rooted in the daily experiences of life, and expressed through the rituals of the community of faith. The AICs serve as a bridge connecting the everyday life of the people with God. The AICs, with their upholding of traditional human values, have reacted in terms of a caring and sharing fellowship to the sense of alienation brought about by Western church practice. As Sogolo (1994:11) rightly comments regarding AIC church practice: "an action was judged right or wrong depending on the extent to which it promoted well-being, mutual understanding and social harmony".

The Shembe church (*Amanazaretha*) is one of the fastest growing AICs in South Africa. There is a great exodus of people from the mission churches to the Shembe church in KwaZulu/Natal, which raises eyebrows. The Shembe church is predominantly Zulu speaking. The language used in worship appeals to the experiences and concerns, the joys and hopes of Africans (Bediako 1995:66).

Prophet Shembe is considered a revelation of God among the Zulus, just as Jesus was among Jews (Oosthuizen 1976:4, Wessels 1990: 108). Shembe is seen as standing at the centre; according to his followers the only difference between Christ and Shembe is that Christ is white and Shembe is black (Oosthuizen 1976:15). Shembe was also regarded as the one who would restore the ancient splendour of the Zulu kingdom. Martin (1964:126) contends: "in the belief of his followers Shembe has even become co-creator with God and mediator in heaven". His image amongst his followers is almost the image of a messiah.

3.3.2.3 The problems of the African Christian identity crisis

The problem of African identity has its roots in the history of the contact of African peoples with the West. The problem emerged with the increasing Western cultural and political penetration and dominance in Africa, which coincided with an equally massive Western missionary enterprise (Bediako 1995:178). The problem was that missionaries identified Christian faith with "Christendom": this ignored the fact that conversion to Christianity did not necessarily demand acculturation into the culture of the missionary (Stinton 2004:46). Magesa (2004:166) cautions that the "missionary's task of proclaiming the Gospel will initially be defined by temporary dominant factors familiar to him/her and his/her place of origin."

In mainline churches the crisis of identity of many African believers lies in the fact that many African Christians superficially practised the "foreign faith" of Christianity, but they remained convinced of and rooted in traditional religion (Tlhagale 1995:53; Baur 1994:290). The spontaneity in liturgy, clapping of hands, and rhythmic swaying of the body in traditional religion seems to answer their spiritual quest (Selialia 1995:127). Oosthuizen's view (2000:280) concerning mainline churches is that "those in mainline churches have much to do with a schizophrenic syndrome because they have been mentally colonized, and what they need is a mental and spiritual decolonization process".

The core issue is that both the African identity and the Gospel identity must be preserved. As Magesa (2004:158) warns, "what must always be borne in mind is that both the African identity and the Gospel identity possess within them divine character because both enjoy divine origin". Egbulem (2003:18) writes "all that exists has its origin and meaning in God and will terminate in God". The proclamation of the word of God in John's Gospel connects the mystery of creation and incarnation. In his very person and in all his actions and relationship, Jesus announced the good news of God's compassion for humanity. Humanity and the Gospel are both created by God, but express themselves differently. Both are equally important.

3.4 Features of Tswana traditional religion

Mogapi (1991:136) remarks, "*kitso le tlhaloganyo ka ga boleng jwa Modimo ga bo a tla ka Makgowa*," which translates as "Knowledge and understanding of the being of God did not come with western people". African people are often given names which reflect their faith in God: *Goitsemodimo* – it is only God who knows, *Oteng* – God's presence and *Omphile* – God gave me a gift (Mogapi 1991:137). The concept of God was there among African people before they came into contact with Christianity (Oosthuizen

2000:279; Barreto 2000:61; Bujo 1992:17), although God was not directly approachable. The faith in God found in Tswana people was and is for the most part monotheistic (Setiloane 1976:80; Barreto 2000:58; Bujo 1992:18). Christianity can be said to have articulated this one God whom Africans knew much more clearly than the African tradition was able to. God is creator; God alone can give life, especially human life (Bujo 1992:17), strength and growth. All these witnesses in traditional African religious thought testify that God sustains every living thing (Setiloane 1976:78), but human beings are a special object of the Creator's attention. God has placed everything at their disposal (Gn 1:28).

The Tswana worldview and philosophy of life is integrated, holistic, a unity which embraces the nuclear family, the extended family, one's lineage, and the ancestors (*Badimo*); ultimately also the Source of Life *(Modimo)*. Tswana traditional religion is embedded in people's lives (Mosala & Tlhagale 1986:77; Barretto 2000:58-59), and can only be understood in its proper context, not simply as institutionalised in either church structures or liturgical ceremonies. Themes and values, including prayer, sacrifice, traditional healing and medicine, and traditional authorities like the chief occupy a legitimate place in the religious system of Africa (Oosthuizen 2000:277). The Tswana chief therefore holds both a social position *(as Kgosi)* and a religious position *(as Morena)*. People are under the chief's guardianship, and the chief also mediates between people and their ancestral spirits.

Ancestors are living dead who are present in people's lives and who provide identity and protection (Gwembe 1995:30; Setiloane 1976: 65). Ancestors (*Badimo*) are immediate agents of God (*Modimo*): their function is to ensure the good ordering of social relationships among biological living relatives (Mogapi 1991: 136). Tswana traditional religion's most outstanding feature is the centrality of the ancestral spirits (Stinton 2004: 133; Setiloane 1976:65): without an appreciation of this essential element, missionaries failed to understand not only the religious aspects of African life but the

whole of African culture (Ela 1988:14). Western missionaries ignored the ancestors and condemned the rituals connected with them (Bujo 1992:44). The ancestors and rituals connected with them just form part of African religion and are "… not the totality of African traditional religion" (Oosthuizen 2000:279). This condemnation by Western missionaries did not discontinue the significant role played by the ancestors in people's lives. The ancestor cult was central to the African religious and social structure, and to destroy it undermined the whole fabric of society.

This created separation between Christian faith and African Traditional religions is expressed in many ways (Tlhagale 1995:53); for instance, one acts as a Christian on Sunday by going to church while a Tswana traditional ritual like thanksgiving (*Mpho ya badimo*) is performed at one's home. One can deduce from this that Christianity has in some central respects never reached the Tswana soul (Barreto 2000:61).

3.5 Missionaries proclaimed the Gospel but ignored the context of Batswana people

From the start, the missionary message of the Christian church failed to incarnate itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it. Unfortunately the recognition of the contextual nature of the faith only occurred towards the end of the twentieth century (Bosch 1991:421). Western missionaries primarily considered ideas and principles; application was secondary for them, in order to confirm and legitimise the idea or principle (:421). In addition, the missionary endeavour has at times been motivated by ethnocentrism (Law 1996: 46), along with the desire for wealth, power, and prestige. The objective truth of the Bible was determined by the church.

There is thus evidence of serious failure in the history of the practice of mission in Africa: the Gospel has hardly taken root; it was not allowed to become sufficiently

immersed in Africans, in the African culture (Kapenda 2000:42; Tlhagale 1995:169). As Baur (1994:109) writes: "missionaries came in a concerted way to various parts of Africa … aiming to proclaim Christ's name and liberating message"; however, as Magesa (2004: 155) indicates: "unfortunately, the vast majority of the early evangelisers were antagonistic to the 'marriage' between the Gospel and various cultures they encountered".

The goal of the Gospel-culture encounter is to help the African people and the African church to come closer to God. Bosch (1991:389-93) cautions that Christian mission does not belong first of all to the church but to God. More concretely, the goal is to help all African Christians and indeed, all African people, to lead a life with an integrated spirituality. The process should lead to a point where African Christians can live their faith as "truly African and truly Christian", without split personalities springing from divided loyalty (Magesa 2004:160).

3.5.1 The role which language plays in understanding the Gospels

Language study and practice are intrinsic to Christian mission (Kraft 2001:137). As Bediako (1995:xi) points out, the translation of the Gospel takes place in a process of communication, interaction, and refinement of theological understanding, which gives rise to a new Christian idiom. Hence Tlaba (1995:65) makes it clear that "the first stage of every evangelizer is to learn the language of the region where he / she works". In principle, the Gospel is translatable into African languages, for God speaks all the languages. People like to worship in their own languages (Kraft 2001:137). If the Gospel is to be translated into another culture, then it must be translated from one linguistic world to another too. True communication requires common ground. Satisfactory communication between people with no common language is consequently impossible without concerted hard work on both sides (Gittins 2002a:88). Bediako (2004:vx) argues

that language is a vehicle and human thinking is its passenger. This proves to be true in Tswana too, though not without difficulties: the Tswana language provides dimensions of perception that are non-existent in the English language. This is what Kraft (2001:138) calls, "the reality of perceptual differences between members of different languages." Sometimes the striking uniqueness of an untranslatable word or phrase leads to borrowing, and a foreign word becomes part of one's language. Therefore there is a need to take this culturally defined perceptual difference seriously, in terms of scripture translation and interpretation. Learning new words allows the person to feel less alien in foreign worlds. Language is the soil in which the Gospel becomes a living Word, and in this respect Kraft (2001:135) raises an awareness of two mistakes which have been made by interpreters and translators of the New Testament. The first one is an overestimation of the underlying similarities between Greek and English as regards their worldview. Secondly, to assume that the thought patterns (worldviews) underlying the New Testament are Greek rather than predominantly Hebrew. Discovery of that this error helps to understand why there is a close relationship between New Testament worldview and that of the non-western receiving cultures.

3.6. God is the initiator of evangelisation

Since incarnation denotes embodying or becoming flesh, for instance God entering human culture (Manyeli 1995:26), God is being revealed through human culture and its language (Tlaba 1995:67; Mbiti 1987:388). Tlaba (1995:67) maintains that, "to be a revealer of God pertains to Christ exclusively as the Son of God incarnate". This revelation took place in a specific cultural place, Palestine, among the Jews, through the medium of language (Tlaba 1995:66; Mbiti 1987:388), at a specific moment, over two thousand years ago. Since then the Gospel has been proclaimed, propagated, and accepted within the cultural milieux of the peoples of the world. For the spread of the Gospel human beings are to collaborate with God. According to Mbiti (1987:395) "Without culture, the Gospel cannot encounter people."

Gittins (1999:74) defines culture as "the man-made (human) part of the environment, [which] includes belief and thought, symbol and ritual, language and song, and rather aptly characterizes humanity". Hence, culture is acquired or learned by individual as members of a human society; therefore it is not static (Bevans 1992:250). Theology happens from a particular perspective; the person is influenced by her / his biological and cultural heritage and is conditioned by the time and place (Tutu 1995:154). Culture controls people's perceptions of reality and offers them a system of meaning embodied in images and symbols. It shapes their understandings, feelings, and behaviour and gives them a group identity. Culture is a prism through which a human society views the whole of its experience – domestic, social, economic and political. It is consequently part of the make up of people (Kapenda 2000:42).

3.6.1 The Gospel enters and goes beyond culture

The Gospel, being a gift from God, must go beyond culture, even though it is expressed and communicated within the limits of culture. The cross cultural links between the Christian Gospel and specific cultures are as old as the Gospel itself, as witnessed in the New Testament writers (Mbiti 1987:388). According to Vatican II, culture possesses a legitimate autonomy and freedom (GS=*Gaudium et spes* 59); there is a plurality of cultures; and each person has the right to develop within a particular culture (GS=*Gaudium et spes* 53, 59, 60). Hence Mugambi (1995: 77) has strongly indicated that a central Christological issue causes an ongoing struggle:

> I am wrestling with a contradiction: The gospel proclaims good news in specific cultural and historical terms (Lk 4: 16-22). Yet missionary Christianity has reached Africa as terribly bad news, in which people have been taught in Church to despise their culture, their ancestry, their history and their knowledge. How can Jesus the Son of God, Who created Africans in his own Image, condone such dehumanization?

In the evangelisation process the church combines the Gospel message already incarnated and the values of the local culture (Magesa 2004:153; Manyeli 1995:26); therefore it is fundamentally cultural. Cultural transmission is a necessary tool for the spread of the Gospel (Bosch 1991:297; Mbiti 1987:388); as Tlhagale (1995:170) writes, "faith is the leaven that unshackles the African culture from its own self-imprisonment, from the limitation inherent in the African worldview". Gittins (1999:46) describes this as "… the way the gospel encounters a particular culture and calls that culture to be enriched, transformed". Mbiti (1987:395-6) expresses this point as follows: "the beyond-ness of the Gospel derives from the fact that God is the author of the Gospel while man [humanity – *my own words*] is the author of culture". On the day of Pentecost the Gospel was proclaimed, understood and believed by people in their different cultures (Ac 2:1-11).

God became a human being, immersed in the history and life of the people of Israel, using their language, land, and religion through Jesus, "in order to show that what he did for them is what he intended to do for the whole human race" (John Paul II 1995:60). In other words God did not necessarily need the Jewish context to become human in the person of Jesus (Law 1996:39). The importance of Jesus is his humanity; his biological makeup (gender, race, marital status) is irrelevant in confessing Jesus as the Christ (Ringe 1992:8; Stalcup 1995:127). Melanchthon (1989: 19) maintains, "Jesus is the representative human being – a category which includes female beings" and Africans too. We must recognise cultural plurality as the Gospel is proclaimed in all societies of the world. One can own the culture but not the Gospel, which belongs to Jesus Christ. As indicated earlier, Jesus belongs to all people and so does the Gospel. Mbiti (1987:389) concurs that the "Gospel refuses to be made exclusive property of any one culture, or nation, or a region, or generation".

3.6.2 Missionaries brought their cultural baggage in evangelising Batswana people

Missionaries have commonly assumed that Western civilisation and Christianity are identical (Taylor 1963:4-5; Bosch 1991:294). Their superiority and literacy blinded them in learning and understanding Tswana people (Setiloane 1976:116). Gittins (2002a:15) contends that, "nobody is completely objective, dispassionate, or open-minded". Hence, wherever any missionaries go, they bring with them their own agendas and preferences, their culturally formed interpretations and judgments, and their personal preferences. In evangelising missionaries carry with them tendencies, biases, and assumptions that they use to make sense of the world.

They were not even aware of their own ethnocentrism (Bosch 1991:294). Ethnocentrism is part of the distorting lens that is often part of cross-cultural evangelisers' baggage. In Law's view (1996:46) ethnocentrism is, "the assumption that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality", often not knowing or accepting other worldviews as valid or important. Thus, ethnocentrism inevitably results in negative judgments of the unfamiliar or the other. Psychologically or spiritually this is ego-centrism; more behaviourally or culturally, however, it constitutes ethnocentrism (Gittins 2002a:15).

3.7 Christianising African culture

As much as incarnation took place within a cultural framework, so does conversion. Christianity is the result of the Gospel arriving in a given culture whose people respond to the Gospel through faith. Theology is influenced, if not determined, by the lens we use to view the world (Bosch 1991:421). Every culture expresses Christianity according to its own cultural setting. For Dorr (2000:91), "the Spirit is at work among peoples, traditions,

and in cultures long before the good news of Jesus reaches them". Dorr adds, "… the first task of the evangelizers is to recognize and celebrate this prior work of the Spirit". I concur with Mbiti (1987:389) that the Gospel has been and should continue to be proclaimed within the melodies of our African culture, languages, and musical instruments and through our bodies and the symbols of our artists. This process is inculturation, taking the reality of human experience, reflecting and regularly searching for identification between the Gospel and culture, and when there is mutual correction and adjustment between them (Martey 1993:68; Tlhagale 1995:170), influencing and transforming humanity from within and making it new (EN=*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 18-19).

The Gospel embraces African cultures; it transforms African people within their African culture. God desires people to love, worship, and obey God within their own culture, God does not want people to be alien to their culture, particularly Africans – but, rather, alien to sin. The goal of inculturation is to make Jesus and his teaching concrete among local people. Inculturation is grounded in the incarnation; it involves "immersing Christianity in African culture just as Jesus became a man [I would say: *human person*], so must Christianity become African" (Ukpong 1984:27), all of which constitute the foundations of the Christian faith. Jesus was enculturated or socialized within the context of first century Palestine. Gittins (2000:64) states, "unless we appreciate the fact that and process of his (Jesus) enculturation we will never fully understand the rationale behind inculturation". As Bosch (1991:423) maintains, "every text is an interpreted text and … , in a sense, the reader 'creates' the text when she or he reads it. The text is not only 'out there' waiting to be interpreted; the text 'becomes' as we engage with it". In Bosch's view, the entire context comes into play when we interpret a biblical text.

Unfortunately, as mentioned, being a Christian for Africans meant conversion to a foreign culture, rather than to the Gospel, by stripping off their own culture (Tlhagale 1995:169). Black theology is therefore highly critical of Western theology, not any inadequacy of the Gospel per se but related to human failings, criticising the ways in

which that Gospel has been presented in order to allow the indigenous culture to relate more effectively to the Gospel, Africans need to be freed from European domination. Mbiti (1987:390) affirms that, "the only lasting form of Christianity in this continent is that which results from a serious encounter of the Gospel with the indigenous African culture when the people voluntarily accept by faith the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

3.8 Examination of the theme of the encounter

A critical contextual methodology of evaluation will examine and evaluate how Christianity was introduced to Batswana people. This section uses the methodology developed to examine the encounter of Tswana traditional religion with Christianity. African cultural life has altered, however, and can never be the same again, although certain aspects show only minimal change. Certain demands of modern society cannot be met in the traditional context, especially on the scientific and industrial front. The efficiency and imagination of modern civilisation should, up to a certain level, be accepted, but Africa should not be overpowered by them. African approaches to their indigenous cultures are, as is the case in any culture, protective of the basic aspects of various traditions. The challenges of the modern world affect indigenous cultures to such an extent that even the balanced wisdom of centuries is negatively influenced. It is here that the AICs assist society to retain a balanced outlook within the context of the vicissitudes of urban social problems. New realities have to be faced, but in a balanced manner.

3.8.1 Receptor orientation

The methodology asserts that, in order to been more effective the missionaries should have been receptor-orientated; the communicator's concern is that receivers of the

messages are able to understand its intentions from the receiver's frame of reference; in this case, a Tswana-oriented one. The communicator is required to know the audience and adjustments to be made in order to communicate clearly (Nida 1960:70-71). Mbiti (1987:389) agrees: "it is within our culture that we have to wrestle with the demands of the Gospel, and it is within our culture that we have to propagate the Gospel of our Lord". For African Christians, their traditional understanding is a new way of seeing the world, a way of encountering persons, places and things that is also part Africanness.

African traditional belief and thought contributes to psychological and social identity and integration, making it possible for such people to understand and value themselves and each other, to accept their condition, and yet to deal appropriately with spiritual exercises and practices. The AICs favour a liturgy that is spontaneous rather than predictable (Sprunger 1972:169), enthusiastic rather than formal (:166), participative rather than passive (Onibere 1981:15), and bodily expressive (clapping, marching and dancing) rather than merely verbal or intellectual. They appreciate and understand a liturgy that involves the whole person (Manyeli 1995:28).

3.8.2 Use of cultural forms and symbols

Kraft's (1979:148) third principle (see Chapter 1.7.3 above) holds that messages are understood in the light of "cultural forms" and "symbols" resident within the receptor's experience, and that "meanings are not transmitted, only messages". In *Evangelii Nuntiadi* (EN= *Evangelii Nuntiadi* 63), Pope Paul VI writes: "Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness", Tlaba (1995:65) warns, "if does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs, their symbol, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete lives". Therefore it is to be expected that most people's perception will be limited to what is immediately acceptable to them. Hence it is not all

that surprising that missionaries were protective of the Gospel and promoted their own cultural understanding (Stinton 2004:46; Magesa 2004:166).

Peck (1993:31) observes that "symbols are the place where meaning is stored". Among Africans natural objects, for example, drums, masks and headdresses; and natural places, for instance, mountain peaks, caves and trees are focal points of interaction with spirits and deities. These reflect an African understanding of the inseparable link between the visible and the invisible world (Nigosian 1990:248). Vatican II gave the Catholics permission to use the vernacular, to search for beliefs, rites, symbols, gestures, and institutions of African culture and traditional religion that corresponded to the Christian faith, for Africans better to understand the faith and give expression to it (Baur 1994:296). Kraft (2001: concur that it is the message of the Bible that is sacred not languages themselves. Bakare (1997:1) affirms the primary function of drums, for instance, in cultural activities and rituals. Africans perceive rituals and celebration in a holistic way, rather than dualistically. Manyeli (1995:28) writes of "a meaningful liturgy that invites and demands the participation of the physical (body), psychological (feeling and emotions), and the spiritual 'self'". Nida (1960:69) points out the same dynamic when he says, "the most grievous errors and pathetic failure in Christianity have resulted from a wrong understanding of the Bible's verbal symbols".

3.8.3 Receptor needs

Kraft's fifth principle (1979:149; see Chapter 1.7.5 above) concerns the meeting of the receptor's felt needs as a determining factor for the impact of a message. For the message to influence the receptor's behaviour, she or he must be able to relate the message to a felt need (:149). Oosthuizen (2000:277) concurs:

> The meaningfulness of any theology rests on its relevance to the life of the members of the communities where it is applied … While Western theology has been the intellectual foundation of Western-oriented churches, these dispositions blindfolded theology to the issues at the gut level of Africa's authentic existence. It smothered what is positive in the traditional African context

For instance, most African Initiated Churches have no church buildings. Oosthuizen (:278) comments that "[t]his should not be interpreted merely as a reflection of poverty but as the inner need for fellowship; the need for small-scale church communities which reflect the extended family system in the ecclesiastical context". The Western type of church institution is not responding to this felt need of Africans; therefore Africans have left it and gone to where the felt need was responded to. The African Initiated Churches enjoy a face-to-face fellowship which resonates with the extended family system. Africans need a worship practice that reflects their cultural forms and tastes, including their physicality.

3.8.4 Frame of reference

The Gospel message that Africans have inherited was formulated in terms of European culture and colonial politics. Kraft's seventh principle (1979:149,151; see Chapter 1.7.7 above) states that the most effective communication occurs when the communicator and the receptor are situated in the same context or frame of reference, which includes the sharing of language and culture. Consequently Gittins (2002b: 42) writes that "[s]hared meaning depends on common context and mode of communication". Vatican II strongly affirms (AG=*Ad Gentes* 10) this:

> If the Church is to be in a position to offer all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived.

Those who bring the Good News must experience the same self-emptying as did Jesus. To understand another people's culture, we must learn how people process experience, which takes time, sensitivity, and humility. In order for missionaries to begin to understand each other, they need to descend from their ethnocentricity to be on the same level as each other.

As stated earlier, the AICs broke away from the missionary churches in order to formulate and live the Gospel in terms of their African cultural and political experiences (Nolan 1988:25).The AICs are not simply reactions to the clash of African and Western culture; they often show a keenly refined sense of the liberation people needed (Schreiter 1991:viii).

3.8.5 Discovery of truth

Clearly there were intercultural barriers between Western missionaries and Batswana people. Both Western missionaries and Batswana people were supposed to recognise that each cultural group, with its unique context, experienced God differently. One cultural group should have compared its own experience of God with the other group's experience, to realise that God is not confined to either Western culture or Tswana culture. Within Catholic tradition there are different religious orders which are global and cross-cultural but are rooted in the word of God, believed to be influenced by the Holy Spirit and with Christ as their model. God challenges and affirms each culture according to its strengths and weaknesses. As Gittins (2002a:83) expresses this: "People in other cultures are not empty slates, and they have their own history and criteria of relevance". Unless Christian mission is driven by a genuine respect for other people's values, Christians will never persuade them of the relevance of our own.

An important issue of concern is that people generally feel at home in their own culture. Batswana people, rather than being fulfilled by the new religion, were being alienated, since what was taking place, that is, the forms of worship and praising God, did not seem to fit. The efforts of Protestant missionaries translating the Bible into more and more indigenous languages helped them to feel more at home with the Gospel, offering an opportunity for the Tswana people to gain access to the authoritative source that missionary used. The African proverb and its parallel biblical text together help to teach the meaning of the Christian faith and Tswana Christian truths, beliefs and values. Healey & Sybertz (1996:46) proposed that it was a move from "human value meaning to its applied Christian meaning". Tswana culture, scripture and Christian tradition jointly emphasize the importance of communicating and teaching basic values. Their discovery was contradictory to the negative views which missionaries (and colonialists) held about their African religio-cultural system; the Bible seemed rather to affirm many of their values (e.g. emphasis on family, land and fertility). The understanding of family in Africa is of an extended one rather than of a nuclear family. In Mugambi's view (1989:139) the definition of a family as the nuclear social unit is not strictly biblical, but rather a product of industrialisation and urbanisation.

Africans perceived the missionaries as having failed to love from the biblical point of view. For Barret (1968:156), this does not represent a total lack of all love; rather, it is the failure of missions for there is plenty of evidence of charity, sacrifice and caring. There was no close contact, so it seemed, no dialogue, no comprehension, no sympathy extended to traditional society or religion. The impact of missionaries' attitudes resulted in Africans denigrating themselves and their culture in order to try to fit into the missionaries' culture (Law 1996:53).

3.9 Conclusion

All human beings and all societies tend to consider their own culture and worldview the model to which all others should or must conform. Therefore potential conflict always exists when cultures meet. Though some missionaries were exceptionally sympathetic and scholarly (e.g., Robert Moffat), in general, Christianity did not respect and therefore failed to comprehend African traditional religion. The Western missionaries should have realised that their view of the world is not universal, and that everything that is different should not be judged negatively, but first deserves to be explored and understood. Missionaries negatively evaluated and stereotyped Africans (Law 1996:50; Tlhagale 1995:169; Setiloane 1976:89).

The main problem encountered by Western missionaries was thus their methods of evangelisation in Africa. They had not facilitated the process of the Gospel message in discovering itself through African culture. The missionaries were unable to recognise the translatability of the Gospel, or to remove obstacles from the process. Most frequently, this occurred by denying culture its privileged place in the process of God's self-revelation. The conversion of Africans was more one to Western culture than to the Gospel. This is contrary to the fundamental insight conveyed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ – the Word became flesh and lived among us (cf. Jn 1: 14). Inculturation is a two-way process: it roots the Gospel in a culture and introduces that culture into Christianity.

If outside influences are to bring about positive change, they should serve to confirm a person's or a society's own root identity. The mainline churches should utilise the resources of African worldviews and values in general, and particularly those of African spirituality. In creating a viable form of Christianity, the tools needed include: the Gospel, faith and culture. The Gospel can be understood, articulated, and propagated through the richness of the cultural heritage.

The following chapter takes the argument further by discussing the notion of African spirituality.

CHAPTER 4   WHAT IS AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the influence of an African spirituality and cosmology on the way such people understand life and formulate their ideas regarding God-images, the Spirits and sacrifice. God is perceived in traditional religion as the Creator (Healey & Sybertz 1996:81; Barreto 2000:67), the spirits are understood as God's agents (Skhakhane 1995:105), and human persons in African traditional religion must relate properly to this supernatural order (Mogapi 1991:134). It will be important for this investigation to clarify what we mean by "an African". This will lead us to deal with the traditional African worldview, which may be divided into a spiritual or invisible world and a visible world. It is unavoidable also to discuss African spirituality without dealing with the nature of African traditional religion. We shall work with the presupposition that the effectiveness of Christianity in Africa depends much on a deliberate accommodation to an African cultural understanding of life, as well as on reckoning with an African worldview(s) (Nxumalo 1979:27). The cultural understanding of life among the African people is embedded within the framework of an African spirituality.

4.2 What is African?

It is important to become aware that the continent of Africa consists of multiple peoples and traditions: it is not one "homogeneous village community", and its society is religiously pluralistic (Stinton 2004:28; Kudadjie 1996:63; Mugambi 1989:5). For the purpose of our study, "African" will refer to indigenous African people (Kudadjie 1996:62; Thomas 2005:131) living in the continent of Africa who share similar values, beliefs, norms, customs and cultural traditions, despite the differences that exist (Lapointe

1995:39; Skhakhane 1995:104). Therefore, in dealing with African spirituality, we limit ourselves to a common cultural spectrum. Even in those common cultural spectra we are bound to come across some differences in practices. It is for this reason that the study is based mainly on Tswana tradition and custom, a tradition with which I am more familiar[3]. The influence of traditional (as opposed to more modern) African culture and religion remains very strong among Batswana people (Thomas 2005:11; Bediako 1995:217; Mogapi 1991:134) and is quite evident in their daily lives (Thomas 2005: 131). Just to mention some common African cultural traits: Initiation (*Bogwera*), the close connection with and dependence on nature, awareness of spirits and powers, the ancestors, and the oneness of the physical and the spiritual (Mogapi 1991:35; Setiloane 1976:40; Bediako 2004:xvii).

4.3 The traditional African worldview

Life is so central among Batswana people that it must be characterised as sacred (Barreto 2000:68, Bujo 1992:17). Life is a mystery, not ending with physical death. Respect for life is a moral virtue. A person is expected to live a long and honourable life. A crucial element in Africa's concepts of life is its hierarchical ordering (Setiloane 1976:21). This hierarchy belongs both to the invisible world, that is spiritual entities, and the visible world, which comprises physical, perceivable matter. Life is participation in God as a way of human response to the divine revelation (Bediako 1995:29), but it is always mediated by one standing above the recipient in the hierarchy of being (Thomas 2005:139). In the invisible world, the highest place is occupied by God, the source of life (Thomas 2005:132; Setiloane 1976:70). African people are also hierarchical in the way they relate to each other (Setiloane 1976:70).

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[3] I am a Motswana of Batlharo origin, in the Kuruman area which was evangelised by Robbert Moffat, who translated the Bible into Setswana.

4.3.1 The structure of the spiritual or invisible world

An African worldview indicates that most African societies recognise fundamentally two different types of divinities, the Supreme Being (*Modimo*[4]) (Setiloane 1976:21; Barreto 2000:61) and the subordinate deities (Thomas 2005:36; Gehman 1989:124; Olowola 1993:31). Africans "believe intensely" in the spirit world (Magesa 2004:94; Bediako 1995:63; Martey 1993:77), which is commonly referred to as the invisible world. The spirit beings exert influence over human beings (Mogapi 1991:134). Evidence for the reality of spirits is apparent, because everywhere in Africa one will find objects of spirit veneration (Lapointe 1995:39; Gehman 1989:138). These objects create an awareness of the reality of the existence of these spirits for Africans, whom they honour and offer sacrifice to, believing that these spirits are intermediaries between them and the Supreme Being. Olowola (1993:31) states that to deny these spirits is to deny the existence of African religion. This kind of categorisation stemming from an African spirituality Mbiti (1975:4) names "spiritual realities".

4. 3.1.1 Existence of the Supreme Being

Long before the arrival of Christianity in Africa, African traditional religion recognised God as the source of all life, especially human life (Thomas 2005:27; Mogapi 1991:136; Kibicho 1983:166; Bujo 1992:17). Africans perceived God as a source of life (Kudadjie 1995:67): "*Modimo ke motswedi wa botshelo*", which translates as "God is the fountain of life" (Barreto 2000:61); similarly, "God is Creator of all creatures" is the translation of "*Modimo ke motlhodi wa dibopiwa tsotlhe*" (Setiloane 1976: 80; Kudadjie 1995:67). The notion of life as a gift of God, translated as "*Monei wa botshelo*", is very clear among the Batswana people, God then is the dispenser of life. These expressions testify that God sustains every living thing. Even the diviner's medicines owed their power to God, for it is impossible for anyone to be restored to health without God's action (Setiloane 1976: 47; Barreto 2000: 61). Consequently it is not surprising to find God being addressed as Saviour. God has placed everything at people's disposal (Thomas 2005:132). Batswana

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[4] A concept of God in Setswana, one of the major languages in Botswana and South Africa.

people believed in a Supreme Being *(Modimo)* (Setiloane 1976:80; Manyeli 1992:45), who to some degree was responsive to human conduct (Thomas 2005:132).

4.3.1.2 The role of spirits/ancestors *(Badimo)*

Usually Africans approached God directly during moments of crisis (p'Bitek 1971:113; Gehman 1989:192-193; Thomas 2005:51). It seems that only serious issues were conveyed to the Supreme Being. Presumably, the ancestors attended to minor issues by virtue of the authority delegated to them by the Supreme Being. Batswana people prayed to God in all difficult situations, especially when there was natural disaster: there were prayers in time of drought, sickness, death, when the weather was stormy, or a person had dreamed bad dreams (Setiloane 1976: 45). God was thus like a chief, who both intervenes and arbitrates in bigger issues and in the problems of the African community (Setiloane 1976:21; Mogapi 1991: 72). The common belief was that disharmony among human beings would cause natural disasters like drought, storms, cold blasts, and heat (Thomas 2005:132; Barreto 2000:61). All these would indicate the unhappiness or anger of God (Thomas 2005:132; Mogapi 1991:134). God as the Supreme Being (*Modimo*), as the sustainer of the universe, exercised the final authority over all things, as the "overlord of society who has power of life and death" (Pobee 1979:46; Kudadjie 1995:67). Therefore, as Mbiti (1975:4) points out, "God emerges as the clearest and most concrete spiritual reality". God was viewed as the great ancestor, the first founder and progenitor (Magesa 1997:35; Kudadjie 1995:67).

Africans do not perceive the dead as dead but as living. Among African people the concept is strong that life continues after death (Mosai 1995:157). Death is a mere passage from the human world to the spirit world (Thomas 2005:132). Tlhagale (1995:55) describes ancestors as the doorway to the spiritual world. In Idowu's words (1965:192) "… they still remain fathers and mothers which they were before their death". Mbiti (1970:264) affirms this: "without exception, African peoples believe that death

does not annihilate life and that the departed continue to exist in the hereafter". Physical death is regarded as a natural continuation of a person's existence. Hence the ancestors are crucial in understanding African spirituality, since they are for most Africans the true fulfilment of life (Skhakhane 1995:107). The ancestors are the invisible members of the society who live in the spirit world and who continue to care for their living relatives.

As much as God is present in the lives of African people, God features less frequently in public worship and daily cultic ritual than the divinities, which are many in number and feature in almost every sphere of African life (Thomas 2005:139; Metuh 1987:103; Ogbu 2000:55). God (*Modimo*) therefore plays a relatively minor role when compared to the major role of the ancestors (*badimo*) in the religion of Batswana people (Mogapi 1991:134). This minor role of God is in line with the hierarchical nature of the African understanding of authority, and does not necessarily mean the absence of God in human life. Nurnberger (2007:33) concurs that, "one cannot approach a superior without mediation, let alone the highest superior". Ancestors are seen as mediators between God and their living relatives (Gwembe 1995:32; Barreto 2000:61; Ogbu 2000:55). The ancestors act on behalf of God (*Modimo*) (Pobee 1979:46) and are representatives of *Mwari*[5] the Supreme Being (Daneel 1973:47). Presumably the ancestors are nearer to God in terms of communication with God. God charges them with responsibilities. They are the ones who convey sacrifices and prayers of their living relatives to God and may also transmit God's reply to their living relatives (Pobee 1979:80). The findings of Daneel among the Shonas concur with this ideology.

According to the above findings, God remains in contact with human beings through the mediation of the ancestors (Daneel 1973:47). The mediator concept reflects an African custom according to which an ordinary person cannot approach an eminent person except through an intermediary (Pobee 1979:65).

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[5] *Mwari* is a Shona name for God. Shona is one of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe.

It seems common for some people to offer sacrifices to the ancestors because they fear their anger. This suggests that the so-called ancestor worship needs to be viewed as a practical expression of continued fellowship between the living and dead members of society. The Africans do not worship their ancestors but at least have communion with them. In this communion the living are dependent for their welfare on the dead. The ancestors in turn depend upon their living descendants to honour them as they have been doing during their life time and to sacrifice to them (Krige 1950:293).

However they are not worshipped in the sense in which God is worshipped. God is for the most part believed not to be directly accessible to humans (Manyeli 1992:45). This inaccessibility has created an impression that God is passive and indifferent to human affairs. The Supreme Being (*Modimo*) is intangible, elusive and mysterious (Setiloane 1976:25; Barreto 2000:62). Setiloane (1976:27) maintains that the Sotho-Tswana[6] Supreme Being (*Modimo)* was never conceived of as a "person".

Manyeli (1992:46) emphasises that there is a distinction between ancestors (*badimo*) and God (*Modimo*). The ancestors (*badimo*) are subordinate to God (*Modimo*). The authority of the ancestors, it seems is not absolute since they are not independent. The relationship between an ancestor and his or her living relatives is based on blood relationship. The relational bond they created goes beyond death, connecting families together and members of the wider community of the visible and invisible world. Gender is unrelated to someone becoming an ancestor. Not everyone becomes an ancestor; one has to fulfil certain conditions. Firstly, for one to be considered for ancestorhood, the person should have been married: transmission of life to another person is important. Secondly, one must have lived a morally worthy life and must die a natural death; unnatural deaths such as suicides or unclean diseases are not considered (Gwembe

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[6] All Sotho-Tswana are descended from one ancestor: Mogale. Their customs and their ways of life show that they have a common origin (Setiloane 1976: 12).

1995:33; Stinton 2004:135). Thirdly, an exemplary (Nyamiti 1984:15) life by tribal standards (Stinton 2004:135).

Moreover, the ancestors (*badimo*) vary in degree of importance. This is dependent upon their entrance into the ranks of the dead, which reflects how important an individual was in the construction and foundation of the tribe and its traditions. Supernatural or sacredness is acquired through death and understood in terms of super-human powers and nearness to God. Veneration is not addressed to ancestors, but the worshippers pray in solidarity with them to the Creator. These are regarded as pledges of divine favour, since the dead are held to stand in a close relationship to God, even if they are not invoked themselves (Shorter 1983:199). The ancestors (*badimo)* are constantly in touch with the Divine (*Modimo*). Those who respond to the call of the ancestor and submit to the training, learning from the supervisor everything which the supervisor does, join the culture of the spiritual people (Setiloane 1976:55, Alt 1995:124).

In many African societies, the relationship of the living with the dead, especially ancestors, is regarded as very important (Thomas 2005:132; Gehman 1989:139; Gwembe 1995:30). In Tswana society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the rewards for a good life and punish evil. Thomas (2005:132) writes, "… human beings should live in harmony with all things in existence". Each descendant group looks to its own ancestors, either for favours or to appease them (Tlhagale 1995:54; Skhakhane 1995:109; Gwembe 1995:32). Ancestors are generally appeased through prayer and various rituals involving food and drinks. To remain on good terms with them, the rest of society and creation as a whole is very important. There is a strong conviction that the ancestors exercise authority over the living (Nurnberger 2007:71); therefore the human community believes that the ancestors are monitoring their behaviour in their daily lives (Stinton 2004:135). Ancestral beliefs therefore act as a form of social control over the general behaviour of the living (Thomas 2005:132), either by blessing members who follow the traditions or by punishing those who do not (Barreto 2000:61; Pobee 1979:46; Gwembe

1995:32). The world of spirits and ancestors thus connects an African spirituality to an African cosmology (Gehman 1989:143). Therefore, ancestral beliefs represent a powerful source of moral sanction, as they affirm the values upon which society is based (Opoku 1978:39).

The ancestors (*badimo*) operate in the human environment, and especially in the human family, as guardians, protective spirits/powers/influences (Thomas 2005:139) and as the conscience of the community (Skhakhane 1995:109). They are "guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities" (Mbiti 1969:83), also believed to be protective. The ancestral world is a mirror of the human world (Opoku 1974:39), with the ancestors (*badimo*) acting as points of reference for all living authorities. As Opoku (1974:37) puts this, "they act as friends at court to intervene between humans and the Supreme Being and to get prayers and petitions answered more quickly and effectively". Ancestors are a bridge between God and the living people. The ancestors, on their part, receive their help from God (Alt 1995:117). Ancestors intervene in human affairs to punish those who neglect them or commit some offence within the community (Mbiti 1969:83, Stinton 2004:135).

4.3.2 The structure of the visible world

The visible world, or perceivable matter, includes human beings and nature. In the traditional African view, a continuous exchange is occurring between the visible and invisible worlds (Thomas 2005:36-37), between the living and the dead. Human beings are at the centre of activities within the "creation drama" of the supreme God (Skhakhane 1995:110). It is important to note that African spirituality is based on the centrality of human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life (Du Toit 1996:92). This life consists of their attitudes, beliefs, and practices as they strive to reach out toward God, the spirits, and the invisible forces of the universe. Human beings are

believed to have been created by the creator God (Gehman 1989:55; Mbiti 2006:6; Pato 1996:112; Ogbonnaya 1993:121), who is also the Great Spirit. African people are thus conscious of themselves in terms of relationships. Hence each individual is inextricably bound to four interrelated entities: God, self, community or society, and also to the universe with all its rhythms and patterns and its animate objects (which will be discussed below).

4.4 The nature of African traditional religion

The culture and religion of traditional African societies are inseparable (Martey 1993:72; Thomas 2005:11; Magesa 2004:17), inasmuch as religion is not independent of or free from cultural influences (Martey 1993:39). It is deeply rooted in languages, customs, traditions, histories, and worldviews (Magesa 2004:95; Bediako 1995:55; Mbiti 2006:1). The spirituality of African people is found in this entire heritage. Opoku (1974:153) therefore describes African culture as a God-given heritage which is to be understood as "the sum total of all the traditions, ideas, customs, modes of behaviour, patterns of thought, ways of doing things and outlook on life that have been received from God, learned and passed on from one generation of Africans to the other". It is communal in origin, practice and self-propagation (Nigosian 1990:142).

This is a religion with neither a founder nor sacred scriptures, as is the case with some other religions (Mbiti 2006:1). Awolalu (1979:3-22) adds, it is "written in the people's myths and folktales, in their songs, and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings". Firstly, African traditional religion is non-dogmatic, but experiential (Gehman 1989:50). Its mission is not to seek converts (Thomas 2005:132). It is preserved in oral forms, rites, and symbols. African traditional religion is also strongly monotheistic (Setiloane 1976:79). The majority of Africans believe in one Supreme Being, although different cultures have attributed different names to God, who

is believed to hold African traditional religion together (Thomas 2005:132). Interestingly, African traditional religion employs no physical representations of God (Mbiti 2006:2). God is the ultimate point of reference; this kind of spirituality is therefore God-oriented (:2). African belief in God is always associated with community knowledge and faith (Mogapi 1991:137-138). Thus, people's identity is incomplete without God. Lastly, African traditional religion is strong in the area of moral and ethical values that uphold relationships in the community, and its spirituality embraces these values. Many of these values constitute the basis of traditional laws and customs. Community life is one of the most outstanding expressions of traditional values: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 2006:2).

4.4.1 Manifestation of religious activity

Religious practices demonstrate how people express their beliefs in practical terms (Selialia 1995:127), and are ways in which humans respond to spiritual beings (Mbiti 1970:178), which influence one's life and destiny. These religious practices are of different types. Sacrifices and offerings are intended to appease God or the ancestors (Metuh 1987:132; Gehman 1989:192). Many major life experiences and several social and seasonal events are joyful occasions which people celebrate by eating, drinking, singing, and dancing (Thomas 2005:19; O'Murchu 2002:157; Setiloane 1976:72-76). Thus Nigosian (1990:244) observes, "to African people, practically every element of life, from birth to final entry into the ancestral community after death, has a religious aspect that is marked with a specific ritual". For example, there are festivals to mark harvest time, the start of the rainy season, the birth of a child, and victory over enemies. According to black Christian theologians (Abraham 1994:197-198), therefore, African spirituality may be understood as the experience of the Holy Spirit moving us and our communities to be life-giving and life-affirming. Spiritual movements are often sustained through the rituals in which members participate. This is how Africans celebrate their spirituality.

4.4.1.1 Sacrifice as a means of worship/veneration

Worship within African spirituality expresses submission to the Spirit and therefore proceeds by supplication, adoration, petitions and resignation to the object of worship. Worship can consequently be expressed by action as well as by word. The most important ritual among African traditional religious practices is that of sacrifice (Thomas 2005:17; Tlhagale 1995:53). The petitions and sacrifices offered to ancestors represent an indirect way of worshipping God, since Africans traditionally tend not to deal with God directly (Bujo 1992:23; Gehman 1989:192). The purposes of making sacrifices and offerings, performing ceremonies and rituals, were to restore and maintain balance in nature (Gehman 1989:193; Thomas 2005:20). They may be public or private practices, formal or informal, regular or *ex tempore*, communal or individual, direct or indirect (Gehman (1989:192; Metuh 1987:131). Firstly, some sacrifices are preventive in character, serving to avert dangers or misfortunes that threaten a person, a family, or the whole community (Thomas 2005:18; Sawyerr 1969:59). Secondly, other sacrifices are expiatory in nature, intended to remove guilt or offence (Adeyemo 1979:34). Thirdly, still others are periodic offerings made to ancestors at their graves. Lastly, special occasions, such as an annual festival, call for a great sacrifice offered to maintain a good relationship between human beings and the Supreme Being with divine assistants, ancestors, and other spirits (Mbiti 1970:179; Thomas 2005:18).

4.4.1.2 Religious objects and places

Natural objects and places are set apart for religious purposes, as focal points for African people to interact with the world of the spirits and deities (Nigosian 1990:247; Gehman 1989:206). Religious objects and places constructed by human beings are also found. In Mbiti's view, this part of African religion covers the things and places which have been set apart as being holy and sacred (Mbiti 2006:6). Such places are not commonly used,

being reserved for a particular religious purpose, because they have acquired a sacred character and are recognised as sites of worship (Nigosian 1990:248). Some such sacred sites belong to private individuals and families, while others belong to the whole community in a given region. They may include places such as shrines, graves, sacred hills or mountains, and objects such as rivers, trees, caves, springs, ponds, and many other elements (Nigosian 1990:247; Mbiti 2006:7). Sacred objects may also include drums, masks, rainmaking stones, fire, carvings, certain animals, and colours. These religious places and objects represent the presence of a spirit or deity. Tlhagale (1995:178) concurs that "… in some African cultures drums are being used during consecration not only to create an appropriate spiritual disposition but also to acknowledge the divine presence after the words of consecration have been pronounced". This deep affinity with natural objects and places reflects the African understanding of the inseparable link between the visible and invisible worlds (Nigosian 1990:248).

4.4.1.3 Religious officials or leaders

Religious officials or leaders are people who conduct religious matters, such as ceremonies, sacrifices, formal prayers and divination. These leaders are endowed by their ancestral spirits with the power of counteracting witchcraft (Gehman 1989:75). Idowu (1973:190) states that they

> ...depend upon the Deity for the fulfilment of personal, basic needs which are more than material (although those are included), with the belief that the transcendental being on whom he [i.e. the religious official] depends is capable of fulfilling these needs. Religion implies trust, dependence and submission.

In most cultures, people who are trained for these positions include both men and women. The training assists them to know more about religious affairs, and they are subsequently respected by their community for the ability to fight witchcraft (Gehman 1989:76). As religious officials they hold offices such as priests, rainmakers, ritual elders, diviners, medicine persons, and even as kings and rulers (:74). Unlike professionals in

different fields, these religious officials are not paid, but in most cases people give them donations and gifts to show their gratitude. As specialists or experts in religious matters, they are the human keepers of the religious heritage. Such officials are therefore an essential part of African religion, since without them religious practices would grind to a halt and people would not benefit from these in practical terms (Mbiti 1975:12). Because of their unique relationship with the ancestral spirits, the religious officials are accorded special honour. They communicate with the spirit world through dreams and visions (Gehman 1989:75).

One important feature of African spirituality is its awareness of the unity of beings in the universe. Spirituality is essential for the maintenance of harmony in the community and the environment (Kudadjie 1996:75). Things are not so sharply differentiated from each other. It is a lived faith. Skhakhane (1995:107) remarks, "just as blood keeps one alive, spirituality is a permanent and constant source of life which emanates from the very depth of a person". Ter Haar (1992:135) therefore defines spirituality as an attitude resulting from a belief in the existence of an invisible world.

4.5 What is African Spirituality?

As indicated earlier, African people view and understand the material and spiritual worlds as inseparable (Alt 1995:115; Skhakhane 1995:110). This understanding incorporates the socio-cultural, philosophical, political, and religious settings of African people. African spirituality refers to certain common cultural traits and philosophical paradigms that reflect a general mindset, belief system or life approach. There are two foundations to African cultural experience: reverence for life, and social bonds (Du Toit 1996:92; Rakoczy 2000:80). The cultural view of Africans holds that the birth of new life is good news and occasion's joyous celebration (Rakoczy 2000:80; Nigosian 1990:244). In the African worldview, spirituality has to be communal and corporate (Kudadjie 1996:

75; Mbiti 2006: 2). LaCugna affirms (1991: 292) this: "living as persons in communion, in right relationships, is the meaning of salvation and ideal of Christian faith". The spirituality of African people requires people to possess the ability to relate well to nature, and other people, because these good relationships indicate how you relate with ancestors (Skhakhane 1995:112). Bellagamba (1987:107) argues that a spirituality that does not incorporate all people, their events, their richness, their hopes and concerns, cannot speak to Africans who are fundamentally communal and relational.

Kalilombe (1999:213) cautions us, though, that what constitutes African spirituality is not exclusively African; nor do all Africans necessarily live this spirituality. However, he also observes that in defining African spirituality, we should go about it by "examining the way of life and following up those attitudes, beliefs and practices that animate people's lives and help them to reach out toward super-sensible realities" (:216) – that is: God, the spirits, and the invisible forces in the universe. Once this consideration is taken, according to Kalilombe (:219), African spirituality may be centralised around "human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life this side of the grave". Lartey (1997:113) argues that spirituality must accommodate the

> ...human capacity for relationship with self, others, the world, God, and that which transcends sensory experience, which is often expressed in the particularities of given historical, spatial and social contexts, and which often leads to specific forms of action in the world.

To embrace African spirituality entails an understanding of harmony (Du Toit 1996:92; Alt 1995:115; Kudadjie 1996:75) in interpersonal relationships: "*Motho ke motho ka batho*" – roughly translated as: a person is a person through people. For African people, this understanding is therefore to be found in the solidarity and participation of all humans in the events of life. One's religious conviction affects one's thinking, acting and feeling (Skhakhane 1995:106). Therefore a religious person is governed by particular concerns which are central to him/her (McBrien 1981:1057). In African spirituality, the value of interdependence through relationships is placed high above that of individualism and personal independence (Myers 1999:50; Kalilombe

1999:220; Pato 1996:114). Africans view life as more about co-operation than competition.

In the African worldview everything works for the total welfare of a human being (Skhakhane 1995:110). The condition of other creatures affects the condition and welfare of the whole community and individual. O'Murchu (2002:158) states that "nothing makes sense in isolation". The community is the core of African spirituality (Du Toit 1996:103; Skhakhane 1995:110; Magesa 2004:180). The family is the foundation and the heart of the community. As we relate to each other, we express our identity and calling (Myers 2004:11). Consequently, the very centre of African spirituality lies in the core-issue of relationships (Magesa 2004:214). In Lartey's view (1997:113-123), spirituality could as well be defined by a "characteristic style of relating".

4.5.1 Relationship with transcendence

Spirituality generally refers to the apparently universal human capacity to experience life in relation to a perceived dimension of power and meaning which is experienced as transcendent towards our everyday lives (Schneiders 2000:341; Nolan 1988:187), although such transcendence is often experienced in the midst of our everyday lives. The response to and relationship with transcendence is most often mediated through particular cultural expressions within a given religious tradition's system of symbols. Therefore, spirituality is an encounter with God in life and action (Skhakhane 1995:105). The experiences of going beyond limitations or restrictions are experiences of God, because God is transcendence (Hughes 1996:30). God challenges us to go beyond ourselves, and change our lives (Nolan 1988:187). Nolan (:189) adds: "it is God calling us to personhood", to *ubuntu*. For Soelle (1981:68), "the dignity of human beings is the capacity for going beyond what exists. We are only truly alive when we transcend". Our response as human beings is to worship and serve God. We encounter God who is

transcendent in God's immanence, in our felt experience (Hughes 1996:31). "*The Word became Flesh and dwelt amongst us*" (Jn 1: 14). God manifested God's self in human beings through Jesus, destined to become at one with God. We are to find the God in our everyday experience, above all in our relationships (Hughes 1996: 37). In the Gospel of Matthew 25:35, "*for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink*" – Jesus' criterion for finding or not finding God lies in our relationships with one another. African spirituality stresses this sense of awareness which lies at the heart of the divine and human encounter (Alt 1995:121).

4.5.2 Intra-personal (relationship with *self*)

The manner of the relationship we have with ourselves is an important aspect of our spirituality. As Hughes (1996: 30) remarks, "whenever we use the word 'I', we touch on our transcendence". Hughes (:30) further states: "this 'I' can know that the ultimate 'I' is something I am to become, something I am to discover, something which is in a relationship with everything else in creation". Nolan (2006:101) similarly comments: "Jesus says if you don't know yourself, you know nothing." Jesus' spirituality challenges the individual to look at oneself, for each to become aware of one's own hypocrisy. The issue here concerns honesty, sincerity and truth (Nolan 2006:101). In traditional Christian teaching, much stress has been laid upon self-denial and abnegation. Healthy relationships with our selves require variable responses to particular characteristics of the self.

4.5.3 Corporate relationships (*among people*)

The dyad is the starting point of the corporate relationship. To be able to cultivate an I-Thou relationship with another person in which mutuality, respect, accountability and friendship are sustained is indeed a spiritual task. According to African people, human beings are defined within existing relationships with other beings, namely: God, the spirits, ancestors, and nature. Thus, in Pato's (1996: 112) words, "an individual is never

born whole and fully human". Africans would thus say, "I am related, therefore, we are" (Pobee 1979:49). Tutu (1995: xiv) affirms this:

> We say in our African idiom: A person is a person through other persons. A totally self-sufficient human being is ultimately subhuman. We are made for complementarity. I have gifts that you do not; and you have gifts that I do not. Voila! So we need each other to become fully human.

In an African spirituality, a sense of humanity *(ubuntu)* is only interpreted within the understanding of participation in a common humanity (Nolan 2006:18; Shutte 1993:47; Pato 1996:117; O'Murchu 2002:158). As Kalilombe (1999:220) observes, "…for traditional Africans, humanity is first and foremost the community". It is in our interconnectedness and relationships that we become our true selves (Macquarrie 1970:21; O'Murchu 2002:158; Rakoczy 2000:8). The essence of being is participation, in which humans are always interlocked with one another (Pato 1996:114; Kalilombe 1999:220; Mbiti 2006:2). True selfhood is always relational. The idea of the extended family expresses the view that human life exists only by being shared (Du Toit 1996:92; Macquarrie 1970: 4). Hence, for Pato (1996:113), "life is not attainable in isolation and apart from others. Life is perceived as something communal" According to Stinton (2004:167), "the individual's life is only meaningful as it is shared". Mulago (1969:143) concurs by stating that, "for the Bantu, living is existence in community".

Africans display a strong devotion to the ancestors (Gwembe 1995:30, Mogapi 1991:134, O'Murchu 2002:158), as indicated above. The dead continue to live among the people as guardians of tradition and morality (O'Murchu 2002:158). People and ancestors belong together. Therefore, African spirituality is a spirituality of belonging. The solidarity of belonging through participation is the mark of being (Myers 1999:133). "I participate therefore I am" (Shutte 1993:47). In Pato's view (1996:113) "to be truly human, therefore, is to belong, and to participate positively in those activities that make self-fulfilment in life by all concerned possible. So we are all ineluctably interdependent". Without this sense of belonging, a human is more than half dead (Alt

1995:116). One way of ensuring common purpose is through a commitment to consensus and reconciliation (Du Toit 1996:92; Alt 1995:116). Consequently, as Dube (2005:77) remarks, most Africans' emphasis falls on interconnectedness, interdependence and continuity of life and relationships.

In sum, it can be argued that from the perspective of African spirituality, a human being is composed of material or physical being, but also has a spirit or soul.

4.5.4 Relationship with the land

According to the African worldview, nature is a gift from God to humankind, so that it is productive and supportive of life (Myers 1999:120). For this reason human beings are called to care for the world (:120); we have been put in charge of all that goes on in physical nature. Hence, the land, water, vegetation and animals form an integral part of an African spirituality. African people live in close harmony with the soil of the earth (Abraham 1994:198, O'Murchu 2002:156). Thus African spirituality is deeply rooted in land (Du Toit 1996:96) and in nature as a whole (Kudadjie 1996:65). Land is the link to the ancestors, to tradition and to life. Anything that causes disharmony in one part of this configuration causes disequilibrium in the whole (Kudadjie 1996:75). The alienation of people from their land is therefore a cause of spiritual and often physical death. The misuse of the land is a violation of the very spiritual values that hold African people together (Du Toit 1996:96). The soil of Africa is saturated in sacred history, while at the same time being rich in mineral resources (Mbiti 2006:6). According to Magesa (1997:73):

> Human love and fertility, for example, are not simply symbolized by the fertility of the earth; instead, they are deeply imbedded in the earth as it receives the rain and the seed and produces vegetation and crops for human consumption. Thus they offer up their vital power for the life and fertility of human beings. It follows, then, that in a real and immediate sense the sterility or fertility of the earth affects the

fertility of the human community. So water and air are not only symbolic of, but are, in fact the purity of the Divine.

The African traditional medicine man/woman (herbalist) uses the trees and animals of nature as "chemical particles" for the making of his/her medication. The African peasant farmer is attached to the land for his/her produce and wealth. The meaning of all this is that "nature and persons are one, woven by creation into one texture or fabric of life, a fabric or web characterized by an interdependence between all creatures" (Magesa 1997:73). However, it should be noted that this does not imply that African people worship nature; rather, they show respect for what nature is – a creation of God and gift to humans. Thus, observes Magesa (1997:73): "This living fabric of nature – including people and other creatures – is sacred. Its sanctity does not mean that nature should be worshipped, but does mean that it ought to be treated with respect".

Land is therefore a religious symbol designating belonging, community, and identity. The soil cannot be owned, but belongs to the people (Du Toit 1996:97). Manley (1995:42-53) drew attention to the fact that the Western concept of title deeds is alien to the African concept of land, even blasphemous. For the Shona in Zimbabwe, for instance, blood links human beings to the soil in an intimate identification. The ancestors are the soil by virtue of their blood. For African people life centres on a system of beliefs translated into actions or practices. Thus Africans feel within themselves the role played by their ancestors. African spirituality is earthbound, and may be called creationist spirituality (O'Murchu 2002:156). African spirituality recognises the "personhood" of all things in creation, and therefore deeply respects nature. People are rooted in nature and therefore live a life of reciprocal dependence with the rest of creation (Abraham 1994:197-198). The earth is our home; consequently African spirituality is a realistically down-to-earth belief (Alt 1995:119).

4.6 Conclusion

All areas of African peoples' lives seem to possess a dimension of spirituality. This spirituality is not practised in isolation, nor without material and physical effort. The source of African spirituality seems to reside in African primal religions. African spirituality would not be possible without a rediscovery deeply rooted traditional cultural values. In order for Africans to practise African spirituality, they should attain a self-esteem that identifies them with their own culture. People practise spirituality in their daily lives, and at critical moments. African traditional religion asserts that there are both visible and invisible worlds. Spirituality is like a bridge joining these two worlds. The effort to live ethically acceptable lives and to relate well to nature enhances spirituality. It is through the latter that humans are engaged in a universal search for deeper meaning, in an effort to develop our total being and to experience fulfilment. The morality of an act is determined by its life-giving potential: good acts help to build the community's vital force, whereas evil acts tend toward the destruction of the community's life.

Individuality and community are poles that run through all aspects of human existence. The African concept of life transcends biological concepts. African people are connected to the ancestors by religious bonds. Ancestral beliefs, in summary, underscore certain social ideals: the vibrant reality of the spiritual world, the continuity of life and human relationships beyond death. The ancestral beliefs uphold the principle of unity and solidarity. African society is a real "mystical body", encompassing both dead and living members, in which every member has an obligation to every other, and all depend on each other and on the whole. *Ubuntu* is the ability to relate well with others and nature. An African will always strive for the maintenance of a dynamic relationship with her/his extended family, clan, tribe, and ancestors. It is the mark of African traditional spirituality to ensure that relationships between people in the community and with the environment are cordial (Kadudjie 1996:75). This African inheritance should thus be understood in a holistic and informed way.

The ancestors are honoured in every good deed which a person performs in the course of his/her daily life. Life can only be enjoyed in its fullness when the ancestors are remembered and honoured. African spirituality consists in an intimate relationship of people with their ancestors, who initiate and govern their activity in life in such a way that they relate to all other beings in a manner which guarantees harmony and peace. The harmonious integration of the entire universe constitutes the essence of ancestor veneration.

First and foremost, traditional African culture values good and harmonious human relationships. Family and community interests take first preference over personal ambition. Secondly, high value is placed on co-operation and the sharing of resources, rather than on competition against others. The function of leaders, at every level of society, is to transmit a life which embraces the whole of human existence. The understanding of the human person promotes self-esteem, respect for one another, love, care, hospitality, and must affirm others. The emphasis on the community may give the impression that the individual does not count very much. In fact, though, the individual is also important, and is expected to be truly human, which is not possible without an intimate relationship with the ancestors.

The following chapter takes this issue of humanness further in considering the implications of the incarnation.

CHAPTER 5 INCARNATION AS GOD'S COMMITMENT TO CULTURAL PLURALISM

5.1 Introduction

The early Christians accepted four narratives, the Gospels, into their canon, giving a "license to pluralism" (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:42; Mc Brien 1981:392; McFague 2001:41). This confirms the point made earlier on, in chapter 1.5, that Christian spirituality is centred on Jesus Christ even though he has been seen from many perspectives, but the confession of one faith unites Christians (Johnson 1988:89). Traditionally the Gospel of Matthew has been understood as Jewish-Christian (Levine 1992:339). We should equally become aware of cultural plurality, as the Gospel is being proclaimed in all societies of the world (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:42; Mbiti 1987:389). According to Arrupe (1978:21), "real pluralism is most profound unity". Paul VI (1969:404) considers that "a certain pluralism in the Church is not only legitimate, but desirable". Arrupe (1978:21) adds that "the present crisis of unity, in many cases, is due to insufficient pluralism, which fails to provide the satisfaction of expressing and living one's faith in conformity with one's own culture." Therefore cultures create social contexts with their own significance, worlds of meaning with their own rationale, and ways of behaving with their own justification (Kraft 2001:33; Nyamiti 1989:18). The statement affirms the point made earlier in chapter 1.1 that Christian missionaries preached their interpretation of Christ's message as developed in their own location. A consensus is thus emerging that more pluralism is needed, not less, if Christianity is ever to become a clear sign of Christ's presence among all peoples. However, as different people reflect on different scriptural texts in different times and contexts, certain texts seem to speak much more clearly to different people (Bate 2000:42).

There is a multiplicity and a diversity of culturally defined worldviews on reality. The Gospel evidences a pluralistic character without imposing a uniform destiny (Magesa 2004:164). As Hillman (1990:155) maintains,

> The cultural patterns of the peoples being evangelised are all under the same universal redeemer and lord of history, hence, they are all inundated by the same recreating and super-abounding grace of God. All cultures are, therefore, assumed to be compatible with Christianity.

Many cultural values are already quite consistent with Gospel values (Kraft 2001:35; Stinton 2004:281). For Hesselgrave (1991:79), "every culture has elements of divine order and satanic rebellion; each has potential for the revelation of God's truth and for its concealment or mutilation". Ideally, the good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of imperfect humanity. Hesselgrave (1991:82) concurs that "all cultures need transformation in motivation if not in content". Each particular culture is called to be converted to the Gospel; it is called to assimilate another belief system, another way of living: in short, another culture (Kraft 2001:447; Stinton 2004:251).

It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the relationship between God, human beings, and culture, with primary attention being given to two aspects of these relationships. Firstly, consideration will be accorded to how God reveals God-self to human beings. Secondly, it is important to effectively communicate the Gospel cross-culturally in order to understand God's revelation and the relationship between God and human beings. Central to both God's revelation to human beings and God seeking to bring human beings back to God-self are the incarnation, the written Word and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

5.2 The creation of humanity

Human beings are one species, *Homo sapiens*, and are theologically speaking descendants of the first human couple to whom we refer as *Adam and Eve* (Niditch 1992:16; Nolan 2006:162). God names male and female, together, *"adam"* that is, "earthling or humankind" (Lawler 1985:6). Hill (1984:5) concurs that *"adam"* represents all human beings, since we are all created by God, and the unity of all constitutes a reflection of the divine image (Gaybba 2004:128; Niditch 1992:16) so that we may be God's faithful covenant partners. The relationship of human beings with God precedes and prescribes all other relationships (Myers 1999:51; Lawler 1985:7). One of the most moving images of God's relationship with humanity is that of covenant love. In Deuteronomy 6:5, this relationship is not a love of interpersonal affection, but a love that is "defined in terms of loyalty, service and obedience" (Kraft 2001:33; Lawler 1985:10; Myers 1999:50). Human beings are in covenantal relationship with God to protect nature even as they should care for other human beings (Myers 1999:120). The story of Jesus is the story of a God who was so passionately concerned for creation that God chose to become one with humanity (McFague 2001:169).

Humanity is found in two varieties, male and female, which are equal in human dignity and complementary to one another (Niditch 1992:16). In human creation, in order to possess a complete, full humanity, male and female should stand together (Lawler 1985:7). We are one flesh (Nolan 2006:162). O'Murchu (2002:142) concurs: "biologically, and not just culturally, we very much belong to one family, characterised by great age and an intriguing story of cultural exploration". We share the same blood and the same ancestry. Each one's identity is as a member of the human race. A human person does not have an identity apart from the relational context to which that person belongs (Myers 1999:43). Thus a meaningful relationship with God rises from learning to relate lovingly and contextually (O'Murchu 2002:86).

5.2.1 Humanity as the image of God

Every human being is an image of God (Gaybba 2004:128), and being in God's image is enjoying a close relationship with God (Myers 1999:43; O'Murchu 2002:84). All human beings have bodies and are all interconnected, but are interdependent (O'Murchu 2002:84; Nolan 2006:173); are able to image God, to relate to God. This very point is stressed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is in the flesh of Jesus that we encounter God most fully. As Gaybba (2004:131) writes, "from a Christian perspective, the surge of matter to image God reaches its high point in the appearance of humanity. But humanity's imaging of God reaches its high point in the appearance of Jesus Christ". The climax of God's revelation is Emmanuel, Jesus (Richard 1988:52), a first-century Jew who lived in a tangible milieu (Okure 1990:60; Irvin & Sunquist 2001:22), the human situation, representing God, and telling us about God and his own relationship with God (Jn 14:9, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"*). O'Murchu (2002:153) strongly emphasises that "incarnation means God coming in the flesh of humanity, fully entering into that embodied condition, blessing and affirming all that is happening to it, and using it henceforth as a means for bearing witness to the presence of the divine in the world". In the image of the Church as the body of Christ, Christ is the only perfect image of God, to include all other human beings, in himself and his relationship with God (Hill 1984:202).

5.2.2 Human community reflects Divine community

The Trinity Christians know of, is one in which a human being – Jesus – is a member of a divine community (McBrien 1981:344; Gaybba 2004:98; Myers 1999:43). Jesus was a human being with relatives, distant relatives, friends and a nation – an entire world (Schneiders 2001:222; Levine 1992:340; Stinton 2004:169). This experience of God in Jesus Christ prompts and enables human beings to seek their identity. If it is not good for

the `adam (human being) to be alone (Gn 2:18), perhaps this is so because it is only in their togetherness that humans can truly image God: *"male and female He created them"* (Gn 1:37). In the unity of sexes we find the deepest imaging of God. Human beings in their historical existence are a community (Karokaran 1994:77) as intended by God (Gaybba 2004:99), and are not only part of, but also share in God's own communal life. Humanity is incapable of being truly human other than by being in community (Myers 1999:43) – the *ubuntu-botho* (human solidarity) concept (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1994:157). Our personhood is not something we already possess, but something that comes into being in relation to other persons. God became part of the community that is humanity so that humanity could be part of God's own communal life.

5.3 God's revelation in human context

Revelation is understood as God's self-communication to human beings, sharing God's very self with human beings in a relationship with God (Jn 3:16). Communication of the Gospel includes a theological interpretation of the images of God, who is in relationship to the believer (Stinton 2004:51; Rakoczy 2000:74). Christians relate to God through the images which mediate the divine mystery (Gaybba 2004:117). The means of communication had to be by means of a way human beings would understand (Bevans 1992:12). The Gospel can therefore never be communicated without making use of the transitory languages and cultural forms of a particular people (Gittins 2002a:29; Dulles 1983:238). Christianity in its origin is cultural in its application; therefore propositional truth must have a cultural incarnation to be meaningful. The concept of divinity is understood to be present in all human experience (Gaybba 2004:59; Mananzan 1996:164).

Magesa (1990:113) writes, "there is not only one theology in the universal Church but a pluriformity of theologies. These should share and enrich one another". All

theology is contextual and influenced by the contexts in which the believers live (Bevans 1992:12; Kraft 2001:344; De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1994:45), which includes incarnation theology. The Gospel message, like every human culture, is contextualised or embedded. The doctrine of incarnation suggests that the mysterious God took the opportunity of being contextualised in a very real human person. As Okure (1990:61) strongly asserts, "we owe it to ourselves to allow Christ to assume our different cultures substantially, and transform them from within, and thereby become himself fully part of us and one of us". The incarnate presence of Christ thus takes on many shapes and forms in multiple contexts of the world (Stackhouse 1988:4-5).

Translating the scriptures into any language does not change the sacred character contained in their original language. Bediako (1995:110) argues that

> Behind the Christian doctrine of the substantial equality of the scriptures in all languages, there lies the even profounder doctrine of the incarnation, by which the fullest divine communication has reached beyond the forms of human word into the human form itself.

Pope Paul VI (EN=*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 18 -19) identifies the processes of evangelisation and inculturation in their deepest meaning and implication as saying that if evangelisation means anything, it must mean bringing the good news into all the strata of human life in order, through its influence, to transform humanity from within and to make it new. The content and substance of the Gospel are to be constant; therefore the quality of life must exhibit those universal Christian virtues. In contextualised situations only the linguistic and conceptual patterns may vary from one language to another (De Gruchy & Villa-vicencio 1994:45), for the message to constitute meaningful cultural behaviour (Kraft 2001:346; Nolan 1988:26; Hesselgrave 1991:85). We (human beings) are, through Bible translation, thus continuing the process of incarnation, because God becomes a human being in any nationality (Bevans 1992:12; Dulles 1983:104). The translatability of the Gospel message means its transculturality (Magesa 2004:165).

5.3.1 God's revelation within culture

God's ultimate revelation came to human beings in and through human language (Kraft 2001:31; Richard 1988:58), within a culture, directly in the life of Jesus who is God-human. Therefore the history of God's revelation should be culturally interpreted, and thus remains embedded in a specific cultural tradition. God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ signifies that God became a participant in human life, experience and one human culture (Kraft 2001:32; Richard 1988:58). Through Jesus Christ God's revelation became an encounter of human beings with one another, within human history (Gaybba 2004:98; Richard 1988:58). Through Jesus we can imagine how God would act if God lived in culture, because in Jesus God actually lived in human culture (Kraft 2001:32). Revelation is not only the experience of the past, but the experience of actual community. The Jesus who spoke in the past is the same Jesus who speaks to his followers through the Holy Spirit (Richard 1988:56). The transcendent God has chosen to reveal (that is, make knowable) God-self to cultural human beings. Christian faith is consequently the crossing of a boundary within the dimensions of human existence (Kraft 2001:396; Irvin & Sunquist 2001:39). Therefore it is inherently coloured by the cultural context. The reality of faith is historical, an intrinsic part of human life (Richard 1988:58).

5.3.2 The Gospel is translatable to all cultures

The interaction between the Christian Gospel and specific cultures is as old as the Gospel itself, as witnessed by the New Testament writers (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:40; Kraft 2001:29). The dimensions of Christian spirituality have become incarnate in the cultures of the human community for over two millennia (Gaybba 2004:173). From a specific cultural perspective, Sanneh (1989:32) writes, "access to Jesus as Saviour, Redeemer, and Judge was to be through the specificity of cultural self-understanding, and that cultural specificity is the ground of divine disclosure, with Jesus as the divine outpouring

on the human scale". According to the Old Testament, God communicated revelation to ancient Israel people in terms of Jewish thought patterns, and they responded to God's message in Hebrew language and culture (Gaybba 2004:39; Magesa 2004:149; Kraft 2001:33). In the New Testament this covenantal relationship is extended to people outside Israel. Acts 2: 1-11 illustrates how the Gospel and culture became intimate partners:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place… And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. … And at this sound the multitude came together and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered saying … We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.

Traditional Christian confession holds that through the Holy Spirit, God's presence and power do indeed form part of and belong in every locality (Hillman 1990:155). According to Acts 2, the Gospel was proclaimed, understood, believed by people in their different cultures throughout the world. Pope Paul VI (G.S=*Gaudium et Spes* 53) states that the Gospel is culturally transmitted (Kraft 2001:57; Okure 1990:58-59; Stinton 2004:280). Law (1996:38) points out: "God through Jesus Christ challenged us to move toward Pentecost, where people of different languages and cultures were finally communicating with each other". As we struggle to reach Pentecost, overcoming intercultural barriers, we are forced to recognise that each cultural group, with its unique context, experiences God differently. The Holy Spirit entrusted the Gospel into the hands of human cultures (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:2). African cultures are among those cultures to which God has done so, exactly as with the Jewish and other cultures of the world. Mbiti (1987:388) expresses this well: "the Gospel is a stranger in every culture – a stranger who settles down, when it is so accepted by Faith, and yet a stranger calling all people to a newness of life in Christ". The understanding of Jesus transcends a construction of the Gospel in any single culture (Mbiti 1987:388; Stinton 2004:282). The World Council of Churches (WCC) Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 formulated this view as follows:

> Despite all our cultural differences, despite the structures in society and in the Church that obscure our confession of Christ, and despite our own sinfulness, we affirm and confess Christ together, for we have found that He is not alien to any culture and that He redeems and judges in all our societies.

The life of faith of a person or community is rooted in cultural experience (Gaybba 2004:39). In Kraft's words (2001:33), "…we see this method of God's revelation of himself … In each case we see God starting where people are culturally for the sake of revealing himself to them comprehensibly".

The Christian religion is translatable, which signifies that it is relevant and accessible to any person of any culture. Christian doctrine rejects the notion of a special, sacred language for its faith, and listens to God speaking in the vernacular so that "all of us hear … in our own languages … the wonders of God" (Ac 2:11). When God created human beings and their environment, God gave humans a cultural mandate which entailed certain governance over God's environment (Gn 1:26-30). Culture and history are parts of the construction of the reality in which we live. Therefore our context influences the understanding of God: when images and concepts of the biblical text somehow correspond to our own context, then the texts become alive (Bate 2000:42; Bevans 1992:4). Culture influences how people understand the Bible, communicates the Gospel, live their Christian lives, and develop churches.

Every human culture is the vehicle of good values that help us to understand and articulate what is authentically human. "On the one hand, the Gospel reveals to and liberates in every culture the ultimate value of the values which it carries within itself. On the other hand, each culture expresses the Gospel in a distinct way and brings out new aspects of it" (ITC 1989:29). God does not favour one culture over another.

5.3.2.1 The function of inculturation

Inculturation aims at making Jesus and his life and teaching concrete among a people, so that God's intention and power, which Jesus represents, are to the highest extent possible appropriated in the manner of a particular locality (Okure 1990:71; Magesa 2004:165). The goal of the church's mission remains to incarnate the Word of God in particular places, among given peoples, at particular times, through the generous sharing of the evangeliser's life of faith (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:92; Gittins 2002a:x). Paul was convinced that the message of Christ's Gospel could be expressed in the Jewish culture just as well as in the Gentile ones (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:38; Bosch 1991:128). Paul's theological insight was that, while no culture or cultural system could claim to be the exclusive norm of God's truth (Sanneh 1990:30), every culture could claim the Gospel to a certain degree.

5.3.2.2 Inculturation and liberation

Bujo (1992:57) discusses John 10:10 as follows: "If Jesus is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then He is the final answer to the aspirations of the whole human race and not only to Africans. All human cultures manifest the human longing for fullness of life". Bujo (1995: 33) furthermore affirms Jesus Christ: "he is the unique manifestation of the life of God, and He is the source and proto-model of all life. It is He who teaches us what …is the true life, what is to live. He has come that we might have life and have it in abundance (Jn 10:10)". For Christianity, life is found in its fullness in Christ (Jn 1:4). Thus the biblical faith affirms the centrality of Christ to and for the lives of human beings (Stinton 2004:77).

The answer to the question "*Who do you say I am?*" (Mt 16:15) furnishes the interpretative framework for Christian life. Christian spirituality is lived in the power and presence of the Spirit of God. The Spirit transforms the person and community into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), who can name God as "*abba*", a loving parent, and live rooted in the very life of God (Jn 15:1-11). The Spirit's presence and action produce "freedom, speech, action, community and life" (Comblin 1989:61).

5.4 Approaching an incarnational Christology

The basic tenet of the incarnation is that God is present and acts in human history and the world as a dynamic liberating presence (Kraft 2001:41). A definition of the incarnation, according to Lane (1992:10), is the creative coming of God in humanity in the Christ-event, the appearance of the universal within the particular, and the revelation of the infinite to the finite. The incarnation suggests that the Divine Word is manifested, becomes historical, in a unique and full way in and across the entire history of Jesus in his connections with Israel and the entire human community. The history of salvation is rooted in "*the Word became flesh*" (Jn 1:14;).

In understanding culture as mediating Christology, it is true to say that a Christology that takes human experience seriously is also a Christology of inculturation (Hillman 1990:153; Sarpong 1976:109). This is the content of contextual or situational Christology. The quest for full humanity in Jesus Christ is the search for inclusive theological anthropology, language and images. The doctrine of incarnation is that God became a human being through Jesus in order to bring salvation to all people (McFague 2001:159; Bosch 1991:64). God became human flesh (Jn 1:14), in a Jewish context, in the person of Jesus, son of Mary, a male, with particular personality traits, and language, as all humans possess (Bevans 1992:12). For Law (1996:68), "through Jesus, God committed to understand humankind only through the complete human frame of

reference". Jesus lived a human experience; consequently God, through Jesus, stepped out of the divine and entered into the human experience totally and completely.

Jesus moved in two cultures, that is, the divine and the human (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:194). God is revealed to human beings through Jesus' actions and words (Kraft 2001:19) and those of the first few generations of his disciples (Mbiti 1987:388; Hill 1984:4) as recorded in the Bible.

5.4.1 Jesus Christ the bond of unity between humanity and divinity

In Chapter 2 we have seen that our judgement will be based on how we have treated our fellow human beings. God clearly identifies with every human being (McFague 2001:55); so that whatever we do to any of them we do to God (Nolan 2006:160). Jesus too identified himself with all human beings (Stinton 2004:143; Nolan 2006:159). Nolan (2006:161) strongly affirms this: "God is one with all human beings, and we are one with one another, whether we are aware of it or not". Sarpong (1976:108) too states that "humanity is universal. Christianity's claim to be universal is only true when it can be expressed in any cultural form". Loving one another is the discovery and awareness of our oneness with one another. The bond of kinship is the origin of the love of neighbour in the Hebrew Scriptures (Lv 19:18). Jesus extended the solidarity or bond of kinship to the whole human race: "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, Love your enemies …*" (Mt 5:43-44). Jesus desires to move beyond the limitations of blood family or family of close relatives to the border of the family of God's kingdom. We must love all human beings, even our enemies, and treat them all as our brothers and sisters. Jesus saw all people as his relations.

5.4.2 Jesus, the perfect representative of humanity

Scripture avers that Jesus was like the rest of us (human beings), in everything except sin (2 Cor 5:21, Heb 4:15); therefore he is our perfect representative (Hill 1984:219). Jesus Christ serves as a primary model for the human race, embodying in our world an irrepressible manifestation of relational creaturehood. One could argue that to be ideally human is to live the life of Jesus Christ who is without sin. Through Jesus' unity with God we have learnt that it is possible for humanity to be one with God. The unity that existed and which continues to exist between Jesus Christ and God is the feature that makes him unique. Jesus was more human than other humans in that he was more fully aware of his identity as one with all humans. Jesus showed the world that a human being can be holy by his compassion for the poor, the oppressed, the powerless, the outcasts, and the foreigners. In this sense, through exercising empathy and commitment to cultural pluralism, we are responding to God's call for us to be holy (Law 1996:68). Human beings are called to participate in Jesus' unity with God.

The figure of the cross dissolves the barriers erected by human arrogance and fixation against the liberating space of divine relationship. God's reconciliation of humankind with God-self put humans back in touch with God again. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus was liberated from the particular cultural circumstances of his earthly life and inserted into cosmic history. Christ's resurrection and sharing in heavenly glory reveal to us that humanity goes beyond the limits of sinfulness and mortality (Hill 1984:221). Belief in the risen Christ provides a transcendent principle, operative within history, that draws humanity toward greater universalisation (Thompson 1980:264). Rahner maintains that through incarnation the entire human family is constituted as God's people and is involved in a supernatural relationship with God. All human beings are called to eternal blessedness in Christ, whose grace is offered always and everywhere. Incarnation is a full integration of divinity and humanity (2 Pt 1:4), which is why the Word became flesh and the divine Spirit was poured out on all on Pentecost. The Holy

Spirit binds us all to each other. Therefore, it is possible for full human existence to transcend these limits. In Schillebeeckx's (1970:47) view, Jesus is made into a representative symbol of human aspirations by the subsequent activity of others who profess faith in him.

5.4.3 The role of Jesus' life in incarnation

According to Christianity, we know God only as God has been revealed in and through Jesus (Okure 1990:58; Ela 1988:105; Cone 1987:152). For Jesus' coming means that God's life is very much related to human beings (Myers 1999:43). By becoming the incarnate Word, Jesus perfects and seals a unity with humanity. God develops human relationships. Through an encounter with Jesus, humanity now knows the full meaning of God's action in history and humanity's place within it (Cone 1987:153). Jesus lived a human life and contributed to humanity's salvation. The unity between God the creator and humanity began with the incarnation (Phlp 2:8). As regards his unity with humanity, Jesus' life was a life of love for and service to others (Lk 22:27). According to the New Testament, Jesus is the man for all people who views his existence as inextricably tied to other human beings (Irvin & Sunquist 2001:22; Cone 1987:153). Jesus' unique way of relating to God is his experience of God as *abba*, included in which is the awareness of God's universal love for all people of different cultures (Hearne 1990:89, Nolan 2006:79). Jesus is God coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing humanity from ungodly principalities and powers that hinders their relationship with God (Cone 1987:153). Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation. Becoming a slave, he opens realities of human existence formerly closed to humanity.

5.5 The universal mediation of the incarnate word

The Bible is regarded as the source and norm of all Christian knowledge and the evidence of the divine will toward all humanity. Different experiences, however, indicate the different aspects of the total picture of God. All humanity needs continuously to work together in order to discover the divine fullness. The creation of the world is mediated by the humanity of Christ. The incarnation of our Lord was God's act of intercepting human and cosmic history (Mbiti 1987:388). Christology is incarnation-centred in the sense of its belief that God intervened in human history in the unique or singular incarnation of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. God meets humankind in the history of salvation (Jesus' birth, work, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension). Incarnation means that God made visible, in human life, the life of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Jesus Christ is that embodiment, God's eternal Word-in-the-flesh (Jn 3:16, 17). According to John's Gospel, God addressed us through his Word, Christ; he revealed the very meaning of the whole cosmos, which had been "hidden since all eternity" (Mt 13:35). Humanity can be understood only in such universal terms. The fundamental aim of God in creating is disclosed in Christ: that Christ embodies the secret heart and purpose of all things, "the mystery hidden from the beginning" (Eph 1:9; Col 1:26). The revelation of Christ thus pertains to the very nature of the cosmos (Toolan 2001:209). Jesus Christ is the main reason why Christianity understands itself as intended for all people (Rahner 1966:118).

Christ has to do "with the very essence of the Word's becoming man" (Bujo 1992: 82). For revealing both God and true humanity, Jesus identifies fully with humankind (Stinton 2004: 143). Nasimiyu highlights the point that "the Son of God comes into the history of every family when in the Incarnation he becomes a member of their own family" (cf. Stinton 2004: 198). Walls's view (1996: 25) is that Jesus should have a home in every cultural context, "without becoming so identified with that particular context that others cannot live there". In the context of God's inclusiveness towards all people, cultures are simply relative to each other. We cease to judge each

other, but accept each other as also being children of God. To be "perfect" means to be as inclusive as God is inclusive, and to be as compassionate as God is compassionate.

5.6 Examination of the theme of the encounter

It is through communication that people relate to their world and to each other (Kraft 2001:122). Communication underlies all activities in human society. Culture may be regarded as systems in which the communication process cultivates and regulates human relationships. A particular culture within which "the speaker and the audience" have been socialised creates and modifies its own signification system. People communicate their customs, traditions, values and mores, through their culture from one generation to the next. According to Thomas (1994:32) the word communication can be traced back to the Latin word *communis* – meaning common. Thomas (:32) adds, "… the Latin context would then seem to indicate the need of the sender and of the receiver to have something in common (*aliquid commune habere*) to be able to communicate". Christianity is essentially about communication: God's self-communication, building human community in the images of divine communication (Soukup 1983:7). In Christianity we witness a divine-human communion and the cultivation of human relationships (Thomas 1994:34). All human communication processes thus take place through the sharing of meaning in common symbols and systems.

The argument of communication theory is that messages pass between humans while meanings do not. Berlo (1960:175) concurs: "meanings are in people", not in the messages. That implies that the meanings understood by the receptors of a given message are likely to be at least slightly different from the meaning intended by the communicator of the message. During the communication process the receptor plays a crucial part in determining the meaning of the interaction (Kraft 2001:79). It is important to become aware that when communicator and receptor stem from different cultural frames of

reference, then it is virtually certain that the meanings of speech and behaviour will be interpreted differently by each participant.

5.6.1 Receptor orientation

The importance of this approach is an attempt to look at things from the point of view of the "receptors." On the part of those who communicate messages their primary concern is to do whatever may be necessary to enable the receivers of the messages to understand their intentions as clearly as possible within the receivers' frame(s) of reference. God chose this incarnational approach to reach people where they were within their contexts (Kraft 2001:384). Faith is therefore to be expressed in many cultural identities (Karokaran 1994:47). God's primary method of communicating the Gospel to human beings was by identifying with human beings, seeking to win a hearing as a human person from within a specific cultural context. Not only did God communicate effectively, but God also provided the model par excellence (Jesus Christ) of effective cross-cultural communication of the Christian message (Kraft 2001:41). Hesselgrave (1991:60) states, "communication experts put the spotlight on audience response". The effective communicator employs some or other method of measuring audience response. The latter will help the communicator to evaluate whether s/he has achieved her\his purpose (Kraft 2001:217). As people communicate they make decisions on the basis of what has captured their attention and appealed to them as the right thing to believe or do (Hesselgrave 1991:60). Culturally relevant Christian communication should be adapted to both the Gospel content and the mindset of the hearers. The goal is persuasion; "on the basis of the given truth, or previously learned truth, the hearers are urged to respond in particular manners" (Ericson 1978:82). To accomplish this "requires a familiarity with systems of persuasion available both in the language and in the ideological patterns of the people" (Ericson 1978:82).

5.6.2 Receptor needs

People should understand the message, because accepting or rejecting it depends on their understanding (Stinton 2004:253, Hesselgrave 1991:107). Every group of people establishes mutually shared "signs" and "symbols" for effective communication. Inculturating Christianity within a given culture involves translating the Gospel message so completely into forms specifically appropriate to that culture, that the people within the society understand it and live its meanings as if it were their own, rather than foreign (Kraft 2001:36; John Paul II 1982:46). The Christian message should speak to their felt needs. Forms of worship, proclamation, expression and outworking of the faith-relationships with God, etcetera should be appropriate to the culture. True witnesses are challenged to follow God's approach to culture-bound humans. It appears to be God's desire to adapt God's approach to human cultures in order for God to be experienced by humans as relevant to the needs of those enmeshed in each particular cultural context. Kraft (2001:36) concluded that "God is primarily concerned with similarity of perceived meaning rather than sameness of forms in the expressions of Christianity from culture to culture". Contextualisation took God's truth out of the Hebrew community and into the larger community of humanity. God and humanity are therefore inseparable.

5.6.3 Frame of reference

The means which God used to reach humans is that of human media, in order to communicate with human beings (Kraft 2001:208). The rules of human communication require that people who wish to interact understandably must function within the same frame of reference. In Christian faith, the concept of revelation exhibits very clear parameters and frames of reference. Revelations comes directly from God, through Jesus, to human beings, mediated through the Bible. A message can have meaning only if it is within the experience of both the sender and the receiver. Meaningful communication

requires that both sender and receiver share a common language (Berlo 1960:175). Meaning is intimately related to context (Kraft 2001:20); the context of the message must be taken into account – that is, the place and time of a conversation (Hesselgrave 1991:36). In the incarnation the Word became flesh (:229). Our response to the God who has spoken through God's Son has to be formulated from the struggles of people, from their joys, from their pains, from their hopes and from their frustrations today. Kraft (2001:382) concurs: "in human experience, the primary frames of reference are cultural and beyond culture, human commonality".

5.6.4 Discovery of truth

According to the Christian churches, the foundational truths of existence have been revealed by God to us in a unique and special way in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus asked the question, "*Who do you say I am*?" (Mk 8: 27). The truth of the Gospel is that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of the living God and a saviour of all peoples and cultures, because his saving action took place in history, in which he affirms their separate identities and helps them realise these in the same way he affirmed and fulfilled the aspirations and destiny of Israel as a distinct people (Kraft 2001:208). Jesus belongs to and is leading all people to the fulfilment of their destiny in God, and thus truly becomes the universal saviour (Karokarna 1994:48). Western missionaries had identified their cultural expressions and practices of religion with the faith itself (:52). The missionary church domesticated Jesus of Nazareth by identifying the revelation in history with a particular people and culture, which offers an indication that when we put God within our cultural frame, it limits our perception of God. Therefore the propagation of such a faith would have displaced other cultures. The AICs broke away from the missionary churches in order to formulate and live the Gospel within their African cultural-political experience. Even though most of us came to be in a relationship with God within our own cultural boundaries, Jesus challenges us to perceive God as outside our cultural frame of reference. God also interacts, challenges, and affirms cultures different from ours. The

truth is, it is the Holy Spirit who takes the Word and makes it understandable to and operative within the hearers of the Gospel.

5.7 Conclusion

As God's message is proclaimed in various societies, the shape and content of the man called Jesus of Nazareth becomes clothed in very distinctive cultural forms. The relationship of Christ and Jesus of Nazareth helps us to understand the relationship of Faith and culture. The Christian faith derives its name and identity from Jesus who was revered by his Jewish disciples as the Messiah, and by his Gentile followers as the Christ (Mugambi 1989:136). The historical Jesus is the key in knowing Christ, and eventually God. Our knowledge of Christ should be situated within the context of his life and ministry in Palestine during the first century AD (Sobrino 1978:4). For believers it is important to portray Jesus as a Jew who lived in Israel over 2000 years ago, with all the historical and cultural details of that time. Gittins (2002a:36) concurs that without knowing the culture we will not understand other people's beliefs and behaviour. African Christians portray Christ as an African living here and now. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is fundamental to Christian faith. Regarding Christ, the resurrection proved and established the divine character of Jesus. The universality of Jesus Christ affirms and fulfils the expression of the identities of different people and generations (Bosch 1991:421). God chooses to reveal God-self in such a way that the members of various societies may focus on those aspects of God's nature and activity most amenable to their cultural expectations as to what God should be like, and thus respond to God in faith expressed in ways appropriate to their cultures.

The Bible should be perceived as a "zoom lens" used by different people at different times; the understanding of the comprehensiveness of God will differ from culture to culture (Kraft 2001:33). Different cultural insights also have important

contributions to make regarding the comprehensiveness of the truth that God seeks to reveal concerning God-self and God's interaction with human beings. It is necessary for us to interpret the biblical revelation, recorded in its cultural context, if we are to understand it aright. In order to communicate this message to the people of our society, we must clothe the supracultural again in a form appropriate to our culture, like Jesus Christ who revealed God in human life and culture. A revelation of absolute truth communicated in culturally understandable terms shows us the God who stands outside of any culture but who is willing to work within any culture (Kraft 2001:35). The Bible presents supracultural truth in cultural trappings: specific events occurring in the lives of specific persons acting out and/or interpreting their interaction with God in accordance with the specific cultures in which they are immersed (:32). If one compares the experience of covenants in the Old Testament and love between God and humans in the New Testament, the apparent theological difference disappears if one takes cultural factors into account.

The fundamental reality is that no single cultural context can claim a monopoly on understanding Jesus Christ. The multiplicity of Christological images arising in Africa enhances the discovery of the fullness of Christ, which transcends all cultural constructs of the Gospel. The perception and experience of Jesus by different cultures throughout history has expanded our corporate understanding of Christ. Walls (1996:54) assents: "It is a delightful paradox that the more Christ is translated into the various thought forms and life systems which form our various national identities, the richer all of us will be in our common Christian identity".

Such a cultural context is investigated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6   **"WHO DO YOU BATSWANA CHRISTIANS SAY THAT I AM?"**

6.1 Introduction

The basic aim of this chapter is to attempt to formulate the relationship between Jesus and the contemporary African reality, focusing on Batswana people. The chapter addresses the problem mentioned earlier, that is the "faith schizophrenia" in Chapter 1.1, of how to become an integrated Motswana Christian. In our attempt to understand Christ from a Tswana perspective, the work of Christ rather than his person will become a priority (Bediako 1990:10; Waruta 1991:54; Magesa 1989:82). The history of Jesus, the living Christ, continues in the history of human beings as a living and functional Christology (Healey & Sybertz 1996:76). Therefore Batswana Christians, like any other Christian community, continue the story of Jesus.

The African people understand Jesus Christ in the context of their own religious consciousness (Bahemuka 1989:11). As Waruta (1991:53) indicates,

> In African religious tradition, mediation between humanity and divinity, between natural and supernatural; between the world of man [*human beings*] and the world of spirit was accomplished through three main religious specialists – the prophet, the priest and the sacred king ruler, chief-elder or the accepted potentate.

Batswana people, and indeed all Africans, are formulating their own Christology by their response to the person who Jesus is to them (Healey & Sybertz 1996:75). Mugabe (1991:343) shares the same conviction that Africans cannot have a meaningful Christology when it is built on foreign theological models.

The impact of Jesus on people's lives (Nolan 2001:164) leads them to question who Jesus is. It is a challenge for all believers in Jesus Christ to develop a Christology: an interpretation of who Jesus really is, in thought patterns and images familiar to them from their particular cultures (Nyamiti 1994:63; Bediako 1990:10; Waruta 1991:53). The question arises from the experience of salvation: something good happened to people who had an encounter with Jesus Christ. The answer is based on their faith and in the actual way of how people live.

The four Gospels differ in culture, geography, time and emphasis; these writers demonstrate the pluralism that exists in biblical Christology (Johnson 1988:89; Mugambi 1989:136). Jesus Christ is the universal saviour and thus the saviour of the Batswana people and indeed of all Africans (Bediako 1990:5). Schillebeeckx (1980:18) states insightfully: "the account of the life of Christians in the world in which they live is the fifth gospel; it also belongs to the heart of Christology". African Christology is an important theme for broadening and deepening the meaning of the root metaphor, "a fifth gospel".

6.2 The character of the New Testament Jesus

Focusing on the historical Jesus means that African theology recognises history as an indispensable foundation of Christology (Nyamiti 1991:13; Stinton 2004:15). The Bible must be read correctly in the context of African realities (Mbiti 1987:395; Oduyoye 1986:3) and in order to express African faith we must examine biblical and African symbols (Healey & Sybertz 1996:91), to avoid manipulation of the Gospel mentioned earlier (in chapter 2.1). We are not free to make Jesus what we wish him to be at certain moments of existence. In any kind of theology, its image of articulating Jesus should be consistent with the essence of the biblical message (Kraft 2001:344; Omulokole 1998:32) and at the same time should relate to the experience of the people (Stinton 2004:30;

Gittins 2000:24; Nyamiti 1991:3). Jesus should be who He was (Cone 1986:120). According to Christians, Jesus is the Word of God (Jn 1:1) who came down from "heaven". In the scriptures Jesus identified with the poor and the outcasts (see chapter 2.6.1), which is an expression of the very being of God. Consequently Christ, within an African context, should identify with Africans as oppressed people too. Christ's humanity helps us to identify him with our ancestors; hence through his function He becomes mediator, saviour, redeemer and hope (Stinton 2004:150). His baptism also reveals Jesus' identification with the oppressed. Jesus' baptism by John was not only connecting his ministry with John's, but a proof that he was also in solidarity with sinners (Cone 1986:114).

African Christology will be meaningful when we translate the Gospel into the contextual situation of our daily life (Stinton 2004:36). Contextual theology makes sure that faith and practice are not divorced; hence theological formulation is coupled with a living out of theology (Amirtham & Pobee 1986:6; Cole 1998:12). Conn (1978:44) is convinced that the appropriate procedure is "a formulation from exegesis of biblical texts within a socio-cultural context, and a living out of that theology within the given cultural context, utilizing the Bible as the only authority while recognizing the progress of biblical revelation". Christ must be seen to identify with humanity's suffering, weakness, and pain (Johnson 1988:89; Boff 1978:242). Since incarnation means that God became human and dwelt among human beings, what does the presence of God mean to Africans in the midst of hunger, oppression, HIV/AIDS and pain? The life, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal that he is the man for others, disclosing to them what is necessary for their liberation from oppression. If this is true, then Jesus Christ must be black so that blacks can know that their liberation is his liberation.

6.2.1 The quest for the historical Jesus in an African Context

The reality of the Bible is that it evolved from historical processes, where God shows Godself to humanity through human events which become the mediators of God's transcendence (Haight 2001:61). The history of the historical Jesus is in the first place an invitation to follow his praxis: in the language of Jesus, to follow him on a mission (McFague 2001:172). The Christology of liberation means to rediscover the story of Jesus in all its historical depth in order for it to be verified in people's lives (Boff 1978:239). Cone (1986:113) states clearly that "the Gospel speaks to the situation". Contextualisation offers a challenge to all Christians to be engaged in it, as they allow the Gospel to speak to every language and culture at every point in history (Cole 1998:13; Kraft 2001:345). The Gospel is constant; situations differ. Jesus is called different names by different people in varying cultural contexts, but the Gospel remains the same. Christians, from their own experiences of salvation, praxis and prayer, must name Jesus Christ again and claim him again for their own people in their own time and place (Johnson 1988:89).

The thought-world of Africa and that of the Bible are very similar (Mbiti 1987:395; Stinton 2004:149; Mugambi 1989:139). Therefore, African Christians have no difficulty in relating the Gospel stories to their own situation (Mugambi 1989:139). This is why Africans who possess the Bible in their own native tongues can hear God speaking directly to their hearts (Mbiti 1987:395; Bediako 1990:44), because God's basic method of communication is incarnational, that is, in Jesus Christ (Kraft 2001:207). In the great commissioning (Mt 28:19-20) God uses human beings to reach other human beings, which is an affirmation of this incarnational method (:207). Bediako contends that the only language which has the ability to speak to the heart and mind and respond to the word of God is in fact our mother tongue (Bediako 1990:43; Bediako 1995:60).

The New Testament claims that Jesus emptied himself of all supernaturalism and became an ordinary person like us, but according to Abogunrin (1980:26) this is meaningless in the African context. The Jesus whose message is capable of being relevant in the African context is the one who announced that he was anointed to preach the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed (Mugambi 1989:146; Lk 4:16-22; Is 61:1-2). African Christians want a Jesus they can adore, but they relate even more to a Jesus who knows their problems of poverty and sufferings (Stinton 2004:271), and who can help them out of these situations (Bujo 1992:9). Resurrection illustrates that Jesus wields the power to conquer all that is evil and destructive. Jesus was wounded by crucifixion; resurrection healed the risen Christ, who is now calling Christians to share his mission of dying in order to bring his new risen life to the world (Nasimiyu Wasike 1998:27). This suggests that the death of Christ on the cross empowers people to do something about their present condition, hoping that Christ will help them realise their potentialities.

6.2.2 Tswana perspective on Christ's suffering

According to the Scriptures, Jesus represents all oppressed people. Nolan (1988:66) affirms that God experiences a special concern for the poor because of their suffering. "*Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do it unto me*" (Mt 25:40, 45). Batswana Christians in their situation and with their experiences are in a better position than anyone else to determine the meaning and scope of Jesus for themselves. In both Setiloane's poem (1976: 128f) and Butelezi's article (1976:171), the central theme is the suffering of Christ and the Black person's identification with it, from his or her existential situation of oppression and suffering. What Wessels (1990:8) depicts as the "scourged or suffering Christ" is a tortured thin-looking black Jesus on the cross who cried "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Wessels (:95) adds that an

"African Christ" will look, feel and be able to identify with the African person in her/his cultural totality.

From Setiloane's (1976: 130) point of view, the cross of Christ is the very source of attraction for the oppressed people of Africa. Jesus was highly sensitive to any humiliation which led to suffering (Nolan 1988:52). He made contact with the marginalised and outcasts and treated them with human dignity. This attracts Africans, according to Walingo (1991:176), for Jesus is their consoler, comforter, and hope. Nolan (1988:66) affirms that Jesus represents the suffering, and God sides with the oppressed. Thus, what appeals most in the life and witness of Jesus to Africans is his suffering (:115); for through it he is seen as identifying himself with the plight of Africans. It is important to realise that the suffering Christ in Setiloane's poem is closely associated with the African God, *Modimo*. This God as expressed in the poem is identical with the biblical God, the creator revealed to humankind through the Jews who believed in Yahweh: "I am" (Setiloane 1976:128).

The cleansing blood of the cross of Christ transcends the barriers of skin colour, race, and tribe. It embraces all humankind (:131). It can be said that African theologians are aware that Christ unites all people in himself as the crucified one since the cross of Christ symbolises unity. The incarnation and the suffering of Christ challenge Christians to make a Christian impact on all social structures (Myers 2004:46), and to do so even to the point of suffering, just as Christ suffered when he made concrete his love for humanity (Butelezi 1976:178).

The redemptive suffering is based on the model of Christ and is manifested through love seen as self-sacrificing for the sake of the oppressed (Myers 2004: 36). From the views of different African theologians it becomes apparent that the suffering and the cross of Christ are the focal points in African theology. Most African theologians

put their hope for the liberation of Africans in the suffering and crucifixion of Christ who identifies with their plight. However, this crucified and suffering Christ liberates not only Africans, but the whole family of humankind (Setiloane 1976: 131).

It becomes necessary to give attention to the context in which the Gospel is proclaimed. The Gospel is related to the realities of the world. Jesus' preaching of the reign of God proclaims justice and peace for all people. The reign of God is not exclusively for the privileged: it values every human person (Nolan 2001:75). Jesus' preaching broke the old pattern of discrimination and set up a new pattern of relating. Jesus is redefining relationships, creating a new kinship that is not ruled by a male, nor based on blood or on law but on faith. As Schneiders (2001:228) comments, "the seeds of Christian universalism were also sown by Jesus in his ministry". Myers (2004:45) concurs, "we are to embrace the 'other,' and this must include the non-poor as well as the poor". This is the heart of the Gospel and the beginning of transformation.

The challenge for theologies in Africa is to be at the same time biblical and relevant to the realities of the people, namely as immediate, concrete action (Childs 1974:83). Christ must be able to be perceived in the concrete life and action of the people in their present context. The truth of the Bible must be understood within different contexts, without being taken captive by these contexts. Incarnation means that God has already entered into our human situation, and now we must open our eyes in order to see where God is, what the risen Christ is doing and what the Spirit is calling us to do (SACC 1986:77-79).

6.3 Who is Jesus Christ for Batswana Christians today?

Jesus' question "*who do you say that I am*?" (Mk 8: 29), in Johnson's (1988:89) view, "challenges each culture, ethnic group, nation, community and individual" to write its

own fifth Gospel (Healey & Sybertz 1996:32). Any response to this Christological question must begin with the acknowledgment of concrete human experience in each one's daily lives (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 15, Martey 1993: 79). Schreiter (1985:2,3) argues that the theologies being passed on to churches outside the North Atlantic area were not meeting the specific needs of the newer churches, and that theologies were needed which made sense "of the Christian message in local circumstances". Nolan (1988:25) affirms that contextualisation is taking the contents of the Gospel from the Bible (and tradition) and giving them a new shape in our particular context. In Africa, religion remains part of African consciousness as a whole (Nurnberger 2007:9). Identity is tied up with religion, and so it relates more fully to everyday life (Bediako 2004:xvi). We must bear in mind that in Africa, life is unity (Mbiti 1969: 48); therefore Jesus' question cannot be separated from the concreteness of the everyday life of the people. In 1987, the AACCs' response (1987:1) was:

> *In our attempt to answer the question, we must try to rescue Theology and therefore Christology from the shelves of the universities and the sanctuaries of the Churches: and make it a living, dynamic, active and creative reality in our communities and among our people. If indeed Jesus has come and lived with us: He is our elder brother, liberator and healer.*

Batswana people and indeed most Africans base their relationship with God on living contacts, in concrete situations and experiences (Barreto 2000:61; Mbiti 1969:5; Waruta 1991:57). The disciples' answer to the Christological question "*Who do people say I am?*" regarded him as a prophet in the line of Moses, Elijah, Amos, and the other pre-exilic prophets (Mt 1:14; Lk 7:16, 39, 24:19; Jn 9:17). The scripture lists a variety of titles, which are typical ones of the first century, like son of God, son of Man, messiah etcetera. The context from which Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, was the context of oppressed and colonised Jews (Martey 1993:81); therefore they were expecting a messiah who would restore the glorious Kingdom of their ancestor David (Mi 5: 2) and also their dignity and freedom (Is 61). As Kurewa (1985:9) states: "Africans cannot simply imitate Peter," but have to say "who Christ Jesus is from African perspective – to express who He is and what He is doing in our midst". Mugabe (1991:343) concurs that African Christology "can only be formulated in African cultural symbols and categories

of thought". Christianity must make Christ real through African life and thought (Gaba 1978:400). Luzbetak (1988:79) agrees and considers that contextualisation's goal is "to integrate the Gospel message with the local culture in such a way that the message becomes a part of the cultural system itself". The African worldview provides the framework for constructing African Christology (Pobee 1979:81; Nyamiti 1989:17). These various experiences deepen our understanding of God by furnishing different aspects of the total picture of God.

It is in Jesus' sharing of our common humanity that he opens the path of liberation in history (Healey & Sybertz 1996:15; Goba 1988: 39). In Boff's view (1978:242), "Jesus is in solidarity with the mentality of the population of the village and participates in the destiny of a nation subjugated by foreign occupation forces". A "Black Christ" or "Black Messiah" portrays Jesus as oppressed (Cone 1975:133), representing the oppressed and marginalised black Africans, but Jesus is also the one who liberates them from their suffering and oppression (Boesak 1984: 10). Such a Gospel which speaks about people's experience and daily lives, is a down to earth Gospel (Healey & Sybertz 1996:15).

The voices of women in theology have caused a shift in African Christology; the new challenge is posed by the structures in African society that oppress women and marginalise children, drawing on the role that Christ plays in liberating people of all genders. The realities of daily life must be understood by those who want to proclaim the Good News. It is Good News for the total human context. We cannot exclude social circumstances, political tensions, race relations, etcetera. It is the aim of this study to attempt to understand the African context and to place the Gospel in that total context. As Taylor (1963:35) reflects:

> As Western Christians we have seen Christ coming, thank God, into our individualized lives, redeeming our particular situation, delivering us from our own type of temptation. But until our vision is aligned to the African way of looking at things, until we have felt our individuality vanishing and our pulse

beating to communal rhythms and communal fears, how can we guess what the Lord looks like who is the Saviour of the African world.

Christians discover the story of God at the heart of their own personal and communal stories (Healey & Sybertz 1996:76). Pope Paul VI strongly emphasised in (EN=*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 63) that for evangelisation to be effective, it should consider the actual people to whom it is addressed, and use their language, their signs and symbols.

From the Tswana religious orientation we can infer a Christology of reciprocity based on the Trinitarian fellowship. It is important to note that the African Synod of Bishops (Rome 1994) chose the family as the model of the Church in Africa. This was seen to complement the Vatican II model of the church as the people of God (*ecclesia Dei*). The advantage of the former model is that it reinforces the sibling relationship or Christian fellowship. In the analogy of the incarnation, Tswana (African) Christological attributes are explored. The essential cultural symbols of humanity (*ubuntu*), friendship, togetherness and hospitality are set in creative dialogue with the Christian ethos: love of God and neighbour. The various names we give to Christ should make Christ one of us as Africans. Jesus as the brother of Batswana Christians provides biblical meaning and personal experience which provides ground for Christological images. In Romans 8: 29 Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren. Batswana Christians' perception of Jesus as brother attests to the contextual evidence appropriated through their experience of brotherhood in an African context.

6.3.1 Jesus as elder brother

Jesus is our brother, since, "he participated in the anonymity of almost all human beings and assumed the human situation that is identical for all" (Boff 1978:242). In the image of Jesus as the elder brother, the Tswana perspective grants us a Christology of

reciprocity. In African traditional society the first-born boy or eldest brother enjoyed special honour and privileges (Setiloane 1976:35; Kabasele 1991:121). The main function of the elder brother is that of being an exemplary or role model in a reciprocal relationship of respect for elders. Reinforced here are the siblings' relationships. The centralities of natural families in African society and in the biblical worldview are the basis of the model with its emphasis on communion.

The Tswana elder brother plays the essential role of setting a good example, and he can thus be trusted with questions of justice within the family, clan and society. The naming of the elder brother, in Tswana tradition, expresses a closeness to the ancestors of the family. In the traditional bifurcation into male camps, especially at puberty, young boys learn life skills and the facts of life from the elder brother. In Tswana society, the elder brother also takes overall responsibility for aged parents as well as younger brothers and sisters. In a comparative approach, Jesus is understood to have a unique role as mediator and role model. As Christians, we model our lives according to Christ's. The Gospel of John agrees, *"I am the Way; I am Truth and Life; no one can come to the Father, except through me"* (Jn 14: 6).

Elders who are the aged male leaders in traditional Tswana society were custodians and implementers of justice. Characteristic of manhood in the African concept is bravery, power, and leadership (Healey & Sybertz 1996:77). Jesus showed those characteristics by overcoming sin and death (1 Cor 15: 55 -57). Jesus Christ is the "Elder Brother par excellence" and the "Eldest Brother of the Anointed Ones". For Sawyer (1968:73), his being "the first born among many brethren who with him together form the church is in true keeping with African notions". As the eldest of the elders and the lineage head, Jesus Christ thus becomes the head of every family. The biblical parallels are: "*he should be the eldest of many brothers*" (Rm 8: 29) and "*he is the image of the unseen God, the first born of all creation*" (Col 1: 15) and the first fruits of those who have died (Col 1: 20). There is a natural filiation with Jesus as Son of God. We in turn

become adopted children of God (cf. Gl 4: 5). Jesus is our elder brother, since within this human life he revealed God by his death and resurrection (Boff 1978:243).

Related to both ancestorship and kinship, is Jesus as the "Elder Brother". Kabasele (1991:122) states that "it is the eldest brother who makes an offering to the Ancestors and to the Supreme Being on behalf of all the rest". Sawyerr (1968:73-74) agrees with the image of Jesus as elder brother: all offerings must be made through Christ, who is the "Eldest Brother". This relates to Jesus Christ as "Intercessor" and "Mediator", as bridge between God and human beings (1 Tm 2: 5). The image of Jesus as a brother conveys a notion of the humanity of Jesus, while Jesus as ancestor does the same (Stinton 2004:172). Jesus as a brother expresses close relationship, intimacy and human solidarity.

6.3.2 Jesus as ancestor

Among the main aspects of the Tswana religion is the cult of the ancestors. Ancestors in Africa are the "principle" or "source" of personal, family and community life. Magesa (2004:126) assents that "what happens to living humanity and the universe in general flows through the ancestors from God and back to God". The ideology of Jesus being a universal brother agrees with Bujo's (1995:36-37) position that Jesus as life-giver and as ancestor alone unites all humanity into a single clan and ethnic group. For an African person, life is inconceivable without ancestors (Stinton 2004:141), while from Christianity's point of view life in God is only attained through Jesus (Jn 14: 6). In attributing ancestorship to Jesus, we explore how ancestral belief and practices dialogue with Christology. We translate the Christian faith into genuine African categories and thought forms. Ancestors are believed to transmit and safeguard life, while Christ nourishes the life of believers (Kabasele 1991:120). Wanamaker (1997:285-289) asserts that if Christ is to be understood as an ancestor, there will need to be some

correspondence between the function of the ancestors and his own function in the lives of the believers. As Pobee (1979:83) clearly states, all Christological titles are based on the humanity and divinity of Jesus. It is in this context that the study formulates the image of Jesus as ancestor.

To consider Jesus as an ancestor means that he is to us an elder in the community, an intercessor between God and human community (Milingo 1984:71). Ancestry and kinship are related; one's ancestors are part of one's kindred: ancestors from the lineage of one's kinship up to one's founding ancestor. Christ as proto-ancestor has to do "with the very essence of the Word's becoming man" (Bujo 1992:82), for in revealing both God and true humanity, Jesus identifies fully with humankind and thereby encompasses the striving after righteousness by all of the ancestors. The word proto-ancestor means "first model", similar to the biblical imagery of Jesus as the "new Adam", with Jesus revealing sinlessness and bringing life. The "Jesus as ancestor paradigm" rests on his "common divine sonship with us" (Nyamiti 1984:16). Christ is the Son of God; baptism makes Christians God's children; therefore Christians share common kinship with Christ. In retrospect our origin goes back to Christ as our ancestor. God spoke to us through Jesus Christ, a proto-ancestor from whom all life flows for his descendants (cf. Heb 1: 1-2). If we look back on the historical Jesus of Nazareth, we can see in him, not only one who lived the African ancestor-ideal in the highest degree, but also one who brought that ideal to an altogether new fulfilment. Jesus performed miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead to life. In short, he brought life, in its fullness (Bujo 1992:79). The African ancestors are in this way forerunners, or images, of the proto-ancestor, Jesus Christ (:83).

Ancestors exercise their authority as ministers of the Supreme Being (Nurnberger 2007:29; Pobee 1979:94). Jesus holds authority over the human realm and is even superior to all spirit beings, including the ancestors (Stinton 2004:140; Pobee 1979:94). According to Bujo the title proto-ancestor signifies that Jesus "infinitely transcended" the

authentic ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors (Bujo 1992:81). Jesus is teaching humans how to become human and perfect (Stinton 2004:142). Bujo (1995:66) concludes that "Jesus Christ is the proto-ancestor for the Africans. The law for living as good and wise Africans came to us by the intermediary of the ancestors; the divine grace and wisdom to clothe us with the new man have come to us by Jesus Christ". The proto-ancestral image is found in Christ being portrayed as the head of the body in Pauline ecclesiology and cosmology (Col 1: 18; Eph 1:23), the beginning and firstborn from among the dead (Col 1: 18). Bujo (1990:83) concludes that the concept of Jesus as proto-ancestor reflects the belief that "he is the firstborn among all the ancestors", not on a biological level but on "a soteriological level of re-birth to a mystical and supernatural life and mode of existence".

6.3.3 Jesus as Healer of healers *(Ngaka ya dingaka)*

Healing was central to the ministry of Jesus and also to the commissioning of his disciples, who were told to proclaim the Good News and to heal the sick (Mk 6: 12-13). The apostles and the early church naturally continued this ministry. Jesus as Healer *par excellence* is understood not to need the help of any traditional medicine (*molemo)* or of Western medicine, since it is God (*Modimo*) who made the herbs, shrubs, trees, and so forth used by people for medicine (*molemo)*. The Batswana people understand that the ancestors, in their death, acquire power from *Modimo*. Jesus is a healer, who by his death and resurrection conquered evil – including the Tswanas' chronic fear of *boloi*, witchcraft and sorcery. This is comparable with Christ's mission agenda or jubilee mission (Luke 4: 16; 21) of bringing the Good News of salvation. The Tswana Catholic Hymnal (1975:494) illustrates Jesus as a healer

1. *Yesu, O ngaka ya batho,*	Jesus is a healer of people
O alafa moya le pelo.	You cure spirit and heart
Jaanong ba re lwala, re bobolang	Then, we who are ill and sick
Re a go itekodisa.	We present ourselves to examine us

2.	*O ntlafaditse lepero*	You cured leprosy
	O tsositse losung Lasaro	You raised Lazarus from the dead
	Wa ba wa leleka bo-Satane	You even chased Satan (*evil spirits*) away
	Wa kabolola ditsebe	You opened deaf ears

3.	*Mme jaako O fodisitse*	Like you have cured
	Malwetse otlhe a mebele	All physical illness
	Jalo O n'o eleditse thata	Now you so wish
	Go tlosa one a mewa.	To take away all spiritual illness
4.	*O tlhabolotse dipelo.*	You have transformed people's heart
	O senkile dinku tsa gago	You search for your sheep
	O dibiditse, O di otlile	You have called them, and fed them
	O di isitse kwa sakeng	You taken them into the kraal

In Tswana religion, Jesus as the healer can be seen to adopt the roles of *Modimo*, ancestor and traditional healer. Christ as healer and Creator, *par excellence*, is *Modimo* who heals without herbs and provides all medicine (Mararike 1995:9, Healey & Sybertz 1996:86). Batswana people understand that the gift of healing comes from the *badimo*. A healing ministry, particularly as imparted by the ancestor, is meant to be for the good of the family, clan, and tribe.

The traditional healer *(ngaka)* is consulted in cases of illness and death. Thus it is the *ngaka* who informs one of the need for appeasement of the spirits. In the dialectic of Western medicine and traditional medicine, the Tswana believe that the *ngaka* is the specialist in dealing with diseases like cultural cleansing. Thus the *ngaka* is understood to heal the whole person – there is stress on psychosomatic therapy (Chavhunduka 1977: 142-143; Kolie 1991:139). According to Chavunduka (1977:2.131), a good *ngaka* may cause ill effects in the client because of a desire to become rich, or in anger at not being paid for his services. The negative effects of the *ngaka* are seen in the practice of sorcery. Business people are at times unfortunately advised by *ngaka* to use human parts with medicine (*molemo*) to gain better business acumen.

In the culture–Christianity dialectic, the ambivalent status of the *ngaka* as traditional healer is problematic. This is implicated in the early missionaries' and colonialists' coinage of the term "witchdoctor" (Mogapi 1991:120). The rejection of *ngaka* practices by Christian missionaries as evil and pagan is seen to impose an unhealthy dualism onto Tswana culture, in the believer who is both *Motswana* and Christian. Christian evangelisation becomes superficial because, in situations of crisis, a *Motswana* Christian may backslide into culture. The positive role of the *ngaka* as parallel to the healing ministry of Christ is highlighted in the AICs (Daneel 1970: 1ff). There are also striking parallels in the methods employed in the healing process by both African Initiated Churches and traditional healers, such as, spirit, salt, candles and oil (Mulago 1991:124-125; Daneel 1970: 33) and prophesying and divination.

It can be averred that whatever method is used, ancestral spirits or God's Spirit, a *Motswana* understands that *Modimo* is the ultimate healer. A good *ngaka* would acknowledge *Modimo* as the ultimate giver and sustainer of life. In this context we note a significant development that has occurred among Batswana Christians. This is an understanding of the immediacy of God, who can be addressed directly in prayers, dreams and prophecies, unlike the traditional mediation of spiritual leaders such as a *ngaka*. Walls (1996: 196-197) is right in asserting that in divination, help was sought from and people spoke to the ancestors, and not God. People moved from one church to another in search of healing, like changing clothes, or from one *ngaka* to another, from one medical specialist to another. The Tswana's essential cultural element of hierarchical mediation contains a positive side concerning diffusion of tension. In attributing to Jesus the title of healer there is dialogue with the Tswana quest for holistic healing, in the face of chronic illnesses like cancer and HIV/AIDS today. This concept of holistic healing is reflected in verse 3 of the Tswana Catholic hymnal mentioned earlier.

The hymn illustrates that God in Jesus heals in unrestricted or unexpected ways. Concerning the title liberator, or saviour, the Tswana conception differs from the

Christian understanding, which regards salvation as first and foremost liberation from sin. In a holistic and existential spirituality, for a *Motswana*, it is not salvation from sin, but liberation from anything that oppresses them, such as disease, pestilence, war and the Tswana chronic fear of witchcraft, which is central.

6.3.4 Jesus as Chief *(Kgosi)*

It is important to note that leadership patterns vary among traditional African societies; however, this discussion is contextually grounded in the concepts held by Batswana. It is noteworthy that other cultures have a king or potentate as the highest authority; the Tswana equivalent is the chief *(Kgosi).* Mogapi (1991:67) writes, "*Kgosi ke yone molaodi wa batho; morongwa wa badimo, le mosireletsi wa merafe mo diphatseng dife kapa dife,*" which translates as "chief is the one who governs people, messenger of ancestors, and saviour of the nation in any kind of trouble". Kabasele (1991:109-112) identifies the chief's characteristics as those of possessing supernatural power, generosity and the ability to reconcile. The Tswana chief exercises spiritual powers communicated to him by the soil through the ancestors (*badimo*) (Mogapi 1991:67; Manley 1995:70). The chief is also a guardian (Mogapi 1991:67). The importance of the Tswana's designation of Christ as *Kgosi* (chief) is seen in Tswana names, for example, *Morena* (Lord), *Mmoloki* (Saviour)

In the Tswana culture-Christianity dialectic, we can employ the Servant King motif of Scripture (cf. Is 53) and the Christ of the Gospel. In a new Christian understanding, God is understood as the ultimate giver of the chief's supernatural powers through the mediation of the primogenitor. Emphasis falls on the concept of the ancestors as guardians of the social and moral order and the land. Reconciliation is a function of the chiefly jury. The Tswana chief (*Kgosi)* fulfils religious, political and social roles (Mogapi 1991:71-72). He is an intermediary between the ancestors and must see to it that

ceremonies such as the petitioning for rain and harvest thanksgiving are performed (Krige 1950:233). Clearly, traditional leadership symbolism further informs Christological images of kingship/chieftaincy. For example, Jesus as chief is very common in Tswana singing and praying (Stinton 2004:203); as in for instance this hymn from the Tswana Catholic Hymnal (1975:491), which affirms Jesus as chief.

1. *Dumela, kgosi Yesu Kreste*   Greetings, Jesus Christ the Chief
   Rotlhe re go obamela jaana.   We are all worshipping you
   Pako, tlotlo di nne go wena   Praise, honour to you
   O leng Modimo wa rona   You, being our God

Chorus: *O buse O laole, Oh Morekolodi. O phatla-kanye baba; Gola, O nne Kgosi.* Govern, control, our saviour. Destroy enemies. Grow, become the chief.

2. *O Kgosi ka botsalo jwa 'go.*   By birth you are the chief
   Ka gonne O Morwa wa Modimo   Because you are the Son of God
   O o busa lobopo lotlhe   You govern the whole creation
   O busa le wena, Yesu   God govern with you Jesus

3. *O kgosi ka gonne O fentse*   You are the chief because you overcame
   Boshula jotlhe mo sefapanong   All evils through the cross
   O fentse baba ba Morena   You overcame enemies of the Lord
   Ba e leng baba ba batho   which are enemies of people

This Tswana hymn offers contextual evidence which points to the kingship of Jesus being prevalent as a Tswana expression of Christianity. Some traditional African societies, like the Akan of Ghana, portray Jesus Christ as king of kings, who therefore is greater than and superior to traditional kings (Aboagye-Mensah 1984:437-438). This illustrates that the impact of traditional leadership symbolism extends beyond the particular people group represented here.

In a pedagogical approach, the attribute of Christ as Chief can be understood as good news to believers when we look at Christ's lordship having power over and against political leaders (cf. Rebecca Pentz, in Erickson 1991:591). Thus the chief's lordship can best be described as the empowerment of his subjects. Concerning the jurisdiction of the chief, it can be said that tension exists between customary law and Roman-Dutch law. For example, the offender does not undo a crime, such as murder, by serving a jail sentence. Rather, the family has to make reparations for such a sin through ritual (*Mpho ya badimo-* thanksgiving) and by giving a herd of cattle. The chief's judgment is by consensus, and judgment is according to the gravity of the offence. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Christ teaches against revenge and expands the view of sin and reconciliation by encouraging unconditional forgiveness and love for one's enemies (Mt 5: 38 ff).

The chief is responsible for law and order, is an intermediary of the ancestors, and acts as protector of the community. As Mogapi (1991:67) observes, *"Kgosi ke yone rradigole, difofu, botsofe, batlhoki, batlholagadi, Masiela, dikhutsana"*, which may be translated as the: "chief is a father of the crippled, the blind, the elderly, the poor, the widows, and the abandoned children". Hospitality to strangers and providing for the needs of the poor and widows are prerogatives of the chief. There is a striking parallel with the Old Testament concerning the leader of the community having to take overall responsibility for the *anawim* (the poor of Yahweh – cf. Ps 72). These elements underlie the essential cultural elements of friendship, hospitality, and togetherness. Christians today replace the *anawim* with the preferential option for the poor and marginalised of society, as compatible with Christ's mission agenda (Lk 4:18-19, cf. Is 61:1-2).

6.4 Conclusion

The images used in this chapter reflect the African social arrangement according to which ordinary people do not enjoy access to an eminent person. Africans are responding in metaphors to the question asked by Jesus, "*Who do you say I am?*" The question was first addressed to others and then to the disciples, whose answers were the sum of all their previous religious understanding and experience. These answers will be of help to Batswana people to understand who Jesus Christ is for them (Martey 1993:86; Stinton 2004:160). Both God, who is revealed through traditional beliefs, and Jesus Christ, who is known through the Scriptures, can be understood meaningfully by Batswana people only when approached through their traditional background of worship and liturgies (Muzorewa 1985:72). They need a mediator. They concretise Christ's power for Batswana Christians. To the ordinary Motswana Christian, however, Christ remains implicit: he is eclipsed by the prominence of the ancestors. The average Motswana Christians consequently experience problems in their attempt to relate the concept of the cross to their African world-view. African traditional beliefs do not teach about human sacrifices.

In a creative dialogue between culture and the Gospel and Christianity, it can be said that Christianity has a lot to learn from Tswana culture. By the incarnation God assumed the totality of our human condition with its anxieties and hopes. Africans are making Christ sing and dance. They speak through him, and he through them. The African Christ is a healer. From the discussion above it can be inferred that the mediation of the ancestors was restricted to living relatives only, meaning that mediation was not inclusive but exclusive: their mediation was conditional, since it depended on the merits of their relatives. Ancestors also tended to eclipse God in the perceptions of the people, because some people had a tendency to treat ancestors as supreme beings, not as mediators. Questions of biological ancestry are not considered problematic in comprehending Jesus as ancestor, on account of the New Testament teaching regarding

the spiritual adoption of believers into Jesus' family (Mt 12:46-50). The divinity of Jesus causes him to be a "great ancestor, an ancestor with a difference" (Stinton 2004:160). Saying that Jesus is an ancestor, is not to argue that he is of African origin. The ancestral image used to understand Christ, however, allows Christ to come very near to Africans. They desire an uncompromised Christ of the Bible who sets his people free in the here and now, a Christ who is a healer of all their diseases and anxieties. They feel at home with Christ who is in solidarity with them.

Africans Christians live dual standards: when they are with their clans they say the ancestors are the intermediaries between them and God, and when in church they claim that Jesus is the intermediary. This is spiritual betrayal. Christian worship from an African perspective is constituted by the people's awe and joy at Jesus' response in to their experience of life, seen in his activity among people. In the assimilation of the basic worldview and life experience of the African people, the process takes place in a way which makes the Christian faith, as an African one, meaningful to African Christians. This assimilation may be called indigenisation of the Christian faith, as it were, into African soil. But it may just as well be interpreted as the Africanisation of the Gospel and the Christian experience – an African understanding and expression of biblical truths in which people of the African continent feel at home.

The succeeding chapter deepens this discussion by considering the appropriateness of various Christologies in Tswana spirituality at present.

CHAPTER 7   **RELEVANCE OF CHRISTOLOGIES IN TSWANA SPIRITUALITY TODAY**

7.1 Introduction

On the basis of the New Testament witness it is clear that Jesus' teaching and mission placed God at its centre (Kasper 1976:72; Nolan 1988:17; Gaybba 2004:183). In transmitting the Gospel, Western missionaries passed on their portrayal of Christ as a European, white man, as was mentioned earlier in Chapter 3.3.2.1: this is a "trans-coloration of Jesus" (Wessels 1990:159). Conversion to Christianity aimed more at promoting Western cultural, moral and spiritual issues (Schapera 1953:58) than at acceptance of any culture as a vehicle of God's encounter with humanity. Western culture has thus offered an obstacle or hindrance to effective cross-cultural communication of the Christian message. The Christian faith has remained largely foreign to Batswana believers. According to Thoma (1980:107), Christians have Westernised Jesus, as was stated in chapter 3.1. Yet Jesus Christ can be de-Westernised without losing his essential significance as the incarnate Son of God. Non-Western Christians need to remove the Western cultural layers of Christianity, which have kept the Christ bound for so long, in order to reclaim the core of the Christian faith and let Christ be for all human beings, each to praise and honour him in their own mother tongues and dialects, as indicated in chapter 5.3.2., Batswana Christians must dress Christianity in the Tswana cultural heritage if it is to be of any lasting significance to them (Ayandele 1971:3; Okure 1990:59). Unless Batswana Christians reconstruct doctrine in the context of their own worldview, the Christian faith will be irrelevant to them.

McFague (2001:63) writes, "a working theology for us cannot be one from the past". One can continue McFague's argument by saying that even Western theology cannot be a working theology for Africa. Song (1979:11) asserts clearly that Christians "who are not endowed with German eyes should not be prevented from seeing Christ

differently. They must train themselves to see Christ through Chinese eyes, Japanese eyes, African eyes [Tswana eyes – I would specify], Latin American eyes". African theologians have been using Western theological tools in doing African theology, and therefore did not meet the needs of African spirituality. Had they done so, African theology would be more responsive to African cosmology and a worldview centred on Christ, and there would have been continuity between African traditional life and the new faith. Tswana traditional religion contains its own doctrines, laws, taboos and sacred spaces. All life among African people is influenced by an African spirituality. Therefore, Christianity should embrace the core issue of an African spirituality and cosmology that emphasizes communality and relationships. Christianity in Africa should be sensitive to the fact that God-images are also connected to the different ways in which African people describe God through metaphors, traditional events and symbols, as indicated in chapter 1.2. To make a proper diagnosis of God-images used by Batswana people, Christianity should understand the use of metaphoric expressions and concepts, which form an integral part of the way Batswana people express themselves concerning the significance of God's nature and character.

The spirituality of Christianity has presented Jesus as some kind of spirituality, rather than as a person who had a spirituality of his own from which we might be able to learn something. Tswana culture differs from Western culture; therefore a Tswana Christian way of worship should differ from any Western Christian manner of worship; yet Jesus Christ remains the foundation of Christianity. Jesus said '*... no one can come to the Father except through me*' (Jn 14: 6). Any kind of Christian spirituality should be rooted in Jesus' spirituality, affirming the point mentioned in chapter 1.5. The worship of God can only be true and acceptable if done through Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. Nolan (2006: xviii) contends that, "his [Jesus'] spirituality is about the experience and attitudes behind what he said and did, what fired and inspired him." He read the signs of his times and taught his followers to do the same (Mt 16: 3-4). Therefore African Christology and spirituality will be meaningful only if they enhance everyday life. What Christ means for the Africans when he says: '*I am the way, the truth, and the life*' (Jn 14: 6a) would be articulated in an African fashion.

7.2 Christianity is centred in Jesus Christ

African Christians have been comfortably happy with their situation in Christendom (Taylor 1963:16), even though authentic Christianity was alien to them (Omulokole 1998:33). Christianity had been much eroded and corroded in African missionary churches to the point of remaining nothing but formal religion (Myers 1999:238). Conversion involves a change of worldview, whereas acculturation is a superficial conformity to the norms of a dominant invading culture for the sake of survival or a benefit. According to Van der Walt (1994:44), "a worldview is the bridge or link between faith and man's life in the world". Nash (1992:19) concurs that "putting on the right conceptual scheme, that is, viewing the world through the correct worldview, can have important repercussions for the rest of the person's understanding of the events and ideas". Batswana Christians need a worldview that is informed and empowered by Christ who revealed God to humanity (Mk 10:42-45), as stated in chapter 5.4; then their Christian practice of faith will be essentially Christological.

7.2.1 Christians are called to imitate Christ

The only way to know Jesus as the truth is to follow his way (Myers 1999:213). Jesus understood the purpose of the law (*Torah*) as service to human beings. He broke the law whenever he observed that it would do harm to people, as that was never the intention of the law (Nolan 2006:55). Jesus instructs us to go and do likewise, thus giving us the liberty to substitute that context with our own (McBrien 1981:921). He spoke of turning the other cheek instead of taking revenge, of loving one's enemies instead of hating them, of doing good to those who hate you, of blessing those who curse you, and of forgiving them all seventy times seven times (Mt 5:38-43; Lk 6:27-37; Mt 18:22). Jesus did not base the importance of social relationships on the differences of groups and classes,

between religions and nations, and between the rich and the poor (Gittins 2002a: 153), but on people and their needs (Nolan 2006:56).

The missionaries promoted a spiritualisation of discipleship and the biblical message (Wessels 1990:190), rather than making people disciples of Christ. Evangelisation is a two way process: non-Christians can also reveal to Christianity some of the broader implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which it has either forgotten or never discovered (Balasuriya 1981:119). Therefore non-Christians have a role to play in the growth of Christianity. Clearly Jesus Christ is not bound to one specific context, Western or African, as we have seen earlier in chapter 5.4. Different people called Jesus of Nazareth by different names because of their varying contexts (Wessels 1990:192). Faithfulness to Jesus and faithfulness to one's culture are not incompatible obligations (Mt 12:1-8), as indicated in chapter 5.3.2.

7.2.2 The Gospel is culturally conditioned

The Gospel is essentially a cultural reality (Oleka 1998:110; Magesa 2004:18). Stott (1974:435) affirms that "God's self-disclosure in the Bible was given in terms of the hearer's own culture". The Gospel message is understood by Christians when it is communicated within their own cultural context (Oleka 1998:111), because people embrace the Gospel with their own thought patterns and worldviews. The discussion of Kraft's communication principles in chapter 1.7 was intended precisely to demonstrate how the Gospel is understood in different cultural contexts. Kraft's communication theory was helpful in distinguishing culture from faith. Our difficulty in understanding the Gospel is that we bring along our cultural baggage and contemporary cultural assumption (Oleka 1998:111). Louw (1999:2) concurs that images of God are influenced by contexts and are "continuously being shaped by cultural environments, social issues, psychological needs and existential needs". These affect how we read, interpret and

understand the Gospel. Appiah-Kubi (1974:4) argues that "the foreign researcher, however sincere or experienced s/he may be, faces the danger of taking her/his own religion or point of view as normative. Hence there is need for Africans to be interpreters and architects of African Theology". Affirming the point made earlier, in chapter 5.3.2, Christianity takes root in a culture when the liturgy is creatively evolved within that culture. Restricting Christianity to one liturgical form creates the impression that the Holy Spirit is culturally trapped. Two-way dialogue is necessary between two cultures, with both open to the prompting and teaching of the Holy Spirit and the will to surrender themselves to the worldview contained in the Bible (Myers 1999:237).

7.2.3 Language factor

The Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20) is addressed to all nations. It is important for every nation to use its mother tongue, because it helps recipients of the Gospel message to hear it in their own language. Hearing God in one's mother tongue is essential for religious transition (Bediako 1998:10; Bediako 2004:xv). Certain insights about Jesus simply cannot be conveyed as well in English as in the mother tongue (Stinton 2004:273). As Cole (1998:20) points out, "language is a vehicle of communication". Each language conveys its own concepts, thought forms and cultural heritage (Gittins 2002b:36). It is important also to note that God-images are expressed through the metaphors in which Batswana people have found it comfortable to depict their belief system and the way they live and interact with one another, nature and God within a given context.

7.3 Universal relevance of Jesus Christ and Christianity

To accept the universal relevance of Jesus is to accept the Gospel's relevance to the believers' own cultural settings (Bediako 2004:25). If Christianity is truly universal, then

every culture should surrender to Jesus Christ and not to any other culture (Wiredu 1980:xi). In a transformed Christianity any Motswana or African Christian can comfortably worship uninhibited, emotionally or psychologically, in his or her own historical and cultural settings. Jesus Christ is the only centre of Christianity (I Cor 3: 11; Okullu 1974:53; Neill 1961: 9). Batswana Christians have interacted creatively with the person and images of Jesus. The Jesus they believe in is the Jesus who is involved in their lives (Oduyoye 1986:96; Bujo 1990:129; Dulles 1974:21-22).

7.4 Christianity is contextual

In contextual processes a Christian theologian must combine an understanding of thought patterns and worldview of the biblical settings with those of his/her own culture. In evangelising Batswana people, Western missionaries failed to take into account Tswana worldview together with its thought patterns. They did not recognise that an understanding of God's love is context-dependent. Batswana Christians ought therefore to refer to the original thought patterns and worldviews of the Bible, as indicated earlier, in Chapter 2. 1, and to their own contemporary culture in order to understand the Gospel message mentioned in Chapter 3.3.2.2. Once Batswana Christians comprehend the Gospel message in such a way, they will be able to apply it to their contexts and cultures, as illustrated in chapter 6.3. The Gospel and human persons may be culturally conditioned, but the Spirit of God is not bound by time and space.

7.5 Batswana Christians and their own worldview

Being an African can neither be compartmentalised into science, philosophy, religion or ethnology (Setiloane 1975:34), nor can an African understanding of the world be dichotomous, separating physical from spiritual but holistic. This framework consisting of separate areas of life is deeply embedded in the Western part of the Christian church

and in the daily life of its people. This fragmentation of worldviews creates psychological and intellectual incoherence and a kind of multiple personality (Myers 1999:238). This explains the actions of some Christians who go to the doctor for medical advice, ask the church to pray for healing, and visit the traditional healer (*ngaka*) at night. The Tswana traditional conception of worship is integrated in the people's daily lifestyle and experiences. The fact that the *"Word became flesh"* demolishes the barriers that separated the spiritual from the physical. Christianity should consider the worship of God from the point of view of their daily affairs, and not as a one day per week act (Muthengi 1998:257).

Tswana traditional worshippers have something to offer to Christianity in this respect: they do not wait for Sunday to come before they worship their deities. They worship them at any time during the day, as well as weekly and annually. The Gospel of Luke (18:1) encourages Christians to pray without ceasing, but Tswana traditionalists are the ones practising this. African life is essentially religious; therefore Africans will never be contented with a religion that is not able to touch every phase of life and interpret the divine in terms of humanity. What has been wrong, in the relationships between African Christianity and the Christianity of the West, has been the assumption that when Batswana (Africans) become Christians they give up their values and insights. To the contrary: their norms, insights and values continue in their everyday life. Being African Christians today means that we identify fully with our African heritage. We also accept and acknowledge the Lordship of Christ. The biblical worldview is holistic in a sense that the physical world is never understood as being disconnected from the spiritual world. The said worldview is close to this Tswana traditional worldview.

7.5.1 Tswana understanding of Christian community

Jesus was opposed to the Jewish temple as a symbol of institutionalism and exclusiveness, since it was concerned more with power than with justice and love. The missionary churches' view of Christian community is inclined to see the work of Christ as leading to a new, separate and even exclusive community. Tswana or African thinking would however see it as dynamically bursting all barriers: "and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us)" (Mt 1: 23). Mbiti (1990:31) assents: "to be human is to belong to the whole community and to do so involve participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community". When a Motswana enters the Christian community, s/he seeks to find therein the same relatedness as we have described above, where not even death brings separation, because all is undergirded by *Modimo*. If s/he does not find this kind of community in all humankind, s/he seeks it in the closer community of those "who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour like her\him" (Setiloane 1975:36). To that particular Motswana Christian, this new community begins to take the place of his/her tribe in the original setting.

7.6 Incarnation as affirmation of Batswana people's life

The focus falls on the incarnation as the affirmation of Batswana people's lives. For Christianity to be rooted in Batswana Christians means that they perceive Christ as Motswana. That does not mean the historical Jesus was a Motswana, but that the Christ of faith can be seen authentically by a Motswana only through his\her culture and thinking categories. To regard Christ as a Motswana is, in short, to see in Christ a Motswana "Emmanuel," one who dwells among Batswana, in their world of meanings, of signs, and symbols (Okolo 1980:16-17). Jesus as black is crucial for Christology if we truly believe in his continued presence today. The importance of the concept of the black Christ is that it expresses the concreteness of Jesus' continued presence today as the incarnate one who shares our human heritage (Bediako 2004:24), not our colour. God

identified with all people in a spirit of solidarity and compassion (Nolan 2001:167). An 'African Christ' will look, feel and be able to identify with the African person in her/his cultural totality (Wessels 1990:95). The Tswana way of preaching about Jesus resembles the Jesus of the choruses and the hymns. Jesus knows how to dance, clap hands and to cry. Jesus becomes a character who is often acted out, with loud sermons which are interpreted. In the eyes, faces and gestures of the preacher one gains glimpses of different images of Jesus in joy, pain and sympathy, when he appeals for people to follow him. For Africans, it is not they themselves, but Jesus and his Spirit who speaks through them. Nolan (2001:164) concurs that Jesus' followers "felt that they were possessed by his spirit and were being led by his spirit." In them you see Jesus in earnest, speaking out forcefully, gesturing, crying, jumping up and down and sometimes even fainting in the process. Bediako (1990:16) concludes that Christ bridged the gap between the awareness of the existence of God and God's remoteness, being our ancestor *par excellence*; he becomes our mediator who continues to intercede for us. As our ancestor, Christ becomes the new source of our human lineage (Healey & Sybertz 1996:83). Ancestors are important for the preservation of stability and the progress of a community of the living and the dead.

7.7 Contextual relevance of the image of Jesus as ancestor

In the ancestor religion which underlies such an anthropocentric Christology, the Batswana people see the ancestors as denoting origins or roots (Stinton 2004:134; Healey & Sybertz 1996:123; Mogapi 1991:134). Batswana Christians read scripture from within their worldview in order to arrive at an understanding of Christ that deals with the perceived reality of the ancestors (Bediako 2004: 24). In his earthly life, Jesus manifested precisely all those qualities and virtues which Africans attribute to their ancestors and which lead them to invoke the ancestors in daily life. Batswana Christians accept Jesus of Nazareth as the one in whom divinity (*bo-Modimo*) and the total revelation of humanity has never found an equal in any living person (Setiloane 1975:35; Bujo 1992:82). This

means that the human can only be conceived in relation to this God. Jesus' unique experience of God was as his loving Father, his *abba*. Setiloane (1976:131) strongly emphasises that his blood cleanses all humankind. Jesus' Jewish ancestry ceases to be important, because he becomes the heavenly one who in effect becomes universal in a way that our own ancestors cannot (Healey & Sybertz 1996:83; Bediako 1990:13). This makes it possible for Christ to become the ancestor of all humankind. The idea of exemplification corresponds to the notion of African ancestors (Kabasele 1991:123). Jesus becomes the focal point for a full understanding of the ancestors, because of the incarnation of all humanity, and since believers are adopted by faith into the family of God (Walls 1978:13; Stinton 2004:150; Rm 4: 11-12).

An ancestor is someone who is close to the people from which he came. Africans now have something to say about the mystery of the incarnation: God has spoken to humanity at various times and in various places, including through our ancestors, and through Jesus Christ, the unique ancestor. This helps Batswana Christians to appreciate their close association with incarnation (Bediako 2004:24). A common proverb among Africans is "blood is thicker than water" (Healey & Sybertz 1996:83), which includes even baptismal water. It is therefore legitimate to accord Jesus Christ titles more deeply rooted in the culture of the people to whom the message of the Gospel is being addressed. Being a true Christian and being truly a Motswana (African) are not opposed to one other, because to be a true Christian means to be a true human being, since it was Jesus himself who was truly human.

Another major role of African ancestors understood to be fulfilled in Jesus is that of ongoing participation in the life of the human community, specifically as family guardian (Stinton 2004:150). Jesus transcended his blood family (Lk 14:26) and the Jewish community in order to form a new and universal community (Nolan 2006:58; Mugambi 1989: 139; Soares-Prabhu 2003: 93). Jesus lived on earth, and then died, but he is still remembered because he is known to be spiritually present in our midst. Therefore,

through death, Christ becomes our ancestor (Nthamburi 1991:67; Stinton 2004:151). The term "ancestor" can only be applied to Jesus in an analogical way, since to treat him otherwise would be to make of him only one founding ancestor among many. This signifies that Jesus did not only realise the authentic ideal of God-fearing African ancestors, but also infinitely transcended that ideal and brought it to a new completion. No other ancestor can be thought of who was capable of such a complete and effective realisation of the ideal.

The authority of Christ differs substantially from the authority of the ancestors. Jesus was not inspired with a love for power, but with the power of self-sacrificing love (Nurnberger 2007:75). It is an authority that God shares with Christ and that Christ shares with us. Christ's authority leads to freedom and responsibility, rather than to submission and obedience (Mugambi 2002:67). The non-dominating mind of Christ rules by his being a servant to his followers; the message to Christians is that they can only lead in humble service (Bediako 2004: xvii; Nurnberger 2007:75). An ancestor is full of power and exercises authority over human beings (Barreto 2000:59). The fact that Christ possesses authority over all cosmic powers is an indication of his superiority to ancestorship (Pobee 1979:81-98). It appears then, that the appellation of ancestor is inclusive of all other familial images of Christ (Nyamiti 1984:22).

The weakness of an ancestor cult is that it is restrictive, because it is an "ethnocentric" cultural phenomenon (Stinton 2004:152). Jesus did not fulfil all the traditional requirements of ancestorship, such as longevity, marriage, and offspring (Stinton 2004: 155). Jesus' death is questionable in this respect, unless it is interpreted as a sacrificial death.

Ancestors are creatures while Jesus is their creator. The ancestral images come to an end while Jesus is eternal. "Christ fits the category of ancestor because, finally, he is

the synthesis of all mediations" (Stinton 2004:158, Heb 8). Jesus as ancestor is consequently, in this respect too, a viable and meaningful image for Batswana Christians.

7.7.1 Jesus as mediator

The New Testament presents Jesus as a leader (Heb 2: 8ff) and representative of believers in the presence of God (Appiah-Kubi 1987:71). Jesus as a mediator who possesses a human link with the transcendent resembles the function of African ancestors (Stinton 2004:149). The concept of mediators is important in the African heritage; African Christians have naturally interpreted Jesus in relation to such notions. Jesus Christ, "the Second Adam" from heaven (1 Cor 15: 47), becomes for us the only "mediator of a better covenant" (Heb 8: 6) between God and ourselves (1 Tim 2: 5). Because of the fact that ancestors mediate between God and their living relatives, it can be said that a parallel exists between their mediation and that of Christ's mediation. The existence and "remoteness" of God in African traditional religion is bridged in Christ alone. In Christ's death, African Christians have been set free from "the sins committed under an earlier covenant" (Heb 9: 15).

7.8 Conclusion

Setiloane (1976:80) affirms that in Tswana religion God is invisible (Ex 33:20), and a Supreme Being, and Creator. Batswana people believe in the existence of spirits, which is in conformity with biblical teaching, contrary to the assumptions made by Western missionaries, namely that some beliefs were plainly superstitious and should be discarded by those who confess their faith in Christ.

The richness of Jesus' personal experience of God was authentic, out of which flowed his sense of mission, authority, his Gospel and his whole lifestyle. The distinctive essence of Christian experience lies in the relation between Jesus and the Spirit. It is this relationship which provides continuity between the diverse experiences of different believers and those of Jesus himself. The goals of spirituality are set in terms of the Christ who has transcended to a new level of spiritual existence (Macquarrie 1972:48). The Spirit reflects the character of this Christ. Jesus' relationship with God in the Gospels becomes determinative for later Christian experience (Dunn 1975:358). Incarnation illustrates that God transcends all human bondage (Mugambi 1989:147).

Tswana culture and traditional religion bring out features in the face of Christ which have not been revealed before. Batswana Christians should learn from Tswana traditional religion that before they embark upon any project, they should invoke the spirits to bless and help. All this stands as a challenge to Tswana Christianity in its own patterns of worship. Rituals fulfil a dual purpose: that is, firstly, the living communicate with the spiritual world; secondly, rituals have a therapeutic effect: they heal the individual and the clan, and also help preserve unity in the community. Christianity has Christianised Africa, but Africa has not yet Africanised Christianity (Gehman 1987:iii).

Any culture is the creation of sinful human beings; for its own transformation, it has to be purified by the Gospel, which is divinely inspired. If the Gospel was actually intended for the whole of the human family, then all cultures have a right of access to the Gospel, and they may express its presence in ways that are different from African, European and Jewish people. In fellowship, Christians should show openness to sharing and receiving the meaning of the Gospel from other cultures (Mbiti 1987:397). Batswana Christians are spiritually capable of glorifying God through the inherent elements of their religiosity and culture. This does not stand in contrast to the confession, in the Gospel, that there is only one way of approaching God, and that is through Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2: 5-6).

The responsibility of the Gospel is to make sure that human beings are liberated from cultural imprisonment. The biggest challenge to twenty-first century Batswana Christians is to be open to the experience of God, to create new expressions of faith, to worship and mission anew at both individual and corporate level, rather than starting from tradition and institution. The life of the Christian church will only progress when each generation is able creatively to reinterpret its Gospel and its common life out of its own experience of the Spirit and the Word (Dunn 1975: 360).

Batswana Christians do not wish to deny the importance of the Christian tradition; at the same time they desire to bring fresh insights into African Christianity. The purpose of African theology is to present the Gospel in a more intelligible manner to Africans and to deal effectively with problems and situations which are peculiarly African. A theology should be biblically based and relevant to the spiritual needs of the African people. I suggest that the spirituality that results, if it is based on the Scriptures, could bring new insights to other parts of Christendom too.

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