HIDDEN PRESENCES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE AMAXHOSA OF THE EASTERN CAPE AND THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THEM

P T MTUZE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to reopen the debate on the whole question of inculturation in Southern Africa especially in light of the fact that we are now in a multi-lingual and multi-religious state. It is an attempt to rehighlight the plight of the spirituality of the amaXhosa people over the last century when missionary and imperial onslaught relegated it to the doldrums. This plunged the amaXhosa in a crisis that has left them directionless, to put it mildly. This is said because the total onslaught destroyed their self-respect and their identity and begs the question as to whether their acceptability to God was contingent on renouncing their culture especially the hidden prsences - Qamata, the living-dead and the notion of evil spirits.

It is precisely because of these misconceptions regarding African culture and spirituality that the thesis has a strong expository and apologetic bias primarily aimed to address, and put into proper perspective, the significance of the Supreme Being, the living-dead and the evil spirits in African culture. The issues are discussed within the broader socio-historical context.

The thesis is basically comparative in that it uses Celtic spirituality and the approach of the early Celtic church to the question of inculturation as its point of departure and as a foil against which the preposterous actions of the church in Africa should be seen. This comparative element is also reflected in the unmistakable `dichotomy' of Western religion and African spirituality, or better still, lack of spirituality, that was so fervently maintained by the missionaries and the colonialists alike. It is for this reason that I concur with Chidester (1996:xiv) that `the study of religion must find itself, once again, on the frontier'. The study is informed by this approach right through. It should be stressed, from the outset, that the idea is not comparison in order to satisfy our curiosity, nor is it comparison in order to try to authenticate and vindicate the beleaguered African culture. The central idea of the study is to expose the absurdity of the policies of the past century in this regard. The myth of the pure blooded Christianity is confronted, if not exploded. Several examples of both inculturation and continuities between Christianity and other faiths such as the Jewish founding faith are given.

The subtheme of cultural domination subtly spans the whole study culminating in Chapter Four where the blacks begin to appropriate some of the Christian symbols and the whites also begin to assimilate African concepts such as ubuntu.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and scope of study

The main thrust of the study is on hidden presences, i.e. the deity and the attendant presences such as the living-dead and what is generally known as malevolent spirits. The reason for concentrating on these three aspects of African religion is that they actually form the basis of Xhosa spirituality. Everything else flows from, and converges on them. This very issue was the terrain of the struggle in the frantic attempts of the early missionaries to stamp out Xhosa spirituality in all its manifestations. This is attested to by the following comment by Fuller (1907:12) on African religion:

> Religion is a real new ideal also, if by Religion we mean the systematic application of theology and moral laws to human life, physical and spiritual. Often enough people see it stated that the Kafirs have a religion of their own. Some call it "excellent," others "complete"; but those who have studied this so-called religion in its various forms, become convinced that its only power is to degrade, and the only hope for its devotees is to escape from it. They have had a belief in a first Creator, but know nothing about Him. They worship, if they do worship, the ancestor who was the first of their particular branch of the tribe; they people the earth with numerous spirits of the living and dead, who seem according to them to exist for the purpose of doing harm; they have tribal customs which may once have meant well, but are now disgusting. It seems a pity to call this "Religion."

The blatant denial of African religion was coupled with an attitude evinced by some of the colonizers and missionaries that the people they found in Africa and in South Africa in particular were not actually people. They were either subhuman or animals.[1] This can be seen from the following comments by Fuller (1907:7):

> There are certain distinct convictions of the white people that must be taken account of. The Dutch as a class say that it can never be right to teach the Native or to make him a Christian. Their position is that he is either not human, or in some way is of a lower humanity than the white man. The Colonials as a class say that the Native has been spoiled and is being spoiled by

> education. The educated Kafir, who to them is the same as the Christian Kafir, is a good thing made utterly worthless. But both Dutch and Colonials know the value of the Kafir as a labourer, and from the point of view they treat him well. As they put it, they treat him very much as they would their horse and their dog. The English as a class have no uniform method; one day they treat the Kafir almost as an equal, the next as less than worthless. They believe that he is theoretically human; but they treat him according as the whim of the moment suggests.

It is contended that African religion is in tandem with how Junod (c.1938:125), in contradistinction to the above, explains religion:

> Religion is the manifestation of the best in human thought in the sense that it tries to relate human life to God or to the highest spirits. Religion differs from magic in that religion exists only where there is a feeling of dependence or subordination, an act of prayer and propitiation, that is, when man tries to propitiate a force or forces in a personal way, the force or forces being really conceived as also having a personal nature... As soon as the individual believes in spiritual forces with which he can come into personal contact, through ritual, sacrifices or prayers, we have a manifestation of religion.

A subsidiary aim of the study is to show how Christianity failed, dismally, to take cognisance of the significance of African culture in the attempts of the early missionaries to evangelise Africa. The study shows very clearly that the missionaries, consciously or unconsciously, had a double agenda in that they were also de facto agents of the colonial powers who subjugated the propagation of the Word to cultural and political imperialism. Mission had to serve a particular purpose - to ensure that Western civilisation uproots all vestiges of culture and civilisation in Africa so that Africa would be a replica of the colonial powers in every respect.

Saayman (in Prozesky 1990:34) gives one of the fairest explanations of the predicament of the missionaries in colonial history:

> On the other hand the missionaries were as much children of their own time as any Westerner who lived during the era of colonialism. They therefore paternalistically saw many benefits in the whole process of colonialism and the acquiring of Western civilisation, and therefore often, consciously or unconsciously, acted as agents of the colonial authority.

Basing his approach on Comaroff and Comaroff's, Kiernan (in Prozesky 1990:13) rightly points out that:

> The spread of Christianity has meant that those Africans who resisted its religious message internalised to some extent its categories (for example, of time and work) and values (for instance, individualism and egalitarianism). In short there was a complex exchange of influence between the two. Christianity has modified the African worldview: on the other hand, Africans have reinterpreted the Christian message.

The misguided notion that Christianity is a pure religion which never took over anything from receiving cultures across the globe is shown to be a fallacy in that so much of what we consider to be Christian values, rites, festivals etc today could be traced back to pre-Christian or pagan sources. Now that we are into a new non-racial, non-sexist, multi religious South Africa, it is imperative that some of the negative impressions and misrepresentations on African culture and spirituality be exposed and corrected.

The study shows how closely related African spirituality is to Celtic spirituality and even to Judaism and how it was undermined by the early missionaries in their frantic efforts to uproot African culture. The comparison is essential because it shows how successful inculturation was in other parts of the world especially because those concerned decided, consciously, to integrate what was good in the receiving cultures into the new religion. The enormity of the tragedy that happened in Africa can only be fully realized when seen against the backdrop of what happened in other parts of the world, in this instance in the early Irish church where most of the traditional forms of worship were consciously incorporated or baptised into the new religion.

The importance of going back to earlier cultures and traditions and learn from them is articulated as follows by Donaldson, as cited by Snyman (1996:32):

> Margaret Donaldson (unpublished:1) suggests that, if answers are to be found to some of the pressing questions we face today, we ought to go back to earlier cultures and traditions and learn from them. Is there a better place for Presbyterians to look for answers on the issue of spiritual direction than the spirituality of their Celtic forebears? Not only does it make sense in terms of our Scottish/Celtic heritage, but the close relation between Celtic and African spirituality offers

a unique and exciting point of contact for discussion of common spiritual concerns that arise in a multi-cultural church such as ours.

Although the study has a direct bearing on, and relevance to African spirituality in general, it should be stressed that its central focus is the spirituality of the amaXhosa nation of the Eastern Cape Province. The Eastern Cape Province was the cradle of both Christianity and education as well as the frontier battlefield where the conflict between Christianity and African culture was fiercest given the imperial domination culminating in the hundred years of war between the colonizers and the indigenous amaXhosa.

The first chapter is introductory and sets out the main concerns of the study and gives an overview of African spirituality besides placing the discussion in its proper historical context both in terms of the South African church history and global experience.

The second chapter clearly indicates that there are striking similarities between African and Celtic spirituality. This could be ascribed to the fact that both spiritualities owe their origins to pre-Christian traditional cultures. Both cultures were later influenced by extraneous forces such as the Irish Catholic Church in the case of the Celts, and the Western Christian Church, in the case of South Africa. While the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland decided to baptise some of the primitive cultural practices, the church authorities in Africa sought first to destroy the receiving cultures, much to the detriment of the Gospel.

It is amply illustrated that a large part of the crisis in the case of South Africa was thanks to the fact that Christianity came coupled with colonization and imperialism. It, therefore, had a hidden agenda that went way beyond the spread of the Word of God. Cultural domination was part of that agenda. This did not only unleash strong resistance from those to be Christianized but it also clouded the laudable objectives of the early missionaries. The Gospel became the victim of its own propagators.

The thrust of the third chapter is on the Deity and other hidden presences in African spirituality. Because

African spirituality had been colonized, the colonizers who were the early missionaries and their principals refused to recognize the African way of perceiving especially the Deity and the hidden presences. African religion was trampled on and thrown overboard as paganism. No attempt was made to come to grips with the essence of African spirituality as reflected in the African perception of God and the role of the various presences in African society. By refusing to accept this philosophy, on which the very lives of the new converts depended, the early missionaries were instrumental in creating instability in these societies because they removed the very foundations on which they stood.

The Deity, the benevolent presences and the malevolent spirits form the crux of African spirituality. It will be observed here that Africans do not regard the ancestors as "spirits" hence the avoidance of the term "ancestral spirits" wherever possible. The chapter clearly demonstrates how the people's lives are intricately intertwined with their religion. It also shows how the colonial culture gradually impacted on African culture.

Chapter four brings the problem closer home. The buck ends with the Western church which we inherited, willy nilly, and which was, incidentally, very hostile to our culture. A detailed study is made of the areas in which there were tensions and cross-pollination between Western Christian culture and African spirituality.

As amply demonstrated in this chapter, even those African priests who ventured to commend African spirituality, e.g. Calata and Nyoka, did so with the view of overhauling Xhosa spirituality in line with the whims of their spiritual masters. The aim was, in fact, to purge the spirituality of all so-called paganism. No effort was made to get to the bottom of the indigenous spirituality / or spiritualities and yet no effort was spared in condemning it or certain parts of it.

The case study on the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (henceforth known as the CPSA) in chapter four has been deliberately included to give some indication of the ultimate scene when blacks appropriated certain Christian ideals and symbols and incarnated them in some aspects of their traditional religion, with the whites, on the other hand, beginning to show clear signs of tolerance. This emerging

scene becomes even more exciting when seen against the backdrop of current developments in the Order of Ethiopia (now officially renamed the Ethiopian Episcopal Church) which has evolved a culture based liturgy for the incorporation of diviners into the church.

The chapter ends with an exposition of the African concept of ubuntu as seen against current thinking in quantum physics because both emphasise wholeness and integration. Ubuntu is to African spirituality what love is to Christianity and what the holomovement is to quantum physics.

Chapter five is a general conclusion aimed at tying up the main points of the study and highlighting its main thrust and purpose.

1.2 African spirituality: a broad overview

It cannot be gainsaid that the African experience of religion is closer to that of ancient Israel than it is to modern Westernism. The latter tends to enforce a rigid demarcation between the secular and the sacred realm, between the natural and the supernatural whereas in traditional African religion there is no clear line of demarcation between the spiritual and the secular.

Like the Hebrews, the Africans have an immanent view of God. The distinction between God and creation is not as strongly defined as in Western spirituality. This view is summed up as follows by the TEE College (1989:114):

> In African tradition, as in ancient Israel, life belongs to God who "summons it into being, strengthens and preserves it". Religion in this context is not something peripheral, a leisure time activity, but it is a way of life. It impinges upon every aspect of human living. The world therefore cannot be divided into sacred and secular spheres, because the spiritual is experienced everywhere. Rather, the distinction is between good and evil spirits.

The last statement focuses our attention on the main objective of this discussion, the concept of the Deity in African spirituality as well as its relationship to the hidden presences. These hidden presences govern the African people's existence and they give meaning to their lives. As pointed out by the TEE College (1989:114), `God and the ancestral spirits represent all that is creative and

life-affirming, while evil spirits are a threat to vitality, stability and unity'. Every African person's life is affected, in one way or another, by the tension between God, the benevolent presences and the malevolent spirits. This complex interrelationship between these forces is explained as follows by the TEE College (1989:115):

> Religion in African society is therefore not a Sunday garment or an attitude of vague solemnity with regard to birth, marriage and death. It is the way in which people find satisfaction for their daily needs. It has to do with basic human relationships through which allegiance to God finds expression, and with the issues of land, cattle, rain, health, well-being of the family, clan and nation.

In line with this thinking, they continue to explain that according to Africans `milking a cow or smearing the floor with cow dung may not appear, in themselves, to be connected with religion, but they are acts which bring those in this life into contact with the spirits of the deceased relatives and all good things they stand for' (TEE College 1989:115).

In this way, there is always tension between the concept of `God in certain things' and `God in isolation'. Let me hasten to state that African spirituality is basically panentheistic and not pantheistic. Africans never had gods and goddesses as we find in other nations. They do not worship certain objects, not even the ancestors, but they recognise the presence of God in certain natural phenomena. This will come out more clearly when we discuss the other hidden presences.

The tension between African spirituality and Christianity could be confronted creatively in the manner suggested by the Lambeth Conference 1988 (1988:89) which believed that `if the Gospel can free you from cultural oppression, it can also free you from the cultural oppression of a church that does not know how culturally conditioned it is.' This is emphasised because refusal to acknowledge cultural conditioning has caused tension in the church.

1.3 **Early contact and conflict between Christianity and African culture**

Although contact between Christianity and African culture could be traced back to the visit, in 1488, of

Bartholomeu Diaz to the land of the amaXhosa, and intermittent contact between the Khoisan and the Portuguese, English, and Dutch navigators in the period 1488 - 1652 (Pillay and Hofmeyr 1991:232), real conflict between these two rival cultures occurred in the nineteenth century. This conflict is articulated as follows by Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:68):

> During the nineteenth century the Xhosa-Cape frontier was moved eastwards step by step, following conquests by the British Imperial and Cape Colonial forces. By the 1880s, after one hundred years of war, the Xhosa-speaking peoples, from the Zuurveld in the Eastern Cape to Pondoland, had been incorporated under British sovereignty, suffering dispossession of their ancestral land, destruction of their polities, and displacement and domination by alien rulers. Every aspect of their daily lives, their customs, and their beliefs had come under sustained attack from missionaries.

Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport ibid:68) divides the spread of Christianity into Xhosaland in the nineteenth century into three periods. The first from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1820s, the second from the 1820s to around 1860, and the third from the 1860s to 1910.

The struggle for supremacy and the appropriation of sacred symbols manifested itself differently in each period. The first period was open and corresponded with the open frontier. There was borrowing of sacred symbols across borders. The second coincided with the arrival of the British settlers and the intensification of missionary advance into Xhosaland. The third period was termed `the high Imperial era of the closed frontier' (Hodgson in Elphick and Davenport ibid:68), in which `white dominance emerged unquestioned in many zones, and African people began a concerted attempt to liberate their indigenous symbols from an alienated past.'

Van der Kemp who pioneered missionary enterprise among the amaXhosa `condemned their "barbarous" customs, but he never tried to alienate them from their culture or to replace it with European values and consciousness', according to Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:70).

The expulsion and displacement of the amaXhosa from their original ancestral land[2] was a wound that went deeper than the struggle for agricultural land as land was associated with the burial places of revered ancestors, and kraals served as temples for sacrifices and other rituals (see Hodgson in Elphick

and Davenport 1997:71). The onslaught struck at the very core of the people's existence. Take away the land, and you have taken away the blessings of the ancestors because, as said by Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport ibid:71) besides the sacred burial places, `the ritual space of cattle enclosures was also sacred; people could not leave them without fear of losing the blessings and protection of the ancestors, the guardians of the land'.

Beside the wars of colonization, the outbreak of the Nongqawuse cattle killing[3] catastrophe broke, not only the political power of the black rulers, but it also destroyed the cultural integrity of the black people and gave a lot of credibility and leeway to the Christian culture whose protagonists had always warned against the disaster of embracing a `heathen culture'. The struggle to uproot African culture was waged even more relentlessly as the ensuing study reveals. The collective impact of these forces on African people, let alone their culture, and the attitude and the complicity of the church[4] in this process, are spelt out in no uncertain terms by Villa-Vicencio (1990:22):

> The church played an ambiguous role in African society throughout the colonial period. The missionaries actively promoted colonial advances made into African society and in some instances welcomed military aggression against the Xhosa and other chiefdoms. The defeat of African chiefs, the shattered morale of the people, the loss of land, the confiscation of cattle and the collapse of African culture created a milieu within which missionary attempts to lure Africans into their missions became much easier.
>
> Initially rejected by the majority of African chiefs, missionary endeavours met with a measure of success only when the socio-economic, political and cultural structure of Xhosa society began to crumble in the wake of frontier wars. To become a Christian was to become Westernised, to live in square houses, wear Western clothes and participate in the colonial economy.

One of the most vociferous critics of the missionaries, Nosipho Majeke (1952:7) seems to imply that there was a conspiracy between the missionaries and the colonialists, a view that I do not share:

> Throughout all this period, more than half a century, the misionaries are at hand, preparing the way, disarming the chiefs with their message of God's peace - at the same time the God of an all-powerful nation prepared to be their "friend." Thus they make easy the negotiations between the Governor and the chief; they act as the Governor's advisers and assist in drawing up the terms of the "treaties". They become interpreters and "peace-makers" while at the same time they are

military advisers to the invaders.

I wish to stress that my approach will be similar to the line adopted by Comaroff and Comaroff with regard to missionary history as I agree with them that `this is a history of events, not an event history. Because we explore those events within a multidimensional process, an engagement of increasing scale and complexity, we cannot construct a single-stranded chronology in which to fit them' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:39).

The study will be informed by discourse analysis in its approach because, as pointed out by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:11):

> [T]he study of Christianity in Africa is more than an exercise in the analysis of religious change. It is part and parcel of the historical anthropology of colonialism and consciousness, culture and power; of an anthropology concerned at once with the colonizer and the colonized, with structure and agency.

In plain terms, except where the aim is purely comparative in essence, the thrust of the contact between Christianity and African culture will reflect not only the domination on the part of the colonizer, but also the resistance on the part of the colonized and the impact that tension had on both parties. In this way it is hoped that a balanced view of both the confrontation and the resultant evolutionary processes will be ensured.

1.4 **Transfer and transformation of sacred symbols globally and in Celtic spirituality**

The attitude sketched above stems from the false notion that Christianity never assimilated anything either from its Jewish ancestral roots or from neighbouring cultures as its history unfolded. If one considers the vehemence with which the early missionaries condemned all vestiges of traditional African culture and spirituality, one would get the impression that Christianity itself is a pure blooded faith that is untainted by cultural contacts both on the spiritual and the cultural level.

There are several grounds for believing that Christianity took over a number of symbols, rituals and festivals that were, in essence non-Christian in origins. A classical example is the pre-Christian Passover

which has its roots in pre-Christian Judaism. Before the arrival of Christianity Easter denoted `the festival of the vernal equinox, and subsequently, with the coming of Christianity, it denoted the anniversary of the resurrection of Christ' (Douglas 1974:330).

The Holy Eucharist has its roots in the pre-Christian Passover feast as well. According to Douglas (1974:749) `there are features of the meal which Jewish scholars ... have noted as distinguishing features of the Paschal feast'. The similarities are so strong that Douglas (1974:749) cannot but comment:

> The Jewish Passover, based on Ex. xii and interpreted in the Haggadah for Passover and the Mishnaic tractate Pesahim, provides the indispensable key to an understanding of the meal and also the meaning of the Lord's Supper in the early Church.

Another interesting link with the past relates to crucifixion. Jesus was hung on a cross but Scripture refers, at times, to a tree, a symbol of humiliation. Acts 5 :30 reads that `The God of our Fathers raised Jesus from the dead - whom you had killed by hanging on a tree'. This is an oblique reference to pre-Christian practice whereby `dead bodies were occasionally hung on a tree as a warning', according to Douglas (1974:279). The tree, in pre-Christian times, was a symbol of humiliation, hence its substitution for the cross.

It is also interesting to note that atonement, one of the strongest pillars of Christianity, also has its roots in pre-Christian life where sacrifices served the same purpose. The analogy is so close that Hebrew 1X :22 can declare that `without shedding of blood is no remission' (Douglas 1974:108).

The mitre which is now worn proudly by our bishops is an artefact from pre-Christian times, engravings and all (Douglas 1974:832). Still on ecclesiological matters, even the idea of an altar and accompanying incense is not exclusively Christian in origins. It actually emanated from pre-Christian Jewish temples and altars where a variety of utensils, analogous with our Eucharistic vessels, were found, as attested to by Douglas (1974:1233).

It cannot be doubted, therefore, that Christianity took over practices even from non-Jewish nations down

the centuries. The point made here is that all Christian practices and symbols are not purely Christian in origins as many of them predate Christianity, as noted above. The preposterous and arrogant denial of the same right to African cultures is therefore quite surprising.

Pato (1998:6) argues as follows against supremacists and ideologues who regard anything African as syncretistic:

> The claim, therefore, that the use of pre-Christian symbols is syncretistic may only reflect the vested interest of a dominant essentially colonial class. For that matter, Christmas trees, Easter eggs, hot cross buns, to mention only a few, are just as much examples of syncretism. But how often are they points of contention? Indeed, if there were no pre-Christian symbols and ideologues, there could be no effective Christian symbols and ideologues either.

If one were to apply strict anti-syncretism measures to the Christian festivals in the Christian year, one would have to jettison a number of church festivals which are rooted in paganism. Besides Easter, which, as seen above, is a christianized version of the Jewish Passover, (cf.Gunstone 1979:6), there are other festivals that have become so much part of the contemporary church that we have become oblivious of their pagan origins.

Paradoxically, Christmas, generally regarded as the most pagan of church festivals (cf. Kraabel 1982), is one of those festivals that are deeply rooted in paganism because of its origins in the pagan Hellenistic world (Gunstone 1979:23). According to Gunstone (1979:24), `the Church took over the pagan festival and baptized it for her own purposes';a process that he continues to explain as follows:

> When the Christian saw his pagan neighbour looking to the shining light of Sol as a symbol of joy, peace, and eternity, he told him that as a Christian he worshipped another and greater sun - the one foretold by the prophet, `the sun of righteous ... with healing in his wings' (Malachi 4.2).

Few people today are aware that the reference to the sun when talking about Christ has its roots in pagan sun worship which was baptised as indicated above. Fewer still are aware that even our revered form of address - `Peace be with you' is equally pagan in origins, exactly in the same way that the African acclamation `camagu' belongs to pre-Christian ancestor veneration.

Gunstone (1979: 31) points out that `the practice of commemorating the saints on certain days of the year arose out of the cult of martyrs. When the Church began to acquire its own list of martyrs, their memory was honoured likewise'.

The transfer of sacred symbols from one culture and milieu to another is nothing new if one considers what happened in early Ireland. The theme of continuities, as Sheldrake (1995:10) calls this process, in Celtic religious culture, underlies the question where the distinctive pattern of Celtic Christianity came from. Due to spatial limitations, only some of the parallels between pre-Christian culture and early Christianity will be highlighted without discussing these in detail. The aim is to highlight the tolerance of the early Irish church towards pre-Christian ideas.

Kraft (1988:127) cites classical examples of God's own sense of tolerance towards other cultures as reflected in the Bible:

> A third aspect of biblical relativism (again partially overlapping with the other two) is the fact that God takes into account the cultures of the peoples with whom he deals. That is, God conditions his expectations for each society to take account of the cultural patterns in terms of which their lives are lived. True, God works with people for culture change. But he starts by accepting and even endorsing customs practiced by Old Testament peoples that he condemns or at least does not endorse in his dealings with Greco-Roman peoples.

To prove this point, Kraft (1988:127) cites several examples of Jewish practices that God endorsed or condoned, e.g. slavery (Leviticus 25:39-46), polygamy (2 Sam.12:7-8), levirate marriage (Deut.25:5-6) and trial by ordeal (Num.5:11-28). Even Christ accommodated the Mosaic divorce.

Like African culture, Celtic culture addressed the immediate needs of its peoples. Its survival could largely be attributed to the fact that the early Irish church heeded an important principle in cross-cultural situations - cultural validity or cultural relativism which Kraft (1988:49) articulates as follows:

> "Cultural validity" is a doctrine developed by anthropology (ordinarily referred to as "cultural relativism") that maintains that an observer should be careful to evaluate a culture first in terms of its own values, goals, and focuses before venturing to compare it (either positively or

negatively) with any other culture.

As pointed out by Sheldrake (1995:9) `it is fair to say that the Church in Celtic lands took over wholesale so many of the existing cultural and social structures that it seemed to Christianise traditional religion in a more systematic way'.

The first example was a ritual, adapted from pre-Christian origins, called caim. This was a ritual whereby people drew a circle around themselves with the index finger of the right hand when faced with danger (Sheldrake ibid:9). It was done for protection and could be equated with making the sign of the Cross for blessing in Christianity.

Samain was the greatest festival of the Celtic year. It was one of the four major turning points of the seasons marking the end of the year and the beginning of another at the divide between autum and winter. It later came to correspond to the Christian Feast day of All Saints (Sheldrake ibid:10), among others.

Another important cultural issue in old Celtic life was kinship which, no doubt, paved the way for fellowship in early Christianity. It was exactly in such social relations where druidic schools played an important role as precursors of Christian community forms such as the institution of soul friends (anamchara) and other Celtic ascetics (Sheldrake ibid:20). Celtic society was a close-knit society.

Even the Irish society's preference for the monastic order to episcopacy had its roots in old Irish social life which was based on kinship instead of rigid stratification. However, Sheldrake (ibid:14) stresses that a `rigid antithesis between monastic and conventional pastoral organisation in the Celtic church is far too crude'.

When it comes to continuity of place there were also some interesting developments. The first of these

was the Celtic tendency to name places in terms of events. It later manifested itself in the naming of Christian places in the landscape. According to sources, the original Celtic Church sites were simply planted on pre-Christian places of religious or social significance (Sheldrake ibid:18). A good example of this translation was Armagh in Ireland which took its name (Ard Macha) from a pagan goddess.

There were also various rural sacred sites in Ireland which had particular associations with tribal celebrations, races and games and which were later translated into graves of saints. A good example of this is the number of Churches dedicated to St Helen from Ellen the Celtic goddess of three heads who was associated with wells (Sheldrake ibid:18).

Pagan deities were sometimes retained in Christian demonology. The attributes and even the names of earlier gods and their characteristics were kept alive by the early Irish Church and allocated to saints. The saints were given attributes of the former gods. There is also a strong correlation between the pantheon of old gods and the Christian belief in angels. The lower gods could be translated as lower grades of spiritual beings under a single supreme God (Sheldrake ibid:20).

Another continuity of association with pre-Christian `high places' was with regard to St Michael which was built on a traditional wooded Celtic burial mound.

The Celts felt themselves surrounded by gods who were close at hand rather than distant and disengaged. These gods offered fertility and protection. The Chief was the custodian of these powers in the same way as the role later played by the abbot and the abbess in the monastery.

The Celts' belief in afterlife was a blessing for the church because it easily translated into resurrection (Cunliffe 1992:23).

Even old Celtic sculpture and their carved stone pillars translated into the high Crosses that characterised the early church.

It is also quite remarkable to compare the Celtics' drinking from a common cup carried from person to person by a slave (Cunliffe ibid:42) to the chalice and the role of the priest, God's own slave, in the church. St Paul (Eph.3:1) calls himself `the prisoner of Jesus Christ'.

A pagan trinity existed in pre-Christian Ireland and this easily translated into the Divine Christian Trinity.

All the above ensured continuity from pagan culture and cosmology to early Christianity. Even the pagan worship of the Sungod translated very well into the Christian Supreme Being (De Paor 1993:10).

From the above, it cannot be doubted that Christianity found easier acceptance in early Celtic society because it was based on what the people knew. It confirmed what they could relate to instead of trying to destroy what they knew. It remains a great pity that those who carried the Gospel into Africa worked for the decimation of African culture and religion instead of building on it. This decision to put Christian values on a collision course with African values is regrettable.

Spatial constraints do not allow a more detailed discussion of the cross pollination between pre-Christian and Christian symbols, rituals and festivals. Suffice to say that the fallacy of a pure blooded Christianity is a myth.

Contrary to what has been sketched above, the seed of the bias against African religion was sown at the very inception of the church in South Africa. Pato (1998:5) articulates the attitude of Bishop Gray, the founder of the Anglican Church in South Africa as follows in this regard:

> When he founded the CPSA in 1870, the church Gray knew and which he represented was his home church, the Church of England. Thus the CPSA was structured to be like the church at "home", England. The dominant features became, and to a large extent still are, those of the Church of England.

It is in light of this attitude that it was felt imperative to present a case study of the relations between the black congregations of the CPSA and their white counterparts in the Eastern Cape.

1.5 **Conclusion**

This introductory chapter highlighted the primary objectives of the study as well as methodological issues. Besides giving an overview of African spirituality, it also placed the study in perspective by sketching the early missionary history in the Eastern Cape as well as how the early Celtic church addressed similar issues.

Notes:

1. Chidester (1996:14) confirms this by commenting that `in many cases the diagnosis of an alien society without religion was delivered bluntly in the assertion that such people were brutes or beasts' and that `as animals by comparison to Europeans, ...they lacked any recognisable human right or entitlement to the land in which they lived'.

2. The unholy alliance between colonizer and missionary had its roots in the firm belief that the one complemented the other as can be seen in Ricards (n.d.: 54).

3. See also Chidester (1996:103).

4. See also Encyclopedia Britannica (1975:1014) for similar colonial insensitivity in China.

CHAPTER TWO

ASPECTS OF AFRICAN AND CELTIC SPIRITUALITY : SOME PARALLELS AND COMMONALITIES.

2.1. **Introduction**

It should be stressed from the outset that this is a broad comparison of some of the salient features of Celtic spirituality and African spirituality. The aim is not to seek or force a one to one correspondence between the two spiritualities but to show that there are striking similarities and commonalities between them. Sometimes the discussion goes beyond issues that are manifestly spiritual to purely cultural issues. The reason for this is that it is sometimes difficult to separate the two.[1] It also depends on how narrowly one defines spirituality because, as pointed out by Schneiders (1989:679) `the term has broadened to connote the whole of the life of faith and even the life of the person as a whole, including its bodily, psychological, social, and political dimensions'.

Two factors seem to undergird these similarities. The first is that both spiritualities emanated from pagan or pre-Christian cultures that seem to have a lot in common as will be seen from this discussion. The second factor relates to similar historical developments and evolutionary processes in both Ireland and South Africa. Both were heavily influenced by foreign imperial powers, the Romans and the British, respectively, and both had Christianity foisted on them willy nilly although the modus operandi differed in some cases.

In Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church authorities resorted to baptizing some of the pagan cultural practices thereby integrating or grafting them into the new faith. In Africa, the colonizers sought to destroy what was perceived to be pagan cultures so that they could replace them with the culture of the colonizers. Christianization, therefore, went hand in hand with imperialism. A lot of energy was wasted on trying to rid African converts of their indigenous culture. They had to be given new names, a new God, a new form of worship, a new lifestyle and, to crown it all, a new culture. No doubt, they entered the new faith as underdogs, as putty to be moulded and manipulated by the missionaries.

De Waal (1991:14) decries this situation when she says:

> The price that the Church has paid for its neglect of the Celtic tradition was thus brought home to me very forcibly in Africa. If the nineteenth-century missionaries had been able to speak to the African in these more primal and universal terms that had resonance with what they already knew, perhaps that might have meant a very great difference.

This does not mean that the Celts were better off. They also faced difficult odds as stated by Cunliffe (1992:33):

> They terrified and fascinated their Greek and Roman neighbours, these "barbarian" inhabitants of the European heartland. They had no written history, not even a written language of their own, no dominant city- states to impose order, no clear-cut boundaries.

Hughes (1987:1) sums up the attitude of the colonial invaders, eg. Gerald of Wales, to the primitive Celts:

> It is generally recognized that his information was unsatisfactory and his point of view prejudiced: nevertheless his writings throw some light on an invader's attitude to the native Irish. Gerald stresses the primitive character of their way of life ... They are lazy people, who think that `the greatest pleasure is not to work and the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty'. Their clothes and fashions are odd, their customs barbarous.

2.2. **A compendium of parallels and similarities between African and Celtic spirituality**

2.2.1 **Kinship and kingship**

The Celtic church, according to Donaldson (1994:1) `was familial or family based in its organisation. Celtic society was rural and the basic units of settlement and social organisation were the family and the clan. There is almost a comparison with the extended family of the kraal in African society.' As pointed out by De Waal (1991:24), `the pagan Celts in Ireland and throughout Europe value their families and tribal affiliations.'

African tribal communities are also largely familial. Kinship plays an important role in the people's lives. Families and extended families constitute clans which in turn form tribes[2] exactly as explained by Bradley (1993:5) with regard to primitive Celtic society:

> In marked contrast to the centralised and urban nature of Roman society the Celts' lifestyle was rural and strongly tribal. Their lands were divided into small kingdoms loosely ruled by princes. Kingship was regarded as a sacred office and had its own hierarchy with smaller chiefs and princes paying allegiance to a high king. In general terms, however, Celtic society was non- hierarchical and decentralised, being made up of a series of loosely organised and largely autonomous communities bound together by family ties much along the line of the clan in the Scottish highlands.

This resonates with what was found in Africa at the peak of its tribal societies. Dwane (1989:107) articulates this as follows:

> Xhosas believe that the human family consists in households, clans, tribes, nations, and their respective ancestries. Those who are in this life, are governed by the overall injunction to preserve certain key values, which converge upon, and are subsumed in the concept ubuntu.

With the passing of time and the introduction of the notorious closer settlements, the familial character of the basic unit changed but its tribal structure remained.[3] With different people forced to live together in rural villages instead of the scattered family houses of the past, the basic units tended to become more heterogeneous. The different levels of chiefs ruled over particular tribes as kingship contributed to tribal cohesion. This cohesion centred around the concept and way of life that Dwane touched on above and which he (Dwane 1989:107) explains as follows:

> Ubuntu broadly speaking is the idea that other people's humanity and its claims upon one must be taken seriously. It is the Xhosa version of the precept that we must treat others as we would expect them to treat us. The Xhosas say `unyawo alunampumlo' - tomorrow you might be a stranger and find yourself dependent upon someone else's mercies; so take care how you treat the people you encounter.

African chiefs contributed to the establishment of churches by granting the missionaries land on which to build churches. The same happened in Ireland. Maire and Liam de Paor (1978:33) say in this regard:

> Although not all the Irish kings accepted Christianity from Patrick - Loiguire the high king, among others, remaining pagan - there was little opposition to his ministry and he was permitted to move through the country, baptizing, confirming, ordaining clergy, and founding churches. He speaks of `countless numbers' of converts and many of the petty kings are recorded as making grants of land for the building of churches.

The economies of both societies were pastoral and agricultural. There were no cities or towns. People lived in tribal villages mainly as separate clans. Coupled with the strong pre-Christian culture that had evolved over many years, this life offered all the conditions for receiving the Christian faith except for sporadic outbreaks of war which sometimes disturbed the peace and led to large-scale destruction of what had been achieved. A good example that comes to mind was the burning down of the old Lovedale during one of the frontier wars. This led to the missionaries' deciding to send Tiyo Soga, the first black to be ordained as priest, to Scotland for training and ordination.

In these societies cattle played an important role, hence the following remark by Maire and Liam de Paor (1978:77):

> The importance of cattle is amply demonstrated not only by the laws, the stories, and the annals, but also by the results of archeological excavation.

Another classical indicator of this closeknit family life was the Celtic practice of drinking from a common cup carried from person to person by a slave (Cunliffe 1992:42). Except for the slave, this practice is still prevalent in African societies where the beaker has to be passed on from person to person until it reaches the last person at the beer party. The amaXhosa, therefore, found the chalice and the communal drinking of the holy eucharistic wine something they could easily relate to.

It is also interesting to note another parallel between these two nations concerning the storage of grain. In both societies grain was stored in below-ground silos for long-term use or in small granaries above ground to keep it away from damp and from rodents (Cunliffe 1992:60). The ground silos or cornpits (izisele) were a common feature of traditional African society. The same applied to the granaries (iindladla) which were used to store grain above ground.

The dancing sun is another interesting commonality in the two cultures. O' Donoghue (1993:15) also points out that a striking feature of life in Ireland `is the custom of going to see the sun rising on Easter morning with the expectation that it may move and dance as a kind of manifestation of this central mystery of the risen Christ'. I remember, as a young boy, how awe inspiring it was on the farms when all of us, in our best Christmas clothes, stood with our parents watching the rising sun dance! Funnily enough, it no longer seems to dance anymore now.

Still on the social front, there is another remarkable parallel between Celtic and African spirituality. This involves children. Bradley (1993:43) points out that it was common practice for primitive Irish people to hand a newly- born baby over the fire. This practice used to be widely followed in primitive Xhosa societies. A newly-born child would be swung over a fire across the smoke of particular herbs. The belief was that the smoke from the herbs would strengthen the child against adversity especially physical abuse. The missionaries eschewed the practice especially because they abhorred the words that were purportedly uttered while swinging the child over the fire : "You must deny even what you know" ("uze ukhanyele into oyaziyo").[4] If these words were true, then one would have to find the rationale behind this sort of utterance. It could have been that it started with wars and the torture of captives. Africans, like many other nations, detest turncoats and spies. One has only to remember what happened in more recent years when the socalled spies (iimpimpi) were killed by the notorious necklace method. Rather than risk this fate, one had to deny all knowledge of actions that were likely to result in selling out.

2.2.2 **Naming in terms of events**

The Celts had a tendency to name places in terms of events. Later this manifested itself in the naming of Christian places in the landscape. According to sources, the original Church sites were simply planted on pre-Christian places of religious or social significance (Sheldrake 1995:18).

Among the amaXhosa people are sometimes named after certain events, eg. Nomvula and Mvuleni, female and male respectively, were born on a day or time when there was abundant rainfall. Nomfazwe's birth coincided with war while Nonkwenkwezi was born in 1910 when the historical

Haley's Comet was spotted. Naming people after events seems to be the closest parallel to the Celtic practice of naming places after events. As a non-recording nation, the amaXhosa find it difficult to associate the current place names with historical events.

2.2.3 **The gods and the spirits of the departed**

The Celts felt themselves surrounded by gods who were close at hand rather than distant and disengaged. These gods ensured fertility and protection. It cannot be gainsaid that some African nations have their gods or divinities, eg. the 401 Yoruban divinities (orisa) mentioned in Thorpe (1991:91), but the amaXhosa, as far as could be ascertained, never really had any gods. The closest parallel to this in Xhosa society are the living-dead who are benevolent beings (not spirits) whose main function is to ensure good life and well-being except when someone has gone against social and ritual norms in which case they exercise their prerogative to punish the offender.[5]

Both the Celts and the Africans believe in afterlife. The Celts' attitude to the world to come is shown with great clarity by the way their graves were furnished with the equipment they would need, each according to his status (Cunliffe 1992:23).

The amaXhosa also used to bury the male heads-of-household in the same way. The man would be buried with his pipe, tobacco and sometimes with some maize seed or millet so that he could sow and cultivate crops when he reaches his destination. It was also not uncommon to see him buried with his weapons - a stick, a spear and a shield.

The reverence which the amaXhosa have for the departed is shown in the way in which they perform various rituals after the death of a head-of-household. Besides the ritual to send him off to his ancestors (ukukhapha), another ritual has to be performed after a few years to bring him back home (ukubuyisa) so that he can be with his family albeit in an invisible form. It is this being that ensures the link between the living and the Deity. The living-dead being so close to the Deity act as intermediaries between the living, the dead and the Deity. That is why Ferguson (1988:16) rightly points out that `only a tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual'. The African God is immanent but he cannot be

approached directly. Like the Chief, access to him is via the councillors, in this case, the living-dead conjured up as invisible beings and not really as "spirits".

The most important issue in Celtic spirituality is the presence of God throughout creation. God is presented as a Triune God - God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - in the various prayers ranging from the kindling of the fire in the morning and smooring it in the evening, on the one side, to a variety of other protection prayers, on the other. As pointed out by O' Donoghue (1993:52) there is always `a clear distinction between what is seen and understood and what lies beyond vision and understanding'.

There seems to be some correlation between the hatching blessing and its attendant rituals on the one side, and the imbeleko ritual on the other. According to O' Donoghue (1993:54ff) `this work of putting the hen to hatching was seen in terms of a ritual which linked it up with the heavenly bodies and with the heavenly presences'.

The invocation of the presence of God in this act of re-creation resonates with the invocation of the ancestors as the plenipotentiaries of Qamata during the imbeleko ceremony which is also aimed at enhancing creation and linking the hidden presences with the visible presences. The Celtic ritual enacted by the woman's going sunwise with the little basket as she sets out to put the eggs to hatch, corresponds with the African woman's act of presenting her child to a member of the family who comes up to the doorway holding a goat by its horns before it is slaughtered as a ritual to introduce the new member of the family to the living and the living-dead. Both rituals convert ordinary reproductive actions into sacred creation exercises. (See also O' Donoghue 1993:56).

It is obvious from the above that the question of hidden presences is pivotal in Celtic spirituality, as stressed by O' Donoghue (1993:59):

> The people of the Carmina Gadelica lived in a world of many dimensions, some of them entirely hidden from our modern eyes. These dimensions opened up in many directions, opened into regions down in the depths but more especially upwards to `The Sacred Three' and `the Name that is Highest of all'.

In contrast to the ancestors in African spirituality, angels and saints played a crucial role in Celtic spirituality. These presences depended on careful consideration and some deep rooted imagination as this belief system crumbles in the face of dogmatism and scepticism as pointed out by O' Donoghue (1993:61).

> The angelic world opens up at the margins of this world where a certain kind of imagination reveals tentatively and faintly, never obviously, a world of light so delicate and tenuous that it is blown away by both dogmatism and scepticism.

The Celts also believed in the ancestral presences which they equated with angels. This is explained as follows by O' Donoghue (1993:69):

> There is a sense in which, for the people of the Carmina, the dead are always present in the elements and in the seasons and changes of nature, being as it were `ministering angels', that is, human beings who are taken into the work of angels in the world `beyond' that is within our everyday world.

2.2.4 **Malevolent spirits**

It is interesting to note that both the Celts and Africans believed in the presence of malevolent spirits. They are not ashamed to express their fear for these malevolent forces. The `caim' and other protection prayers clearly indicate that this fear was a reality in their lives.

Celtic Christianity, according to Bradley (1993:45) recognised the existence of good and evil forces because `their view derived from pre-Christian belief in a world populated by good and evil spirits, a world of spells and incantations ... it also had strong foundations in the sense of demonology and the portrayal of a world in the grip of evil forces which is so clearly found in the Bible'.

The presence of evil forces in Celtic spirituality is explained as follows by O' Donoghue (1993:64):

> Now and then in the Carmina Gadelica we come across references to evil beings and forces contrary to human well-being. Only now and then, only here and there, but enough to let us see that these folk were deeply conscious of the Adversary, variously named, variously personalised.

De Waal (1991:111) also expresses this quite poignantly:

> The Celtic world was one in which men and women feared the reality of evil. They were willing to admit the power of the forces of darkness. They did not attempt to deny sin, pain and suffering. There was no running away here. They did not hesitate either to name the dark powers or recognize the part that they played in their lives. Today we are rarely as honest. Perhaps we are just beginning to face up to sin and evil and to talk about them.

It is also interesting to note the commonalities between the Celts and Africans on the cause of some illnesses. As pointed out by Cunliffe (1992:69), `the Celts believed that if a human being was at risk through serious disease or because of exposure to danger, it was because the gods were wrathful. The only way to placate the antagonism, and to save the endangered life, was therefore to offer another life in its place. Criminals were preferred as sacrifices'.

Of course the main commonality here is with reference to the cause of some illnesses which is ascribed to the agency of the living-dead who are by nature benevolent. This philosophy among the amaXhosa forms the basis of Jordan's monumental novel, The Wrath of the ancestors, where large scale disaster follows blatant disregard of traditional customs.

This leads us to another clear correlation between Celtic and African spirituality - human agency in the manipulation of evil forces. O' Donoghue (1993:65) contends that `it would be naive to rule out the possibility of connivance and collusion on the part of men and women with the destructive forces, variously understood and invoked.'

Like in African spirituality the Celts were conscious of a number of beings which were connected with evil forces. One type of these is explained as follows by O' Donoghue (1993:65ff):

> But as a rule the Shee or Leannawn Shee were not so much evil as mischievous, capable of leading humans a merry dance if they are interfered with.

Because Celtic spirituality recognised the presence of antagonistic or malevolent spirits, the Celts also believed that salvation was possible through Christ and his many powers in the same way that Africans believed that Qamata had the power to protect them from all kinds of evils.

While the Trinity, theophany and the harmony in creation are well known hallmarks of Celtic spirituality, the Celts' belief in the existence of malevolent spirits and the impact this had on their lives are two issues that are not as fully appreciated.

One of the strongest resemblances between Celtic and African spirituality is their openness about the presence of malevolent spirits. Both spiritualities acknowledge the presence of evil forces that threaten people's daily lives, hence the proliferation of protection prayers in Celtic spirituality and hence the strong belief in the ancestors as protectors in African society.

The best known piece of writing in regard to protection in Celtic society is the hymn or invocation known as St Patrick's Breastplate, otherwise known as the Deer's Cry. St Patrick's Breastplate takes us to the heart of Celtic spirituality. This type of prayer is called a Lorica (protection prayer) and it is a commonly found form of prayer, both in medieval manuscript collections and in the material collected in the 19th Century by Alexander Carmichael. The term `Lorica' means "breastplate". It is a military/defensive term, referring to the armour worn by a soldier. It is this reliance on God's unfailing protection by the Celts that has led Bradley (1993:32) to stress, in this regard, that Celtic spirituality `is shot through with a sense of the presence of God and it powerfully invokes his protection against the forces of evil'.

It cannot be gainsaid that one of the primary evils against which protection had to be sought was the demonic powers. Prayers such as St Patrick's Breastplate aimed at counteracting such menace by invoking God's supreme power and presence. O' Donoghue (1989:57) articulates this as follows:

> Since the Lorica is a protection prayer its main purpose is to deal with the enemies that menace the wayfarer. Some of the enemies against which protection is sought are evil chances of life: death by fire, by wounding, by drowning. The great enemy is the demon. For the people of the Lorica the demon is a very concrete and personal reality, powerful, subtle, cruel, unrelenting.

The demon resonates with the evil spirits that Africans associate with sorcery. Because the Celts were acutely aware of the seen and the unseen dangers that surrounded them, God's protection was a sine qua non in their lives. As confirmed by De Waal (1988:159) `in a life that was full of danger and uncertainty prayers for protection and the shielding of God was seen as a very immediate reality'.

In both cultures dreams and visions play a parallel role. The Celts attached great significance to dreams as can be seen in the Lives of saints. Sellner (1993:16) remarks as follows about the importance of dreams in Celtic society:

> This Celtic Christian spirituality was very much the child of the pagan culture which preceded it, one that valued poetic imagination and artistic creativity, kinship relations and the warmth of the hearth, the wonder of stories and the guidance of dreams.

Among the amaXhosa dreams are a means of communication between the living and the dead. It is through dreams that one would get a message from the ancestors telling one to slaughter a beast for a particular ritual. This also resonates with Sellner's (1993:30) statement that `the dead saints appear to their friends, sometimes in dreams or in visions in which their souls are seen to be carried to heaven'.

A classical example of the importance of dreams in Xhosa society is the historical Nongqawuse dream in which she purportedly had a vision of her ancestors who told her to tell the people to destroy all their livestock and empty all their ground silos because the ancestors were about to send armies to drive the white people to the sea after which food would be made available in abundance. Most of the chiefs believed her because it was generally known that ancestors appear in dreams and visions.

2.2.5 **Plants with medicinal powers**

Because of the bond between both peoples and nature, healing played an important role in Celtic and African spirituality. `The Celts approached the natural world with a feeling of familiarity and a sense of reverence and awe' (De Waal 1991:89). According to their philosophy, `all good things come from God and this includes the medicinal plants and healing powers. God's grace is everywhere, even in medicinal plants' (Mackey 1989:13).

Needless to say that Africans also believe in the potency of certain medicinal plants. These plants are said to cure a variety of ailments.[6] It is only in recent years that western medicine is moving towards some co-operation between western doctors and traditional healers, an attempt which aims to restore the ties that were broken by western religion which refused to recognise traditional medicine.

2.2.6 **Closeness to nature**

Donaldson (1994:4) stresses that `a closeness and harmonious relationship with nature was another feature of the Celtic Church. This can be seen in many ways. Peregrenatio itself depended on entrusting oneself to the elements in God's created world'.

There are several pointers to the fact that Africans too were closely related with nature, if not now, at least in the not so distant past. The first of these is the use of certain animals as totems among some of the black tribes. Junod (1938:107) explains totemism as follows:

> Totemism is the belief that there exists between a social group, a clan or a family, an intimate relationship with one given natural object, especially an animal, which is thus considered as the emblem of such a clan or family. It is probable that all Bantu tribes went through a totemic period, to-day this totemism has practically disappeared amongst Southern Bantu, and one can only find traces of it in some manifestations of the life of the group.

One of these totems is the snake "uMajola" which forms the crux of Jordan's story in The Wrath of the ancestors. The second is the elephant among the amaHlubi especially those called Ndlovu, the elephant. Among the Sotho tribes we have the Taung (Lion) tribe, to mention but a few. Another strong indicator can be found in such fossilized forms of language as idioms and expressions, of which we have large numbers, that relate to animals, wildlife and the landscape.[7] Nature is respected because it is believed that it reflects God. De Waal (1991:78) clearly indicates that this theophany should not be confused with pantheism:

> There is never any confusion between the Creator and the world of his creating. God is involved in his creation, and is close to everything that he has made in his world, but there is here a vision of creation which yet avoids pantheism.

2.2.7 **The Celtic and the South African bards**

There are striking similarities between the Celtic bard[8] and the traditional African bard or praise poet as some prefer to call them as pointed out by Mafeje (1967:195):

> I am here suggesting a similarity between the role of the Celtic bard and that of the South African bard, despite the fact that some linguists such as Jordan believe that the South African traditional bards are a genre `for which no exact parallel is to be found either in classical or in modern Western poetry'. I think, institutionally, there are parallels and this can be seen from the way the South African bard arose ...

Mafeje (1967:196) summarizes the parallels between these bards, the Celtic and the South Africa bards, as follows:

(i) both the European and the South African bards came from the commoner rank;

(ii) their positions depended on their general acceptance by the people;

(iii) the roles of both types are characterized by some measure of freedom to criticize, whether subtly or openly, those in authority, i.e. the Kings and Chiefs.

2.2.8 **The Celtic and the Xhosa sense of sin**

Needless to say that Celtic Christianity was characterized by a discernible sense of sin and sorrow. According to de Waal (1991:101) `the sense of sin, reparation for sin, extreme austerity and asceticism are equally part of the Celtic way to God, and give it its power and strength as much as does its creation-centred spirituality'.

In contradistinction, the amaXhosa had no perception of sin in the Western theological sense, but they had a clear sense of what is wrong and what is right. To them, wrongdoing went further than committing an offence against an unseen God. All wrongs were wrongs against persons, dead or alive. The living dead were wronged too when the person concerned failed to do his duty towards them or when he had committed an incestuous act.

There were, however, times when peoples' actions came close to sinfulness as we know it in the Bible. If a boy's operation took extraordinarily long to heal at the circumcision school, he was confronted by the guardian (ikhankatha) and told to confess the wrong that he might have done to some member of the family. This usually involved sexual acts that were incestuous. As can be seen, this came very close to confession and sin in the Biblical sense of the word. The guardian (ikhankatha) in this context came close to filling the parallel position of a soul-friend (anamchara).

2.2.9 **Polygamy**

The last parallel between the Celts and Africans relates to the much debated issue of polygamy. Hughes (1979:47) explains the practice in Irish society as follows:

> This is made more complicated by the fact that a woman might have children by more than one husband, while a man very probably had children by more than one wife. For Irish society was polygamous. This does not mean that society was permissive. On the contrary, marriages must have been carefully arranged and illegal unions carried severe deterrants. But a man might have a chief wife and a subordinate wife or wives (the usual word - a borrowing - is adaltrach), who are all described as `lawful women'.

This resonates with practice in Africa in general where, in traditional societies, men were allowed to marry as many wives as they could afford to support. Soga (c.1931:136) remarks as follows about polygamy:

> The custom of polygamy may be said to be universal among all tribes of Bantu origin. It is, however, practised in varying degrees by different tribes, some of which though recognising polygamy as the tribal custom largely practise monogamy. The reason for this is practical and economic rather than ethical.

The custom bore the brunt of missionary wrath. Only one person in the colonial times came to its defence. This was none other than Bishop Colenso who found it very difficult to refuse to admit polygamists to the church. Dwane (1989:118) reflects Colenso's views as follows:

> I feel very strongly that the usual practice of enforcing the separation of wives from their husbands, upon conversion to Christianity, is quite unwarrantable, and opposed to the plain teaching of our Lord. It is placing a stumbling block, which he has not set, in the way of receiving the Gospel ... If natives become Christians before their marriage, they would, of course, be allowed only one wife.

It cannot be doubted that these views were too radical for the Church of the time. This led to strained relations between Colenso and his superiors. Added to Colenso's other revolutionary views on African culture and the church, they were part of his endless strife with the Metropolitan, ultimately leading to his breaking away from the established church.

The Western church militated against polygamy throughout Africa. The only other missionary who resisted its ravages in this regard was Bachmann in Tanzania. He also refused to turn away polygamists from the church. Fiedler (1996:62) reports this confrontation with the church as follows:

> ... after some years he extended his conviction that opposition to polygamy was not part of the gospel but an ill-suited import from Western culture to its consequence, when he reached the conclusion that the church would not only have to agree to polygamous unions contracted before baptism but also if they were contracted after baptism.

A close examination of the situation in Africa as a whole reveals the real cancer in the whole issue - Western civilization and its disastrous effects on indigenous cultures. One cannot but agree with Gutmann's feelings on European civilization, as reported by Fiedler (1996:35):

> Gutmann saw two adversaries to the work of the church, the first being Islam, the second and the much more dangerous one being civilization... But he saw European civilization as a much more formidable enemy because it destroyed the very social organisms which were destined by God to be the vessel to receive the gospel.

The main objection to Western civilization in this context is that it went hand in hand with imperialism as attested to by John Philip (1828:ix - x):

> While our missionaries, beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are by the most unexceptionable means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire.

2.3. **Conclusion**

One could go on ad nauseum trying to highlight commonalities and parallels between these two spiritualities and cultures. Suffice to say that there are striking similarities and commonalities in the peoples' lives, cultures and spiritualities as evidenced in the foregoing compendium.

It should also be stressed that the material has been deliberately presented in broad perspective rather than in-depth in order to show the extent of the commonalities. Of course it is to be understood that there is a trade off here in that these could not all be treated in detail.

Notes:

1. Mbiti (1994:13) associates African religion with African heritage in general and later comments that "African religion is found in all aspects of life" (Mbiti 1994:29).
2. See Mbiti (1994:175).
3. See also Soga (c.1931:17).

4. Soga (1931) explains the custom but refrains from commenting on the denying part of it. Elliot (1970:56), on the other hand, has an interesting commentary on this vexing question:

> This ceremony has tremendous significance in the child's later life because it means he must never betray his friends or give them away. Even though he knows they have done wrong, he is supposed to deny all knowledge and act as if he knew nothing.

5. See Soga (c.1931:318).

6. Soga (c.1931:216) even mentions intelezi (Bulbine Asphodeloides), a plant said to have power to prevent lightning.

7. Soga (c.1931:329-350) gives a list of such idioms and metaphors.

8. Like the African bards who strove to uphold social justice and harmony in their communities, the Celtic bards, according to Simpson (1995:13) promoted the spread of Christianity:

> Bards played a key role in Celtic life. They were the storytellers, poets and songsters who, together with the seers who interpreted the meaning, passed on the message so that it touched parts the formal church functionaries could never reach. This enabled Christianity to survive fierce ideological onslaughts.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DEITY AND OTHER PRESENCES IN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

3.1. **Introduction**

Before embarking on this theme, allow me to try to explain my understanding of spirituality as used in this discussion. Spirituality can mean different things to different people, let alone different nations. Its meaning is not static as could be seen from the fact that `in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it stood for the clergy as a distinct order of society, and sometimes for ecclesiastical property or revenue', according to Wakefield (1983:361). He (ibid:361) further explains spirituality as follows:

> This is a word which has come much into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities.

Jones et al (1986:xxii) concede that the term spirituality is not easy to define:

> `Spirituality', we confess, is a vague word, often used with no clear meaning, or with a wide and vague significance; but we can think of no better single word to describe our subject. We are concerned with the individual prayer and communion with God, both of the `ordinary Christian' and of those with special spiritual gifts, and with the outer life which supports and flows from this devotion; in other words with mystical theology and with such parts of moral and ascetical theology as relate to it.

Even though we tend to speak of African spirituality in the singular there are, in fact, several African spiritualities as attested to by Pobee (in Wakefield 1983:5):

> Spirituality may be understood as `the personal relation of man to God' (Sudbrack), the ways in which Africans appropriate - body, soul and mind - the salvific mission of Christ. Given the diversity of Africanness and the diversity of Christian traditions, we can only expect to find African spirituality in the plural.

African spirituality as used here refers to a contrived distillation of some common issues in African spiritualities across a wide spectrum, taking into consideration that these issues will be more stressed in the one African spirituality than in the other.

3.2. **The Deity in African spirituality**

In our quest for labels there is a tendency to negate the presence and even the notion of the Deity or God in other religions. A second fallacy is to equate Western spirituality with God about whom all Westerners were unanimous and of whom they had total conception from the beginnings of the world. This kind of thinking gives rise to the notion that African people had no conception of God before the arrival of the missionaries.

It cannot be gainsaid that Christianity in Southern Africa piggy-backed on cultural imperialism and colonialism which were characterized by a tendency to denigrate and uproot all traces of the indigenous or receiving cultures. Coupled with the fact that the conquerors had an undue advantage because they owned the essential propaganda systems such as printing presses and the media, these misconceptions about African spirituality soon became fact. Misconception became fact by propagation.

Perhaps the strongest and the most often cited misconception about Africans[1] and the Deity was made by Alberti in 1807 (Fehr 1968:47) who once said:

> Among the Kaffirs there is simply no conception of God, or an invisible Being, to whom they ascribe a powerful influence over themselves or on nature in general. One sees other uncivilized races, who worship the sun or other real or imaginary objects thereby indicating that they surmise that they are the origin of the ordinary or the extraordinary occurrence of nature or owe their existence to a particular all-embracing authority, from which to expect benefit or detriment. Of this, however, one does not discover the slightest evidence amongst these Kaffirs. Religious ceremonies and priests are completely unknown to them.

This flat denial of knowledge about God among the Africans at the time has, ironically, confirmed that Africans did not worship certain objects including, by implication, ancestors. Ironically, Alberti seemed to sense the presence of some inexplicable power behind the thinking of the very same Africans when he (Alberti in Fehr 1968:48) said:

> It is true that one occasionally attributes some adversity to the effect of an inexplicable power, which has been inflamed by anger, and one then endeavours to pacify this wrath or to divert it from oneself by making honourable amends. In the meantime, however, it is not possible to discover a generally acknowledged direct and recognizable cause, just as little as one finds that one can personify that inexplicable power or conceive a true being or spirit.

Writing exactly one hundred years later, Maclean contradicts Alberti's view that religious ceremonies and priests were completely unknown to the early amaXhosa. He (Maclean 1906: 107) says about rain makers:

> This is another of the heathenish vanities in which the benighted Kafirs put their trust. They firmly believe that some of their priests have the power to cause it to rain; and that were it not for the baneful and malicious influence of the "amagqwira" or sorcerers, this blessing would uniformly follow the rites and ceremonies performed in order to its attainment.

It is interesting to note that Junod, one of the earlier anthropologists, held a similar view to his compatriots but he acceded, at least, that there was some kind of Divinity, Creator, in the African spirituality or belief system. It is clear that the earlier missionaries, unlike Junod, had no resources for understanding African culture and spirituality. Anthropologists such as Junod had better tools of discernment compared to earlier missionaries. Junod (1938:132:) wrote about heaven and earth:

> These ideas have a much less religious character than ancestor worship. There is really no direct connexion with Almighty God or with Heaven. Religious means a relation between men and spiritual beings, as best expressed in the monotheistic religion, where a definite personal relationship exists between man and his God. Tonga, Ila, Rotsi, Sutho, Nguni, practically all Bantu peoples, Central, Northern and Southern, believe in a kind of Divinity, Creator and sometimes Providence.

Junod indicates that some African people had a clear conception of a Supreme Being. He (1938:137) describes this Divinity as follows:

> The Supreme Being amongst the BaRotsi is called Nyambe. He is more remote than Leza is to the Ila. However, every morning the Zambezian presents Nyambe with an offering of water in a wooden plate placed on a little altar built in his kraal; he kneels down, he turns his face towards the rising sun, and twice makes the royal salute "Yo-Sho!" Then he bows his head and claps his hands, muttering certain words.

Junod (1938:137) then describes in detail how the Zambezian prepared for the prayer to Nyambe and what he says in the prayer:

> "One of the older men or the oldest of the village must address the prayer to Nyambe. He gets up before dawn, because the spot must be well prepared and perfectly clean before the prayer starts. He clears the place of all weeds and sweeps carefully the centre of the square of the village. Then he builds up a small heap of pure white sand, on the top of which he places a clean plate with a few grains of mielies or millet. He kneels down politely, facing the rising sun, a little behind the offering. With a loud voice, and giving the royal salute, arms uplifted and bending the upper part of the body repeatedly, he says: -
>
> "Yooo shooo! Yooo shooo! O Great King! No man can be compared to Thee. We come to Thee, because Thy favours are innumerable. Thou showest great compassion to Thy servants; we come to Thee, so as to receive Thy blessing and so as to be strengthened. Thou art a powerful King, O King Nyambe! Everything is possible for Thee. Thou canst call back to Thee all men and they cannot refuse compliance, as Thou reignest over all things. May Thy rains water our seeds so that they may grow, as Thou art all-powerful..."

The detractors of African spirituality consistently give the impression that God in Western religion was a given, right from Adam. Murray (in Owen 1971:vii) argues that even among the great Greek philosophers there was no unanimity about God:

> We shall find the Parmenides telling us that God coincides with the universe, which is a sphere and immovable; Heraclitus, that God is `day night, summer winter, war peace,satiety hunger; Xenophanes, that God is all-seeing, all-hearing, and all mind; and as for his supposed human shape, why, if bulls and lions were to speak about God they would doubtless tell us he was a bull or a lion...'

Murray (in Owen 1971:vii) makes interesting comments on these divergent views as to the nature of God:

> At the one extreme the word `God' signifies a transcendent, infinite being who is Creator and Lord of the universe. At the other extreme it is applied...to any finite entity or experience which possesses special significance or which evokes special gratitude. Between these extremes there are a large number of other usages. Sometimes men have worshipped many gods whom they have conceived as magnified human beings existing in a supra-mundane realm. At other times they have believed in one God who is identical with the world, so that `God' and `Nature' become interchangeable.

It took the early philosophers such as Philo, Aquinas, Aristotle, Plato and many others many years of cogitation and contemplation before they could come forward with some general ideas regarding the nature of God. This holy mystery, while it is both transcendent and immanent, remains nothing less than a mystery even today. Neither has advancement in civilization or science enabled those concerned to arrive at conclusive proof of God's identity, let alone existence. At least, Swinburne is honest about these differences when he (1996:3) says in one of the most recent discussions of this vexing problem:

> I emphasize that, in this chapter, when I write that God does this or is like that, I am not assuming that there is a God, but merely spelling out what the claim that there is a God amounts to. I am not directly concerned to assess the claim that there is a God, where `God' is being understood in some quite different sense, as the name of a quite different sort of being from the one worshipped in Western religion.

Mbiti (1994:45) explains the African origins of belief in God as follows:

> All African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the center of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs. But exactly how this belief in God originated, we do not know. We only know that it is a very ancient belief in African religious life.

To show how widespread this belief in God is, Mbiti (1994:47) compiled a long list of God-names from various African countries. In some countries there are several names for God. It is Mbiti's contention that there are thousands of God-names in the continent which `shows us clearly that African peoples are very familiar with the belief in God and that over the years they have formulated certain ideas about God' (Mbiti 1994:48). The amaXhosa also have several names for God although the standard appellation is Thixo.

The four categories suggested by Mbiti for grouping African ideas about God - what he does, human pictures of God, the nature of God, and people's relationship with God - are not radically different from the anthropomorphic attributes found in Western religion. The only exception, however, is with regard to God as a Mother of the people in matriarchal countries. It is true that context does influence the way people view God. Judao-Christian spirituality, because of the experiences of the Jews, emphasizes God as Protector, Father, Judge, Warrior, Cloud, Rock and even Fire.

Because the missionaries contended that `the Xhosa had no word in their language to express deity', Hodgson lists several names[2] which were supplied by the late Professor Pahl, ranging from uMdali and uMenzi to Qamata which the missionaries rejected in favour of Thixo (Hodgson 1982:42). They insisted that Qamata was a pagan god and God had to be given a Christian name in the same way that so many people could not use their African names for the same reasons.

Soga, one of our most outstanding anthropologists, put the question of the Supreme Being beyond doubt when he (Soga 1931:149) said:

> If the belief in a supreme, and only one God, on the part of a race or tribe, is an indication of Monotheism, then it may without doubt be asserted that the amaXosa are monotheistic in religion. They have a conception of a Supreme Being clearly defined: a God who is the creator of all things, who controls and governs all, and as such is the rewarder of good and the punisher of evil.

There have been sporadic murmurs expressing disquiet about the use of the God-name Thixo, a borrowing from Khoisan which the missionaries preferred to the original Xhosa word for God, Qamata. Hodgson (1982:104) explains these sentiments as follows:

> Most Xhosa Christians affirm a universal concept of the Creator. In addition, many argue that Qamata whom they have always known is the same as the Christian God. There is a strong move today to replace the name Thixo, which is regarded as having been foisted on them by the missionaries, with Qamata. This conforms with the desire to recover past traditions and customs as part of the black cultural renaissance, and goes together with the resurgence of the ancestor cult.

3.2.1 **The link between humanity and Qamata**

Here lies the basic difference between African and Western spirituality. We approach God differently. Because God is great and almighty, like the King in secular life, he cannot be approached directly. In African society one cannot go straight to the Chief or King. He has to approach the councillors first and he might even consult the junior Chief before consulting the King via his councillors. In the same way, God or Qamata cannot be approached directly. One has to go through the ancestors[3] who act as intermediaries between humanity and Qamata. The ancestors are approached through sacrifices and

appropriate propitiatory addresses or prayers. They convey the people's wishes and supplications to Qamata.

As said above, Qamata, even at the linguistic level, could not be accepted into the spiritual terminology less so in the ontology of divine deity. Consequently, only the Western God was recognized. The missionaries opted for the Khoisan appellation, Thixo, rather than the extant God-name, Qamata, who was regarded as an idol.

The onslaught on Qamata was severe, no wonder that Ntsikana, the first Xhosa convert, referred, in his famous Great Hymn, to Thixo and not to Qamata even though the metaphors and the expressions used in the panegyric belong to traditional oral poetry. The following translation of Ntsikana's Great Hymn appears in Opland (1992:111-112):

He is the Great God, who is in heaven

Thou are Thou, shield[4] of truth.
Thou art Thou, stronghold[5] of truth.
Thou art Thou, thicket[6] of truth.
Thou art Thou, who dwellest in the highest.[7]
He, who created life,[8] below, created life above.[9]
That creator[10] who created, created heaven.
That maker[11] of the stars, and the Pleiades.
A star flashed forth, it was telling us.
Maker[12] of the blind, does he not make them on purpose?
The trumpet sounded, it has called us,
As for his chase, he hunts the souls.[13]
He, who amalgamates flocks[14] rejecting each other.
He, the leader,[15] who has led us.
He, the great blanket,[16] which we put on.
Those hands[17] of thine, they are wounded.
Thy blood,[18] why is it streaming?
Thy blood,[19] it was shed for us.
This great price, have we called for it?
This home of thine,[20] have we called for it.

Several very significant metaphors have been used to describe God as seen by this newly converted tribesman. These connote the following: protection [4-5], security [6],transcendence [7] creator [8-12), omnipotence [13], unity[14], providence [15], comfort [16], God in Jesus [17], sacrifice [18-19], conversion [20] which is an allusion to Konwana's house, one of the earlier converts. The early missionaries edited the praises to read "wakhonana" which is not only senseless but also totally foreign because they probably did not want to canonize or honour such a humble family. Some say this allusion refers to the Soga family which later produced the first African priest to be ordained.

It is interesting to note the resonances between Ntsikana's Great Hymn and the following Celtic `Morning Prayer' from Allchin and Esther de Waal's collection, Threshold of Light (1988:2):

Morning Prayer

I believe, O God of all gods,
That Thou art the eternal Father of life:
That Thou art the eternal Father of love.

I believe, O Lord and God of the peoples,
That Thou art the creator of the high heavens,
That Thou art the creator of the skies above,
That Thou art the creator of the oceans below.

I believe, O Lord and God of the peoples,
That Thou art He who created my soul and set its warp.
Who created my body from dust and from ashes,
Who gave to my body breath and to my soul its possession.

Father, bless to me my body,
Father, bless to me my soul,
Father, bless to me my life,
Father, bless to me my belief.

Like the Celtic prayers which are Trinitarian, Ntsikana's Great Hymn and doxology is Trinitarian. The three Godheads are blended perfectly. It starts with God the Father and moves on to God the Son and

the Holy Spirit who is seen as a leader who has led his people and then as a blanket which is wrapped around the people. The image of God as a blanket that envelopes people is also found in the following Celtic poem from David Adam's collection (1989:11):

Dressing Prayer

This day I bind around me
The power of the Sacred Three
The hand to hold,
The heart to love,
The eyes to see,
The Presence of the Trinity.

I wrap around my mortal frame
The power of the Creator's name:
The Father's might, His holy arm,
To shield this day and keep from harm.

I cover myself from above
With the great Redeemer's love.
The Son's bright light to shine on me,
To protect this day, to eternity.

I pull around me with morning light
The knowledge of the Spirit's sight.
The Strengthener's eye to keep guard,
Covering my path when it is hard.

This day I bind around me
The power of the Sacred Three.

It is clear from Ntsikana's hymn that there was a shift in consciousness from the traditional conception of God to Western conception and symbols with the images of the colonized culture running parallel with those of the colonizing culture - shield, stronghold, thicket, Maker, hunter and great blanket, on the one side, and trumpet, wounded hands [of Jesus] and flowing blood, on the other. No doubt the colonizers were introduced, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to images relating to African deity.

3.2.2 **Benevolent presences**

The ancestors in African society effectively take the place of saints in Western religion. Their presence is invoked to ensure safety, good health, peace or communion with Qamata. Whenever there is a ritual to be performed, the names of the living-dead will be recited in litanic fashion by the most senior member of the family in the same way that some Christians particularly Roman Catholics and Orthodox believers would send supplications through Mary or other saints.

Okure (1998) raises very thought provoking, if not controversial, questions regarding the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the ancestors. She, in effect, calls for the renunciation of the ancestors if African Christians are to take their place as children of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the only legitimate intermediary between us and God.

While Okure's concern for the supremacy of the Holy Spirit is understood, she seems, especially in the case of Xhosa spirituality, to miss the point. The ancestors and the Holy Spirit are not in conflict as they are neither contending nor similar spirits. The amaXhosa, while acknowledging afterlife as spiritual existence, view the ancestors as living beings much like as when they were in this world. This view is in tandem with the point made by Mbiti (1994:79) that `the spirits of the living dead look as they did when they were humans'.

The ancestors do not purport to displace the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ from their position as a direct line of communication. Fundamentalist Pan-Africanist Christianity sees God and the Holy Spirit as one. It is only the historical Jesus who gained himself the position of Proto-Ancestor through incarnation. Working through the ancestors does not undermine the Holy Spirit who remains God (Qamata) and all his vital force.

Thorpe (1991:109) articulates this as follows:

> In many respects the attitude adopted by African people to the Supreme Creator resembles the respect accorded their rulers. Throughout Africa proper procedures must be observed if a person wishes to address a human ruler. An ordinary person cannot simply enter directly into the presence of a chief or king but can do so only indirectly through approved mediators

> or councillors. This attitude or respect for authority extends to the spiritual arena as well so that intermediaries are necessary if one wishes to address divinity. This is particularly true regarding the Supreme Being who is considered to be behind everything - cattle, animals in general, trees and plant life as well as human beings.

Several causes could lead to the need to seek God's favour or protection - famine, death, bad luck, ill-health and many other exigencies. Worshipping God in this way is designed to restore harmony between God and the affected party or the community. It should, however, be stressed that Qamata's presence is not only sought when things go wrong. It is also sought when one has experienced some unexpected good fortune or when things really go well during which time a thanksgiving sacrifice would be made. The role of the sacrifices is explained as follows by Mbiti (1994:66):

> People make offerings and sacrifices in order to draw the attention of God to their needs, but these things are not always given to him directly. It is believed that God does not need such things. The sacrifices and offerings are then made to lesser spiritual beings, such as divinities, spirits and the departed. These act as go-betweens between men and God. They are expected to receive the offerings and sacrifices, and then relay people's requests to God.

Mbiti (1990:69) correctly points out that `the living-dead occupy the ontological position between the spirits and men and between God and men. They in effect speak a bilingual language of human beings whom they recently `left' or of God to Whom they are now nearer than when they were in their physical life.[21']

The point made by Mbiti that God does not want the sacrifices per se is very interesting. It means that the sacrifices are not an end in themselves, but they are a means of ensuring communion with God. It should also be stressed that the living-dead have to be mandated by the living people to act on their behalf. They have to be translated by the living into this new capacity. Therefore when a head of a household dies, an ox must be slaughtered for him to send him off (ukukhapha) and after some time another beast must be slaughtered[22] to bring him back home (ukubuyisa). These rituals ensure his mandate to act on behalf of his family as a properly appointed ambassador-plenipotentiary.

Although there is a clear line of demarcation between the Deity (Qamata), the ancestors, and humanity, African spirituality regards the relationship as one of harmony rather than mutual exclusivity hence Africans spare no effort in ensuring good relations between Qamata, the

ancestors and humanity. Anything that threatens this relationship or coexistence is vehemently opposed by society. This can range from antisocial behaviour, sorcery and irresponsibility to failing to do the family rituals and to display humaneness towards others (ubuntu). Qamata is the God of the whole community. It is therefore imperative that the whole community and the whole nation behave in ways that would be acceptable to him, failing which retribution and public censure would follow on the whole community.

This link between the Deity, the living-dead and humanity is not confined to one fixed place or a physical structure. The God of the African is omnipresent. He goes with him/her everywhere he/she goes. That is why an African man would invoke God's presence when going on a long journey or even on a hazardous short trip. On a long journey several occurrences would indicate that his ancestors are accompanying him for it was usually men who undertook these hazardous journeys. The appearance of the Cape longclaw (inqilo) was a sure sign that his journey has the blessings of the ancestors. This luck could also be crowned by the appearance of a honeybird which would lead him to a beehive. The man would also say prayers of thanksgiving as he throws a stone or two at the isivivane (cairn) alongside the road. If the head of the household moves house he calls his neighbours together and he informs them and the ancestors that he is moving to a new place of abode where, on arrival, he has to inform the ancestors once more of his present whereabouts. The constant need for ancestral blessing resonates with Celtic culture which is very sacramental. There is always a need to bless.

Contrary to what earlier scholars said about the non-existence of priests in African religion, Soga (1931:156) confirms our contention that the diviners actually played the role of the priests in African society. This is how he views the role of the priest-diviners:

> The priest-diviner works within certain well-defined limits. The scope of his activities include (sic) cases of illness, sickness, poisoning, sudden death, lost property, failure of crops, epidemics of disease in human beings and cattle, mysterious deaths in flocks, times of natural calamity, asking favours of the ancestral spirits on behalf of some important tribal interest.

It is evident from the above that African spirituality is based on theism and not on deism which Morin (1990:12) defines as follows:

> This term denotes the doctrine of those who, while rejecting the God of Christian revelation, nevertheless accept the existence of a supreme Being whose nature remains somewhat indeterminate. This God does not have anything in particular to do with God conceived of as a person as one finds him in theism.

Thorpe (1991:108) wraps up this debate by pointing out that `throughout most of Africa there is a belief in a Supreme Being who created and set the world in motion and then, more or less, withdrew'. It has been amply illustrated in this discussion that the God of the Africans is not a **deus remotus**. He lives with them in their daily lives through the medium of his intermediaries, the living dead in the same way that the God of Christianity's presence on earth is spiritual and not physical.[23]

When the Western church came and vociferously tried to destroy the indigenous people's belief in their ancestors they, in fact, were destroying the very fabric on which African communities were founded. The ancestors protected the people from the hordes of evil spirits that threatened their lives and well-being. This is confirmed by Eiselen and Schapera (in Schapera 1966:254):

> The ancestor spirits, as we have seen, have power to protect and help their descendants, as well as to punish them. Continued good fortune is attributed to their benevolence, while calamity may result from neglecting them. The good relations between them and their descendants must therefore be maintained with meticulous care. It is more essential to retain their favour than to propitiate them occasionally; and so a certain well-defined conduct towards them is traditionally prescribed.

It is therefore a sine qua non in African society to ensure the presence of the benevolent presences in order to stave off the wrath of evil spirits. Christian fundamentalists have often argued quite vehemently that Christ was the one and only sacrifice and therefore anything else is idolatry. This raises interesting questions regarding the place of Christ in African spirituality.

Benezet Bujo (in Africa Faith & Justice Network 1996:140) resolves the issue by suggesting that Jesus Christ be regarded as some kind of Proto-Ancestor so as not to place him in conflict with the natural ancestors:

> Numerous studies have made clear the deepest significance of the belief in ancestors for the life of Black African men and women. An ancestor is the main pillar on which a community or clan rests. The ancestor constitutes the unity of the community and represents the pivotal point from which all actions of the members of a clan take their dynamism and legitimacy. This observation is extremely important for an ecclesiological blueprint that strives to be at home in the Black

> African cultural heritage. In this article I attempt to trace the fundamental concept of ecclesiology back to Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor in such a way that the vitality of the community of believers will be visible in both a spiritual and organizational manner.

This view resonates with the following comments by Dwane (1979:235):

> As `Inyange lamanyange' Jesus is the First-born of all the amanyange. He stands in their midst as their Inkulu, the Priest who offers intercessions on their behalf, and on behalf of their living descendants. But he does not abolish their role as intercessors. Instead he unites their care for their descendants, and intercessions for them with his own, thus rendering them perfect and pure.

African fundamentalists argue very strongly that Christ and his role in Christianity should not be brought into conflict with the role of the ancestors in African society. Instead of playing the one against the other, they need to be allowed to complement each other. Black Christian believers who uphold both are in fact using a double barreled gun against the powers of evil spirits. The reconciliation is further enhanced by the fact that Africans do not deny that Christ is God and that the ancestors are not gods but invisible agencies that mediate between people and God in the same way that angels and saints are not gods but vital links between us and God. In fact, there are strong parallels between the institution of angels and saints and that of ancestors. While we revere the angels and the saints we never set them up against Christ and the Deity. The same applies to the benevolent presences. As Mbiti (1994:81) points out the belief in spirits helps to explain the universe. He emphasizes that `we should remind ourselves that the belief in the existence of spirits provides people with the explanation of many mysteries which they find in the universe'.

3.2.3 **Malevolent spirits**

It is not my intention to be entangled in the polemic or endless debate on witchcraft and superstition. Neither is the purpose of this section of the dissertation to try to draw a clear line of demarcation between witchcraft and sorcery. My thinking on these issues resonates with what Mbiti (1990:197) says:

> Witchcraft is a term used more properly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion. African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, evil eye and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belongings. Generally the same word is used for all these English terms; and the same person is accused or suspected of employing one or more of these ways of hurting members of his community.

This explanation has been necessitated by the fact that a discussion of malevolent spirits impinges on our understanding of the terms used in connection with witchcraft in all its varied manifestations.

Eiselen and Schapera (in Schapera 1966:269ff) refer to "lesser Deities" in their discussion of African religious beliefs and practices. These are, according to them, local spirits of various kinds whom they explain as follows:

> The Bantu finally believe in local spirits of various kinds whose sinister presence is generally greatly feared. There are sacred woods or mountains inhabited by the spirits of dead Chiefs or ancient dynasties, or by dissociated spirits, often vague and shadowy in character, but none the less terrifying and dangerous to the traveller; there are spirits of streams and pools, round whom collect many weird beliefs and fearsome tales.

No doubt the association of spirits with sacred woods or groves and mountains resonates with the awe with which these were regarded in primitive Celtic society. It was this very sacredness that led the early church to decide to found its own Christian structures on those primitive sites and landscapes in order to bridge the gap between the old and the new.

Of the so-called lesser deities mentioned by the two authors, I wish to refer only to a few which are known in Nguni societies. The first of these are the Thikoloshe (sometimes called Tokolosh) or uHili and iChanti. Contemporary mythology regards both as agents of sorcery. Thikoloshe is said to be used by sorcerers to do all kinds of evil errands associated with witchcraft.[24] These evil deeds are explained as follows by Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:241):

> The sorcerer, unlike the witch, consciously and deliberately, by himself or with the aid of a nganga, endeavours to bring about the death of an enemy by magical means. By placing concoctions secretly in the courtyard or in the hut or in the pathway, or putting ill-working ingredients into a person's food, or even wishing him ill or threatening him in a quarrel, he does his evil work.

Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:244) describes Thikoloshe very vividly:

> Thikoloshe or uHili, the familiar most widely believed and most commonly adduced as the means of witchcraft, is a small hairy being, having the form of a man but so small that he only reaches to a man's knee. He has hair all over his face and coming out of his ears, and his face

> is squashed up like a baboon. The penis of a male is so long that he carries it over his shoulder, and he has only one buttock. Both male and female Thikoloshe wear skins, and live in dongas and on the banks of rivers. Thikoloshe has an ikhubalo ("charm") with which he can make himself invisible, and he is only seen by adults who own him and by some children. In himself Thikoloshe is only mischievous, bent on thieving, and is often playful, but as a familiar he is dreaded. A woman witch (igqwira) who has a Thikoloshe always has a male one, and she has sexual relations with him. Some say men have a female Thikoloshe, but others say only women have them. At night, Thikoloshe are sent by their owners to make people ill, or to kill them.

Having heard all this, it is evident that Thikoloshe cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be associated with the deity. He or she is part of the malevolent spirit realm. It is interesting to note that even after years of enlightenment, the belief in the existence of this spirit still persists. The latest manifestation of such a spirit was reported in the Fort Hare student newspaper, Comtalk (May 1998:8), by Chumani Mbusi who wrote under the caption "Invisible creature threatens Mdeni family":

> The Easter holiday was a nightmare for the Mathe family, risiding of (sic) Mdeni Village near Alice, after what is believed to be an invisible and invincible creature set alight their clothes, beds and blankets, shattering windows into small crystals with hot stones and bricks.

According to the report, an eyewitness, Mrs Nosence Mathe, a hawker in Alice, said the incident started on Tuesday, the 10th February when they were television news at 7:30 pm. Her report goes on as follows, according to the students' newspaper article:

> "We heard loud bangs on the roof, but we just ignored that, we thought that there were children playing outside. The following day, the same time as the day before, the noise started again, it was like there was someone throwing stones. We saw window panes breaking down and flying all over the house. My husband went outside to investigate but he saw nothing", she said. Nosence says that they did not sleep that night untill the following day. "A fire started bellowing in the morning burning mattresses and clothes and even those wet hanging on the line. It is like a spirit fire and it is very fast", she added that "the big round hot stones were also making a come back hitting everyone on the site."

For many generations, the most feared of all the evil spirits was the impundulu or lightning bird. It was said to be extremely vicious and caused the death of innumerable numbers of people. A striking feature of this evil spirit is that it is said to be owned by women exclusively, in the same way that only women owned inyoka yabafazi (the women's snake). Both are used to cause illness to adults and to

young children or babies, respectively. It is interesting to note that, until the coming of Western medicine, the impundulu was said to be the undoubted cause of such diseases as T B whose fatal symptoms were the vomiting of blood by the afflicted.

The iChanti is another feared magical snake. No doubt, it is also one of those snakes that are associated with sorcery. According to Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:244),

> Ichanti is a snake which lives in rivers and which has power of metamorphosis, appearing in any form. Anyone who sees it falls ill and will die unless treated by a magician. Some people say that the ichanti sometimes works on its own; others, that it is always controlled by a witch.

Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:244) also refers to umamlambo as a dangerous charm which can turn into a snake. It is used by men in order to get rich very quickly. One who has this charm is said to be extremely lucky. His cows would breed very fast and his money would double in the bank and whatever he touches would figuratively turn into gold. But the price of these riches is said to be very high as the owner would have to sacrifice a family member at times. Some also allege that the man is expected to have sex with this snake. It is also stated that the snake can turn itself into a very beautiful woman with several female sexual organs to be satisfied.

Isithunzela (zombie) is another dreaded spirit in African society. Its awesomeness could be attributed to the fact that it is the spirit of a dead human being who had been raised by means of witchcraft. The person is no longer himself or herself but has become the sorcerer's agent or tool to do whatever evil the sorcerer wants to do. Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:245) explains this spirit as follows:

> Even evil omens never come of themselves, but are always sent by a witch. But perhaps worst of all their malefactions is interference with bodies of the dead. Flesh of corpses is one of the most dangerous ingredients of ubuthi, and this use is bad enough. But witches can raise the dead and use them as their slaves. The witch beats the grave with a switch, and the grave opens and the body comes out. He drives a wooden splinter into the dead man's head so that he becomes foolish, and pierces his tongue with a long bone needle, so that he cannot speak. The raised person (isithunzela or umkhovu) takes the form he had when he was alive.

It cannot be doubted that these and many other beliefs or superstitions have a strong grip on the lives of many African people, including some who profess to be practising Christians. They impact on

their view of life, sickness and death. Their behaviour would be largely circumscribed by these fears and doubts, potentialities and realities because to some these are not mere superstitions but realities.

Any religion that undermines these fears or feelings or even superstitions cannot go far in influencing the lives of the affected parties. Arrogant denials and denigration cannot alter people's beliefs, hence the following warning from Hoernle (in Schapera 1966:221):

> The student who approaches for the first time the subject of Bantu medicine and magic needs more than ever to remember the famous saying of the Roman poet : Homo sum, humani nihil alienum a me puto. He will meet with beliefs and practices which Western Science would deem "superstition", and European morals and law would deem immoral and illegal. But he will err gravely if, for this reason, he allows himself to regard these beliefs and practices as manifestations of a kind of mentality with which he, as a European, has nothing in common. On the contrary, they lie within the scope of our common human nature. The very same beliefs and practices - same in principle, if not in detail - were an integral part of the European civilization of our own ancestors. Right down into the modern times, the belief in witchcraft was not felt to be in conflict with Christianity. It was shared, and acted on, by learned and unlearned alike - by priest and doctor, by judge and magistrate, no less than by private burgher in towns or the peasant of the countryside.

3.3 **The gradual rise of a new consciousness**

The question of the deity and the African presences was the most contentious issue among the missionaries and their African converts during the struggle for the appropriation of sacred symbols. The success of the whole missionary endeavour hinged on the full-scale replacement of the `heathen deity and belief system' by the Western God and belief system. That is why the early colonization of African consciousness advanced at two levels, as explained by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:199):

> At its most tangible it involved what the evangelists termed "direct influence" - the effort, that is, to convert the heathen by exposure to the divine truth, to a persuasive account of the sacred narrative. But at a deeper level only partially distinguished from the first, the Nonconformists set their sights on a "revolution in the habits of [the] people; on reforming the African by engaging him in an argument whose terms they regulated, and whose structure bore the hegemonic forms, the taken-for-granted tropes, of the colonizing culture.

This chapter was not concerned with the deeper level, the politics of space, but with the first level in which the missionaries persuasively sought to bring about a new consciousness and conversion to the colonized blacks. As seen above, they had no alternative but to reject outright whatever they considered to be in conflict with their own intentions and objectives. To people who believed implicitly, rightly or wrongly, that they were ordained by God `to cast the native as a savage "other" whose difference was to be "converted" into the currency of the Christian commonwealth' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:198), the battle lines were drawn right from the outset and compromise was not part of the agenda.

The colonizers were not foreign to the idea of reverence for certain individuals such as ancestors because they had numerous saints they revered but they were antagonistic to the African ancestors merely or largely because they regarded them as pagan. Africans, on the other hand, easily accepted the idea of saints since they resonated with their own ancestors and, secondly, the idea of resurrection was not at all unfamiliar to them given the fact that they were aware of life after death. On the evil spirit level, once again, the blacks easily assimilated the idea of biblical demons and demoniacs because these resonated with the host of evil spirits in African society whose existence, ironically enough, the missionaries vehemently denied. As in the case of the Tswana people, this contact could not but interinfluence those involved as pointed out by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:238):

> For a long time, however, the vast majority of Southern Tswana remained reluctant to enter more closely into the society of the church. They refused to give the anxious evangelists what they hoped for most, some sign of the intention to convert; although, as we have already said, a more diffuse process of conversion to the signs and practices of European Protestantism was already well under way.

In Xhosaland also the two-edged sword manifested its power in the rise of such early converts as Ntsikana, Soga and many more who followed in their footsteps while on the side of the colonizers some were beginning to appreciate the significance of certain aspects of African culture, e.g. Colenso and others.

3.4. **Conclusion**

This section aimed to show how Africans implicitly believe in the existence of God and also in the effectiveness of his association with all creatures. As pointed out by Johnson (1997:1) `the existence or non-existence of God is the most important question we humans are called to answer'. Besides, it has far reaching implications because it could determine our behaviour. To Johnson (1997:6) `the most extraordinary thing about the twentieth century was the failure of God to die'. I could only add that the God of African spirituality was at no stage under threat of death at all. The reason for this eternal life is probably because the Africans root out any force that attempts to bedevil the relations between humanity and Qamata. The ancestors act as watchdogs to ensure harmony between God and humanity. Their mediation aims to provide a vital link between Qamata and humanity. Witches and sorcerers are smelt out and punished and those who do not want to toe the line of community norms and expectations are ostracized. The head of the household is expected to disclaim his very own son if the latter insists on doing serious antisocial acts in traditional society and break the harmony that should be there between Qamata, the living-dead and humanity.

Notes:

1. Dwane (1979:4) also cites Revd William Shaw's remark that `the Kaffir nations cannot be said to possess any religion, but they practice (sic) a complicated system of superstition'.

2. See also Dwane (1979:12).

3. See also Dwane (1979:11).

4-20 Discussed intertextually.

21. This view is also supported by Dwane (1979:20).

22. See Dwane (1979:15).

23. According to Dwane (1979:10) the Xhosa traditional view tends to lay stress on God's otherness, i.e. his transcendence.

24. This is also confirmed by Dwane (1979:34).

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS RECONCILIATION AND INCARNATION

4.1. **Introduction**

It is an open secret that the early missionaries, intentionally or unintentionally, had a double agenda in their propagation of Christianity in Africa. The spreading of the Gospel was coupled with, and at times even subordinated to, the spread of Western culture, particularly English cultural values. Cultural imperialism vied with the propagation of Christianity.

The early missionaries and the succeeding batch of intellectuals and anthropologists condemned, in the strongest possible terms, anything associated with African culture and spirituality. Black converts had to be literally emptied of all vestiges of their indigenous cultures so that they could be filled with Christian and Western cultural values. Dwane (1989:28) articulates this attitude as follows:

> I maintain, and there is enough evidence for it, that the early missionaries to Africa behaved like Judaizers towards African converts. Instead of accepting them as they were, they attempted to make them in their own image, after their own likeness. Of course one has to admit that there were exceptions to this rule, but the general assumption was that Africans were `savages' and `thorough infidels' who had to be persuaded to abandon their own way of life, and adopt Christianity with all its Western trimmings, lock, stock and barrel. The outcome of this is that when African Christians now look at themselves, they realise that they are dressed up in borrowed robes.

This cultural domination manifested itself in various guises, eg.:

i) The black converts had to be given new names, the so- called Christian names, thus implying that their own indigenous names were pagan names. Gone were meaningful names such as Jongintaba (the one who watches the mountain), Nomalanga (the lady of the sun) as they had to give way to Paul, Patrick and Elizabeth or Victoria.

ii) Converts had to wear western clothes as their traditional dresses were also frowned upon. It became a sin, not even taboo, to enter the church wearing traditional dresses.

iii) On the socio-religious front, there was even greater tension. The missionaries banned several practices that formed the basis of the social and religious life of the black people. First of all, circumcision was banned. This created serious problems for new converts as manhood is the cornerstone of African life since it is based on a patriarchal system. There is a clear demarcation between boyhood, manhood and womanhood. The banning of circumcision cut across the grain of this social fabric as boys have no status in African society.

iv) When the missionaries went further to condemn and excommunicate any of their members for performing certain rituals, such as ukukhapha (farewell to the departed), and ukubuyisa (ritual to invite the deceased head-of-household back home), they dealt a death blow to the very essence of African life and religion. The rituals are a sine qua non for harmony, order and peaceful coexistence between the living-dead and the living.

v) Simple practices such as the imbeleko ritual whereby a baby was incorporated into society played a very important role in African traditional life. The child had to be introduced to both the living and the living-dead to ensure acceptance and the survival of the lineage. For missionaries to debar their congregants from performing this ritual was as good as condemning the child to perpetual disenfrenchisement.

vi) If any practice among the traditional Xhosa had been trampled under foot and even completely misrepresented, that practice is polygamy. So many evil things had been said and written about it, giving the whole world the impression that this practice entailed the sale of women or presenting it as a form of slavery. Those who engaged in it were debarred from becoming members of the Christian church. Even when Bishop Colenso tried to defend the custom, he was pooh-poohed by the church of the day.

One could go on ad infinitum listing numerous cases that clearly show missionary insensitivity to African culture or their bias in favour of their own culture. This led to many disgruntled black priests' quitting the mainline churches to establish their own black churches. This disillusionment spans the whole history of the African church from Van der Kemp to the present day. One of the current radicals in this regard, Revd. Thamsanqa Sipho Mgidlana of East London, believes that blacks should be

worshipping Ntu, not Thixo whom he regards as the creation of the whites. In an article authored by Mxolisi Ntshuca and published in the Daily Dispatch on 22 January 1997, very controversial points were made by this fiery octogenarian some of which are cited below:

> "It appeared to me that Christianity was nothing more than a plot by the settlers to try and make imbeciles of the African people...
>
> "It was then that I discovered that the western way of worship was not for Africans. This way was forced on us. And when the Europeans came to us they never called on the chiefs and presented their religion. Instead they looked for puppets like Ntsikana and Nongqawuse and that is also the reason why Xhosas should never had (sic) used the word Thixo when they refer to the Supreme.
>
> "The word Thixo is not a pure Xhosa word, because it came with Ntsikana whose bona fides as a prophet are questionable. The origin of Thixo can be found in the Khoi and Bushman (sic) languages.
>
> "This now confirms that Ntsikana was told about Thixo. It was never a word the Xhosa should have used to refer to the Supreme..." Daily Dispatch 22/1/97 p.12)

Mgidlana challenges the so-called superiority of the white race in religion and politics; he calls Ntsikana a fake, and speaks strongly against having to worship the Supreme in a foreign way. Although his seems to be a lonely voice in a wilderness, he has added his voice to a number of voices that have expressed great dissatisfaction with how blacks have been treated by whites in the sphere of religion, especially their refusal to accommodate African culture.

Cultural and spiritual imperialism manifested itself across the globe where different cultures and spiritualities met. Of the most interesting approaches to this problem I can think of only two men who had to face the problem boldly and decide on a course of action, one way or the other - Bishop Colenso and Reverend Tiyo Soga whose approaches will be discussed in turn.

Bishop Colenso tried to retain some elements of African culture much to the chagrin of his church authorities. He accepted polygamists in his church and spent hours trying to understand the gospel from the perspective of the Africans.

He fought most gallantly for the acceptance of polygamy even in the face of very strong opposition from his church as attested by Guy (1983:74):

> The Bishop of Natal was alleged to tolerate a practice which one of his contemporaries - a missionary - said was the `dirtiest, filthiest, nastiest, subject' in the colony. In fact Colenso felt that the practice was without doubt opposed to Christian teaching. However he did feel that someone who was already a member of a polygamous relationship should not be excluded from joining the church. The price of conversion to Christianity should never be the dissolution of the family and perhaps the destitution of wives and children.

Polygamy could easily be dismissed as mostly or even exclusively a social practice and therefore not a spiritual matter. However, a deep look into this practice will reveal how closely related it is to the amaXhosa belief in procreation and to their belief in ancestors as both sustainers of life and blessers of progenies. It was one of the most contentious issues in the relations between the Western church and the African people.

It cannot be doubted that the early converts found the message of the Gospel as propagated by the missionaries very confusing in this regard. How does one accept the Jewish practices reflected in the Old Testament, e.g. polygamy and mohar (gift paid by the bridegroom or his father), on the one hand, and reject the same polygamy and lobola when practised by Africans? Vide the following comment in the Readers' Digest (1988:130) on polygamy in Israel:

> The kings of Israel were polygamists on a grand scale. David had at least 20 wives and concubines, but that seems practically ascetic compared to the lavish harem of his son Solomon, who reportedly had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3).

Although Colenso was by nature Constantinian, believing strongly in the hegemony between church and state, his views on African religion were not rigid. They were not adversely affected by his strong sense of British justice and truth. Although he regarded the dissemination of British rule as the divinely ordained task to spread justice and truth to `heathen lands', his universal concept of religion enabled him to see some good in others. He was sufficiently self-liberated to appreciate that there was a germ of the true faith in the minds of the so-called `barbaric' or `savage' Zulus. He strongly believed that these metaphoric plants should be carefully tended and pruned and not rooted out.

Colenso never tried to contrast the best in Western religion with the worst in African religion. His attitude towards African culture was the same. What was important to him was contact on the finest points in the two cultures and religions. Although some pruning needed to be done, these points of agreement could be developed for mutual benefit.

Having considered the attitude of a white missionary, it should be interesting to note the attitude of one black pioneering missionary, the Revd Tiyo Soga. He was the first black priest to be ordained in Scotland and his naturalisation into Western culture was complicated even further by the fact that he married a White Scotswoman from the Burnside family.

Tiyo Soga was a real product of the missionary era. His position was made even more tenuous by two factors. Firstly he was brought up and educated by white missionaries. He had to be deculturated to make him suitable for his new role as first African priest. His second dilemma was the fact that after marrying a white woman, he still had to come back and work among his own people even though he was so to speak a black in white robes. Consequently, he was out of touch with the pulse of his own people on many issues, eg. on circumcision because he himself was not circumcised. Like his white counterparts, he played an ambivalent role of promoting missionary work and being civilising agents at the same time.

Because blood is thicker than water, at least Soga differed slightly from his peers and mentors in that he did not believe in the total destruction of the traditional practices. He regarded some Xhosa social practices as significant for the lives of the people. The influence of the white missionaries was, however, very strong on him. They rejected most of the traditions as pagan practices which could not be accommodated or tolerated in Western religion and civilisation.

One of these contentious practices was circumcision. Soga regarded the rite as reversion to paganism. A great controversy ensued. Like Williams, his white colleague, Soga viewed the resultant resistance as `truculent hostility on the part of the young lads on the station torn between Victorian Christian morality and culture' (Williams 1978:71).

Unlike Colenso, Soga did not try to explore the good points in African religion and culture to establish which could be adopted and adapted to the new religion and culture. He strongly opposed witchdoctors, polygamy, lobola and initiation rites. Althoug he greatly admired chieftainship (Williams 1978:121) and wanted to preserve some cultural integrity, he could not convince the white missionaries of the importance of the institution in African society.

It cannot be doubted that Soga's influence as a black nationalist of the time led to the rise of black independent or initiated churches that admired and exploited some of his thoughts on `purified nativism' (Williams 1978:126).

Heavily influenced by Western missionaries, Soga lived at a time when there was a general belief among white missionaries that there was not much of African religion (Williams 1978:80).

Soga laid the foundations of the African church in two ways. He was the first ordained black minister. Secondly, he had tremendous influence on the formation of the 19th century independent black churches. The Thembu Church and the Mzimba Church reflect some of Soga's thoughts and ideas. He nurtured black nationalism.

Although Soga played a positive role in this regard, his influence was not always direct. When confronted by cultural problems such as circumcision, he invariably sided with the white missionaries. This attitude estranged many would-be followers. Besides this shortcoming, Soga could not resist colonial efforts aimed at `ensuring law, order and equity by demanding that all aspects of black society which were considered unacceptable to the Victorian Christian morality be abandoned' (Williams 1978:121).

4.2 **Resistance and transformation among the early converts**

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:250) stress that `analytic dangers lurk behind the concept of conversion' one of which being that `in the African context at least, it tends to conflate changes in the individual spiritual identity with cultural transformation, thereby muddying the historical relationship between subjective experience and collective existence'.

The conversion proceeded at two levels according to them (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:311) - `the most overt being to convert the Africans, to overwhelm them with arguments and messages, thereby to establish the truth of Christianity' and, secondly, `the effort to reform the indigenous world; to inculcate in it the hegemonic signs and practices'.

The missionaries who had come to Xhosaland as "Saviours" soon gained the notoriety of being partners-in-crime with the colonial authorities and forces. Christianity was seen as a veiled attempt to soften the people's hearts while the colonial authorities were dispossessing them of all their land, their cattle and their culture. No doubt this feeling led to the rejection of evangelisation in the Eastern Cape as the target audiences suspected ulterior motives on the part of the evangelisers.

Fast (1993:147) comments as follows on the rejection and failure of evangelisation in the Eastern Cape:

> After more than three decades of evangelisation in the Eastern Cape, Henry Calderwood of the London Missionary Society commented that if he viewed `the Caffres as a nation, they may be said to have refused the gospel.

He (1993:147ff) gives the following reasons for the failure - `white missionaries were associated with white encroachment, the threat missionary teachings posed to Xhosa social structure and the negative perceptions of the austere missionary lifestyle and of the diverse collection of converts at the mission stations'.

Etherington (1996:201) aptly draws our attention to recent trends in the study of colonialism and Christianity by saying:

> Writing about the relationship between colonialism and Christianity is still permeated by disputes about the role of organized religion in sustaining white supremacy, despite an emerging consensus among historians that Christianity was a two-edged sword that could undercut as well as sustain domination.

It cannot be denied that it is an ill-wind that blows nobody any good. The spiritual transformation that ensued awakened the blacks to much that was of relevance to them in their struggle against the colonial oppressers, using the very tools that they had introduced to them via the missionaries. The early converts

made use of whatever they could incarnate in their changing spirituality for their own liberation both spiritually and politically.

This process is articulated as follows by Etherington (1996:209):

> [t]he missionaries, who aimed to replace African cultures with European `civilisation' and who frequently allied themselves with colonial governments, nevertheless transmitted a religion which Africans turned to suit their own purposes: spiritual, economic and political.

Binarism, as reflected in the orthodox approach to colonial cultural history, definitely has its serious disadvantages because it emphasises, and even overemphasises, the dichotomy between the oppresser and the oppressed to the exclusion of everything else. A critical analysis of the events that took place in the nineteenth century frontier is presented as follows by De Kock (1996:32):

> The early history of missions is not a straightforward success story (see Williams 1959), but the argument remains that even in the first three decades of the century, when converts were hard won and scarce, the mission station `occupied a critical interstice in the colonial encounter in which Africans came to better understand the material and intellectual consequences of colonial expansion' (Crais 1992a:101). There is, in addition, a degree of symmetry, on the one hand in the decline of African power in the Eastern Cape in the nineteenth century as the Hundred Years' War on the frontier dragged on, and, on the other in the gradual increase in the success of an institution such as Lovedale, along with the general encroachment of the European mercantile economy.

But a word of caution is essential here. Etherington's concept (1996:204) of "African agency" should not be used to legitimise or to justify injustice but to show that all encounter is multidimensional and not strictly binary as earlier discourse seemed to imply. This could be seen in the case of Ntsikana, Nxele and the rise of numerous prophets among the amaXhosa. This new emphasis is also reflected in the following comments by Etherington (1996:205):

> Thus, as Janet Hodgson has shown, within a few years of the time when J.T. Van der Kemp's pioneering attempt to plant a mission station among the Xhosa ended in failure and retreat, home grown prophets filled the land with messages which reverbarated sympathetically with Christian doctrine. Later, when missions were re-established, it became difficult to draw a hard and fast boundary between purely Xhosa ideas and Christian ones.

The cultural and political oppression gave rise to two major figures among the amaXhosa - Nxele and Ntsikana. Their role is described as follows by Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport 1997:71):

> In response to colonial aggression, Nxele and Ntsikana emerged as prophets offering Xhosa new sources of symbolic meaning and power in a rapidly changing world. They appropriated and mobilized Christian symbols: Nxele for militant resistance, Ntsikana in an evolutionary model, that allowed black people to direct their own transformation. Throughout the century these two models dominated the response to the missionary presence, among the Xhosa who neither remained rooted in ancestor ritual, nor acquiesced in the missionaries' scheme of total cultural reconsctruction.

Nxele's belief that he was sent by the ancestors, who were due to return soon, to avenge the wrongs of the past led him to march on Grahamstown in a daring demonstration of resistance but he could not match the military power of his adversaries and ended up on Robben Island from where he never returned. However, in the minds of his followers, his mission had not failed to consolidate them against the intruders because he `had incorporated apocalyptic Christian concepts within a Xhosa world of reference, drawing upon the power symbols of the new tradition to promise salvation here and now, but under the aegis of an African deity' (Hodgson in Elphick and Davenport ibid:72). He had deeply implanted the seed of resistance leaving his people with the eschatological hope of his triumphant return.

Ntsikana, the pacifist who opted for an `evolutionary model that allowed the black people to direct their own transformation' (Hodgson in Elphick and Davenport 1997:71), paved the way for conversion under the influence of Joseph Williams. He led the incarnation of African culture into Christianity but the odds were against him, the missionaries and the rest of the new converts.

The struggle for supremacy between Christianity and African culture was intensified. The missionaries, encouraged by the gains obtained so far, but extremely frustrated by the obvious failure of their mission to draw whole communities, and especially their rulers, to the church, went all out to destroy African culture which they regarded as damnation and utter debasement of humanity.

In the ensuing struggle some of the missionaries acted in collusion with the colonial authorities in ruthless acts of subjugation, but others equally vehemently opposed these measures thus earning themselves the ire of the colonial authorities and the settler communities. The repercussions were, no

doubt, very serious as attested by Hodgson (in Elphick and Davenport ibid:79):

> With the exception of significant converts, the large majority of Africans, at this stage, resisted the missionaries' message. Initial attempts by Xhosa rulers to assimilate missionaries as raindoctors were soon abandoned, as the struggle for the ownership of sacred symbols became entwined with military conquest. While the African socio-economic and political systems remained intact, mission agents could be ignored or their message rejected as "a killing word" ... The failure of missionaries to incarnate the gospel as an African expression of Christianity also discouraged early conversions.

The early African converts to Christianity must have found the attitude of the early missionaries quite mystifying to say the least. This is said because there are so many similarities between Christianity and African religion and social practices. For the protagonists of Christianity to be so hostile to African religion should have been baffling and stifling whereas a little more understanding could have resulted in the same continuities that were observed in Celtic Christianity.

If the tensions reveal anything, it is that while the Africans fought tooth and nail to avert complete reconstruction, they steadily succumbed to the pressures of the colonizing culture. The role of the following two African priests clearly shows how much the colonization process was succeeding and to what extent it was failing to change African consciousness. Their attitude to African culture was made even more interesting by the fact that Revd Wallis, was, figuratively, always peering over their shoulders.

In 1930 Revd S.J. Wallis, S.S.J.E. collected, edited and published several cultural essays entitled Inkolo namasiko A-Bantu (Bantu Beliefs and Customs) under the auspices of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). These articles were written by black Christians themselves from a black Christian's perspective even though Wallis's influence could not be discounted. On the question of **life after death** , A.D. Nyoka (in Wallis 1930:29) points out that the amaXhosa knew about life after death long before the arrival of Western Christianity and civilisation. They knew that a human being's soul does not vanish into thin air like a beast's after death but that his or her soul or spirit goes to some place where it would join members of the family that departed before it. Nyoka stresses that African rituals associated with death confirm this belief.

Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:30) gives the following illustrations of the people's belief in life after death - first of all the person's belongings such as his sleeping mat, his blanket, tobacco bag, his pipe and his spears were all buried with him. If the death had occured far away from home, his belongings at home were kept apart for a considerable length of time until, hopefully, he could come and claim them.

A second illustration of this belief according to Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:31) is that blacks show great respect and awe for graves. The awe is caused by the fact that the dead were said to rise at night and visit their next of kin. It was believed that wicked people were also able to rise at night and do harm to anyone found in the vicinity of the cemetery. This resonates with the present day notion of ghosts, according to Nyoka.

A third proof of this belief according to Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:32) was borne out by the need to do certain rituals on the advice of a diviner whenever unexpected adversity or sickness struck. According to him the ancestors get angry when the living members of their families neglect to do certain rituals or to behave in a manner becoming of respectable citizens. In this way the living-dead regulate the behaviour of the living, an issue that the missionaries failed to appreciate.

According to Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:34) the ensuing ritual during which a beast was slaughtered and some beer brewed was not at variance with the Christian sacrament of the Holy Communion in which the body and blood of Christ resonate with the sacrifice of a beast and the drinking of some beer.

Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:34) also points out that African diviners have close ties with the living-dead. This, according to him, is another proof that there is life after death. One only has to visit any diviner at work to realise how dependent he/she is on the guiding presence of the departed izihlwele (totems and such other figures or icons). At every divination the presence of a host of ancestral beings is invoked, starting from those on the father's side to those of the mother's side and those of the principal trainer-diviner. Nyoka (in Wallis ibid:35) articulates this as follows:

> Xa seleligqirha elipheleleyo, aba bantu bakowabo bangasekhoyo baza kumchazela yonke into emalunga nezifo zabantu, kwanamayeza okuzinyanga ezo zifo, nendawo anokufumaneka kuzo; ngoko kule nto yobugqirha kufike kucace kakuhle ukucinga koNtsundu ngabangasekhoyo bakowabo.

(When he/she becomes an accomplished diviner, the living-dead will tell him/her about everything regarding people's ailments, and about potent medicines with which to cure them, and even where they could be found; thus proving that the blacks were mindful of their departed.)

Revd. James A Calata (in Wallis 1930) discusses at length what was one of the sore points in the relations between black and white in this country, especially in the church and in other ecclesiastical circles - **circumcision**. One has only to read about Tiyo Soga's experiences and how his own people once rejected him because the white missionaries had refused to allow him to be circumcised. Many of the early missionary converts are still stigmatised because of this. Manhood carries the necessary integrity and credibility in African society because men of a particular age are the link between society and the ancestors. They are family priests. Social norms censure anyone who has not undergone this custom at the appropriate age. In fact, in African churches boys are not even allowed to become lay-preachers!

One can see from the above that it was grossly incorrect for the early missionaries to discourage Xhosa males from undergoing this ritual as it formed the basis of the Xhosa social structure.

Only the highlights of Calata's views will be given here. Calata (in Wallis ibid :38) introduces the topic as follows:

Abafundisi abaninzi abasebenza phakathi kwabantu abantsundu ekuqaleni kweli lizwe balithabatha isiko lolwaluko njengesithintelo ebuKrestwini, baza baligweba njengesiko elikhohlakeleyo, kangangokuba kukho abafundisi ekuthiwa babasika abantu eTyalikeni ngokuva ukuba babalusile oonyana babo.

(Many of the missionaries who worked among the blacks in the early years regarded this custom as a hindrance to Christianity and condemned it as a pagan custom so much that some missionaries allegedly excommunicated members who were reported to have circumcised their sons.)

Calata traces the custom back to early Jewish history and Jewish-Egyptian links. In both cases there was interinfluencing between Jewish and African practices. Of course, we are now faced with an egg and chicken situation in which we cannot tell exactly from which of the two nations the custom originated. The big question from some of the new converts must have been how to reject a custom that has such strong Biblical roots.

He (in Wallis ibid:44ff) stresses the importance of circumcision among the blacks and also highlights some aspects of the custom or rite that could either be updated or dropped altogether. Needless to say that a feeling of ambivalence on the part of the author, at times, probably stemmed from missionary pressure. Calata attempts to rid the custom of certain trappings and trimmings that are, in his view, unnecessary. These will be summed up cursorily.

Calata questions the smearing of the newly circumcised boy's body with white clay. He contends that baptism and confirmation are designed to fulfil the same function and intention as the white clay.

He also rejects the umguyo ceremonies that precede the actual circumcision because, as he puts it, these occasions are accompanied by excessive drinking.

Calata Christianises the rite when he relates the `ikhankatha' (guardian) with the role of the priest or the lay-preacher. It is the priest who must scrutinise the rite and eliminate what is not acceptable in it. The boys should be reported to him beforehand, and, if possible, he should bless them before they go to the circumcision school and, to complete his new role as the guardian, the priest should even visit the boys and pray for them at the circumcision lodge. Considering the outright rejection of this custom by the early missionaries, this stance by Calata and Wallis should be applauded as quite revolutionary.

He (in Wallis ibid:45) also touches on a very crucial issue in African spirituality - **confession** (ukubula). If a boy's operation took longer than normal to heal or does not show signs of healing at all, the boy would be induced to confess whatever wrong he had done. In most cases this involved some incestuous relationship. This definitely resonates with the Christian idea of sin and confession.

Contextualisation is a difficult exercise. Consequently, Calata (in Wallis ibid:46) feels obliged to warn against degrading the church in the process:

> Kodwa umfundisi makalumke angayidelisi iTyalike ngokuthi ayenze ukuba ithi ngokufuna ukwalamana namasiko abantu ihle kumgangatho wobumoya ibe sisicaka senyama, kodwa mayithi ukwalamana kwayo kufane kanye nokukaKristu owehlayo waba ngumntu, wawathobela amasiko alungileyo obuJuda. Kanti noko ujonge kwenye inkalo, kwinkalo yokubatsalela abantu ebuKrestwini kungekhona ebuJudeni.
>
> (But the priest should be careful not to degrade the church so that, in its attempts to relate with the people's customs, its spiritual status is so devalued that it becomes a servant of the flesh; but its relationship should be just like Chist's who humbled himself and took on a human form, and obeyed all good Jewish customs. In doing that he aimed to draw people to Christianity and not to Judaism.)

That Calata stood for controlled or well thought out contextualisation is evident from his strong comment (in Wallis ibid:46):

> Xa kuthethwa ngeTyalike kaNtu, kungenjalo yabaNtsundu, kukho abacinga ukuba kuloo Tyalike oobhishopu bayo baya kuvumela onke amasiko abantu abaNtsundu ukuba enziwe, njengokuba nangoku sibona kukho iibhishopu ezikwangamagqirha avumisayo, axhentsa intlombe, zenze zonke iintlobo-ntlobo zezinto, ze ngeCawe zinxibe ii- "cope" nee-"mitre", zisithi zona zishumayela iTyalike yesizwe. Hayi khona!
>
> Xa kusithiwa isiko lokwaluka malamkelwe ziiTyalike kuthethwa ukuba yonke into elungileyo kulo mayithatyathwe njengesiko elilulngileyo, ze liphakanyiselwe kumgangatho wokwalamana neTyalike, ayekwe amasiko amenza umntu agxekeke njengomKristu akuwenza.
>
> (When talking about the African Church there are people who think that in that church its bishops will allow all African customs, just as we see today that there are bishops who are also diviners who hold traditional dances for the diviners, and then on Sundays they put on the copes and mitres saying that they advocate or preach a church of the nation. Never!

> When it is said that the churches must accept the circumcision rite, what is meant is that all the good things in it must be regarded as a good custom and the custom should be upgraded to a level at which it could be harmonized with the church, and all the customs that degrade a person as a Christian should be dropped.)

Calata expresses himself strongly against ubulunga, the rite whereby a necklace made of hair from the tail of a particular family beast is worn. He regards this as idolatry and he even condemns the umgidi celebration parties for young men who come out of initiation schools. He also strongly suggests that the young men should be brought before the priest for blessing as soon as they come back home. In this way he bridges the gap between what was regarded as an abhorrent pagan custom and the church.

4.2.1. **African agency and the changing spirit realm**

The mainline churches have left no stone unturned in their efforts to uproot all belief in both the benevolent and the malevolent presences. After all the years since the advent of Western Christianity in Africa, there is still no hope of bridging the gap between the two cultures on this issue. Not even the miracle of a new South Africa seems to do the trick. The Western church has simply behaved as if all these African realities do not exist, as if they are mere figments of the Africans' superstitious minds. Admittedly, they could be as all superstition is, but the fact of the matter is that they have a very strong impact on the people's lives.

All black people do not subscribe to these views or superstitions. Some blacks are even more vehement than their white colleagues in condemning them yet others believe in them so implicitly that they have left the mainline churches disgruntled and frustrated and have found a home in the mushrooming pentecostal churches. Some of these churches are a combination of divinership and Christian worship.

In the early fifties we saw a proliferation of the Zionist churches which clearly baptised divinership. Some of the services were divination sessions in the guise of western traditional forms of worship. Causes of sickness were diagnosed in African fashion and the underlying practice was clearly based on the African traditional form of divination. People were told that they were being bewitched by one

or other malevolent person in the same way as the diviners do. Malevolent medicines were allegedly dug up from underneath people's floors in the same way as medicine people did. In the beginning, the church diviners used holy water to cure the afflicted but with the course of time there were clear changes in both the medication and the method of diagnosing the illness.

Nowadays there are church persons who practise both as traditional diviners, priests and faith healers. The service goes through various stages. In the beginning the diviner dons his or her traditional garb. The dancing and the singing is typical of the normal diviners. The clapping that accompanies the divination is also reminiscent of the traditional diviner. The medicine that is dished out to the patients is also the normal herbs and other potent wild plants.

Later on the service assumes a more western style. It starts with prayers and animated singing of hymns accompanied by the same drum that was used for traditional divination. The only discernible difference is that the diviner is now robed in flowing church robes instead of the typical diviner regalia. Prayer and the laying on of hands seem to take the place of traditional herbs in this part of the service. It cannot be doubted that the line of demarcation between the traditional diviner and such a priest is very thin if at all in such circumstances.

Of course the faith healer is a stage beyond this secondary stage. He or she does not use herbs but concentrates on prayer, laying on of hands, use of certain potent artefacts such as candles and cosmetics specially treated or blessed. He or she utilises special powers from the Holy Spirit to divine people's illnesses.

It should be stressed that spiritual issues should not be seen in isolation but in a holistic sense in which there is an interrelationship between several factors in the lives of those concerned. The abovementioned malevolent spirits could easily be discarded as cultural superstitions that have nothing to do with spirituality. This isolationist view goes against the grain of the following comments by Schneiders (1989:693) that:

> [s]pirituality is a holistic discipline in that its inquiry into human spiritual experience is not limited to explorations of the explicitly religious, i.e. the so-called "interior life." The psychological, bodily, historical, social, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other

dimensions of the human subject of spiritual experience are integral to the experience insofar as it is the subject matter of the discipline of spirituality.

It is this interdisciplinary nature of spirituality that enables us to consider cultural issues and how they impact on the faith lives of the people. There is clearly some correlation between these phenomena and the spirituality of those concerned. Secondly, there is correlation between spirituality and the role of key social role players such as diviners and herbalists since these agencies fight against malevolent spirits. They seek to restore harmony in society. Even the very act of consulting them is spiritually motivated in that it revolves round the people's belief system and the knowledge that the incisions the herbalists make on various parts of the body and the medicines they dispense have the power to ward off evil spirits.

4.2.2 **Appropriation and variation in the CPSA.**

Having looked at the broad picture and at the historical developments especially in the earlier years, it should be of interest to narrow our focus down to consider what is now happening in the relationship between black and white congregations of at least one particular denomination, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA) otherwise known as the Anglican Church. The following case study is by far incomplete. It can only serve as a pointer to some evolutionary trends within the Anglican church.

The CPSA is one of the European churches that were transplanted wholesale into the African soil without further ado. Right from the early beginnings, this church made no serious efforts to align itself with the receiving culture. It remained staunchly true to its European identity and traditions.

Perhaps the efforts of the CPSA to remain both British- Roman Catholic in outlook, on the one side, and African on the other, were eventually thwarted by its own readiness to succumb to the strict racial demarcations of both the colonial and post-colonial eras. The church was strongly divided along racial lines. There were black, coloured, Indian and white congregations across the country and, for a long time, there was very little done to link the various racially segregated congregations.

While the church insisted on the same basic liturgy and hymnology, albeit in translation and adaptation, the African churches gradually developed an ethos of their own. This dichotomy between black and white Anglicanism grew wider and wider over the years. For many years the missionary schools and churches fostered a spirit of some common heritage but with the waining of these establishments over the years, the distinctions have grown stronger. The collapse of missionary institutions such as Lovedale, St Matthews, Healdtown meant the demise of this strong influence in these different denominations - Presbyterians, Anglicans and Methodists, respectively.

There are many fine and minor differences between black and white Anglican congregations. Only a few will be touched on here.

In the first instance, black congregations have a strong tradition of the existence of the Mothers' Union (MU) characterised by their purple blouses (white in some dioceses). Their structures range from local to Archdeaconry, Diocese and Provincial level. It cannot be doubted that some of the black congregations would have now been dead without this pillar of support. The Anglican Women's Fellowship (AWF), originally of the predominantly white churches is a slightly different but related women's auxiliary within the church. The MU is virtually defunct in the white churches.

On the men's side we find another striking difference between black and white congregations. Black Anglican congregations have a long tradition of lay-preachers whereas in the white congregations normally only the priest and some selected persons preach or conduct services. Without this group some of our rural churches would have closed down long ago. Many people have been brought to Christ by these often semi-literate footsoldiers!

In more recent years, there evolved within the CPSA what is called the Bernard Mizeki Young Men's Guild. This Guild has attracted many young men (some of them quite old, in fact), some of whom had been either out in the streets or on the periphery of church activities, to the church. The style of preaching and singing could be labelled as mildly revivalist and Methodist, but this is generally speaking the style of doing things in Africa. Of course, some orthodox Anglicans have expressed

concern about the Guild's evangelistic approach but this could be expected from people who make no distinction between the Anglican Church and English culture.

A few years ago I followed with great interest another development in the CPSA. One of the younger and more fundamentalist black clergy tried to do away with the so-called Jesus' Seven Words on the Cross on Good Friday because, according to him, concentrating on the so-called Seven Words was not an Anglican tradition. Only black congregations hold this three hour preaching on the so-called Jesus' Seven Words on the cross. The standard prayer book does not refer to Seven Words at all but the black congregations have been preaching on them for ages. No amount of theological convincing could persuade the congregation to drop the service or to hold it in strict accordance with the Anglican Prayer Book. Perhaps their cause was further strengthened by the white Diocesan Bishop, Bishop David Russell who, instead of pronouncing the demise of the Seven Words as was expected when he was invited to take the service in that particular year, preached them in strict accordance with the tradition in black congregations.

While the liturgy used in black and white congregations or parishes is the same, the styles of singing have tended to differ even more radically over the recent years. Blacks are more exuberant, rhythmic and animated while the whites tend to be quite restrained.

In recent years there have been interesting developments in the black congregations of which the mother churches might not even be aware. There are no global attempts to indigenise the Anglican church, but there are informal contextualisation processes within the broader church largely depending on the orientation and attitude of the individual priest. Even among the black clergy some are more conservative or fundamental than others. There are black clergy who are considered whiter than white when it comes to contextualisation within the church but there are others who go beyond limits to Africanise the church in one way or the other.

Today it is not uncommon to see a black Anglican priest at the cattle kraal or byre blessing a sacrificial beast or goat to be slaughtered for one or other ritual. To authenticate his role he would be robed in full church regalia, cassock and surplice. The blessing of the beast is sometimes associated with either the `ukukhapha' or `ukubuyisa' rituals which have up to now been strongly pooh-poohed by the church authorities of the mainline churches.

I once watched with great admiration one of our Anglican priests concelebrate in a traditional beast slaughtering ceremony. The part that interested me most was when he asked the senior member of the family to sprinkle the ox with the family "ubulawu" (herbs with special potency used only in certain rituals). This was done with great reverence and dignity followed by the priest who sprinkled the same beast with holy water.

It is interesting to note that the Mormon religion is not at variance with African religion in this regard because `for Mormons, there is certainly a close relationship between the living, the dead, and the unborn' (Thomson in Blakely, van Beeck and Thomson 1994:95).

In 1997 I had another exciting first hand experience of the reconciliation of Western and African religion. It was at a house blessing ceremony conducted by one of the older Anglican clergy of our church, Fr. H.M. Hintsa. On our arrival at the house we were ushered to the cattle kraal where, after the preliminary courtesies, we robed and started the proceedings.

The service started near the cattle kraal with women keeping a safe distance since they are not allowed into the kraal. We moved from the cattle kraal towards the main entrance led by a member of the family who was reciting the clan praises. From the main entrance the service took on a hybrid form with some sections from the Anglican liturgy and others from traditional practice. Inside the house the sprinkling of the house with holy water was accompanied by references to the living-dead and the invocation of their presence by the priest himself. The whole ceremony was a combination of African and Western rituals until we ended in front of the house where speeches were delivered, ending up in benediction.

Another senior Anglican priest who has openly championed incarnation and respect for African spirituality is none other than Canon J P M Ncaca formerly of the St John and St Chad's Anglican Church in Zwelitsha. Before he retired from full-time ministry he had the honour of being the first black Archdeacon of King William’s Town. Not only did he infuse the orthodox Anglicans in his

church with his lively African style services backed by skilful harnessing of African folkstories adeptly used as inspiring illustrations in his sermons, but he also actively invited his congregants to inform him when they were going to have family rituals.

He used to bless the boys before they went to the circumcision school and on their return at the end of their seclusion. Members of his congregation who wanted to slaughter animals for their family rituals such as ukukhapha and ukubuyisa had their animals blessed before they were slaughtered.

Perhaps the strongest pointer to his unwavering convictions regarding African spirituality could be discerned in two sterling examples. When he was about to leave his Zwelitsha township home where he had stayed with his family for more than twenty years, he slaughtered a beast to inform his ancestors and his neighbours of his intended move. Once again, after his arrival in King William's Town he slaughtered another beast to inform his ancestors and his new neighbours of his present whereabouts, in strict accordance with African custom.

After years of rejection, denial and apathy, the CPSA is beginning to take the question of African culture very seriously. It has now established what is appropriately called The African Culture and Christianity Standing Commission (ACCSC) which explains itself as follows in a memorandum dated 29 October 1997 circulated by Kuse (1997:1) to all Dioceses, Parishes and Congregations and Chaplaincies:

> A few years ago the CPSA felt the need to take African Culture seriously. This was seen as a continental as well as a universal phenomenon. An example of this was in 1991 when African Liturgists decided to meet as African Liturgists. This meeting - in Kanamani, Kenya 1993 - resulted in the formation of the Consultation on African Culture and Anglican Liturgy (CACAL). This was under the auspices of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA). That in turn had arisen out of need for inculturation generally which culminated in the Societas Liturgica and the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC) meetings in York 1989 which had the theme "Inculturation and the Liturgy".

The Commission (Vide Kuse 1997:1) continues to explain the need to take the question of African culture and Christianity very seriously:

> When the Gospel and culture encountered each other this happened in certain ways and had various effects on different people. In the main "Gospel" and "Culture" became polarised, one assuming superiority or ascendancy over the other, or looking at the other as demonic bent on destroying or stultifying any good in the other. This meant a total rejection of the status quo for the new incoming thing. Many Blacks opted for a midway position where they would practise Christianity by day and observe things of culture by night. Gospel and Culture did not need to be threatening each other but to so dialogue that they would enable its subjects to practise beliefs openly and unashamedly.

These sentiments resonate with those expressed by the Africa Faith & Justice Network in **The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives (1996:76)** which also appeal for dialogue with traditional religion:

> Particular attention should be paid to our customs and traditions in so far as they constitute our cultural heritage. They belong to oral cultures and their survival depends essentially on the dialogue of generations to assure their transmission. Corporate personalities, wise thinkers who are its guarantors, will be the principal interlocutors in this phase of profound change in our cultures. A dialogue with the guarantors of our cultural values and our traditional religion (ATR) structured around the cultural heritage is strongly recommended in our local churches.

This reawakening has caught the institutional church by surprise but there is no turning back as pointed out by Dwane (1989:29):

> We have been made not only to look European in outward appearance by our manner of dress, but more seriously, to think, speak, and behave European. But we are beginning to realise that we are in captivity, and that we need to be liberated in order that we may be ourselves, the people whom God has made, and wants us to be. We are learning in this process of re-orienting and re-educating ourselves how to become African, and what it is that makes us African. And as we `decolonise' ourselves, we are discovering that there are riches in our own heritage, and learning to appreciate them. These riches have been bypassed in previous attempts to bring the gospel to Africa. But they are still available and ready to welcome it, and give it a home and a new character. Christianity must have a truly African character if it is to remain in Africa, and be the religion of Africa.

Coming from a senior member of the Anglican episcopacy, and a head of the Order of Ethiopia within Anglicanism, these words have to be taken seriously. They show that there is growing concern about the lethargic approach of the church so far to both incarnation and the decolonisation of African culture. Faced with the proliferation of religions and faiths in the new multilingual, multiethnic and multi religious South Africa, Christianity can only benefit from a speedy review of its attitude to African culture.

What is crucial in the whole debate is to remember that African cultural values give meaning to the people's lives, therefore, they cannot be dismissed without further ado because, without them, life becomes meaningless and empty. David Bohm (1993:147) articulates this meaning as follows:

> I would add further that meaning is at the root of our whole being. How we act is determined by what everything means to us. A very elementary case is a person walking in a dark place, who sees a shadow, which suggests that an assailant may be present. This interpretation of the shadow may arouse the whole body.... The adrenaline, the heart, everything. The meaning of the shadow made these changes occur. Meanings of much greater sublety may move us much more. If we are going to face difficult questions and problems, we have to see their meaning and have the energy to do it. But as we have seen, the ultimate source of meaning is subtle and cannot be made manifest. Deeper meanings lead us to the question of spirituality.

It should be obvious, therefore, that there are moves, sporadic and adhoc in places, to find our roots as African people in the proliferation of faiths we adopted. Some people have even gone so far as to establish Africans-only churches and some have established so-called African churches which are modelled strictly on African cultural values. The quest is for a church that would accommodate their Africanness and their African cultural values which are largely based on the hidden presences and their impact on society as well as on *ubuntu* as a determinant of our relations with God, the living-dead and humanity at large.

It is also very encouraging to note that the institutional church is moving away from the conventional attitude of denial and rejection. It is clearly doing its best to accommodate and to implement, wherever possible, some of the ideals and thoughts it has learnt from African culture. A good example of this is the case where the current Anglican Bishop of Grahamstown has had reason to appeal to the sensibilities of Africanness in dealing with the vexing problem of young children receiving holy communion before confirmation. While the white congregations accepted and implemented this new rite as early as in 1979, black congregations have passionately maintained the old tradition. In encouraging them to seriously consider changing, Bishop Russell (1998:2) clearly appropriates an African custom that was rejected outright by the early missionaries:

> When I come as a Bishop to confirm, I always find some very young boys and girls being presented. They are in no way really mature enough to be making a life's decision of faith and discipleship. It really disturbs me to be presented with such young ones. In African custom, we would not dream of presenting a boy for the highly significant rite of Circumcision with all its solemn symbolism, at the tender age of 12 or 13. Then why are we confirming our young Christians at such a tender age? It is time we committed ourselves to change.

This is only one of the many cross-border appropriations of sacred symbols that are taking place between Africans and white people as we move further and further away from frontier attitudes.

Perhaps the most revolutionary incarnation could be the latest developments in the Order of Ethiopia which is led by Bishop S. Dwane. No sooner had the CPSA Provincial Synod granted the Order full autonomy than it took the first steps to affirm its determination to unshackle itself from the Eurocentric nature of the CPSA with regard to Qamata, the ancestors and the role of malevolent spirits (Vide Dwane 1999). This radical change of outlook comes out clearly in their newly evolved liturgy for the incorporation into the church of diviners or those who feel themselves called to divinership.[1]

This move on the part of the Order of Ethiopia contrasts, radically, with the outright rejection of divinership by the established churches which led to alienation. Vide Pauw (1975: 168):

> If the cases reveal the attitude that the institution of the doctor-diviner is incompatible with church membership, the obverse is found in those church members or baptized Christians who lapsed from the Church altogether when they became doctors. Whether they made a conscious choice or gradually drifted away from the Church, they rejected their church ties for the traditional institution.

Let me hasten to emphasise that shunning the church was not caused, as could be erroneously inferred from the above statement, by any inherent incompatibility on the part of the diviners but it was, undeniably, because of the fact that the institutional churches rejected divinership as one of the many manifestations of the dreaded ‘paganism monster’ that diviners and neophytes decided to break ties with the church.

Needless to say that the central role of the *amagqirha* (diviners) was not only misconstrued but completely undermined by the authorities that be. Before the Order of Ethiopia is, once again, accused of dragging paganism into the church, it should be important to give a clear exposition of the role of the diviners in African society. Perhaps Broster (1982: 15) gives one of the most lucid descriptions of the *amagqirha* in broad outline:

> Before the arrival of the missionaries, the amaXhosa adhered to the ancestral cult. Although the members of this cult believe in a Supreme Being and other spirits, they direct their prayers and worship, in the form of sacrifices, to God via the spirits of their ancestors.
>
> As in other religions, the "priests" of the ancestral cult experience a vocation and undergo training. As *amagqirha*, they are called upon to interpret or divine ancestral behests, and for this reason they are often referred to as "diviners".
>
> In actual fact the *amagqirha* serve a threefold function of religion, magic and medicine. In the first place they keep in contact with the spirits of the ancestors, and ascertain the causes of misfortune and the required propitiation. Secondly they expose evil-doers and identify witches and sorcerers. In the old days this practice was referred to as "smelling out" and probably gave rise to the colloquial but incorrect name of "witch-doctors". Furthermore, to ward off evil, the *amagqirha* provide charms and magic medicine. Finally, through a knowledge and study of the healing properties of plants, they administer herbal extracts in the treatment of disease.

The change of attitude towards traditional doctors (a term that includes both the diviners and the herbalists, *amagqirha* and *amaxhwele* respectively) is happening throughout the continent both in the secular and the sacred realms. This is reflected poignantly by Campbell (1998:1):

> The respect for the important work of the traditional healer, the main provider of health care in Africa for centuries, has waned in modern times, partly because of misconceptions about their practice. Today, with a new openness in South Africa and an increasing world-wide curiosity about natural medicine and therapies, the traditional healers are coming into their own and setting the record straight.

Having tried to address some of the misconceptions and attitudes towards traditional healers, it is now incumbent on me to venture a critical analysis of the Order of Ethiopian liturgy for the incorporation into the church of traditional healers. The interpretation and the views expressed are my own and do not, of necessity, reflect those of the leaders of the church in question.

The crux of the liturgy is its blending of Western religious concepts and African traditional religious concepts. The Trinity, involving Qamata, Jesus and the ancestors is recognised throughout. Qamata is said to be the Creator while Jesus is described as the Young Sacrificial Ox. Traditional images abound because Qamata is also described as the Perennial Fountain, the Waterfall with a foamy mouth and the Bottomless Sea. Reference to a foamy mouth resonates with the "ubulawu" (charm) that diviners and heads of families partake of when celebrating important rituals. The eucharistic bread is referred to as "the home baked wheat bread" and the chalice translates into the "beaker containing beer made from corn".

The preamble to the service boldly makes use of terminology that the institutional churches, including the CPSA, have eschewed hitherto. Secondly, the service includes references to the cattle kraal and family rituals besides employing heavy traditional terminology such as *ukunqula, (*to worship or to invoke), *intsonyama (*meat from inside the sacrificial animal's shoulder), *ukushwama* (to partake of the special portion), *ukucamagusha (*to propitiate, to pray for peace) *and camagu (*let there be peace), terms which resonate with those normally used in traditional celebrations and rituals. Given the context, their use is perfectly justified.

The ancestors are referred to as those who have wrapped all people in Qamata's love, a statement which elicits a response from the audience that calls for peace from the hosts of the One-who-is-above. This clearly indicates that the ancestors are seen as part of the heavenly hosts consisting of angels, archangels and other heavenly bodies.

It is interesting to note that after the supplications and intercessions the centrality of Christ is affirmed. The diviner (or neophyte) is given by the priest the Light of Christ who is regarded as the Proto-Ancestor. That Christ takes precedence over the ancestors comes out clearly in the following prayer:

> Ukhanyo lukaKrestu malubakhanyisele abo bandibizela kolu bizo lobugqirha, ukuze bandikhokele ngalo kolu hambo lunemingcipheko bandifikise esiphelweni esihle.[2]
>
> (May the light of Christ shine upon those who have called me to the calling of traditional healer so that they may lead me in this hazardous journey and bring me to a happy ending).

Once again, Christianity and African spirituality are blended perfectly when the traditional healer renews his/her vows in the Christian faith and his/her belief in Qamata, the Creator of life, and the One who owns all. Christ is once again referred to as "icamagu lokusixolelanisa" (reconciliatory sacrifice) and "nomthombo wobomi nempilo" (the source or fountain of life and health). The Holy Spirit is described in such a way that it is not brought into conflict with the ancestral presences because it is said that God's heavenly bodies and the hosts of ancestral beings are all like a stream in people's lives that is strongly sustained by water whose source is a particular fountain.

The use of the holy chrism once again affirms the religious nature of the incorporation. Maybe in time to come the Bishop might even include the use of the family charm (*ubulawu bekhaya)* before the next phase of the ceremony, that of handing the healer over to the family "izihlwele" (hosts of ancestral presences) in the courtyard.

The interface between Qamata, Jesus, the ancestral presences and the malevolent spirits comes out very clearly in the following concluding prayer by the priest after the head of family has addressed the family ancestors:

> Njengoko nina zihlwele nihleli eNkosini thina bakweli phakade sikholiwe ukuba konke enikwenzayo kukholisa yona. Ngaloo nkolo ke siyamnikela uN…kuni ukuba nimkhokelele kuYesu igqirha lasenyameni nasemoyeni, aphile kwizinto ezimgulisayo, aze axhotyiswe ngezixhobo zokuchasa amandla obumnyama, nokuphilisa abanye abantu. Simnikezela sisithi makube camagu, indlela yakhe ibe mhlophe.[3]
>
> (As you the family hosts are seated with the Lord we in this world believe that all you do pleases him. In that belief we then hand N… over to you so that you may lead him to Christ the healer of flesh and spirit, so that he/she may be healed of all affliction, and be equipped with the weaponry with which to repel the forces of darkness and with which he/she would be able to heal other people. We hand him/her over to you saying may there be peace, and may his/her way henceforth be bright).

The traditional nature of the ceremony is enhanced by the singing of Ntsikana's Great Hymn and the beating of the cow-hide as the congregation returns to the church where Mass is said. The presence

of the ancestors is ensured, once more, by the use of the "umnikandiba" leaves as incense instead of the conventional incense. One wonders, though, whether there is a correlation between the "umnikandiba" plant and the "umnuka-mbiba" plant which is used to swing a baby through its smoke to ward off evil spirits. My suspicion is that the former is a corruption of the latter were it not for the difference in smell as I believe the "umnikandiba" has a pleasant smell whereas the "umnuka-mbiba" plant has an acrid smell. Both plants are used to drive away evil spirits.

Once more the incense, according to what the priest says as he blesses it, is equated with the smell of Jesus Christ which drives away all evil spirits. The ensuing prayers clearly indicate that the family rituals have an important role to play in ensuring reconciliation among people and that the role of the ancestral presences in safeguarding members of their families should not be undermined.

How far this development will go in influencing other churches remains to be seen but it does represent a strong departure, both in practice and in attitude, away from conventional wisdom in the institutional churches. Besides, it is an important milestone and a commendable response to the challenge posed in 1994 by the New People Media Centre (in Faith and Justice Network 1996:18) in one of twelve `Concrete Proposals for the Synod' in Rome:

> Africa is very much in need of its own liturgical rites that can enable it to celebrate in truth its faith and to build truly African Christian communities through worship. The challenge of the African church is to exploit fully Africa's cultural heritage, its symbols and symbolism, its history and actual context, and its theological thinking and reflection. Such African rites will serve as one of the pillars of truly local churches, especially in the celebrations of the vital sacramental moments in life. Such rites will assist in eliminating dualism and at the same time give the legitimate opportunity to the African church to enrich the universal church and all the communities that belong to it.

It is very encouraging to note the following comments by Canon Suggit (1999:30), a highly respected Anglican theologian, on the issue of Africanisation:

> The process of Africanisation however does not primarily depend on the number of African priests and bishops in the CPSA. It really means that the church should express in its worship, faith and life some of the insights and traditional customs of Africans. The importance of the ancestors, for example, may not be disregarded. Some African theologians have thought of Jesus as being the first ancestor - a title which would seem to be in accord with the biblical view of Jesus as the second Adam, incorporating in himself all humankind. Perhaps the creeds need to be re-formulated to give more meaning to African ideas about God. Similarly African ways of worship need to be respected and encouraged, even though they may seem unduly exuberant to a staid English-speaking congregation. The present move for transformation in the CPSA should be a way in which African expressions of Christian faith should be permitted and supported. No doubt these will differ among themselves: it is unlikely that the context and experience of the church in Mozambique will be the same as in the African townships of Gauteng or the Cape.

Considering the vehemence with which the earlier church fathers opposed almost anything African, and being aware of the influence of such great theologians as Canon Suggit in the Anglican church, his views as expressed here can only bolster and enhance the views of those who feel that it is high time that the church in Africa related to, and respected, its African context. In conclusion, I make bold to say that the church in Africa has an enormous missionary task on its shoulders to *mission* the institutional Church and help it rid itself of all vestiges of Eurocentrism while retaining its catholicism and its universalism., *subject to the authority of Christ* (to cite Suggit 1999:31) and in obedience to the fundamental precepts of the all-embracing *ubuntu* of Qamata based on the tenets of integration, collective accountability and responsibility for the welfare of this continent and all its peoples.

4.2.3 **The African concept of ubuntu and current thinking in quantum physics**

Of all the concepts and the conversations that have been exchanged between black and white over the last century, none has caught the imagination of people across colour lines more than the African concept of ubuntu. While ubuntu cannot be used as a panacea for all the problems of the continent, it could be used to forge closer ties and deeper understanding among the peoples of the continent, especially if viewed against the backdrop of developments in quantum physics today as will be seen in this concluding section.

Western spirituality is based on a culture that is strongly underpinned by individualism and competition, a culture that is characterised by a tendency to regard reality as fragmented. Each person is an island, each person is minding his or her business. Ubuntu, in contradistinction, has wholeness as one of its pillars. It has foundations in a culture that regards life as a seamless garment that is so great and inclusive that there is no effective difference between the spiritual and the natural.

In this kind of existence, one person's personhood and identity is fulfilled and complemented by the other person's personhood. Each person **is** because the other person **is**. Each person exists because the other person exists. This view resonates with current thinking in quantum physics as espoused by Bohm one of the most outstanding quantum physicists.

As pointed out by Bohm (1993:147) `many thousands of years ago, our culture was not broken into fragments as it is now. At that time, science and spirituality were not separated'. The big divide came only much later when technology began to split from religion. Scientists such as Descartes argued that everything was a machine -the animals, the body, et cetera. According to this view, only the immortal soul was not a machine (Bohm 1993:148) hence the strict division between nature and spirituality.

While science is essential, in fact it is a sine qua non for our existence, it has been amply demonstrated that it is not an answer to all our needs as human beings, let alone as spiritual beings. This need for something else which science cannot provide is articulated as follows by Bohm (ibid:149):

> Nevertheless, science as we know it cannot, by itself, give meaning in the deep sense of ultimate significance, value and purpose. Science does have value in it. To acknowledge the fact, whether you like it or not, is an important value. Also science has the purpose of obtaining knowledge and satisfying curiosity. However, this is still a rather limited meaning.

Bohm argues for a coherent wholeness and a coherent culture in which science and spirituality could not only coexist, but also complement each other as both are essential for human survival. In order to achieve this, he also calls for dialogue between those concerned. Besides these suggested measures, he strongly calls for a common coherent consciousness.

It is obvious from the above that the key for the coexistence of science and spirituality could be found in **fellowship** and not in **isolation**. This coexistence, however, can only be successful if we could have a radical attitudinal change in those who are involved in the two activities. This view resonates with the following comment by Bohm (1993:149):

> We are all pushing against each other and everyone is trying to win. The significance of wholeness is that everything is related internally to everything else, and, therefore, in the long run, it has no meaning for people to ignore the needs of others.

There is, therefore, need for all concerned to revisit the traditional conservative view of reality as a machine with parts that can be reduced to smaller constituent elements, instead of seeing reality, as Bohm (in Keepin 1993:45) puts it, as `unbroken wholeness in flowing movement'. Keepin (ibid:45) continues to point out that Bohm `shows that there is no concrete evidence in science to favor its fragmented world view over the unbroken, flowing holomovement he proposes'.

Bohm (1980:173) gives a clear exposition of the untenability of the mechanistic order in which `each part is formed ... independently of the others, and interacts with the other parts only through some kind of external contact'. As a physicist, Bohm employs the theory of relativity to illustrate that the basic assumption underlying the generally accepted form of mechanism in physics has been shown to be untenable. These basic assumptions crumble even more rapidly when tested against the quantum theory.

Instead of the mechanistic order, Bohm (1980:177) proposes a new order, the implicate order, which he explains as follows:

> We proposed that a new order is involved here, which we called the implicate order (from the Latin root meaning `to enfold' or `to fold inward'). In terms of the implicate order one may say that everything is enfolded into everything. This contrasts with the explicate order now dominant in physics in which things are unfolded in the sense that each thing lies only in its own particular region of space (and time) and outside the regions belonging to other things.

The crux of Bohm's thinking is undoubtedly wholeness instead of fragmentation. He has clearly indicated how the theory of relativity and the quantum theory have provided substantial evidence to

disprove the claims of the old paradigm upheld by the mechanistic order. He concludes that even consciousness could be viewed in the light of the implicate order thus enabling us to find a common ground with others.

The implicate order with its emphasis on wholeness and interrelationship, offers us a good opportunity to reorganise our relationships. It also accords with the communion consciousness idea proposed by Beatrice Bruteau (1980:43) which only transcendent persons can attain. These are persons who are indwelling in others and are united with one another's personhood thus, to use Bruteau's term, establishing `interpersonhood' (Bruteau ibid:56). This strongly resonates with the African concept of ubuntu which has been variously defined e.g. Cowley (1991:44) says in this regard:

> Ubuntu (`Botho' in Sotho, `Vhuthu' etc.) is like the English person-hood, an abstract term, it manifests itself through various visible human acts in different social situations. In short, the quality of Ubuntu is manifested in every human act which has community building as its objective orientation. Any act that destroys the community, any anti-social behaviour cannot, in any way be described as Ubuntu.

While community building is one of the many spinoffs or facets of ubuntu, ubuntu should not be confused with generosity (ububele) and philanthropy. It is something deeper than those activities, good as they are. It involves sharing yourself, your humanity with the other person first, and then the rest will follow suite. There is a sense in which the primary purpose is person building which will automatically dovetail into community building. Its hallmark is empathy even before sympathy. This cannot happen without indwelling.

It is only through this process of becoming like Christ and becoming the other person that we can reach the final integration which Merton (1980:211) says `is a state of transcultural maturity beyond mere social adjustment, which always implies partiality and compromise. Such a person has attained a deeper, fuller identity than that of his limited ego-self which is only a fragment of his being'.

From these observations, it is quite clear that what Peacocke (1979:17) says cannot be denied that `science and Christian theology cannot avoid encountering each other and thinking anew what kind of interrelationship they might have today'.

We need to be aware of the paradigm shift that has occured in physics and which has affected the way we view reality. As stressed by Capra (1985:xviii) the `crisis derives from the fact that we are trying to apply the concepts of an outdated world view - the mechanistic world view of Cartesian-Newtonian science - to a reality that can no longer be understood in terms of these concepts'.

Bohm's first important discovery in physics paved the way for the deeper themes of wholeness and interconnectedness that permeate contemporary science and contemporary spirituality today. This is related in detail by Keepin (1993:32):

> He discovered that, in a high temperature gas (known as a plasma), electrons that have been stripped away from atoms do not behave as separate individual particles but rather as part of a larger, organized whole. Vast numbers of electrons would produce effects that were highly organized, as if some organic process were orchestrating their collective behavior.

This theory underscores and greatly illuminates the contemporary view that reality is not necessarily synonymous with fragmentation and deductionism. Secondly, it proves that scientism which held sway for so long and influenced the thinking of many generations was based on an unsound premise. The behaviour of the electrons is analogous to the behaviour that forms the essence of current trends in contemporary spirituality. These trends emphasise integration, wholeness and unity and the orchestrating force behind them is the spirit.

Keepin (1993:34) explains that `Bohm postulates that the ultimate nature of physical reality is not a collection of separate objects (as it appears to us), but rather it is an **undivided whole** that is in perpetual dynamic flux'. This view undergirds current thinking in the science/spirituality debate. It also forms the basis of the proposed ideal interrelationship in society, as well as of the spirituality that informs that relationship.

The old paradigm was mechanistic and reductionist. Reality could, purportedly, be divided into an infinite number of smaller constituent elements. Anything not reducible in this way was rejected outright. Everything had to be testable scientifically. Measurement and quantification were the only criteria acceptable in determining reality.

The systems view that is now emerging in physics has revolutionised our thinking on reality. It has been shown that reductionism is by far not the only way of looking at reality. In fact it can even distort reality. Scientists such as Henry Stapp (vide Capra 1985:70) clearly argue for a shift from the mechanical Cartesian view to a modern understanding of physics which embraces words like organic, holistic and ecological. He strongly challenges the atomistic view of the protagonists of the Cartesian-Newtonian view by saying:

> An elementary particle is not an independently existing unanalyzable entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things.

The essence of Bohmian physics which has so influenced our thinking on reality is that reality, like modern physics, is dynamic. By his coinage, the **holomovement** , Bohm clearly shows that there is a constant flow of material from one form to the other. Consequently, he strongly advocates the study of movement instead of the study of the structure of objects as was done in the old paradigm. This resonates with the study of the dynamic of relationship as evinced in love and care for one another in contemporary spirituality, as opposed to the mechanistic study of individualistic characteristics as happens in fundamentalistic interiority.

African culture has its own limitations but it does go a long way in the direction of creating an existential reality that emphasises wholeness instead of fragmentation, a culture that believes in solidarity instead of isolationism and competition, a culture that strives for sharing and indwelling instead of polarity and selfishness. All these values are held sacred by its protagonists because any aberration from them invokes the wrath of their revered hidden presences.

4.3 **Conclusion**

It should be stressed that African culture should not be glamourised or romanticised. It cannot be denied that African culture, like all cultures, has its good points and its bad points. Up to now, the tendency was to emphasise the bad points and to be completely oblivious of the important role which the culture played in African society. Even the few good points that have been bandied

about in recent years, e.g. ubuntu have been exploited for expediency and not because there is a genuine commitment to follow what ubuntu means in actual practice - not only an outward show of hospitality, but also a commitment to share in the other person's suffering and celebration and to maintain at all costs the harmony between the living and the living-dead whether they be saints or ancestors. This is based on a philosophy that there is essentially no difference between people, that you are in me and I am in you, and, therefore, we are basically one person because "umntu ngumntu ngabantu" (a person is a person because of other people).

Notes:

1. The extracts and all the quotations are from an unpublished draft liturgy compiled by Bishop Sigqibo Dwane entitled 'Inkonzo yomntu omhlophe' (1999: pp. 1-14.)
2. Dwane, ibid: 3.
3. Dwane, ibid: 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The study focused on two primary objectives which were basically treated interchangeably. The first objective was to highlight the essential features and nature of the phenomenon of hidden presences in the spirituality of the amaXhosa of the Eastern Cape as seen against the backdrop of Celtic spirituality which has so much in common with African spirituality.

Because African culture had been downtrodden and denigrated over the past century, it was felt essential to find a culture and a spirituality that could act as a sounding board and anchor to a culture that had almost been completely destroyed by Western cultural imperialism. Frankly speaking what happened in Africa is in complete contradistinction to what happened in Ireland where the early Irish church authorities took a conscious decision to baptise some of the elements of pre-Christian Irish culture. In essence, therefore, this study is an evaluation of the route that Christianity refused to take in its dealings with African culture and spirituality, a refusal that has led all of us to the cul-de-sac we find ourselves in.

The second objective, or better still, subtheme, of the research relates to the impact of Christianity on the above institutions. The study attempts to prove that Western Christianity was somewhat inconsistent in its policies in that it operated differently in Africa to what it did both in Europe and in Ireland. The first serious error was to presuppose that Christianity had to go hand in hand with cultural imperialism. A second misdirection was to give the impression in Africa that Christianity was a pure religion which never took over anything from the receiving cultures. As was clearly seen in chapter one, Christianity took over many pagan rituals and practices from its founding Jewish culture.[1]

As seen in chapter two, the existing commonalities between African and Celtic culture and spirituality are indicative of the fact that both cultures were deeply rooted in vibrant and steady pre-Christian communities where God was both immanent and transcendent. There was no strict demarcation

between the spiritual and the secular. People did not wear their spirituality like garments on a Sunday and shed them on the other week days. Their lives were given meaning by their rootedness in nature and humanity. Nature was theophanic. It reflected God or Qamata. God was indwelling in other people and therefore one had to show respect and love to one's family and to the broader community.

Chapter three clearly shows that, contrary to the ill-informed pronouncements of the early missionaries and their satellites, there is incontrovertible evidence that blacks have always believed in the existence of God whom they called Qamata, Tayi, Mdali and whom they also knew by many other names. Even though he was both immanent and transcendent, the only link between him and the people was through the mediation of the living-dead. The living-dead were like the justices of the peace and the custodians of law and order besides goodwill and harmony. They ensured that every able bodied person kept the social norms to the letter. That is why African culture has been accused of being static and rigid, allowing for no change. The son had to do like the father did, and the father had to do like his own father did, with no substantial variation to the norm and rule of life. This ensured continuity and identity.

Collective responsibility and accountability are attested to by the fact that each household was expected to fulfil its role in keeping the relations between it, Qamata and the ancestral world harmonious. One person's dereliction of duty and shirking of responsibility could bring calamity to the whole nation. In this way, everybody was everybody's keeper. This led to ubuntu (vide chapter four) - bonding and interrelatedness as compared to the individualism of the West which is sometimes acute even among so-called Christians. Ubuntu is certainly in tandem with the Christian teaching of love and fellowship.

Another bone of contention between the Western church and African Christians in this country has been the question of evil spirits. The church insisted that these were superstitions. No serious attention or consideration was given to the fact that in African society these were real life threatening menaces. In contra-distinction again, the early Irish Celtic church acknowledged the existence of the evil spirits and sought Christian ways of dealing with them instead of branding them as superstitions. While the Celts used the power of prayer and supplication to Christ to crush these spirits, the Africans

appealed to their own intermediaries, the living-dead, whom they regarded as powerful enough to keep the danger at bay. Once again, one could imagine how they felt completely vulnerable when they were told that they had to do away with ancestor veneration. It was like being told to remove your roof in the middle of a devastating storm!

Chapter four highlights the battle for the appropriation of sacred symbols, on the one hand, and reconciliation and incarnation on the other. This tension occured on both sides of the encounter. The encounter between the missionaries and the colonizers, on the one side, and the amaXhosa, on the other, was multidimensional. Its impact, albeit in varying degrees, could be felt on both sides. While in the beginning the total onslaught met with total rejection, cracks began to be visible on both sides even though those on the black side were soon to be more gaping.

The amaXhosa resisted imperial domination to the bitter end but with their energies sapped by hundred years of war and the devastating Nongqawuse tragedy, they ultimately found themselves drawn more and more into the Western economy and social and spiritual order. Wholesale transformation was averted simply by adopting Western ideals and incarnating them into African culture and spirituality while their adversaries also had to change their attitudes and accept certain African practices. The relation of the black CPSA vis-a-vis its white counterparts and predominantly white upper hierarchy, is illustrative of how much blacks have succeeded in appropriating Western sacred symbols. We also saw how they unobtrusively practised rituals and customs which were previously strongly condemned by the established structures and which they, even today, have not officially sanctioned. That the white upper hierarchy has kept a low profile is certainly tacit approval of some of these practices, if not, a willingness to accept and respect the church's multicultural nature in the same way that Colenso tried to and burnt his fingers rather badly.

This section also touched on an important development in the incarnation process whereby the Order of Ethiopia (now officially renamed the Ethiopian Episcopal Church) introduced their new liturgy for the incorporation of diviners into church membership. This bold African Renaissance step is expected to have a significant impact on thinking and attitudes in other African churches.

The short research also clearly demonstrated that the propagators of Western spirituality were not only grossly ignorant of the culture within which they were supposed to operate but they also consciously refused to be part of that culture. They failed like the Roman Catholics in China to take the local culture into consideration when trying to win the people over to Christianity.[2]

Such an unfortunate attitude led to rejection of Christianity by a large number of potential converts. Even those who joined the church did so merely because they saw some gain in joining what promised to be the only way of getting to a heaven that is potentially different from the oppression they were experiencing.[3] This attitude becomes even more lamentable if one considers the beneficial results experienced in the early Irish church which took over some of the indigenous practices and baptised them. In this way the new converts did not find themselves strangers in religion. They were strongly anchored to what they already knew. They came in, not as underdogs who had to be redressed by the colonial church masters in order to become people who are acceptable to God, but as equal partners and as equal human beings in the face of God who does not discriminate on race, colour, culture and demographic situation.

The encounter between Christianity and African culture had its good points even if these were far outweighed by the disadvantages. It opened the African people's eyes to the noblest in their own beleaguered culture and to the best in the encroaching Western culture. They managed to resist the onslaught by the strength of their own roots (ubuntu, communality and unity) and to fight back by invoking ideas from the West which their adversaries could not deny (liberty, equality and democracy) for which they had the support of the global community. They could then face their oppressors in the latter's own terms, and in the newly acquired languages of liberation - the languages of the Bible, Western political philosophy, and political economy, as epitomised by the Church, political movements and trade unions.

It is hoped, in conclusion, that, as a popular radio programme went some years ago, those who come across this short essay on the hidden presences in the spirituality of the amaXhosa of the Eastern Cape will `think on these things' and help create a place in the sun for African culture and spirituality in this country. Whilst everything contained in that culture is of vital importance, it is argued, without any

fear of contradiction, that the essence of African culture is the hidden presences as explained in this thesis.

Notes:

1. This view is strongly supported by Jacottet (1905:5):

   > There is but one God, one Christ, one Holy Ghost; but there is none the less a German, an English and a French manner of understanding and appreciating the same religious faith and life. It is as it were the same sun seen through different coloured glasses. To adapt itself to the mind of the Hellenes, Christianity has had to divest itself of its Jewish garb or husk and take a more or less Hellenic form. It was only by being assimilated and lived by Greeks, Romans, and Germans that it could conquer them thoroughly. It could only do it by the agency of national teachers and national churches. The same thing must happen in Africa if Christianity is to possess Africa, and there become a living and life-giving power. It will have to assume an African form to meet the needs of the African mind. If it cannot do that, our work is bound to be a huge failure.

2. The Chinese bungling is stated as follows by Jean-Marc Ela (1988:13):

   > In this respect, the famous dispute of the 17th century over Chinese rites is still a paradigm that clarifies the difficulties posed by a form of Christianity identified with a particular civilization. During the 17th century, Catholicism was almost wholly identified with Western civilization. The work of Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit colleagues to take on aspects of Chinese culture collided with the phenomenon of European ethnocentricity. A church that is not able to free itself from its contingent social structures cannot be open to the universal in the experience of life.

3. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:240) contend that:

   > The first converts would appear to have been made sensitive to the Protestant message by their very marginality; the promise of equality before the Lord, of unfettered moral economy, must have appealed to those who had long been treated as less than human.

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