A Biblical Critique of the Veneration of Ancestors and the use of Magic as Practised in the Kingdom of eSwatini

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Abstract

The roles of God, the ancestors, their mediators (the *tangoma*), and His Majesty Mswati III in the lives of the people of Swaziland are critiqued from a biblical perspective. It is shown that there are cultural beliefs and practices which are in conflict with biblical teaching, but which have found their way into the broader Church. This leads to a distortion in the preaching of the Gospel: God is portrayed as far removed and favour with God is believed to be accessible only through his intermediaries (the ancestors), leading to fearful subjugation. These two aspects of the image of God converge in a way that obstructs the central importance of the grace of God as found through faith in Christ Jesus.

[1] The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The kingdom of *eSwatini* (Swaziland) is a country in which two cultural themes predominate—ancestral veneration and patriarchalistic rule (van Schalkwyk 2006:219; Nyawo 2004:62; Curle 2012:84). The vast majority of the kingdom can trace their ancestry back to a limited number of Nguni clans with a common language—*isiSwati* (Matsebula 1988; Oluikpe 1997:15–27). This relative homogeneity of worldview within the country makes Swaziland useful as a case study to examine the impact of both of the above-mentioned cultural themes on the preaching of the Gospel. The discussion of the two themes has been split into two articles, so that each can be critiqued in a meaningful way.

According to many people and institutions, Christianity is said to dominate the *eSwatini* belief system (CIA 2016: ¶4; US Department of State 2012:¶4; Kasenene 1993:129; Kumalo 2013:43; Nxumalo 2014:13). However, there are significant areas of conflict within the wider Church's[2] understandings of the roles of God, the ancestors, their mediators—the *tangoma*—and the role played by His Majesty. Firstly, the underlying nature and character of *Mkhulumnqande* (Marwick 1966:228; Mbiti 1991:48) / *Mvelinchanti* (Kasanene 1993a:12; Oluikpe 1997:46; Nyawo 2004:51–57) (the Creator or Great Ancestor of the Swazis) and *uNkulunkulu* (the name given to God by the missionaries) 'are worlds apart' (Kuper 1986:62). Secondly, there is one's own understanding of the role and function of *emadloti* (ancestors). Thirdly, there is a very real dichotomy in the understanding of the role of *tangoma* in the everyday life of the average citizen. Finally, there is the office of the king and his central role in the kingdom's annual *iNcwala* rite.

[2] The Swazi understanding of 'the wider Church' includes Zionists, Independent Pentecostals, Mainline Churches, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics.

2. An Overview of Swazi Religious Culture

2.1. The god of Swazi traditionalists

The traditional Swazi understanding of God is based on African Indigenous Religion. But what are its doctrines? The belief system has no historical record of its tenets, so one is limited to an oral tradition that changes according to tribal grouping and from the personal viewpoint of the individual narrating the story. While there are differences in interpretation, the traditional Swazi belief is that *Mkhulumnqande*[3] created the Earth and handed it over to the ancestors who act on his behalf, ruling over the Earth (Buthelezi 2011:74). Within the wider Church, the earthly life of Jesus is acknowledged as the way of truth and living (LaNdwandwe 2009: 189; Mtshali 2004:11), and his death on the cross is recognised as an act of atonement (LaNdwandwe 2009: 189). Yet, his current resurrected status appears to be somewhat shrouded within the ancestral belief system in which, firstly, Christianity is recognised as being just one of the ways to approach God (Mtshali 2004:20) and secondly, Christ is viewed as the white man's ancestor (Palmer 2015:1).

2.2. The fear-filled role played by ancestral spirits

In African Indigenous Religion's understanding, the ancestors form an integral part of the community, to be revered and feared. They are revered so that favours can be asked of them, and feared in case they get upset and cause harm to the living (Oluikpe 1997: 46). It is for this reason that funerals are such elaborate affairs. Those left behind wish to ensure that

[3] *Mkhulumnqande*—The great one who went before / *Mvelinchanti* (he who appeared in ancient times / the one who appeared first.

there can be no reason for the deceased to be upset, because insufficient honour has been bestowed upon him[4] (Curle 2009:46).

This veneration of the ancestor continues for as long as he is remembered by those left behind. After the memory of the ancestor fades, so does the position of that ancestor, who then changes from one of effectual influence to an ordinary spirit having no influence in the lives of those who are left behind (Mbiti 1991:83). This is why having descendants is so vital to the Swazi, and having many of them[5] ensures that one will be remembered for some time and, to some degree, supports the polygamic custom.

Inherent in the traditional patriarchal custom is a sense of fatherhood—where being a father brought with it a great degree of responsibility to one's 'children'.[6] The practical outworking of these phenomena is seen in the manner in which the average Swazi grouping will approach His Majesty Mswati III, for an audience. Firstly, they will select from among them a group spokesperson. That person will approach the local chief or regional administrator to mediate on their behalf. For in their own eyes,

[4] This has an incredibly sad side effect. In times of extreme poverty and a high prevalence of AIDS, often widows with young children are forced to throw a lavish funeral even though they are destitute.

[5] The custom of having many children has a downside, since the ability to create children does not bring with it the ability to house and educate them, causing a drain on personal and state resources.

[6] This belonging to the king, the ancestors and eventually to God is not just in terms of being subjects, but it means something deeper than this. It means 'belonging' that requires a filial submission and dependence. The lesser being (in status) belongs to his/her master as a child who can have no life without him (Manci 2005:67). Manci, in his doctoral dissertation, states that in African Traditional Religion fatherhood (in its broadest sense) should be seen in the following manner: In the traditional African Worldview all things are considered in their hierarchical order and position in that order. Therefore, as there is a hierarchy in position, there ought to be hierarchy in possession … The '*emaKhosi*' (kings and chiefs), the elders and the heads of families are the logical Earthly representatives of God and the ancestors who administer property for their respective subjects (Manci 2005:64–65).

they are too menial to approach someone of *iNgwenyama's*[7] status. The chief will negotiate with the secretariat of the king to arrange a time for the audience and the offering that should be made. Once these negotiations are successfully arranged and the time and place set, the spokesperson, together with the mediator (*licusa*), will patiently wait until they are summoned into His Majesty's presence. In fear and awe,[8] they must crawl on their hands and knees as they move to where they will sit. Only the mediator (who has some *sigaba*[9] status) may address the king, unless His Majesty specifically requires the spokesperson to speak. Once finished, they will crawl backwards[10] out of the throne room.

This approach is also adopted when communicating with their god. In this case, the spokesperson is the most senior representative of the group—be it family or nation—who will go before the ancestors who are seen as mediators. There, he will offer sacrifices. Tradition has it that, should the sacrifices be acceptable, the message will be conveyed by the mediators to *Mkhulumnqande*. Should the sacrifices not be acceptable, then it is expected that punishment will come the way of the family, or the nation, as the case may be (Mtshali 2004:9).

This fear and awe of the ancestral spirits is strengthened through cultural rituals. These spiritual rites take place throughout a Swazi's life, beginning when the child is born. The details of these rituals are lengthy. Thus the reader is referred to Curle's thesis (2012:78–79)

[7] The title of *iNgwenyama* carries the idea of a king or a lion, and incorporates the power and awesomeness of thunder.
[8] A godlike reverential respect.
[9] Hereditary status.
[10] To turn one's back on the king is considered to be an insult.

2.3. The role of Tangoma[11] in the nation's culture

As is seen in the officiating of the *iNcwala* rite, 'the king is ritually assisted by members of the clergy—priests, doctors and prophets—in their role as mediums… (M)ost importantly, the mediums are possessed by spirits of ancestors, dead kings, and deities, who through them, command the ruler or may even admonish the ruler or the community for not carrying out a ritual process' (Ephirim-Donker 2004:901).

Not only do the mediums give advice to the king, but they also are called on by the princes, chiefs, *indvunas* (heads of communities) and heads of homes to mediate on their behalf with the ancestors (Curle 2012:236). In addition, *Tangoma* are seen as having a wide variety of roles in the community:

> In African tribal communities, witchcraft and other closely related practices like sorcery and magic are believed to have a repertoire of functions on a continuum. On the one extreme witchcraft is believed to be responsible for mindless death and extreme social discord through persecution of innocent citizens.
>
> On the positive extreme, witchdoctors help cure ill-stricken citizens and act as a positive force or antidote against the otherwise debilitating fears of witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard, 1976). Many anthropologists and other scholars have consistently emphasized the positive functions of the belief in witchcraft and the role of the witchdoctor in the African society (Tembo 1993:7).

One of the major problems in understanding the role of the so-called 'witchdoctor' (which is the English term given to a broad range of

[11] Tangoma is the plural of Sangoma which is the common term among the *SiSwati*, *IsiZulu* and *IsiXhosa* languages.

traditional practitioners) is that the word covers both witches[12] and traditional healers. For their part, traditional healers accept that their primary role is to identify and correct the imbalances between the spiritual and the physical worlds. The healers are divided into two types: *tinyanga* (herbalists) and *tangoma* (mediums). The mediums (diviners) allow themselves to be possessed by ancestral spirits to establish where the imbalances are. For their part, herbalists work with roots, bark, and leaves. Unfortunately, the problem for the lay person is to distinguish when a *tinyanga*/*tangoma* is acting as an herbalist, a medium, or an *umtsakatsi* (witch), for some practitioners can operate as a healer or be engaged in sorcery or the casting of curses (Booth 1983:49).

Cumes argues that *tangoma* are able to communicate with the cosmic, the terrestrial, and the water spirits, as well as the ancestors. Within Swaziland, water spirits are feared alongside the ancestors. Sometimes these spirits are said to appear as a snake (Varner 2007:52; Middleton 2012:45). As one reads the almost-weekly news reports of interaction with the spirit world in Swaziland, one witnesses the very real fear that is conjured up in the minds of the people. Fear that, according to tradition, can only be negated through sacrificial offerings (Mtshali 2004:9, 23, 58) to the ancestors and covering oneself with *muthi*[13] to guard against the other spirits.

[12] The power of witches according to Booth is 'both physiological and psychological' (1983:49). Their deeds are secretive and 'motivated by fear, jealousy, hatred or frustrated ambitions' of the initiators of the witchcraft (Ibid).

[13] *Tangoma* use '*muthi*, a physical thing, as a solution for a spiritual battle' (Selepe 2013:43). Because of this, the royal family is susceptible to their possessions being used against them if they are misplaced.

2.4. The position of the iNgwenyama and his role in the Sacred Swazi iNcwala Ceremony

According to Swazi tradition, 'sometimes ancestors have unfinished affairs to complete. Then they are given a strong body to allow them to do this' (Mtshali 2004:10). Flowing from this belief is the understanding that kings will take on the spirit of their ancestor as they take his name at their coronation. Thus, Sobhuza II would have been possessed by Somhlolo's spirit. The same can be said of Mswati III who would have taken on the spirit of Mswati II, who would have been possessed by the spirit of Mswati I. Ephirim-Donker reports that a king

> is the eldest among elders, a member of a royal family who has been duly nominated and elected to the highest socio-political and spiritual office… (T)he ruler embodies his predecessors, entrusted with sacred traditions, which he must preserve and protect for posterity.[14] As the personification of the ancestral rulers, the king (as a living ancestor), is on the threshold between the world of the living and therefore accorded the same praise and worship as his predecessors.
>
> Deriving his divine and temporal authority from a long continuum of rulers, the king exercises religiopolitical and psychological control over his people, his pronouncements having powerful effect on them. Accordingly, he addresses his subjects indirectly through mediators, and he observes many taboos and prohibitions, which he must follow in order to preserve his divinity. The mediators mitigate the potency of the king's pronouncements, and they attest to the veracity of words emanating from him, verifying that the king never errs[15] (2000: 900-901).

[14] This preservation of the Swazi culture is done not only for the king and his family but also for the entire nation.

[15] The Swazi equivalent is *´Umlomo longacali 'manga* (the mouth that can tell no lie)

Whilst the passage refers to the situation in Ghana, it could just as easily be a comment on the traditional position[16] of His Majesty Mswati III within the Kingdom of *eSwatini*.

In addition to the rituals mentioned in 1.2 above, one more custom needs to be considered. Not only is His Majesty the embodiment of the Swazi people and perceived as a living ancestor, but as *iNgwenyama*, he must annually preserve and protect the sacred tradition by dancing *iNcwala*, which Mzizi describes as 'the epitome of Swazi Religion' (1995:100).

In the final weeks of every calendar year—the exact timing being dependent on the phase of the moon—the kingdom of *eSwatini* celebrates a type of Scapegoat Rite (*iNcwala*). Despite the fact that this ritual, at its heart, is shrouded by secrecy, Hilda Kuper, who spent many years with His Majesty Sobhuza II, was able to record much of the event. She documented her findings in her seminal work, *An African Aristocracy-Rank Among the Swazi* (1947), and summarised the details in her later work, *The Swazi: A South African kingdom* (1963), which was substantially revised in the 1986 edition (1986).[17]

The reigning king has no choice but to partake in the ritual that is riddled with magic, potions, drugs, and drama—as it is his supreme act of kingship. Without the king, there can be no *iNcwala*. Yet, the king does not control the event. During *iNcwala*, the king, acting as High Priest of the Swazi kingdom, submits himself to a process wherein he is stripped naked in front of his people under the authority of the priests, known as *Bemanti* (people of the water or *Belwandle*, people of the sea (Kuper

[16] Whether this traditional position is actualised in the practical outworking of the Swazi kingship is discussed in Curle's unpublished discussion of patriarchalism within the Swazi kingdom.

[17] Because of the secrecy surrounding the Sacred Ceremony, no other recognised authorities are available.

1944:231; 1972:594–595; Matsebula 1988:333; Mzizi 1995:104) together with the 'faceless Labadzala'.[18]

The high point of the ceremony takes place on the fourth day. Apart from the drama of first appearing naked apart from an ivory tip to cover his penis (*umncadvo*) (Kuper 1944:249), in the evening His Majesty will appear 'in demonic costume, powerfully doctored and painted black, a wild beast dancing aggressively and showing reluctance to join the people' (Beidelman 1966:377). At this point he must drink from the sacred gourd (*luselwa*)[19] (Kuper 1944:251). Traditional belief holds that 'iNcwala is an affirmation of the king's rule and endorsement thereof by *Mvelinchanti*[20] and *emadloti* (ancestors)' (Mabuza 2007:42). If the ancestors consider him to 'be of good standing he will successfully come out of this ritualistic encounter…, (having received) a confirmation and endorsement … by the supernatural powers to lead the nation into yet another year' (ibid).

During the night, he sleeps with his ritual queen. In a rite reminiscent of the ancient Vedic Indo-European Mare Ritual (O'Flaherty 1982:156), in full view of some of the kingdom's elders, he must 'wipe away the soot' of the nation.[21] Having performed the required cleansing ritual and been

[18] The 'faceless *Labadzala*' form a part of the *Liqoqo* (Councillors) but the identities of these princes of the realm are never revealed to the public hence the use by the media of the additional word 'faceless'.

[19] It is at this point that the *iNgwenyama* is at his most vulnerable. He must drink from the gourd without the benefit of his *Tinsila* pre-tasting it. Throughout the rest of the year, His Majesty, is under the watchful eyes of his *Tinsila* (blood brothers). The *Tinsila* absorb the supernatural dangers preventing any harm coming to him. ' Like the king, they have no real family but are considered the fathers of the entire nation; should one die, he cannot be mourned' (Beidelman 1966:390)

[20] *Mvelinchanti* - He who appeared in ancient times / the one who appeared first.

[21] It is my interpretation of the existing writings that through this sexual act, the 'Bull', having 'overcome the powerful forces acting against himself and the nation' (Beidelman 1966:378), discards the residue of the 'evil' into the womb of the Ritual Queen (Beidelman1 966:399).

'revivified' (O'Flaherty 1982:164) through the act, the king will sit 'naked on a lion skin … in the Royal Sacred Hut (*Nhlambelo*)' (Kuper 1944:219). Apart from the counsellors, only the two ritual queens are permitted into the enclosure.

The people of the kingdom, for their part, are 'also in a state of taboo and seclusion. Ordinary activities and behaviour are suspended; sexual intercourse is prohibited, no one may sleep late the following morning, and when they get up they are not allowed to touch each other, to wash the body, to sit on mats, to poke anything into the ground, or even to scratch their hair (ibid).

Gluckman describes *iNcwala* as a ritual of rebellion (1963:129) as opposed to an act of rebellion, while Beidelman sees it as ritual symbolism (symbolising the supernatural attributes of the kingship) (1966:377), as opposed to the man who has been purified through *iNcwala* (1966:391). For his part, Apter (2007:50–65) sees it as part of a joking relationship where His Majesty is dispraised as a man while praised within his kingly office. While one needs to accept the symbolism of the ceremony in whatever form, there is an underlying reality exemplified in the death of Ngwane V[22] during *iNcwala*.[23]

This is the one occasion throughout the year that *iNgwenyama* is vulnerable to rebellion. (Whilst his *Tinsila* are present, they may not pre-

[22] Ngwane V (Bhunu) is recorded as having died while dancing *iNcwala*. Popular belief is that he was poisoned because he angered the elders.

[23] While they did not occur during *Incwala,* the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rebellions of Fokoti, Somcumba and Malubule against Mswati; that of Mbilini against Ludvonga (heir to Mswati, but never installed as king), Ludvonga's murder, probably by Ndwandwe, his uncle and regent; and the rebellion of Mabedla against Mbandzeni. In addition, there were countless plots with varying degrees of seriousness, in which Dlamini princes conspired against different kings (Lincoln 1987:152).

taste the gourd which he must drink). Custom has it that, if the king survives *iNcwala*, the favour of the ancestors still rests on him. Others, who are more cynical, would argue that, should he not survive the ceremony, his brothers, the 'faceless *Labadzala*' or the *Bemanti* (who oversee the ceremony) (Mabuza 2007:55–56) have come to see him as a liability to the nation.

On the 6th day, if the act of atonement has been successful, the ancestors will bless the ceremony by quenching the fire with rain (Malan 1985:46). If it does not rain, it is an omen of ill fortune for the New Year.

3. The Impact of Culture on the Church and *Vice Versā*

Throughout the ages, people groupings have developed differing worldviews that determine their particular way of life. For better understanding, let us call these worldviews tints in the spectacles through which one views one's personal circumstances. Growing up in the household, these spectacles are tinged by the circumstances within the home. Absent fathers create a worldview for boys that when they marry, they should not be housebound. Similarly, one's local community adds layers of colour to the glass, as does one's national culture. Bring a foreign (western) culture into the mix and the tints grow even darker.

Whilst it is true that Christianity has had a powerful influence on Swazi culture, it can also be stated that Swazi Culture has potently impacted the biblical witness of the Gospel.[24] Within this context, it is important to consider the relationship between His Majesty Mswati III and the Church. To fully understand it, one must begin with Sobhuza I's

[24] Kasenene records that the earliest Christian converts 'changed their way of dressing' [24] (1993:132–133) On the other hand, Mtshali reports that numbers of Mainline Swazi Christian Congregations have adopted practices of Ancestral Worship found in the African Indigenous Religion (2004:82).

(Somhlolo) reported vision of a white man bringing two objects with him into the kingdom. The first, *umculu* (scroll), and the second, *indilinga* (a round object) (Kumalo 2013:236). *Umculu* has been interpreted as the Bible, while *indilinga* is seen as currency, western lifestyle, but also domination (Kumalo 2013:249). Somhlolo's instruction was to accept the Bible but to reject the lifestyle (Kasanene 1993:132; Kumalo 2013:236).

Since then, the church has twice approached the State. In 1932, the evangelical churches were losing influence and membership[25] to the Zionists. Accordingly, they approached the British Government to outlaw the movement (Kumalo 2013:49–50). At the time, His Majesty Sobhuza II and his advisors controlled all aspects related to Home Affairs. Accordingly, Sobhuza told the British that he would deal with the Zionists. This action by the Evangelists politicised the issue. Sobhuza saw within this a way to not only emphasise the Swazi worldview as opposed to the imposition of the British way of life, but also to entrench his own position and that of the Dlamini's. Somewhere between 1937 (Ndlovu 1993:24) and 1939 (Kuper 1972:669), he created the League of African Churches under his patronage, which effectively made him head of the Church in Swaziland and its High Priest. Ever since then, *iNgwenyama* and *iNdlovukazi* (Queen Mother) have celebrated and brought the message at the Royal Easter Ritual (Ndlovu 1993:2).

For their part, the Evangelical Churches such as the Anglican Church stagnated. Prior to 1932, the numbers of Anglicans were doubling every decade (Froise 1996:31).

[25] One of the significant reasons for the loss of membership was the elitist attitude of the whites who refused to ordain black clergy and the legalised racial discrimination (Kuper 1972:595).

In comparison to the growth of the population, the Anglican Church effectively failed in its mission. The fate of the Methodists was similar. It is of interest to note that the Roman Catholics, with their acceptance of venerating the saints continued to grow.

In 2005, the wider Church[26] was 'shocked to the marrow when the Christian clause declaring Christianity an official religion was removed from the Constitution Bill of 2004' (LaNdwandwe 2009:242). In this second time that the Church approached the State, His Majesty told the Church to rethink its objections (ibid:243). His reasoning, which is admirable, was that he had studied the religions of the other two imported faiths (Islam and Baha'i) and concluded that they were legalistic. The request from the wider Church would bring it in line with the legalism of those two faiths (ibid).

But what sets the Zionist Church apart from the mainline and Evangelical churches on the one hand and the Indigenous African Churches on the other? In many respects, Zionist belief systems can best be described as a continuum between Pentecostalism as practised by the Apostolic Faith Mission (from where they originated) to Indigenous African Religion. Cazziol splits them into three categories, namely, progressive, conservative, and nativistic (1986:181).

Commenting on Cazziol's classification, Cummergen explains that 'Progressives tend to have relatively large congregations with viable organizational structures and an educated leadership. Their membership is socially diverse, including teachers, small businessmen and clerical workers as well as farmers and agricultural workers.' (2002:374) Cazziol believes that these congregations doctrinally show little difference to

[26] In this case the wider Church included not only the Anglicans, Methodists but also the Roman Catholics and the Zionists.

other fundamentalist charismatic churches (1986:181). Cummergen continues (2002:374):

> Conservatives, likewise, may have large congregations, most often in the rural and peri-urban areas. The traditional Zionist practices of healing, divination and purification continue to be stressed during worship. Organizational structure tends to be rudimentary and authority is firmly centred on the person of the Bishop. More often than not, these leaders are now old, their authority linked to that of the charismatic pioneers of Zionism in Swaziland.

Nativistic churches do not belong to the League of African Churches. According to Cummergen, they 'exhibit a higher degree of tolerance for traditional (non-Christian) Swazi beliefs and practices than do the other two types' (2002:374).

Kumalo gives the following examples of cultural practices that have been incorporated into the life of the Church. (1) Polygamy is unchallenged. (2) Because the 'Zionists and the League belong to the king' (Cazziol 1986:117), political and social issues are legitimized as the will of god. (3) The manner of worship is more cultural and traditional (2013:50). These cultural and traditional aspects of worship include the veneration of the ancestors, which incorporates sacrifice, rituals and the use of mediums.

Whilst I agree with Cazziol's broad classification, there is fluidity within each of these three classifications, since it is common for Swazis to assimilate their Christian faith into their Swazi culture. I concur with the following thoughts from Kasanene:

> Although many people (in Swaziland) have become Christians, embracing Christianity does not mean total abandonment of one's traditional religion. Even for Christians, Swazi Traditional Religion

> remains a major factor in their lives. It is, for example, common for a Christian to go to church on a Sunday morning and to visit a diviner in the evening (1993:129).

Thus, we can conclude that, while Christianity is said to be the predominant faith in Swaziland, it is important that distinction should be made between those who profess to be Christians and those who 'practise the presence of Christ'[27] (Herman 1895; Bell 2010:160, 170; Payne 1995:39, 116, 159, 214).

4. A Theological Evaluation

4.1. The god of Swazi traditionalists

The god worshipped by Swazi traditionalists is not the same as the God of Christian believers (Kuper 1986:62)—in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the Swazi people believe that they are followers of Christ. Central to the difference is the position of God and the role of the ancestors. What does not appear to be recognised is Christ's bodily resurrection and current status as 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16); 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6) who is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty (Acts 2:33).[28] To many Swazis, Jesus is widely thought of as the *mlungu's lidloti* (the white man's ancestor)[29] (Curle 2012:110). Added to this, God is seen to have no interest in day-to-day occurrences. In a view similar to that of the ancient Mesopotamians (Launderville 2010:121), Swazis consider such matters to lie in the hands of the *eMadloti* (ancestors)

[27] This nominalism amongst those who profess to be Christians is not unique to the Swazi kingdom.

[28] An example of this is in LaNdwandwe's understanding of Christianity (187–191) that excludes any reference to Christ's current position.

[29] A preferable *siSwati* name for Jesus is that of '*uNkulunkulu wemimangaliso*' (God the Miracle Worker).

(Curle 2012:110). Thus the intercessory role of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; 26; 15:26; 16:7–14) is also negated.

4.2. The role and function of the ancestors

In 1.2 above, the reality of the role that the ancestors play in the life of the Swazi was reviewed. As Mabuza comments, 'Right from the time a Swazi person is born until one departs from this world, ancestral veneration is crafted and firmly rooted in the religious inclination' (2007:157).

Because of their deistic understanding of God, the 'Abba' to whom Jesus prayed (Mark 14:36) and of whom Paul writes (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), is a totally foreign concept. The Swazi perspective of their guardians (ancestors) is one of abject fear (Curle 2012:78). This fear, which clouds all other issues within the Swazi kingdom, is directly opposed to Paul's understanding of the Christian life in 2 Timothy 1:7: 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.'

In his study of African ancestral veneration, Jebadu (2006) focusses on three 'prejudices' commonly held by those who oppose the integration of ancestral veneration into worship, namely, accusations of (1) practising idolatry, (2) superstition or (3) necromancy. We will consider Jebadu's comments:

1) Is African ancestral veneration idolatry?

Even if in the religious practices of African traditional societies, ancestors are addressed more often than God, normally the living will turn to the Supreme Being as the last resort when their recourse to the ancestors fails to procure the desired effects (Jebadu 2006:3). While

Jebadu rejects the concept that the ancestors are worshipped, one might legitimately query this position when applied to the kingdom of *eSwatini* (Swaziland). Dlamini and Whelpton in their codification of Swazi law and custom comment that 'Owing to the practice of *ancestral worship*, the question remains whether death terminates legal subjectivity in terms of Swazi law and custom (n.d.:168) (emphasis mine). While Whelpton is a Professor of Law, Dlamini is a senior prince of the realm and would know the implications of such a statement. Added to this, idolatry need not focus on an inanimate object as Jebadu submits (2006:3). Idolatry has as its focus that on which we place our faith. Nxumalo (2014:274) puts it as follows:

> In the New Testament, the term idolatry is used to designate covetousness (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13; Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). This means that any strong desire for material things that replaces our desire for God is a form of idolatry. Thus we can be idolaters when we make things other than God himself a priority in life. Believers who devote their time to their cars, houses, jobs, hobbies and other material things more than they do to serving Christ may be guilty of idolatry (Col 3:5; Matt 6:21–24).

Therefore, idolatry is not just the adoration or worship of images; it is putting things and other beings, dead or alive, ahead of God. Paul describes the origin of idolatry in Romans 1:21–25:

> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a

> lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

In the West, this could be the amount of money in the bank, our position at work, or our attractiveness. In the case of Swaziland, it cannot be denied that dualistic Swazi believers put more trust in the ancestors and *muthi* to protect and guide them than is allowed for by John 3:16–18 where the phrase 'πιστεύων' εἰς αὐτὸν is in the present continuous. This led Grudem to comment that John's words could be translated as 'believe into him' with the sense of trust or confidence that goes *into* and rests *in* Jesus as a person (1994:711). The understanding here is of a vibrant, continuous reliance and belief in a living Christ—not an afterthought when all else fails; or the incorrect view that God is far removed from our daily realities. Polycarp (c. 135: E 1.245), Tertullian (c. 207: W 3.458), Clement of Alexandria (c. 195: E 2.216), Origen (c. 245:9.465) all held to the necessity of an understanding that personal salvation is dependent on personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. With regard to the veneration of the saints (martyrs), Tertullian commented 'Who can redeem another's death by his own, except the Son of God alone?' (c. 212: W 4.100). This indicates that the Fathers in the first and second century held the same view that would later be declared by Luther. The slide toward the Roman Catholic belief that one should pray through Mary[30] or the saints developed over a period of time but only came into full fruition in the 11th century (Fenn 2014:¶2)

A further problem for the Swazi Church's understanding of a truly Christian view of veneration is the position that has developed within Roman Catholicism regarding *sola scriptura*. Their position is set out in

[30] The biblical reference to praying to Mary comes from 1 Kings 2:19–20 when Solomon lifted the status of the Queen Mother above what it had been. This tradition was carried on by the kings that followed him (CatholicDoors.com: n.d.:¶8).

the AskACatholic.Com Website: 'The Church however, has never accepted the notion that Scripture alone is its source. The Church has a teaching authority along with Sacred Tradition. Together with the Scriptures, they make a three legged stool upon which doctrine safely sits'(n.d.:¶8).

This Roman Catholic tradition (arguably adopted by most Protestant denominations in some form) of adding to scripture, has further confused the average Swazi to the point that many (such as is seen in Jebadu) now accept that venerating the ancestors is validated by his Church's tradition, regardless of what scripture stresses.

2) Is African ancestral veneration Superstition?

> Some elements of African ancestral veneration, such as excessive fear of the living dead, the belief that the dead cannot get rest when not being offered a large amount of food and drink continuously, can be regarded as superstitious and it should be part of the pastoral work of the Church to trim and polish it if the Church decides to incorporate it into the frame of the Judeo-Christian faith and elevates it as African Catholic ancestral veneration (Jebadu 2006:4).

To the Western mind, so plagued by its enlightenment thinking which requires scientific proof for all and sundry, ancestors and their veneration would definitely be seen as superstition. Ma (2002: 166) points out that religious experiences in the west have been reduced to 'an abstract conceptualization or scientistic reductionism'. Juxtaposed to this western position, is the situation found in the Kingdom of Swaziland. It is the domain of spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons, and earthly deities who reside in nature (Ndlovu 2009:¶1). It is in this environment that the fear engendered, and the hold that the ancestral spirits have over the Swazi people, is very real.

One must therefore ask the question 'Where or what is the origin of this fear?' Three possibilities exist: (a) the mind is playing tricks on the individual; (b) the spirits are real and do represent God; or (c) the spirits are real, but demonic in nature. We will consider each alternative.

a) The mind is playing tricks on the individual

Kasanene is of the opinion that the Dlamini clan established their authority firstly by way of force and secondly, by mind control. Through this, they established and 'consolidated their power over all the other clans' (1993b:89). While this aspect will be dealt with in greater detail in the article on patriarchalism, it is important to understand that the Dlamini Royalty, over centuries, established a culture that included 'the values such as respect for the elders and one's seniors, (which were) then used to promote respect for the royal household and (encouraged people) not to question it, and not to do anything that was considered to be un-Swazi' (1993b:89–90).

What then, is it to be Swazi as opposed to un-Swazi? First and foremost, it is to accept the hierarchical structure comprising God, the ancestors, the king, the princes, the chiefs, the headmen, the grandfathers, the fathers, the sons and finally, the women and children. Alongside the princes are those gifted in magic. Alongside the grandfathers are the *gogos* (grandmothers), but they are honoured in a different manner to their husbands. Looking up from the bottom of the pot are the cripples, albinos and, last of all, the homosexuals (Curle 2012:314).

God (being 'uninterested' in day-to-day human events) has passed control over to the ancestors, or such is the perception of the majority of Swazis. This position is inculcated into each child from the time that they are born. For the first few weeks, they are 'its', not humans (Marwick 1940:146; Kuper 1986:52; Oluikpe 1997:36). From the time that they are

ritually introduced to the ancestors at about six weeks, (Kuper 1986:52; Marwick 1940:147; Oluikpe 1997:36) each child is programmed to fulfil its position in life, be it male (superior) or female (inferior), and always in fear of what the ancestors will do (Marwick 1940:146–147; Kuper 1986:52–56; Oluikpe 1997:36). For those at the bottom, there is no individualism, and their lot is cast in stone. For those of royal blood, there is a golden highway.

In this manner, the entire nation could be conditioned to follow a world-view that subjects itself to the establishment enforced by a fear of the ancestors. Any movement to be independent is frowned on and thought to be un-Swazi. In that sense, it might certainly be argued that the mind is indeed playing tricks on the individual.

b) The spirits are real and do represent God

Mzizi considers that the ancestors should be seen as worthy 'heroes'[31] (1995:70). His argument is centred on Hebrews 12:1: 'Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance that race that is set before us.' He argues that the ancestors are necessary for the community to establish values in the lives of those left behind. The ancestors are to be respected and honoured in a manner similar to that set out in Hebrews 11 and 12 for the biblical heroes of faith (ibid 72–73).

[31] Mzizi notes that not all persons are considered to be ancestors. Some pass on and become a part of the 'living-dead'. Among those numbered as not achieving ancestorhood are: witches (1995:75); those that are not held in high esteem by their relatives. (They are still remembered but with little emotion and sentimentality. Amongst them are children, young men, and women who passed on before making their mark on community life) (p. 70); and those whose exploits are no longer remembered by the living (p. 70).

At issue is the question as to whether or not these heroic ancestors function in an intermediary role. If there is a distinction between God and the ancestors, then Mzizi would be correct to argue that they do not function in any divine role. The problem for African theologians is whether God's relegation to a being so remote is so great that he has been replaced by the ancestors. This is crucial to the discussion as it highlights the difference between *uNkulunkulu* (the greatest of the great who lives in an intimate relationship with his people) and *Mvelinchanti* (he who appeared in ancient times).

c) The spirits are real, but demonic in nature

There are respected Christian writers who argue that ancestral spirits are, in fact, familiar spirits who have been attached to a family for many generations (McNutt 2009:96; Oparaocha 2010:16; Bailey 2008:162–163; Selepe 2013:75). These familiar spirits can possess an individual and appear to give wisdom and guidance.

3) Is African ancestral veneration Necromancy?

Jebadu (2006:5) explains that, 'In African ancestor veneration, the dead are believed to continue to live and are still regarded as the part of the family of the living. They are believed to be the guardians of the living as well as the mediators between God and the living community.' While Tlhagale holds that Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus supports the theology of ancestors in the gospels (Tlhagale 1994:10), Choon Sup Bea (2007:211–212), having extensively researched ancestral worship in Korea, Japan and Africa, concludes the following:

> The Bible makes it clear that the rich man (in the story of Lazarus) was not granted permission to communicate with his living family members to warn them to mend their ways and ultimately avoid a

> similar fate... To interpret the passage otherwise than in the context of eternal judgement and the need for salvation is misguided. To see it as supporting ancestral veneration indicates an underlying Hermeneutic that reflects 'a process of enculturation in an attempt to integrate the traditional religious practices (of ancestor worship) with the church'… The mediatory role which African theologians have ascribed to the ancestors relegates the redemption of Christ to insignificance and appears to make his role redundant. This in itself puts traditional religion in direct opposition to Christianity in which redemptive salvation of Christ is pivotal.

Perhaps the single greatest tragedy of modern Christendom is the teaching that we need third party mediators between us and God. The scriptures are clear: The Holy Spirit is our constant Advocate (John 14:26) who dwells within us (1 Cor 6:19; Rom 8:11) leading us into all truth (John 16:13). Added to that, Christ Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father 'interceding for us' (Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Why, therefore do we need any ancestor or saint to give us personal direction or intercede on our behalf, when God himself is doing just that? I suppose that one could argue that Christian counsellors fulfil a similar role, but the counsellors pray directly to God, the Father, Son or Holy Spirit and encourage the counselee to do likewise. This is a vital aspect of Christian prayer: acknowledging the believer has an Advocate; The Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) or Christ Jesus (1 John 2). That Advocate then, is God himself.

Summarising my rebuttal of Jebadu's position, in focussing on only idolatry, superstition, and necromancy, Jebadu has ignored, from a Christian perspective, the heart of the debate; the nature of God and the need for salvation (with eschatological history in mind). Those holding to an African Indigenous Religious position believe that salvation is

unnecessary as, subject to certain terms and ritual conditions, [32] everyone becomes an ancestor within the hierarchical positioning that they enjoyed on earth. On the other hand, Christianity holds that 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 6:23). The concept of the coming judgement and Christ's saving grace is spelled out in detail in Hebrews 9:24–29.

It is this pivotal position of Christ's redemptive salvation that brings Christianity into sharp conflict with African traditional beliefs. The scriptures clearly state that, after death, there is judgement (Matt 12:36; 13:40; 18:32–35; 25:31–46; Luke 3:17; 12:46–48; John 3:18; 5:27–29; Rom 2:1–8; Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10–11; Heb. 9:27; Rev 20:11–15). The function of judgement has been given over to Christ Jesus. Those found to be in right standing will be separated from those who are not (Matt 25:31–46). This separation will determine whether those judged will live in God's presence or will remain outside of his presence, facing 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt 25:41). John, in his Revelation, gives a 'macro' picture of what it will be like in heaven where the saints join with the elders, the four living beings and the angels in worship (Rev 7:9–11). A 'micro' vision of the reality of what happens when we die is given by Jesus in his account of the rich man and Lazarus. Both have passed on from this life and have been judged (Luke 16:22–31).

[32] Those who attain ancestral status must meet these important requirements: 'parenthood before death, goodness in the society, one whose body received a ritually proper burial and a guardian of morality in families, clans and the entire nation' (Nyawo 2004:61–62). Should one not have met these conditions, one becomes a 'mere spirit' (64). There is no understanding of Final Judgement (ibid 119; Holland 2005:208).

4.3. The role of Tangoma in the culture of Swaziland

If we consider the scriptures, we do find reference to a spirit world that exists; that of the angels (Rev 7:11) and the devil's angels (demons) (Matt 25:41). Scripturally, these are the spiritual forces that continue to war in the heavens (Dan 1:10; 12:1; Eph 6:12). Unfortunately, while Swazis recognise the witchcraft and evil forces of the *batsakatsi* (witches) (Kuper 1986:68; Mzizi 1995:96), they confuse the work of God's ministering angels (Heb 1:14) with that of the ancestors. What adds to this confusion is the use of spiritual curses and drugs by *tinyanga* and *tangoma*[33] to work out their 'white magic' (Kuper 1986:65). Kuper records that, 'Because of the similarity of principals and techniques, based on belief in ritual, the greatest *tinyanga* are sometimes feared as the greatest sorcerers; those who have the highest power to combat evil have also the greatest means to achieve it' (1947:175).

This belief in the work of the *batsakatsi, tinyanga,* and *tangoma* brings with it an inordinate fear, both of them, and of the spirit world they inhabit. Allied to this is their authority and hierarchical positioning. It was noted earlier that these individuals have similar ranking to the kingdom's princes (Curle 2012:313) and perform the role of soothsayers, which illustrates the level of fear within the nation.

While this fear of the spirit world is experienced by the king, his princes and chiefs, it also augments the control that they are able to impose on those below; there is always the threat that the ancestors will 'punish the living when they do not uphold their legal and moral duties' (Oluikpe 1997:46).

[33] *Tinyanga* = traditional doctors. It is interesting to note that the singular form of the term *inyanga* also means the moon, indicating the influence that the celestial bodies have on the Swazi culture. *Tangoma* = 'Traditional medicine persons with powers or possessing the spirit of divination' (Mabuza 2007:88) (singular = sangoma).

Biblically, fear reflects that one has not fully experienced the perfect love of Christ. Consider the words of John in 1 John 4:1–7. This passage is central to the biblical position of all Christians. First, believers should test the source of the spirit. Second, they should understand their authority in Christ Jesus over all evil spirits that comes with the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

A further consideration is the Godly principle espoused by Jesus at Gethsemane: 'all who draw the sword will die by the sword' (Matt 26:52). Similarly, those who use magic for evil will die accordingly.

4.4. The position of iNgwenyama and the role played by His Majesty in the Annual Ceremony of iNcwala

Buthelezi comments that 'iNcwala has striking similarities with the Day of Atonement, where the whole nation would be in prayer, making a new commitment to their God who is the source of their existence, and from whom they find their own life and identity' (2011:77). A practice that existed during the Greco-Roman period [and before], but not mentioned by either Aristotle or Osiek and Balsh, is that of the expiation of sin through a scapegoat ritual. Smith and Doniger (1989:190) spell out the functioning of such a sacrificial ritual.

> The victim represents or 'becomes' (and thus substitutes for) both the invisible divine recipient of the offering and the human being who makes the offering. 'Through this proximity the victim, who already represents the gods, comes to represent the sacrifier also. Indeed, it is not enough to say that it represents him: it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together.' (Hubert and Mauss 1964:31-32) Every sacrificial victim, then, symbolizes both the god and the worshipper; every sacrifice is both an ersatz self-sacrifice and a dramatization of a deicide.

During the ritual, an animal or a person is substituted as a scapegoat for the sin of an individual or a nation. Hallo, Moyer, and Perdue comment that of all the tribes in the Middle East, the Hittites 'seemed to be the most concerned about ritual purity though the Israelites come a close second on the point' (1983:33). The Israelite practice is spelt out in Leviticus 16. The principle of the Israelite rite was the atonement of sin through shedding the blood of one goat and sending another into the desert. 'That the goat was accompanied by someone and was led to a desert place was meant to show that there was absolutely no possibility for its return. Thus, the guilt of the nation was symbolically forgiven and carried away' (Feinberg 1958:324).

Comfort Mabuza notes that the *Ncwala* Ceremony is at 'the very heart of Swazi Culture (2007:159). The rite, where His Majesty takes on the sin of the nation in an act of atonement, is more than atonement or a celebration of first fruits. It is far more than 'a pageant in which the early life of the Swazi people is re-enacted in a dramatized form' (Marwick 1966:191). It is also a concretisation of the patriarchalistic powers of the ancestors, the king, the princes, and the *tinyanga*. As Kuper wrote (1947:225):

> Incwala dramatizes actual rank developed historically; it is 'a play of kingship'. In the ceremony the people see which clans and people are important. Sociologically it serves as a graph of traditional status on which, mapped by ritual, are the roles of the king, his mother, the princes, councillors, priests, chiefs, queens, princesses, commoners, old and young. Just as in the dance, clothing, service, feasting, and luma - the laws of rank are expressed in action, so in discussing the ceremony they are consciously articulated. Major political adjustments are indicated, and the balance of power between the king, his mother, the princes, and commoners is a central theme.

I find Mabuza's conclusion, that Incwala forms a missiological 'bridge' (2007:159) for the Gospel, somewhat disconcerting. It is agreed that the 'sacred ceremony' (2007:1) plays a powerful cultural part within the Swazi kingdom. However, to use it as a bridge to advance the Gospel is problematic, for *Incwala* has several aspects that are contrary to traditional evangelical biblical approach to the Gospel.

First, the god that Mabuza speaks of is *Mvelinchanti* (2007:1) (not uNkulunkulu) the One True God (see 4.3 above). It is noted that traditional Swazis believe that *Mvelinchanti* was 'A being who became rather than being formed or created; The first of all and the beginner or the cause of life; The Creator Himself and what followed, all knowing and powerful to be manipulated by human control and was not limited in his relationship with any of the creatures' (Nyawo 2004:51–52). However, they also believe that 'people could only have access to Him through lesser divinities and ancestors, whom He delegated to handle the mundane affairs' (Nyawo 2004:54). It was probably for this reason that the early missionaries introduced the name of *uNkulunkulu*—to differentiate between a god who had lost interest in the affairs of man and the God of John 3:16 and John14.[34]

Second, the medium through whom the prayers are made, the *emadloti* (ancestors) (4.3; 6.2.2), are not efficacious, for Christ is 'the way and the truth and the life' (John 14:6) and only he can act as mediator between sinful man and Almighty God (John 1:29; 1 John 2:1–2).

Third, *iNcwala* sacred ceremony declares to the world that the one who atones for the sin of the nation is primarily the King, assisted by his ritual

[34] The term *uNkulunkulu* is decidedly apt for the average Swazi. *Nkulu* is the name of one's Grandfather. In a Swazi's eyes, the Grandfather is the 'Great One'. He is also much beloved of the family and loves his Grandchildren unconditionally. Thus God is seen as the Greatest of the Great, who loves one unconditionally.

Queen (4.8), not the Messiah, Jesus. The sacrifice of the two oxen and the scapegoat function of His Majesty and his first ritual wife (biblically) are insufficient to be the expiation of the sins of the nation (1 John 2:2). The problem with reliance on a man (who by definition is sinful; Rom 3:23) or the ancestors (who were previously men and women) to mediate between humankind and God is that the price paid by sinful man cannot atone for sin (Rom 6:23a). It denies the need for a perfect Christ, who is God made flesh (John 1:14) and negates the completed work of the cross (John 3:16; Rom 6:23b).

Fourth, from the writings of Kuper it appears that His Majesty is referred to as 'King of kings' when summoned by the counsellors (1947:217). This is the title of Christ Jesus (Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Fifth, only old men may go anywhere near the burning of the *incwambo* (others are prohibited for fear of inhaling the smoke) and during the thirty-six hours when His Majesty is sequestered, he is 'dangerous to himself and to others' (1947:219). These two aspects indicate the use of strong drugs during the ceremony. Gluckmann's comment that 'the medicines used are known as "black" medicines, and they are supposed to stir up supernatural power in (His Majesty), from which he must be released with "white" medicines, before he can again move among his people' (1938:25), is cause for concern. Paul instructs Christians: 'Do not get drunk on wine' (Eph 5:18). He also warns against the use of '*pharmakeia*' (administration of drugs other than for healing, particularly, drug related spells or sorcery) (Gal 5:20). Thus, the apparent use of drugs is contrary to the tenets of scripture.

Sixth, the fact that the children get to eat the meat from an ox that was first suffocated and beaten into unconsciousness, before being killed and

thereafter sacrificed to the ancestors is at odds with the apostles' instruction to the Christians in Antioch, in Acts 15:28–29.[35]

Seventh, the entire ceremony is a demonstration of hierarchical power as opposed to Christian service. The erect penis, which is central to the fourth day of the ceremony (Kuper 1944:215), is the symbol of patriarchalistic power. This is misplaced in Southern Africa where constitutionally, 'women hold up half the sky' (Ackermann, Draper, and Mashinini 1991) and should be acknowledged as equals. Biblically, it is at odds with the Christian principle that there is no place for position and status this side of the grave. Also, the ceremonial depositing of the sins of the nation into the womb of the ritual queen, being the only time when the couple has sexual relations, contradicts 1 Corinthians 7:5.

In the same way that Swazi law does not permit a person to hold dual citizenship (Citizenship Act 1992:¶10.1), dualism in Christianity is not biblical (1 Cor 5:11; Phil 3:1–21). The issues set out above would seriously compromise any believer's Christian standing, were they to participate in *iNcwala* rite of atonement. Some would consider such an act to be blasphemy.[36] Yet the Zionist Churches 'occupy a special place in the ritual' (Mzizi 1995:106).

4.5. The impact of culture on the Church and vice versa

Because His Majesty Mswati III is the acknowledged 'Chief Priest' of the Zionist Church in Swaziland, as well as the nation's Ritual Scapegoat,

[35] It should also be noted that 'stress, fear and pain when animals are being slaughtered or [are] waiting to be slaughtered results in several disease processes in the humans [who] eat the meat. Most notable are cardiac problems, impotency and general fatigue' (Putzkoff 2003:¶1).

[36] Blasphemy: 'irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable' (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2011).

it is difficult for the Church[37] to speak prophetically into any situation that involves the ancestors, the role of the king at *iNcwala* and the role of *tangoma*. The fear engendered in the average Swazi by all of them is very real. Objectively, there are three possible reasons for this fear:

Firstly, the magic is non-existent, except within the beliefs of the people. Secondly, the rulers manipulate the beliefs of the people through indoctrination. And thirdly, the magic is real.

Should the magic be real, then biblically it has one of two sources? On the one side of the spectrum, those who are swayed by African Indigenous Religion, would argue that it is god, working through the ancestors and their agents, the *Tangoma.* On the other side, there are those who posit that the so-called ancestors are familiar spirits acting through spirit mediums, which is demonic.

Therefore, I stand in agreement with Sup Bea, that the so-called magic is real and is demonic. As such, the Church should have no part in it.

5. Conclusion and Some Recommendations

Loren Cunningham doubts whether many of the 'reported millions of (African) believers are truly loyal to Christ' (2007:162). His concern is that 'Animism, particularly worshipping ancestors and clinging to fetishes, continues to physically disable many churchgoers' (2007:162). I concur with Cunningham and maintain that this syncretic hold over Africa extends throughout the Sub-Saharan continent and it also includes the kingdom of eSwatini (Swaziland). On the subject, Kraft (2000:390) warned that in making converts, two paths to syncretism are opened by

[37] Mzizi believes that Swazi Zionism, insofar as it has continued to blindly align itself with the state in postcolonial Swaziland, has allowed itself to be corrupted and manipulated by royal power at national level.

missionaries: (1) Missionaries required converts to adopt a faith pattern that is so foreign to the persons own culture that in converting to Christianity, their existing world view remains untouched by biblical principles; (2) So concerned are the Missionaries about the peripherals of their own culture that they allow existing non-biblical worldviews to predominate, thus compromising the Gospel.

In Swaziland, both of the two paths appear to have been followed. Firstly, the missionaries rejected every practice (even the clothing) of *eSwatini* and substituted a foreign culture that was not biblical but cultural. Hayes (1995:344–345) comments that the missionaries were effectively saying, 'You must abandon your problems and accept our problems and explanations of evil'. Secondly, Sobhuza II responded to the British Colonial enlightenment thinking by defending the Swazi Culture (especially its patriarchal world-view). To do so, he encouraged the Swazis to join the syncretic Zionist Churches by becoming their patron. The Swazi people flocked to these churches rejoicing in the fact that they could maintain their cultural practices without losing their Christian status. Unfortunately, this meant that they lost sight of the risen Christ as king of kings and Lord of Lords. In addition, each person's value (as found in Christ Jesus) was lost to the patriarchalistic culture. For their part, the evangelical churches stagnated. The Roman Catholic Church, which acceded to the veneration of ancestors continued to grow. The mass movement to the syncretic churches resulted in the wider Church in Swaziland becoming largely 'nativistic' and unbiblical. For the people and the evangelicals, it was a lose-lose solution.

As far as Sobhuza II was concerned (from a power perspective), the position of the Royal Family was advanced, since he effectively took ownership of the Church becoming its High Priest (Kuper 1972:610). In doing so, Sobhuza chose the 'round metal piece' which Kumalo

interprets as "domination" (2013:249) and rejected the 'scroll' of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. It is this Gospel which loudly proclaims that each person, from His Majesty to the handicapped person in the street, is a 'love slave' (1 Cor 7:22) of Christ Jesus while being his 'joint heir' (Rom 8:17).

Looking forward, what should the Church do? The veneration of ancestors is so deeply ingrained in the life and world-view of the Swazi that it will not easily be deculturalised. The challenges that face the Church in advancing a gospel that excludes the reliance on ancestors (as opposed to Christ) are substantial. Alongside there is the need for believers to desist from the cultural practices of (1) using a *sangoma* as a mediator or (2) settling one's grievances by paying the *sangoma* or a witch to bedevil the accused with a curse or a spell (Holland 2005:11).

Before any change will occur, the wider Church should examine itself and its own practices. This inward reflection would also need to take account of the following: (1) Other modern practices such as the prosperity cult, imported from the west, are harmful; (2) There is a real spirit world that is at odds with the message of the Gospel; (3) Critically rejecting traditional practices, without taking the people's cultural needs to account, is unwise.

One is reminded of Christ's injunction to take the log out of one's own eye so that one can see more clearly to remove the splinter from one's brother's (Matt 7:5; Luke 6:42). Regarding the rejection of traditional practices, Sup Bea advises that 'when one removes a traditional ritual one must take cognisance of the void it leaves in its wake' (2007:212).

Finally, the Church cannot and should not look to the state to bring about changes in a nation's culture so as to bring it in line with a biblical understanding. One need only to recall the fate of the Jewish leaders who crucified Christ to understand that when people turn to the state for

overriding support, it will be the Church that loses. If the Church truly believes in the power of the Holy Spirit, then it should heed the words of Zechariah 4:6; It is not by might nor by power (nor by the government) but by His Spirit.

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