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Are the Dead Truly Dead and Unconscious? "The Dead are not Dead" (Ofosuhene, 2006:13)

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Keywords: *ancestral spirit, familiar spirit, christology, pneumatology, soteriology, pentecostalism.*

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Keywords: ancestral spirit, familiar spirit, christology, pneumatology, soteriology, pentecostalism.

Preamble

This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Rev. Dr. Obed Ndeya Obadiah Kealotswe. He was my brother, friend, teacher, and former colleague in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Botswana. I called him MaChristos because of his humorous ways of teaching Christology.

I also called him Shadipinge. In 1996, the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA) held a conference at Thokoza Centre in Mbabane, Swaziland. The theme of this conference, Theology Cooked in an African Pot - sought to investigate ways in which the traditional African worldview, culture, and philosophy could 'form the substratum of the faith and life of the Christians in Africa' (Fiedler et al., 1998, p. 3). Rev. Dr. Kealotswe presented the paper "Shadipinge Teaches Theology: Biblical Exegesis from an African Cultural Perspective" (1998). Among other things, Rev. Dr. Kealotswe expresses his disappointment with African Theologians' apparent failure 'to develop doctrines from their own African traditional religious view' (Kealotswe, 1998, p. 93). His central argument in this article is that theological reflections on Christology and the healing ministry of the Church in Africa must be based on a genuine and sympathetic understanding of African culture. Having repudiated the view of the African indigenous healer (Shadipinge) as an anti-Christ, Rev. Dr. Kealotswe shows how the grafting of orthodox Christian Christological views on the African conceptions of the African indigenous healer is crucial to revitalizing the current discourse on the healing ministry of the Church in Africa. I called him Shadipinge because he was a Christian Theologian and practicing Pastor who sought to embrace his Christianity and African culture. He drew on the ground-breaking scientific contributions of African theologians such as John Mbiti (1969), Charles Nyamiti (1984), Kwame Bediako, John Pobee (1979), Gabriel Setiloane (1976), as well as Bengt Sundkler (1971) and Oosthuizen (1987).

As a salutary tribute to and a legacy of the scholarship of the late Rev. Dr. Kealotswe, this article is an Afrocentric biblical exegesis of a selected text that raises questions concerning our teaching of Christology, Soteriology, Pneumatology, and the Healing Ministry of the Church in Africa. These theoretical issues lay at the heart of Rev. Dr. Kealotswe's scholarship. Unfortunately, the depth and extent of his scholarly contribution will remain forever hidden from the world. It is embedded in piles and piles of unfinished and unpublished manuscripts that may never see daylight. His published research results reflect only a tiny part of his wide-ranging scholarship. Consequently, he died as an 'unacknowledged Professor of Systematic Theology. Those who knew him well do not doubt that the world owes it to him. *Ezelani nge dothodzo Sungwasha*! (Ikalanga) 'May your soul rest in eternal peace!

I. Introduction

Many years ago, I had an inconclusive discussion on ancestral spirits, African ancestral cults, and African indigenous healers with Fidelis Nkomazana, [1] my former colleague at the University of Botswana. This was a debate between a Church Historian and a social anthropologist. It was also a

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[1] Fidelis Nkomazana is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Botswana. He is also an Elder in the Apostolic Faith Mission, a classical Pentecostal Church. For more detail on classifications of African Pentecostal churches, see Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:9).

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debate between a Catholic and a classical Pentecostalist. As social anthropologists of African indigenous religions, our starting point is African culture. We subscribe to the view that any study phenomenon must be viewed within its authentic cultural context. Culture gives content and meaning. Any construction or reflection of our understanding of the ontology of *badimo* (ancestral spirits) that ignores the traditional African worldview and the cultural context in which such conceptualization occurs can never do justice to this phenomenon of study. It can only be a presumptuous superimposition of extraneous and exotic ideas on what is essentially an African cultural matter. It runs counter to the emic perspective in data collection and analysis in the anthropology of religion. Therefore, every endeavor to contextualize the Gospel in Africa must be premised on the five pillars of African indigenous religions: i.e. 'the belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in the ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine' (Kamara, 2000, p. 508).

In his study of African indigenous cosmology, Moscicke laments the failure of many theologians 'to find ways of inculturating the Gospel in the African world of divinities, spirits, ancestors, and witchcraft.' Most importantly, he correctly points out that 'One cannot understand the spiritual beings of ATR without first grasping traditional African cosmology' (Moscicke, 2017, p. 128). This discussion remained inconclusive because, while I insisted on using African culture as the starting point of our conversation, my colleague saw biblical scriptures as the starting point. Furthermore, given my colleague's characteristic Pentecostal propensity for puritanism and literalism in the use of scripture versus the cultural relativism of our social anthropological reading of sacred texts, we could not make much progress in this discussion.

Indeed, our starting point is African indigenous cosmology. Researchers such as Temples (1952), Jahn (1958), Mbiti (1969), and Idowu (1973) have long examined and documented African indigenous cosmology. A supreme deity (the source and locus of ultimate life power), lesser divinities, and ancestral spirits are all recognized in the African indigenous worldview. Lesser divinities and ancestral spirits' belong to the ontological mode of existence between God and man.' (Mbiti, 1969:75).

Within a traditional African worldview, *badimo* are deified spirits of the dead, who now, on an exalted plane of postmortem existence in the underworld, partake in the devolved mystical power of *Modimo* (God) as divine spiritual beings. They are, therefore, neither idols, evil spirits, nor false Gods! An ancestral spirit is 'analogous to a saint in the Christian sense' (Ofosuhene, 2006, p. 16). Indeed, from a Catholic perspective, ancestral spirits belong to a collegiate of saints, who are venerated but not worshipped as divine beings. [2] In this regard, the Catholic Church is a union of the living (disciples and pilgrims on earth), the faithful dead in purgatory and heaven, and the angels. Therefore, *badimo*, or the spirits of the faithful dead, continue to be part of the Church.

> "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. So, by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped" (Article 9:956 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

On the other hand, the Pentecostals consider *badimo* evil spirits who play no significant role in human salvation and sacred mediation (Anderson, 1991) because the dead are dead and remain unconscious until the general resurgence of the dead in the *Parousia*. Therefore, from a Pentecostal perspective, Mbiti's now famous and standard reference to ancestral spirits as the *living dead* is a grave misnomer. The principal basis of this perception of ancestral spirits is the pessimism and skepticism of the author of the book Ecclesiastes. The Philosopher argues:

> 'Yes, the living know they are going to die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward; they are completely forgotten. Their loves, their hates, and their passions all died with them. They will never again take part in anything that happens in this world.' [3] [Good News Version]

We revisit this issue to bring finality and closure to the debate on the significance of the ancestral cult for human prosperity and salvation. We also do so to interrogate the scriptures more carefully, with the view of finding out whether or not the dead are truly dead, unconscious, or 'completely forgotten.' How we deal with this question impacts our perceptions of ancestral cults and the institution of traditional healing in Africa,

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2. Gundani (1998). Article 9:958 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church reads:

> "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from there sins' she offers her suffrages for them." Our prayer for them is capable of helping them and making their intercession for us effective.'

3. Eccl. 9: 5, 6. The Philosopher collapses the difference between human beings and other animals. By equating the human and animal spirits, both 'creatures' have the same fate and destiny in death. He says:

> 'After all, the same fate awaits human beings and animals alike. One dies just like the other. They are the same kind of creature. A human being is no better off than an animal because life has no meaning for either. They are both going to the same place – the dust. They both came from it; they will both go back to it. How can anyone be sure that the human spirit goes upwards while an animal's spirit goes down into the ground?' (Eccl. 3: 19 – 21).

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whose traditional religion is predominantly manistic. Most importantly, we revisit this debate to demonstrate the value of the multi-disciplinary approach in the study of religion in Africa. Until scholars of religion collapse the neat boundaries of their academic compartments (academic compartmentalization) and begin to converse and collaborate across their distinct disciplines, our understanding of religion will forever be partial and fragmented. We must go 'beyond such compartmentalization' (De Witte, 2018, p. 3). Undoubtedly, the study of the place of the African ancestral cult in society is the convergence zone of a plurality of academic interests and specializations, such as sociology, anthropology, church history, systematic theology, African Christianity, and Pentecostal studies. Despite our different approaches, we are all studying the same phenomenon - religion. For this reason, scholars across disciplines must converse and collaborate.

I have, on numerous occasions, been asked to state whether or not *badimo* (ancestral spirits) are idols and whether or not there is a biblical justification for ancestral veneration. We deal with these issues purely based on our understanding of biblical scriptures. Mindful that this debate goes beyond the narrow corridors of scholarship, we keep the usual scholarly substantiation to the minimum.

II. The Dead can Hear, Understand and Obey God's Command

In every culture, specific categories of persons partake in God's devolved mystical power. Such persons are empowered to do what is customarily the preserve and prerogative of God. [4] In ancient Hebrew culture, these included a variety of God's mystical agents, such as prophets and other holy persons like Moses and Aaron, his brother. Very much against empiricism, science, and rational philosophy, belief in human postmortem existence is based on the continuity of the human mental faculty and consciousness beyond the grave. Physical death neither diminishes human consciousness nor curtails personhood. Therefore, all biblical narratives of the resurrection of the dead hinge upon the dead's ability to hear and obey divine instructions. For example, in Luke 7:14 &15, Jesus Christ raises a widow's son by instructing him to arise. The Bible says:

> 'Then he walked over and touched the coffin, and the men carrying it stopped. Jesus said: "Young man! Get up, I tell you!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. [Good News Version]

Similarly, Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave by shouting: "'Lazarus, come out!' He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave clothes, and with a cloth round his face. 'Untie him,' Jesus told them, 'and let him go.'" (John 11: 43, 44). In yet another resurrection narrative, a dead daughter of a particular ruler responded to Jesus' mere touch and came back to life (Mat 9:25). Speaking about Christ's second coming, St. Paul uses the usual trumpet *leitmotif* (a call to assembly), which shall be blown to signal the commencement of a general resurrection of all the dead on judgment day. Upon hearing and deciphering the meaning of the trumpet, the dead shall begin to come out of their graves. He says:

> We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1Co 15:53, 52; Mat 24:31).

The most classical scripture that seals our conviction on the ability of even the long-dead to hear, understand, and respond is Ezekiel Chapter 37. Unlike the examples given above, in which resurrection involved persons who had recently died (except for the revival of all the dead on judgment day), God uses the Prophet Ezekiel to bring back to life many dry bones in the valley of death. Based on their ability to hear and comprehend the word of God (something that needs consciousness and an active mental faculty), the long-dead appropriately responded to the Prophet's commands. [5] Had this not been the case, no such resurrection could have occurred. Whether performed by God, by Jesus Christ his Son, or any other religious functionary, the resurrection of the dead is a mystery that only attests to God's sovereignty and Lordship over life and death. No other being not so empowered by God can cause the resurrection of the dead.

III. The Dead are Merely Sleeping

Several times, Jesus euphemistically refers to death as sleep (i.e., a state of temporal unconsciousness one enters with the hope and knowledge of rising again). Each time he uses this euphemism, his listeners laugh at what they consider to be his naivety (Mat 9:24; Mar 5:39; Luke 8:52; and John 11:11). These people fail to understand that there is a way in which all dead persons are merely asleep;

[4] In commissioning his twelve disciples to carry on his ministry in Israel, Jesus commands:

> Go and preach, "The Kingdom of heaven is near!" Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, heal those who suffer from dreaded skin diseases, and drive out demons.' (Matt. 10:8).

Hitherto, this had been his prerogative as the Incarnate Son of God..

[5] Ezekiel 37:4 reads: 'Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.'

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awaiting resurrection for final judgment.[6] This is despite the skepticism of the book of Ecclesiastes *vis-à-vis* the temporal condition of the deceased. Eccl. 9: 5, 6 raises three other issues that need further interrogation. The first is the assertion that 'Their loves, their hates, their passions, all died with them;' the second is that they are 'completely forgotten'; and the last is that 'they will never again take part in anything that happens in this world.'

Not all the dead qualify for entry into the ancestral realm. Among other things, criteria for entry into the underworld as ancestral spirits include: having died of a natural cause in adult life; having left behind recognized progeny for whom one resurrects, and who shall, in turn, offer to the living-dead, life-sustaining sacrifices and offerings; having received a proper burial and having lived a morally good life on earth, i.e., probity of character. However, Charles Nyamiti's afro-based Christological model presents Jesus Christ as a prototype ancestor (Nyamiti (1984; Ofosuhene, 2006, p. 16). I doubt Christ qualified for entry into the netherworld as an ancestral spirit. We all know that he did not die of a natural cause; left no progeny behind; was not married, and died at the tender age of thirty-three. He certainly lived a morally good life and received a proper burial. However, from an African perspective, his post-paschal appearances raise serious questions about the state of his postmortem existence. In most African societies, the dead are most prolific when they lie peacefully in their graves rather than torment the living with their postmortem appearances, as the resurrected Christ did. Finally, his empty tomb, and the identity and motive of the being that so desecrated his grave as to cause the disappearance of his body, do not augur very well for his postmortem existence as a deified spiritual being. No wonder he was mistaken for a ghost in one such post-paschal appearance (Luke 24:37). Nonetheless, the spirits of the dead who do not enter the ancestral realm roam around as tormented spirits or ghosts. This often occasions complex cleansing and appeasement rituals that eventually settle the tormented and vengeful spirit (what the Ndebele refer to as the *Ngozi* spirit) back in their graves, where they lie peacefully.

IV. Saul's Encounter with the Spirit of the Dead Samuel

Among other things, this section addresses the question of whether or not there is a biblical justification for the veneration of ancestral spirits. For brevity, we shall use one scripture *(1 Samuel 28: 1 - 20).* This scripture has been carefully and deliberately selected. Problematic as it is, it provides a firm and overarching basis for an erudite exploration of several theoretical issues about ancestral cults and traditional healing in Africa. We begin with the background of our selected scripture.

The book of First Samuel is one of the historical books of the Hebrew Bible. Like all other historical books, First Samuel deals with salvation history, whose theme is that faithfulness to God brings success. In contrast, disobedience brings disaster.[7] Each ruler is judged according to their loyalty to God, and national success depends on this loyalty. The history of Israel is replete with the rise and rise of a succession of prophets and judges, whose responsibility was to advise the monarch and the entire nation on the need for obedient service to God, as well as to uphold morality and justice.

Samuel, one of Israel's last great judges, was dedicated to the service of God from a tender age (1 Sam 1:27) and served God under Eli, the priest. He was held in great honor by all people in Israel and his city of Ramah. They considered him a holy seer and Prophet, 'whose every word came true' (1 Sam 9:6). Therefore, 'when Samuel spoke, all Israel listened' (1 Sam 3: 21). He anointed both Saul (1 Sam 15:1) and David (1 Sam 16: 12) as first and second kings of Israel, respectively. [8]

Shortly after his inauguration as king of Israel, Saul was instructed by Yahweh to destroy the Amalekites. God's specific instructions were: **"**Go and attack the Amalekites and destroy everything they have. Don't leave anything; kill all the men, women, children, and babies, the cattle, sheep, camels, and donkeys." (1 Sam 15:3). Saul did not do as commanded. Instead, he chose to keep the best part of the loot to offer it as a sacrifice to God. He only realized his folly and act of disobedience when Samuel admonished him thus:

[6] Jesus did not coin this euphemism. The book of Kings similarly refers to death as sleep. Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, refers to King David's imminent death as sleep thus: '*Otherwise it shall come to pass when my Lord the king shall sleep with his fathers, that my son Solomon and I shall be counted, offenders*. (1Ki 1:22). See also 1Ki 2:10: '*So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David*.' [King James Version].

[7] See 1 Sam 2:30 "I will honor those who honor me, and will treat with contempt those who despise me." See also 1 Sam 12:13 'All will go well with you if you honor the LORD your God, serve him, listen to him and obey his commandment, and if you and your king follow him. But if you do not listen to the LORD but disobey his commands, he will be against you and your king.'

[8] Sirach 46: 13 – 19 reads:

'Samuel was loved by the Lord. As the Lord's Prophet, he established the kingdom and appointed rulers. He judged the nation in accordance with the Law of the Lord, and the Lord protected Israel. Because Samuel was faithful, he was accepted as a true prophet. People trusted him as a seer because of his words. …[.]. When Samuel was about to die, he gave assurances before the Lord and the anointed king that he had never taken anyone's property, not even so much as a pair of shoes, and no one contradicted him. Even after he died, he prophesied to King Saul how he would die. Out of the grave, he spoke as a prophet to blot out his people's wickedness. (See 1 Samuel 12: 1 – 6).

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> 'The Lord anointed you king of Israel, and he sent you out with orders to destroy those wicked people of Amalek. He told you to fight until you had killed them all. Why, then, did you not obey him? Why did you rush to seize the loot, and so do what displeases the LORD? Which does the LORD prefer: obedience or offerings and sacrifices? It is better to obey him than to sacrifice the best sheep to him. Because you have rejected the LORD'S command, he has rejected you as king' (1 Sam 15: 20 – 23)

Having given the background to our scriptural text, we now describe Saul's encounter with the conjured spirit of Samuel, Israel's most prolific judge and Prophet. Saul, the First King of Israel anointed by Yahweh through Samuel, is distraught. He has a very tenuous hold on power and is constantly preoccupied with his fear and suspicion of David, whom he plans to assassinate. Eventually, David takes refuge among the Philistines, where he is quickly promoted to the rank of a permanent bodyguard to Achish. Yahweh sends the Philistine army to end Saul's reign as punishment for his disobedience. Since Yahweh has turned his face from him and no longer answers his prayers, Saul makes recourse to a spirit medium (a woman with familiar spirits). [9] Ironically, in one of his unpopular decrees, he ordered the extermination and expulsion of all spirit mediums from Israel. This corroborates De Witte's observation of the discrepancy between what we do in public and private. She says:

> Religious practice may vary according to context or specific needs. Religious identification or practice differs between the public and the private realm (De Witte, 2018, p. 3).

Disguised as an ordinary citizen and under cover of darkness, Saul visits one of the few remaining spirit mediums at Endor. After explaining his predicament and assuring the spirit medium that no harm would befall her, Saul requests the spirit medium to conjure up from the dead the spirit of Samuel, his renowned mentor, Prophet, and former judge of Israel. After falling into a trance to conjure Samuel from the dead, the spirit medium suddenly recognizes Saul and admonishes him for his deceit. Before explaining God's decision to end Saul's reign, the 'resurrected' Samuel complains of being disturbed from his 'sleep.' He explains that it is due to Saul's acts of disobedience to God, a fact he had drawn to his attention during his lifetime, that Yahweh has decided to end his rule. [10]

Not only does this scripture exemplify the phenomenon of ancestral veneration in ancient Hebrew society, but it also repudiates the view of ancestral spirits as evil idols and the perception of the dead as truly dead and unconscious. These views are often used as the basis for rejecting African ancestral cults and the institution of African indigenous healing.

V. The Image of an African Indigenous Healer

Saul, the exterminator of indigenous healers in Israel, is eventually forced to patronize their services clandestinely. Recourse to these conventional ritual specialists is predicated on his acknowledgment of their value in ancient Hebrew society. His decision to exterminate them possibly arose from his failure to disaggregate authentic from unscrupulous indigenous healers. Nothing is maleficent or sinister about the spirit medium at Endor to warrant or ground a wholesale rejection of the entire institution of traditional healing.

It is only through the supernatural intervention of an indigenous healer that King Saul gets an explanation of God's anger against him, in line with Israeli salvation history. The successful conjuring up from the dead of Samuel by the indigenous healer for purposes of transmitting divine will and an injunction to Saul confirms the centrality of the indigenous healer in the divine scheme of things in ancient Hebrew society. We have come across an argument that only evil-minded people like Saul make recourse to an indigenous healer. Although this may be the case, let us briefly focus on what the activities of the spirit medium and her techniques reveal about the nature of her office (the institution of traditional healing). Let us use Christ's criterion for passing judgment on her moral standing. Christ's standard contained in Matthew 7: 15 -19 reads thus:

> Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, and neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

First, through the intervention of the spirit medium, communication between God and Saul is re-established. Second, the divine will is eventually

[9] A familiar spirit is a possessing spirit that enables a spirit medium to access mystical and healing power. The familiar spirit is, therefore, equivalent to an African indigenous healer, who derives his supernatural power from a possessing ancestral spirit or Modimo. The conversation between Saul and the medium suggests that Saul could not see what the medium easily saw while in a trance. For this reason, in Setswana, indigenous healers are called *bo-re-a-itse* [those who claim to know what ordinary mortals do not know].

[10] Remember what Samuel had once said to Saul:

> 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and given it to someone better than you. Israel's majestic God does not lie or change his mind. He is not a human being – he does not change his mind.' (1 Sam 15: 27 – 29) [Good News Version].

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revealed and reiterated. Saul came to know what God had ordained for him through the invasion of Israel by the Philistines. Therefore, the spirit medium is critical in divine revelation to humanity. The spirit medium's benevolence and moral uprightness are beyond reproach. There is no doubt that within ancient Hebrew society, as well as within our own culture, an authentic indigenous healer derives mystical power from God. There is also no doubt that an African indigenous healer is a protector of the community against all evil and anti-social elements. By no definition is the medium at Endor a witch doctor. This scripture shows nothing nefarious or evil about her professional conduct. Last, the efficacy of her intervention techniques is unquestionable, as evidenced by the successful conjuring up of Samuel from the dead. 'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' Indeed, this tree is not the type destined for casting into the fire!

VI. The Mediatory Role of Ancestral Spirits

There is no mediation without the crossing of boundaries. Through various divination techniques, African indigenous healers tap divine knowledge, healing power, and mystical explication of the cause and meaning of suffering and afflictions. Through spirit possession, different categories of sacred beings break into the human realm to bring healing and restore *nomos* in the created order.

This model is replicated the world over. Most significantly, it is expressed in local idioms in various cultural contexts. Among these intermediaries are ancestral spirits (spirits of the dead), whose veneration 'is a major characteristic of all traditional religions.' As 'the most immediate link with the spiritual world, they are thought to be constantly near, observing every thought and action of the living' (Ofosuhene (2006:3). They also continue to exercise control over the living (ibid:13). Therefore, African ancestral spirits maintain their 'loves, their hates, their passions' and their traits beyond the grave. They are most suited to fulfilling their mediatory functions because they are both human and divine (their medial position). They speak both the language of humans as well as that of divinity. Through their human experiences, they are best qualified to talk to *Modimo* on behalf of their progeny. In our view, this is the *raison d'être* of Christ's incarnation. [11] When we consider the evolutionary perception of social, intellectual, and religious development, we begin to appreciate that the Christian concept of incarnation and resurrection have their origin and antecedents in diverse pre-Christian cultures and religious traditions, such as African indigenous religions.

Our scripture seriously debunks Pentecostal dogmatic teaching on ancestral spirits that cast them as idols or malevolent spiritual beings. It also casts aspersions on the view of ancestral spirits as beings whose idiosyncratic qualities and traits are now buried with their bones: i.e., devoid of their earthly 'loves, their hates, and their passions.' First, Saul had a clear understanding of the service he needed from the medium, as well as the source of the medium's mystical power. Saul acknowledges that the medium depends on her familiar spirit to effect prolific divination. He explicitly requests the medium to conjure up none other than Samuel from the dead. Why Samuel? The whole of Chapter 12 of 1 Samuel is an exposition of Samuel's credentials as a worthy candidate for entry into the ancestral realm as a beneficent divine mediator, akin to the criteria set for African ancestral spirits. Saul knew and remembered all this. He also recognized Samuel's wisdom, stature as a judge of Israel, and intimacy with God. He knew and remembered too, how in his lifetime, Samuel had interceded on his behalf with God (1 Sam 15:29, 30). Therefore, his choice of Samuel was both deliberate and well-informed. He knew the long-dead Samuel maintained his 'loves, hates, and passions' beyond the grave. Saul needed such succor in conjuring up this icon from the dead. The resurrected Samuel did not disappoint. He was still as disciplined in speech and as steadfast in his defense of moral uprightness and obedient service to God as he was in his earthly position as judge and Prophet. He still remembered what he had said while alive. He echoed in this periscope what he had previously similarly articulated in his parting speech in 1 Samuel 12 thus:

> And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart; And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in

[11] Bafana Phemepheretlhe Pheto, a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission and a local gospel music singer in Molepolole (Botswana), sings a song, part of whose lyrics acknowledge this fact. The song runs:

> *Ka o kile wa nna motho; le botlhoko wa bo utlwa; le lebitla wa le tsena; ke tshepa wena*! (Setswana) [Jesus, I trust in you because you have experienced pain and human suffering. You also spent days in a human grave!]

The lyrics are in line with Hebrews 2: 14 – 18, which reads;

> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death, he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Surely, it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and that he may make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he suffered when he was tempted, he can help those being tempted.' [Good News].

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> ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king. (1 Sam 12:20 – 25).

No doubt, the resurrected Samuel continues to be Yahweh's mouthpiece and the custodian of moral uprightness. As an acknowledged ancestral spirit, Samuel performs his mediatory role as he did as Judge and Prophet. Nothing has changed. He still recollects what he had said to Saul in his lifetime (1 Sam 15: 20 – 23). Nothing has changed. Out of the grave, Samuel continues to speak like a prophet (Sirach 46: 13 – 19). He prophesies Saul's death and Israel's defeat in battle by the Philistines. Although Ecclesiastes states that the dead know nothing, it is Saul who does not know that he is going to die tomorrow. At least Samuel is fully aware that he is dead. Consequently, Samuel tells Saul,' tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' He continues to be privy to God's plans and schemes, as exemplified by his references to Yahweh's plan to 'deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.' Therefore, to argue, like the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, that the dead are 'completely forgotten' and that they 'will never again take part in anything that happens in this world' is impossible to sustain in light of the evidence before us.

Samuel, the long-dead judge, and Prophet, ruptured into history as a resurrected ancestral spirit to participate in and comment on past and contemporary world events. [12] Samuel's discourse also reveals the existence of intimate and cordial relations between Yahweh, the High God, and ancestral spirits as lesser spiritual beings. Obeisance and veneration of ancestral spirits, as demonstrated by Saul's genuflection before the apparition of the resurrected ancestral spirit, neither constitutes apostasy nor idolatry. Samuel's explicit explanation of Saul's demise does not refer to his patronization of the spirit mediums. Nonetheless, 1 Chronicle 10:13 -14 reads:

> So, Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore, he slew him and turned the kingdom unto David, the son of Jesse.

The above scripture raises questions that lie beyond the scope of this article. First, Saul only consulted the spirit medium after the LORD had refused to answer him 'either by dreams or by the use of Urim and Thummim or by prophets.' Second, within the African worldview, particularly in cultures whose supreme being is transcendent (a *Deus remotus*), consultation of spirit mediums and ancestral spirits is a legitimate avenue for accessing divine revelation. The interest of this article is whether or not the dead are truly dead and unconscious. We are not interested in when or when not to consult spirit mediums within the Hebraic culture.

VII. Conclusion

From the periscope in review, ancestral spirits are benign spiritual beings that partake in Yahweh's devolved mystical power. There is continuity in both the character and vocation of Samuel the Judge and Prophet and the resurrected ancestral spirit appropriately adored and venerated by Saul. Neither have the dead lost their consciousness nor their idiosyncratic traits. From their postmortem place of abode underground, they rupture into the human realm, where they continue to shape history and human destiny. There is no evidence of evil in Samuel as an ancestral spirit that justifies a generalized demonization of ancestral spirits and cults. Instead, the scripture affirms and justifies the veneration of ancestral spirits and the institution of traditional healing.

From an African perspective, human life originates from and derives its meaning and purpose from different categories of divinities. Like many other human societies, the Sotho-Tswana have a theocentric view of the world and life. Human life originates in the blissful presence of *Modimo* in the underworld; and culminates with a return to the source, where it continues linearly. Life begins from and ends with the return to the underground purposefully. Matsieng emerged from the underground deliberately and only returned to the underground after completing his life mission on earth (Scheub, 2000). In the same manner, the death and return of human beings to the underworld are purposeful. After deification, ancestral spirits take their place in the divine order. They continue loving, protecting, and caring for their loved ones back on earth at a new, more elevated plane of existence. [13] They partake in the ongoing creative role as life-giving and life-sustaining agents. As a result, ancestral spirits feature prominently in all African traditional fertility

[12] A docetic line of argument is discernable in the arguments of Pentecostals who have attempted an exegesis of this scripture. According to this view, the apparition that came to life 'appeared' to be Samuel, yet in reality, it was an evil spirit. This view is based on the conviction that the dead are truly dead, unconscious, and will only resurrect at Parousia.

[13] The Zimbabwean Roman Catholic funeral rite liturgy acknowledges the ancestral spirits' role in this regard in a funeral prayer addressed to the ancestral spirits thus:

> '*To you all our ancestors who are with God. We are gathered here to present to you your child X [name of the deceased]. We ask you to accompany him/her on his/her journey. Receive him/her in God's kingdom so that he/she will have the capacity to shield others from the misfortunes of the world and to intercede on their behalf. May you lead him/her to the joys and happiness of the righteous, where he/she will live forever more*. 'Gundani (1997, p. 84-85)

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religious rituals. Ensuring the land's and its people's fecundity is the primary function of Sotho-Tswana ancestral spirits. Due to their dual membership as former and continued members of their living human communities (their humanity) and their new membership in the divine realm (their divinity), ancestral spirits are better positioned to mediate between divinity and humanity. This is the basis of the notion of Christ's incarnation and salvific role in Christian theology.

The view of ancestral spirits as idols or evil is neither supported by African culture nor our scripture. The rejection of African ancestral cults is neither scripturally nor theologically based. It is informed by Euro-centric ideologies that have nothing to do with proper hermeneutics. We concur with Ofosuhene's conclusion that:

> .. had the early missionaries to Africa known these facts about African traditional religion [African ancestral cults in particular] when they came with Christianity, they would have realized that preaching the existence of God, the existence and immortality of the soul to the Africans was "taking coal to Newcastle": they were not making any startling revelations. They were only confirming what the Africans knew before they came. If they had taken the time to study the African religion, their work would have been much simpler (Ofosuhene, (2006:19).

There is a need for a new scholarly quest for an afro-based model for teaching pneumatology and soteriology, which considers the critical role of ancestral spirits and African indigenous healers within African culture and traditional worldview. Unfortunately, the quest for harmonizing the Christian and African indigenous worldviews often creates religious, spiritual, and intellectual schizophrenia for Western-trained African theologians like Rev. Dr. Kealotswe and scholars of a Pentecostal Christian persuasion like Professor Fidelis Nkomazana.

For example, at the end of his book, *Images of God among the Sotho-Tswana,* Rev. Dr. Gabriel Setiloane (1975) expresses his spiritual schizophrenia by questioning why he remains a practicing Priest despite his awareness of the harm missionary Christianity has brought upon African cultures. Similarly, the late Rev. Dr. Obed Kealotswe (Kealotswe, 1998, p. 99), a Western-trained African Theologian and a Priest in the United Congregationalist Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA, formerly the London Missionary Society), captures his spiritual and intellectual schizophrenia thus:

> The only problem is that Western-trained African Theologians have a wish that they do not wish to see materialize [i.e., acceptance of the African traditional worldview and spirituality as part of the orthodox dogma and teachings of the Church]. In my situation, I enjoy myself when I visit AICS [African Independent Churches] and learn from them. I enjoy myself when I visit Shadipinge [an African indigenous healer generally denigrated by most Christian denominations], for he tells me about all his beliefs and practices. I accept them, but [I] do not want to practice them because my mind has been so pumped with Western ideas and concepts that I feel inferior if I also believe and practice the life of the AICS or Shadipinge. This is the African Theologian's struggle, i.e., how to disentangle himself/herself from the chains of cultural slavery.

Spiritual and intellectual schizophrenia, products of academic compartmentalization, ultimately limits the advancement of our knowledge of religion. We have, in this article, deliberately weaved from our rudimentary understanding of theological, biblical, and Pentecostal studies to the anthropology of African religions. We hope that this usage of a combination of diverse approaches and perspectives has produced a better understanding of the significance of the African ancestral cult.

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