

A Missionary Handbook on African Traditional Religion

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PREFACE

One of the important areas of study for a missionary or evangelist is to understand the beliefs that people already have before and during the time the missionary presents the gospel to them. These beliefs will shape how they understand the message and the problems they have if they want to respond.

There are many books on African Traditional Religion. In Nigeria, most of them concentrate on the religions of the tribes of the southern part of the country. This book tries to talk about traditional religion more generally, exploring some of the religious ideas found in ethnic groups that do not have much of the gospel yet. Most textbooks on Traditional Religion describe the religion without relating it to the teachings of the Bible. However a missionary needs to know how to relate the Bible’s teaching to traditional beliefs.

This book is also about methods we can use to interest followers of ATR in the gospel and teach and disciple them so that they will understand the gospel and live as committed Christians. It tries to suggest some useful methods for missionaries and evangelists in the field.

My prayer is that Christians who read this book will be encouraged in their own faith and helped to spread that faith effectively to the adherents of African Traditional Religions.

Lois Fuller

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1. Introduction

a) Why Do We Study African Traditional Religion (ATR)?

There are several reasons why missionaries study ATR. Some are listed below:

1. We need to understand the environment in which we minister. Almost all Africans are affected by the powers and ideas of Traditional Religion. We will not understand how they are thinking unless we are aware of ATR.
2. We need to understand conversion and discipleship problems caused by the ATR background so that we can meet them effectively in our ministry. For example, evangelism methods that promise salvation from hell do not work with many who follow traditional religion because they do not fear hell. Many discipleship programmes do not deal effectively with the convert's fear of and bondage to demonic powers.
3. We need to take advantage of insights and advantages that people from an ATR background have for understanding Christ and becoming disciples. For example, traditionalists who are used to trusting their ancestors for help can help other Christians understand how Jesus functions as our elder brother and spiritual ancestor.

The study gives us insight into the relevance of some parts of scripture. There are passages that mean a lot to people from an ATR background that others might not have seen the importance of. For example, some African Traditionalists own horns of animals, containing powerful occult medicines. When these people become Christians they have to destroy these horns. They might feel powerless, until they read, "The Lord is my horn," in the Bible. The horn as a symbol of power is very real to them, and they see clearly how the Lord's power is greater than all powers they used formerly for protection, to get courage and to win over enemies.

4. Missionaries who are Africans need to be clear about their own identity in Christ as relates to their own cultural past. Missionaries from other places also need to think about how Christ relates to their cultural assumptions. All missionaries must be clear about what the Bible teaches and what they believe about traditional African ideas before they can teach others.

b) Neutrality in the Study of Religion

Some scholars believe that the person studying religions should study them academically without taking sides as to the truth or error and rightness or wrongness, of the doctrines and practices. That may be all right for secular scholars, but not for those who have clearly committed themselves to faith in God as he is revealed in the Bible. We don't see the teaching of the Bible as one of many possibly true views of spiritual things, but as the truth. The world calls this being narrow-minded, but truth itself is narrow. Everything cannot be true. Besides this, we are committed as ministers of the living God to helping others to find him. It would be wrong of us to be neutral to things that God condemns as leading people to be lost.

In this study we will aim to be objective. This means we will try to be fair to the facts. It is possible to be objective without being neutral. A judge in the court is objective, but he or she takes a side. Like the judge, we have to decide the side we must take in our study of ATR.

c) The Origin of Religion, especially ATR

People have a lot of theories about how religion started. But according to the Bible, the original religion of man when he was created was the worship of the true God. All people in this world are descendants of Adam and Noah and their cultures often keep some knowledge of God's original dealings with man. Because of sin, much of what they once knew has now been lost, but some has still been passed down through the generations.

People also look at the created world which tells something of the nature of God (Rom 1:19-20). They all have a conscience that makes them aware of right and wrong and judgement (Rom 2:14-15). Then they also see the events of history and draw conclusions about God. They make mistakes in some of their conclusions because of man's fallen will, dim understanding and the influence of evil spiritual powers. Therefore religions made by people are a mixture of truth and error. They cannot save, but there are truths in them which the gospel preacher can build upon.

d) What Does a Christian Do With His "Traditional" Past?

To many people in the world, their religion is part of their ethnic identity. A person who leaves the traditional religion is faced with a kind of identity crisis. Who am I? What do I do about my relationship to my ancestors and the history and traditions of my people? What culture shall I follow, since most things in the traditional culture are linked to the religion? These are important questions. Many people, like the apostle Paul, love their people

and are proud of their ethnic and cultural background. To reject it all is painful. Over the years there have been various approaches to these questions.

1. Some try to reject their past completely, disown its culture and join a new one. This is like Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 2:12) becoming an Israelite or a Francophone African becoming a Frenchman. This sometimes happens if a convert's culture and people reject him totally. For example, some converts from an Islamic background have to do it in order to survive at all. But generally it is not the best way, because a Christian should still stay close enough to his people and their ways that he will be able to influence them toward Christ.

2. Some concentrate on their more original ancestors and traditions such as Noah and their identity as a human being rather than of a certain tribe. They transfer their loyalty from their tribe to the whole human race. Not many people can do this. Most of us want to feel that we really belong to a particular people and culture.

3. Some Christianize the past. They find Christ working in the "pagan" past and so link loyalty to the past and to Christ. For example, some of the culture's traditional stories or customs might point toward the gospel (these customs and stories are called redemptive analogies). Someone could see that the true God has been dealing with his ancestors all along. Thus he sees the gospel as the fulfilment of the revelations God had been making to his people in the past. This is how the Jewish Christians saw Christ. It was also how Bruce Olsen explained the gospel to the Motilone tribe (see the book *Bruchko*). They saw the gospel as the fulfilment of a prophecy made to their people long ago. There are more examples of this in the book *Eternity in Their Hearts* by Don Richardson. Although the traditional past is not revelation like the Old Testament is, God has always been interested in our people and it is likely that he has been working in our past in some way. This is a good approach but it is only part of the answer.

4. Some start a new tradition, like Abraham who made a break with his ancestors and became the ancestor of a new tradition. All Abraham's descendants were encouraged to follow the God of their father Abraham, but not the gods their previous fathers worshipped (Josh 24:2,14-17 and Gen 28:13). This is also a good approach to take as part of the solution.

5. Some concentrate on their new spiritual ancestors, starting from Abraham. New Testament Gentile believers did not join Jewish culture, but they did see themselves as being the spiritual heirs of Abraham (e.g. Rom 11:17-24). They found ways of expressing this in their own culture and language. The Bible talks of believers belonging to a new (spiritual) ethnic group, based on their spiritual identity. Once they were not a people, but now they are the people of God (1 Pet 2:10. See also Rom 11:17-24, Eph 2:11-3:6). This is the main approach that the New Testament takes to the problem. Now we see why it is so important to study the lives of the saints in the Bible. If we are Christians, they are our own spiritual ancestors.

Jewish Christians have an advantage because they are the only Christians for whom their physical ancestors are also their spiritual ancestors. Modern examples of "cultural revival" try to strengthen and harness people's identity and self-image by having them find their spiritual and physical roots in the same place. This can work for a while, but it will finally fail because spiritual roots outside faith in Christ have gone astray and lead to destruction. We need to go farther back, and become the offspring of Abraham.

This does not mean that we stop associating ourselves with our people. We can see Paul, who could "become all things to all men" finding much comfort in the company of people of his own ethnic background (Col 4:11). But he still worked happily with others. He had a big burden for his own people (Rom 9:1-5) but spent most of his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. He never rejected the Jews, but saw himself as a Christian first, a brother to every other Christian, before being a Jew and a brother to other Jews. The Jews hated this, and made Paul suffer for it, but he still loved both them and his Gentile Christian brothers.

e) Some Positive Functions of ATR

Traditional religion has some strengths which we must not overlook. It helps the people that practise it in several ways. A community that uniformly practices ATR gains the following from it:

1. It maintains community unity and peace, for example in promoting submission of women and children, and respect for elders. It enforces everybody respecting rules and customs. For example, the masquerades might punish disobedient people.

2. It provides customs and ceremonies to pass on community history, traditions and culture. The ceremonies may act out the history so that it is learned by each new generation.
3. It enforces morality by punishing thieves, adulterers, greedy or selfish people. It forces people to fulfil their family responsibilities. For example, there are charms to stop thieves and calamities that befall the immoral.
4. It encourages creative art forms such as dance, drama, poetry, music, painting, carving, and pottery which are practised for religious purposes.
5. It gives relief from a feeling of helplessness in the face of illness, hostility, misfortune (such as drought) or fear of these. People feel better when they think there is something they can do about the trouble.
6. Religious social organization helps the mobilization of society whenever needed. For example, the religion may provide the motivation for people to go to war or participate in festivals.
7. It gives relief from grief at separations when someone dies, through supposed communication with the dead. People are comforted if they feel they have a message from their dead father.

The community also suffers some bad consequences, such as oppressive taboos and sacrifices, demonic attacks and possession, and fear. Certain children might need to be killed, such as twins. Certain foods might be forbidden. Sacrifices might be too expensive. For example, in Birom traditional culture, they are supposed to sacrifice 22 chickens for a new baby. Traditional religion may also encourage pride in some powerful people so that they oppress others.

However, if the traditional religion is removed with nothing to replace it, secularization can result in chaos in society due to lawlessness and selfishness. The functions must be replaced if the religion changes.

2. The Traditional African World View

a) Space

Many Africans traditionally think of three kinds of places that exist. There is the sky or the heavens, where God is, there is the earth, including land and water, where people live their earthly lives, and there is the place where the dead and the spirits are. This last place might be thought of as under the ground, where the dead are buried (though spirits are also invisibly in the world with men). The idea of these three places is in the Bible. For example, Philippians 2:10 says, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

b) Time

Western people think of time in past, present and future. Their eyes are mainly on the future towards which they feel they are moving, and their hopes and dreams are all for the future. They think that the future is all new, something that has never existed before. They can forget about the past and leave it behind if they want, since it is gone and will never exist again. They feel as if they are moving along a straight line in time which is going somewhere.

But the traditional African idea is not like that. The future is usually expected to be like the present and past. Rather than a straight line moving towards the future, time is seen as a circle or a spiral. In most West African societies, it seems that people move from the sky where they exist before being incarnated on earth, to the earth where they spend a lifetime, and move on to the world of the dead where the ancestors are, and which spiritually, may be closer to the sky. From there, they come back into the world again and repeat the process. For traditional Africans, their lives also follow a pattern with the seasons of the year. Rain, cultivating, harvesting, and dry season are things that happen for farmers year after year. There are usually yearly festivals and ceremonies. So the future is expected to be like the past if the world is working properly. To make drastic changes that break the continuation of the circle might cause all kinds of problems. Power and blessing flow from one part of the circle (the ancestors or the sky) to the living. If someone tries to jump out of the circle by disowning the gods and ancestors or disobeying them, might not chaos be the result?

Traditionalists would likely understand the writer of Ecclesiastes when he says, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again;

there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time" (Eccl 1:9-10). The writer of Ecclesiastes found this a depressing thought. But the traditionalist sees it as comforting and secure.

John Mbiti, the Kenyan scholar, belongs to the Akamba people who do not think in terms of reincarnation (that is, that people are born into the world again after they die). If people do not come back from the past, how does the past still circle back in the present? The powers from the past keep influencing the present.

From his own point of view, Mbiti divides time into the present and the past. He thinks that the future is almost non-existent to Africans. Other scholars have shown that traditional Africans can certainly think about things happening in the future, especially things that are expected in the cycle of the year and the passing of a person's life. However, the future as something totally new is not a very traditional idea.

Sasa is the Swahili word by which Mbiti calls the present. It can include things about to happen and things that have just happened which are part of the present situation and experience. *Zamani* is the Swahili word for the past. Everything now in the *Sasa* will eventually become part of the *Zamani*. It is as if time is flowing, not forward but backward. The deep *Zamani* contains events which happened so long ago that people alive now do not remember them. All the important things are in the *Zamani*, that is, the origins of things, the reasons for things, the ancestors and the power to live. People's eyes are on the past, their hope, dreams and admiration are centred on the past in the *Zamani*. It is not good to violate the power from the *Zamani* by drastic changes in the *Sasa* which break from the *Zamani*. Thus, traditional customs must be kept and ancestors honoured for society to be preserved. As a person lives his life, more and more of it flows back toward the past. When he dies, he is still tied to the *Sasa* by the memory of him that people in the *Sasa* still carry in their hearts. They sacrifice to him or remember him in other ways. When all those who remember him are also dead, he is totally in the *Zamani*. But he still influences the present because he becomes one of the spirit beings that can afflict people.

However you explain the concept of time, there is a real feeling in ATR that it is dangerous if people are not faithful to the traditions of the past. Past traditions are the same traditions that operate in the present to keep everything in peace and order. If there is too much change, the powers from

the past might punish people, or they may no longer be able to pass along their blessings.

The Bible sees that what happened in the past affects the present. Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead happened in the past and are still operating powerfully as facts in the present. Because we expect him to come again, Jesus is also in the future. He is in charge of the powers of the "underworld" as well as the sky, and looking to those places for power and preservation should lead us to him. However, the Bible also sees time as moving in one direction, toward a goal (the end of the world or the age to come). The writer of Ecclesiastes was depressed when he thought there was no progress, but God says, "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Is 43:19), and the Bible talks about the end of the age and a new heavens and a new earth. With the coming of Jesus, the new age started to overlap with the present age (e.g. Heb 6:5). The kingdom of God is already here, but it is still coming. Some day, it will be fully here and the present age will come to an end.

c) God

God is older than everything in the *Zamani*. He is outside the circle of time and is in touch with everything. He is the Supreme Being, who created everything else. God is part of the world view of practically every African society. There will be more about him in the next chapter.

d) Human Beings

In ATR, human beings include souls waiting to be born, those alive now in the world, and those who have recently died and are still remembered. They are still part of the human community.

The individual person gets his existence and identity from his part in the family, clan and tribe. The community gives birth to a child, and also by various rituals, incorporates him into society. "The individual can only say, 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.'" (Mbiti p. 108-109). The idea of a person going off to make his own life and his own decisions apart from his identity in the family, clan and tribe is an evil and a heresy in ATR. Such a person seems hardly to be human.

Traditional Religion is not something a person decides to follow or is converted to. He meets it in the community he is born into. It is theirs, so it also becomes his. Those not born into the community cannot follow it, so it is not preached to those outside the group. It is part of the group identity

and legacy handed down from their ancestors. Its authority comes from the past, so it should not be tampered with.

e) The Middle Powers

There is a group of beings that are normally invisible. They are created by God, less powerful than God and more powerful than people, so in power, they are in the middle between God and people. They include divinities (gods), nature spirits, and the spirits of people who have died. This realm is very real to Africans, just as real as the world of visible things. It is always interacting with the visible world and the world of men. Some of these beings are friendly to people and some are not. Most have to be given offerings so that they will help or not harm people. Many people believe that the middle powers act as intermediaries between people and God.

As well as beings, many ATRs believe that there is a kind of impersonal spiritual power in the middle realm which can be tapped and used, either for good or evil, by people who know the methods or techniques. These people are often specialists who do this on behalf of others.

f) Animals

Some traditionalists believe that animals have a kind of soul, though where these souls come from and where they go to is usually not known. Some people, such as several ethnic groups in Adamawa State in Nigeria, make pacts with the souls of very powerful animals as protectors of their own souls. Some people are believed to be able to change themselves into animals or send animal forms to attack people. Animals are also used as sacrifices and as food for the spiritual powers they are offered to.

Wild animals are spiritually mysterious. Some of them are sacred and treated as gods. For example, in some places there are sacred crocodiles that eat the chickens offered. In other places the monitor lizard or another wild animal is honoured. At times, only certain clans are spiritually related to a kind of animal. They may not eat it though others can. (Anthropologists call this “totemism”.) Some animals, especially when they behave in a certain way, are believed to be ancestors returning to visit the family, so are treated with respect or observed as omens. The python is viewed this way in some tribes.

g) Inanimate Things

There are spirits associated with or living around rocks, plants, trees, caves, mountains, streams, rivers and lakes or oceans. They may need to be

placated before these things can be used or touched, or for those things to provide people with things like fish. Thus almost everything has spiritual beings associated with it, especially big and important things.

There are sacred plants in some areas that are considered to be spiritually powerful. Some of these plants contain a drug that produces strange experiences when swallowed, some of them are poisons and some have other qualities believed to have spiritual effects. For example, a climbing cactus called “gadali” is sacred and acts as a shrine and is believed to be able to avenge those who appeal to it, in several tribes in north-eastern Nigeria.

h) The Purpose of Life

In many African societies, people are seeking all their lives for well-being, both physical and spiritual. The continuation of the society of a people group is seen as important for this. If the society continues and prospers, the individual can go on existing too. When he dies he needs the people he has left to keep remembering him and making him offerings to preserve his identity and well-being, or to keep begetting children through whom he can return to them. If the family or clan or tribe dies out or scatters, the ancestors perish too, as does the spiritual future of each individual. Therefore all things that preserve the society (marriage, giving birth, unity and harmony, the socialization and obedience of juniors, material prosperity, victory over enemies, good health) are the means of salvation. They need to come to people when they are still in this world. The ancestors are believed to help people gain all these when they are obeyed and consulted.

3. God

a) Traditional Ideas of God

Virtually all Africa believes in a Supreme God who created everything else (the middle powers, people, animals, and the physical universe). People have many theories about how Africans came to know that there is a Supreme God. The apostle Paul wrote “what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Rom 1:19-20). In other words, God is always revealing his existence to Africans,

as to other people, through creation. Since Africans too are descended from Noah, their earliest ancestors knew about God and passed this knowledge on to their children. As the Bible says, God did not leave himself without a testimony. “He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17).

Each people group in Africa has a name for the Supreme God, and each has its own ideas about him. Some tribes see God as related to the sun (e.g. the Rubassa, Birom, Chamba) and some to the rain (e.g. Igede). Although they may have the same name for sun and God, they don't think the sun is God. The sun is like a manifestation of God or the son of God. Some see God as a husband with the earth as his wife, resulting in fruitfulness.

Many tribes see God as somehow far away from man. He created everything and later withdrew. People do not worship him much directly, but worship and pray to the middle powers that affect their daily lives. The Nupe people have a story that once a medicine man made a chain that reached up into the sky and climbed up it to go to see God. The people waited on the ground for him to come back. After they had waited for a very long time, the medicine man came climbing down the chain. He said he had climbed for many days, but could not reach God. “God is far away,” he said, “so each of us should just worship what we find close to us.” Many people also feel that God is so holy, sacred and mighty that it would be disrespectful for people to approach him directly.

Some traditionalists only pray directly to God in extreme emergency when every other hope is gone. However, they often refer to him in daily life. There are a few tribes that worship God directly and regularly. This has been reported in Ghana, and perhaps among the Kambu people in Taraba State of Nigeria.

Generally, God is considered to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He is far away in the sky but also in touch with man. People worship gods and ancestors more because they affect them more on a daily basis, but they know God is always there and some mention him or call his name as a witness.

God is a Spirit. We can see that Africans know this because they almost never make any picture or image of Him. He cannot really be understood.

He is eternal. Most Africans see God as good and merciful, though he can punish sin.

God's love is seen in his kindly provision. He created and sustains all things, (mainly for the benefit of human beings) rules over creation and directs what happens. Most ATRs feel that like a great king, God should not or cannot be approached too directly. Intermediaries (priests and spirits) are common.

The presence of Christianity and Islam in Africa have further strengthened traditional belief in the Supreme God.

b) Traditional and Biblical Concepts of God

We can see that in many ways, the traditional ideas about God agree with what the Bible reveals about Him. He truly is a Spirit, eternal, invisible, omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, in the heavens. God is the ruler, the provider, the judge. The Bible also teaches that God is separated from man because of man's sin, just as many ATRs see God as somehow far away.

Therefore the evangelist or missionary does not need to spend time proving to people any of these things. He or she needs to question the people as to what they believe about God. If he finds they already know these things, he or she should use it as the starting point for further teaching.

Christians have the Bible in which God has revealed himself more clearly to give information that people would not think of just by looking at creation. Here are some of the important ideas revealed or better emphasized in the Bible:

1. God is the only God, the only one we can worship. God made the creation by himself without any other god (Is 44:24).
2. No intermediaries are needed between man and God other than Jesus who is himself God. God is always directly accessible.
3. God is Trinity. Thus He is his own companion and intermediary. God has no wife or children in the human sense.
4. ATR knows that God punishes, but the kinds of things that he hates are not always well understood in ATR. He hates worship of other gods, even

as intermediaries. Ritual requirements (e.g. food taboos) are not his concern. All sins, even against other people, are taken as offences against God himself. The Bible mentions the kinds of sins God forbids.

5. God's justice always demands death as the penalty for sin. His mercy and love paid the price himself by the death of Jesus, and this can be claimed by those who believe in Jesus. The depth of God's hatred for sin and the result of sin in death is not always understood in ATR.

6. God can be so close, the all-in-all, to an individual through the indwelling Holy Spirit. God has a tender love for each individual person. He is so in touch with every intimate detail of daily life that the feeling of need to deal with lesser powers disappears. Fellowship with God is true enjoyment.

Some ATRs understand some of these points already, some don't.

Questions to ask in research about people's belief in God:

1. Who made everything? What is he like?
2. What does he like and what does he hate?
3. What does he do?
4. How do people contact him? Why would people contact him?

c) The Name for God

What should we call God when we go to preach to an unreached tribe? Should we use their own name for the Supreme Being or should we make our own word, like Jehovah, or The Creator (in their language)? This depends on what they already believe about the Supreme God. If their ideas about him are close enough to the Bible's ideas, we should use their own name. Then they will not be confused. We can teach them more about him according to the further revelation of the Bible.

But sometimes a group of people has beliefs about the Supreme Being that are quite different. For example, the Ewe people have a couple, Mawu and Lisa, who together form the Supreme God. They gave birth to the other gods. This concept seems to be so different from the Bible's idea that some of the missionaries decided not to use the name Mawu for God. In ancient Greece, the head god was Zeus. The stories about him told about him committing so many sinful acts that the Christians, writing the New Testament in the Greek language, did not call the Father of Jesus Christ,

Zeus. They used just the ordinary word for deity, *Theos*. Normally, however, we should use the people's own name for God when possible.

4. Human Beings

a) Pre-Existence and the Nature of the Human Soul

Many African groups believe that human souls or spirits exist somewhere consciously before they come down into the womb of a woman to be born into the world. They know that a child is conceived through the union of a man and a woman, but the spirit, character and even appearance of the child come from the soul being incarnated. These souls are created by God at an unspecified previous time. They may have already been to the world many times as they are born, live, die, return to the spirit world, and then get incarnated and born again into their same family (usually). The process of being incarnated includes something by which the soul usually forgets its previous existence(s). In African Traditional Religions we usually talk about partial reincarnation, because, although the person is re-incarnated, something of himself is still in heaven or the spirit world.

Some people in some tribes, like the Yoruba, Edo Urhobo and Igbo, believe that before leaving the spirit world the soul about to be incarnated chooses his own destiny - that is, who his parents will be, his life work, his time and manner of death, and other details. This is worked out in negotiation with God and/or his personal guardian soul (the part of the soul that remains in the spirit world while part is incarnated). The guardian soul is called *ori* (head) in Yoruba. To the Igbo, it is his *chi*. This guardian soul can guide and help the person in his or her life. If it is appeased it prospers the person and he gets good fortune. People may also be told to appease the guardian spirit of a husband or relative to make the family go well.

Before birth, the soul might also wickedly choose to make a pact with a spirit (such as the mammy-water or mermaid) to have extra privileges but die young, or a pact with a group of similar wicked spirits to die young and join them again in the spirit world (such a person is called *ogbanje* by the Igbo and *emere* by the Yoruba). Or the spirit may be a wicked one that torments a woman by being repeatedly born to her and dying (called *abiku* by the Yoruba). If people suspect that a child is of this type, they do things to try to persuade it to stay. If the child dies, they cut and mistreat the corpse so that the spirit will fear to come back to that family. They say that

if the next child born to that mother has marks of the cuts made on the previous child who died, they know that the same child has returned.

Some tribes believe that during pregnancy an evil spirit could drive away the soul sent into a woman's womb and substitute itself. Evil spirits are also believed to incarnate as twins or some kinds of abnormal children, children born with teeth, feet first, etc. depending on the belief of each tribe. People say about children believed to have non-human spirits for souls that they are not "real children". They are often abandoned or killed, and purification rituals are then performed. For example, some of the rural Chamba people still kill any baby born bottom first (a breech baby) and then do purification rituals for the mother, the family and the whole village because they say it is not a real baby but an evil spirit.

Sometimes the indication that a child is not a real child is in the way the child behaves. If a small child does strange things, talks to invisible people, claims that his or her parents are not really his parents, or manifests unusual powers or knowledge, people often consider that the child is really an evil spirit incarnate. People may abandon the child in fear, or consult a diviner about what to do.

Unusual children who are allowed to live need special rites. They may be considered human but there is supernatural influence on them. They are believed to have special powers and must be appeased right from birth with regular offerings. This is often done with twins.

When a normal child is conceived, in addition to the pre-existent soul which is incarnated in the womb, and the guardian soul in the spirit world, there comes into being with the body something which makes the physical body alive. This is the part of the soul which witches are believed to be able to catch and "eat". It can also be destroyed by other physical or spiritual means and when it is destroyed, the body dies, and the pre-existent soul returns to the spirit world. So that part of the soul that makes the person alive does not survive after death. In this belief, the soul has at least three aspects.

There are other spirits or souls which are human in some way:

1. Ghosts. These are the restless spirits of people who did not receive proper ritual burial or who died shameful deaths like by hanging, drowning, loathsome diseases or in pregnancy. Wicked people who are rejected by the

ancestors after death are also in this category. They can do harm if not appeased and driven away.

2. Spirits of witches. Witches are people like everybody else except that they are believed to have a witchcraft spirit which allows them to go about without their physical bodies, sometimes in the form of a night bird, to catch and destroy the souls of other people.

3. Spirits of dead children and twins may inhabit certain forests or areas, and attack people, especially children, who go by.

4. Spirits of people who died before their time are sometimes believed to go to live in another town or area in some kind of visible body, where they can marry and live normal lives to fulfil their normal lifespan. But if someone who knew them before, and who knows they are dead, sees them, they disappear.

b) The Biblical View of Pre-Existence and the Nature of the Human Soul

The Bible pictures man as having either two or three parts. He has his physical body, and his non-physical part. Sometimes the term "soul" and "spirit" are both used to cover the same non-physical part. (E.g. Jas 2:26 and Acts 20:10). Sometimes a difference is made between soul and spirit (as when Paul makes a difference between soulish and spiritual in 1 Cor 2:14-15). All the soul/spirit survives death and goes for judgement to God. (Of course for a Christian, the body is also saved at the resurrection, and in that sense, survives death).

Jesus said "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Did Jesus mean that we should fear witches because they can kill the soul? Of course not. He meant that only God can destroy the soul by casting it into hell. A witch can co-operate with demonic power to kill by afflicting the body through spiritual means. Since the body of a believer is God's property (1 Cor 6:13,19-20) a child of God has the right to claim God's protection and escape. If God has decided that it is time for a believer to die, he may permit anything to kill the body. As soon as a believer dies, he is free from evil powers by being with the Lord. By killing a believer, the devil loses him completely and God has the victory. And of course, God will resurrect the body of a believer when Christ returns, no matter what killed him or her.

c) Do Human Souls Exist Before Conception?

Jeremiah 1:5 says that God knew (or chose - the Hebrew word can mean both) Jeremiah before he was conceived, but this probably means that God decided before creating Jeremiah what he would be like and the work he would be called to do. (Compare Eph 1:4 that Christians were chosen before the foundation of the world, that is, before anything was created including people). Psalm 102:18 talks of generations to come and says they are not yet created (the Hebrew word is *Bara'*, the word use for create in Genesis 1). Only of Jesus is it stated that he existed before he was conceived (Jn 17:24; 8:58; Jn 1:1).

Jesus is the only one of whom it is said in the Bible that he came down from heaven (John 3:13; 6:33). There is nobody else like him, because, as John the Baptist said, "The one who comes from heaven is above all" (Jn 3:31). John contrasted Jesus with himself, and called himself, as an ordinary human being, "one who is from the earth". So the souls or spirits of human beings do not live in heaven before their life on earth.

Christian theologians do not agree about whether God creates the soul of a new person from nothing, or if he creates the soul of a baby the same way he creates the body, by inheritance from the parents. The latter is likely true since a baby takes after the parents in sinfulness of soul as well as the characteristics of the body. In Hebrews 7:10 it says that Levi, the great grandson of Abraham, was in the body of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. This indicates that children yet to be conceived exist potentially in their ancestors rather than somewhere in the spirit world.

The Bible says that Esau and Jacob had not done anything good or evil before they were born (Rom 9:11) indicating that people start responsible action only after birth. They cannot make covenants or decisions before they are born. Any pre-birth sinfulness is inherited from Adam, not due to personal sin. Demons, however, might make agreements among themselves about children yet to be born and try to dominate them.

The Bible also says that man is destined to die only once (Heb 9:27). The spirits of the wicked dead are pictured as imprisoned forever, never more to see the sun (Ps 49:11,16-20) while the spirits of the righteous are with the Lord forever (Ps 49:15; 73:23-26; Ps 23:6 etc). All will be raised to face judgement. The Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, that each person's spirit will be reunited with his resurrected body for judgement, means that no human spirit can belong to more than one physical body and

so re-incarnation is ruled out. African wisdom says that no condition is permanent. That is true in this life, but after this life, according to the Bible, there are two permanent conditions, heaven and hell. Anybody who says he knows what he was doing in his previous incarnation is deceived, probably by demons who tell him about some other person's life that the demons were involved in.

d) Are Some People not 'Real Humans'?

God is the only creator of all things and all human lives. Satan cannot create. God gives life to every person (Acts 17:25,28; Num 16:22; Ps 33:15; Eccl 12:7; Is 42:5; Zech 12:1) and sustains it moment by moment (Job 12:10). All living souls belong to God (Ezek 18:4). Only God can destroy a soul and when the soul leaves the body, the body is dead. In every living person born of human beings there is a genuine human soul created by God. According to the Bible's view, demons can take over a person and imprison the real human soul inside, so that only the demonic spirit manifests. But like the Gadarene demoniac, the real person inside can be set free if the demons are driven out by the power of Christ. The appropriate action for children suspected of being "repeaters" or *abiku*, children who act strangely, or other mysterious individuals, is casting out the demons in Jesus' name and rescuing the person imprisoned inside. Such a delivered person and/or the parents must learn to defend against re-possession by accepting Jesus and then standing on their spiritual rights as people "in Christ", putting on the whole armour of God (Eph 6: 10-21 i.e. holy living) and resisting Satan in prayer.

This means that *abiku* children are not the "same" child coming back. It is a new child each time, but perhaps oppressed and even marked by the same wicked demon. If the demon is driven away, the real child can be set free. Or if the children have been constantly dying because of disease or poor feeding, good medical care and prayer for their health can keep them alive. Likewise, if a child was conceived after prayer to any god or spirit or occult power, that power may threaten to kill the child if he and the parents stop devotion to that power. But by the power of Jesus Christ, the child that Jesus actually created can be delivered and live for his Creator. A child who is thought to be not a child but a demon is really a demonized child. The demon can be cast out and the real child will then be able to express himself.

Mental illness and brain damage can also cause some people to act strangely. These things may be caused by demons. At other times they can

be caused medically. For example, a mother might take certain drugs during her pregnancy which affect the baby in her womb. Then the baby is born deformed. Or a person might have an accident that injures his head. Because some of the brain cells are destroyed in the accident, the person's behaviour changes. Some illegal drugs also damage brain cells. At times, both forces are at work, that is, demons are working together with the physical damage. In such cases, medical treatment can give only part of the solution. In any case, the Bible never commanded killing anyone because he was not a real person or because he was a demon incarnate.

e) Can People Live on in This World After Death?

People who have died may appear in the world, as Moses and Elijah did at the mount of Transfiguration, but there is nothing in the Bible like a person living normally in this world in a physical form after his body is dead and permanently buried. Stories circulate about premature dead people living elsewhere in the country. These stories come from two sources: deception and occult power.

1. Deception: People have been known to stage their own "death" so as to run away and start a new life. They only made it appear that they died. Secondly, total strangers sometimes look almost identical. People see what they expect to see, and jump to conclusions. The story grows the more it is told and fear prevents proper investigation.

2. Occult Power: Demons could impersonate a dead man to keep false beliefs alive.

There are some cases of people like Lazarus of Bethany, the widow's son of Nain, etc. who died and were raised. Their resurrection was different from that of Jesus, because they were only restored to their earthly life and would still die later. The same body was healed temporarily, and everybody saw and knew it. This is different from traditional beliefs that the person's spirit would get a different body, either by reincarnation or some spiritual means, to live as himself or another individual. This is not possible, according to the Bible's teaching. What is possible, is that a demon involved with one person could, after that person's death, impersonate him in the life of another person. The other person is a separate person with his own soul and life, but is affected by a demon pretending to be a person that the demon was previously familiar with.

f) Guardian Spirits

The Bible teaches that there are angels sent by God to take care of little children (Matt 18:10) and to minister to Christians (Heb 1:14). We are not allowed to worship them or pray to them as some people in ATR do to their guardian spirits. Jesus is our only Mediator in the spirit world, and he is more than strong and loving enough to do more than we can ask or think for us. He has power over all other spiritual forces. The Bible does not teach that there is a guardian spirit for a person in the spirit world which is part of himself. The total person is here on earth during his or her lifetime.

5. Divinities And Spirits

a) Traditional Belief about Divinities and Spirits

The "gods" or divinities are not important in all African tribes. In fact, in East and Southern Africa they are much less common. Some West African tribes don't have any, or what they call their "god" is a collective name for the cult of the ancestors. There are also quite a few tribes who have only one or two divinities.

The tribes that have many divinities distinct from the cult of the ancestors are mostly in the southern part of West Africa - tribes like the Igbo, Nupe, Yoruba, Bini, Fon, Fante, Akan and Ewe. In some tribes the divinities are more important than the ancestors. This is probably true for the Yoruba who have a highly developed system of gods. But in other tribes, ancestors are more important. The Akan, for example, feel that if the god you pray to does not help you, you can leave him and go to another god, but you cannot leave your ancestors. To the Akan, the ancestors are more important than the gods.

Divinities are usually related to certain functions like the sun/sky, rain/storm, bodies of water, earth/farming, and iron/hunting. Each divinity has his or her favourite sacrifices and special taboos. They are viewed as assistants of the Supreme God, who look after various departments of his kingdom. Because people believe that divinities affect them in everyday life, divinities tend to get a lot of attention.

The Yoruba probably have more gods than any other tribe in Africa. Their gods like Obatala (the one who forms men), Shango (for thunder), Ogun (for iron), Olokun (for the sea), Orisa-oko (for farming), Eshu (the evil

trickster) and Orunmila (for divination) are widely known. In several tribes there is an earth god or goddess. A Queen “Mammy Water” mermaid (water spirit) is also common. Many tribes have a god that represents the total cult of the ancestors.

Sometimes images are made to represent these divinities. They are usually kept in a shrine or some such secret or hidden place. But often the divinity is not represented by an image as such. It may be contacted through a sacred pot, stone, mud altar, or other such object just as ancestors often are. Divinities can also be depicted in art.

Some divinities have people especially devoted to their worship and service. These people might be especially initiated to the worship, inherit it, and/or they might be required to worship by virtue of their office, such as being chief or head of a family. Other gods are worshipped by the whole community. Often there is a priest who performs the rituals on the people’s behalf. Each household or village might have a shrine to the god.

The relationship between people and the divinity they worship is often seen as a covenant, that is, the people pledge to do their part and the god in turn does his part. The people have to offer certain sacrifices and worship, and the god gives them something such as fertility or protection. Sometimes the yearly festivals are rites of renewing this covenant regularly.

Individuals may also make covenants with divinities or spirits. Sometimes parents make such a covenant in behalf of their child. The god gives benefits such as health, wealth, success or power to the person. In return, the person makes certain sacrifices, keeps certain taboos and/or surrenders certain rights. For example, a woman may gain power to get wealth and surrender the ability to bear children. This kind of covenant is usually dangerous to break. The person may have been required to take oaths to keep the covenant and if the oath is broken, death may result.

Certain divinities are used for taking oaths. Whenever there is a dispute such as over theft, land rights, or accusation of witchcraft, and especially if it is difficult for people to discover which side is telling the truth, the disputants may be asked to swear by one of the gods. If the person is lying, the god will punish and often kill him or her. The oath may be made at the shrine of the god, or some symbol of the god is brought with which the person makes the oath. For example, Nupe people drink some of the river water when swearing by the god of the River Niger, and Yoruba people

touch a piece of iron when swearing by Ogun. In each tribe, there is usually some god who enforces oaths. This helps people in traditional societies to be truthful.

The divinities are obviously powerful spirits widely known. There are other spirits not so powerful or known only locally. Some have names, but some do not.

Some people believe these spirits were created as a separate race. Sometimes they are believed to breed and multiply. Other peoples believe these spirits used to be human. They have now been dead a long time and nobody remembers them. They have become nameless strangers to people unless they tell their names. This is a common idea in East Africa. There are some spirits that are thought to be the spirits of animals.

These spirits are everywhere, though each one usually has a particular place where it normally lives. Spirits are believed to live in rocks, hills, mountains, trees, streams, lakes, forests etc. They may be the guardians of a locality or town near their home (e.g. Ibadan and Abeokuta have guardian spirits). They need to be appeased if one wants to use the place, cut the tree, fish in the lake, obtain prosperity for the town, and so on.

These spirits are seen as beneficial when they do things like teach doctors and hunters the secrets of their trade, guard and prosper individuals, houses, markets or settlements, and reveal secrets to diviners or mediums. They may give powers to certain individuals. But they are often feared as evil spirits, and they are believed to do things like drive people mad, cause miscarriage, illness, deformity and even death, and cause any unexpected or inexplicable misfortune. They may even destroy the people they promised “good” things to. People cannot be sure they are always friendly.

In response to this, people do various things as relates to the spirits. Because they fear them, they get charms and amulets to protect themselves. They offer sacrifices to ask the spirits not to trouble them. They do ceremonies aimed at driving them away from the house or village, and in extreme cases, go to experts for exorcism. Wicked people may manipulate spirits to attack other people and gain power or wealth for themselves.

b) The Bible's Teaching on Divinities and Spirits

The Bible has a lot to say about gods. It is one of the major topics of teaching in the Old Testament, where God was trying to get his chosen people to worship him alone. Some of the things that God said to his people were:

- Not to have any other gods besides the Lord Jehovah (Ex 20:3; Deut 5:7)
- Not to make any other gods (Ex 20:23; Deut 4:15-18)
- Not to invoke the names of other gods (Ex 23:13)
- Not to bow down or worship before other gods (Ex 23:24)
- Not to sacrifice to other gods (2 Kings 17:35)
- Not to burn incense to other gods (Jer 1:16)
- Not to make a covenant with other gods (Ex 23:32)
- Not to swear by other gods (Josh 23:7)
- Not to turn to other gods (Lev 19:4)
- Not to follow other gods (Deut 6:14)
- Not to set up an image or sacred stone (Lev 26:1)
- Not to place a carved stone (Lev 26:1)
- Not to enquire how the worship is done so as to do the same (Deut 12:30-31)

The people were also warned that even if a false prophet did miracles among them to persuade them to worship another god, or their close relatives and friends tried to persuade them, they should refuse. (Deut 13:1-18)

The Israelites were instructed to demolish, break down and break to pieces, smash, cut down, burn and wipe out the names of the idols and images of the people whose land they were taking. (e.g. Ex 34:13; Deut 12:2-4). This was because they were inheriting the land and everything in it to be their own, and they must not tolerate such things among their own property. It is interesting that God did not command them to go and break down the idols in other people's countries. Generally speaking, the people who own the idol and the place where it is, should be the ones to break it down. Thus, the missionary does not break the idols or shrines of the traditionalists he is preaching to. He or she preaches to them until they willingly get rid of it for themselves. Only then, as they take their stand, can they really become free of its power. Otherwise, the power behind it is not broken and the people can just remake or rebuild it again when the missionary is not around.

c) The Real Nature of the Gods

The Bible talks about gods as if they are nothing. There is only one Being who is worthy of the name of God, and that is the one who made the heavens and earth (Is 44:6,8). The gods are only idols (1 Chr 16:26). In one sense, gods and idols are nothing more than names and pieces of wood, clay, or metal, or whatever they are made of. They are not gods (Deut 32:21). Jeremiah 16:20 says, "Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods." They cannot do good or evil or anything at all (1 Sam 12:21; Ps 115:4-8; Jer 10:5). God calls them useless. When trouble comes, they will not be able to help the people who cry to them (Jer 11:12). They have no life and cannot speak (Hab 2:18-19).

The silversmiths in Ephesus were angry with the apostle Paul because, as they said, "this fellow Paul ... says that man-made gods are no gods at all" (Acts 19:26, compare Gal 4:8). However, Paul realized that it was not enough just to say that an idol is nothing. People who have served and worshipped them cannot dismiss them that easily. Paul did not want to encourage a situation where a person excused himself for going along with idol worship and feasts by saying, "After all, there is nothing there."

This is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled (1 Cor 8:4-7; compare 1 Cor 12:2).

Paul knew that God judges us by what is in our hearts. As long as a person believes that there is something there to be worshipped, and he still goes along with false worship, he has sinned.

We see from these verses that the Bible is not afraid to insult the idols and gods, saying that they are not gods, they are worthless, useless, powerless and nothing. Thus we do not have to be afraid of them.

However, the Bible teaches that the so-called gods are connected with demons. Deuteronomy 32:16-17 and Psalm 106:37-38 both say that when the Israelites were sacrificing to the gods of Canaan, they were actually sacrificing to demons. Paul, also in 1 Cor 10:19-21 says, “Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.” Idols can be ignored, but demons need to be resisted and overcome in the power of Jesus.

d) God by Himself does what the gods are said to do

According to the Bible, God does not need deputies to take care of his various works. He does all the things that the gods are said to do all by himself. These benefits can be obtained from him directly.

1. God Gives Crops, Fertility and Rain

When God first took Israel as his own people, he promised that if they obeyed him, he would send them rain and good crops in season (Lev 26:3-5). But if they disobeyed, he would give them drought and famine (Lev 26:19-20). In the days of Jeremiah there was a terrible drought. God sent Jeremiah to the people with a message about what they were going through. They had been praying to God for rain (14:7-9) but God said that because of their great sins, their idolatry and their trust in false prophets, he would not listen to their prayers (14:10-18). All their appeal to other gods had failed. But because they would not repent, the true God also refused. Jeremiah knew there was nothing else he could do. He said, “Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O LORD our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this” (14:22).

When Paul was preaching to the pagans at Lystra, he explained to them where rain and crops come from. He said, “God has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). Even when people think that rain and crops come from gods or ancestors, it is the true God who is having compassion on them and sending these things. Paul further explained to the pagans in Athens, “In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). God does not send his punishments immediately on people who worship false gods when they are doing it ignorantly. When they know and understand the truth, God’s

dealings become more severe. That is why it is so much more dangerous for a Christian to take part in false worship than for an unbeliever.

The Israelites in the Old Testament were always tempted to go to the fertility gods of Canaan for prosperity. Hosea talked about how foolish this was. The people used all the prosperity given to them by the true God to make sacrifices to the false god. Hosea wrote, “She [Israel] has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold - which they used for Baal. (Hos 2:8).

Other verses about God’s provision of rain and crops are Lev 25:18-19; Deut 28:1-6,8,11-14; 2 Chr 6:26-31.

2. God Gives Children

When Sarah was barren, she said that God had prevented her from having children (Gen 16:2). God also closed Rachel’s womb (Gen 29:32) and Jacob recognized that it is only God who gives children (Gen 30:2). God granted children to Sarah, Rebekah, Leah (Gen 30:17), Rachel (30:22), Hannah, Samson’s mother, Elizabeth and the virgin Mary. One of the blessings God promised to the obedient Israelites was blessings of the womb (Deut 7:12-14) and one of the curses for disobedience was lack of children (Hosea 9:11).

3. The LORD is God of the Storm and Thunder

Thunder in the Bible is always connected with God. He can send it as punishment (Ex 9:23) and it is a manifestation of his presence (Ex 20:18; Ps 18:12-13; 77:17-18). He used it to terrify and scatter his enemies (1 Sam 7:10; Ps 18:14) and to warn his people of his anger (1 Sam 12:17-18). It is his voice (Job 37:2-5). As Ps 29 says, “The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters...The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning... And in his temple, all cry, ‘Glory!’”

We know from the Bible that Satan has power to manipulate elements of the weather (see Job 1 where Satan uses lightning, although it is still called “the fire of God” v.16, and wind v.19). He did this with God’s permission. However, Jesus also has power to still the storm (Mark 4:39). Christians have direct contact with Almighty God who is the real owner of these things.

4. God of War and Blacksmiths

In the Bible, as in traditional African life, blacksmiths were important because they controlled the production of both agricultural tools and weapons (1 Sam 13:19-21). They also made idols. God showed how foolish they were to do this because instead of strengthening the blacksmith, the work of making an idol weakened him (Is 44:12).

In many parts of Isaiah, the prophet prophesies the future blessings that God would give to his people when they repented and were restored. In Isaiah 54:16-17 he focuses on the role of the blacksmith in making weapons. God declared that he himself made blacksmiths and was in charge of their making of weapons, and even of whether or not those weapons would be powerful. God says, “See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD.” The Lord can bless or hinder weapons and tools, and Christians can trust him for this.

Part of the blessings that God promised to his people if they were obedient were peace in the land and victory over those who attacked them in war (Lev 26:6-8; 2 Chr 6:24-25,34-35) but if they sinned, God would curse them with defeat (Lev 26:17). So God’s help in war is not automatic, or because we offer sacrifices or do any rituals. It is part of blessing for obedience.

Today, there is no political country or even tribe of which we can say, “This nation is God’s people.” Even when a war is Christians versus Muslims, many of the “Christians” may not really be born again. The people of God are scattered through all the nations, and they do not go to physical war as a body. Often when there are wars, good Christians are on both sides. Christians, however, have another kind of war. As Paul said, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (Eph 6:12) and “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world” (2 Cor 10:4). We can claim the promises of God’s victory in our spiritual warfare.

However, Christians are commanded to pray for the peace of the nations where they live (1 Tim 2:1-2). God is concerned for fairness and justice in the affairs of men, and we can be sure of his help if we are struggling for these.

5. God Controls Wild Animals

Another part of God’s promise of blessing to his obedient people was that he would control dangerous wild beasts for them (Lev 26:3,6). But if they disobeyed, he would send wild beasts and snakes to attack them (Lev 26:21-22; Deut 32:24). God takes care of the wild animals as part of his rule over all things (Ps 104). However, not all “animals” are innocent. In the book of Revelation, we see that the work of Satan is carried out by the Beast, but this Satanic animal is defeated by Jesus (Rev 19:19-20). In the age to come, all the dangerous animals will be harmless (Is 11:6-9). The victory of Jesus over the Beast is the basis for the present victory of Christians over all forms of beasts coming from the power of the evil one.

6. God of the Hills and Valleys, Earth and Sea

The Syrian enemies of the Israelites believed that there were specific gods for hills, valleys, streams etc. They thought that the reason Israel defeated them when the battle was in the mountains was that their God was the God of mountains. They thought that if the battle could be fought on the plain they could win (1 Kings 20:23). But God demonstrated to them that he was God of both the mountains and the plains (v.28). In fact, there is no part of this world of which God is not fully God. Psalm 95 says, “For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountains peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” Any god or spirit that claims jurisdiction over any part of this world has no right to it, and can be driven out by the power of the name of Jesus.

7. God is the Giver of Health

Many of the gods worshipped by traditionalists are valued because of their power to heal. But God himself is the great healer and he is directly accessible to his people. He does not demand fees or sacrifices for his help. In the Old Testament, health was one of the blessings God promised to his obedient people. He said, “I am the LORD who heals you” (Ex 15:26; Ps 103:2-3). However, if they disobeyed, God would send them many diseases (Deut 28:21-28).

In the New Testament, Jesus demonstrated God’s love and power by healing many people. He commanded his apostles to heal as part of their ministry (Matt 10:8) and there are many examples in the book of Acts of them doing this. James also instructed believers to pray for the sick, and said that the Lord would raise them up (Jas 5:14-16).

8. God is the Only Creator

Sometimes people believe that other gods helped God in his work of creating. But God says, “I am the LORD who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself” (Is 44:24).

9. God is Enforcer of Truth Telling

In many societies, when people are no longer afraid of the gods, they are no longer afraid to tell lies. People could make them take oaths on the gods, and the gods really did kill or punish people who lied. Once the power of the gods is broken and fear of the gods is gone, people do as they please.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the people of Israel to swear their oaths in his name (Deut 6:13; 10:20). They were commanded not to swear falsely in God’s name (Lev 19:12) and God promised to punish anyone who used God’s name for lies or misused the name (Ex 20:7; Ps 63:11, see also 1 Kings 8:31-32). A person was not forced to take an oath, but once he swore in the name of the LORD God, it was binding (Num 30:2; Deut 23:21-23). People were commanded not to swear in the names of any other gods (Josh 23:7). There are examples in the Old Testament where people ignorantly made bad oaths in God’s name to do something they shouldn’t do (like Joshua, Josh 9:15; and Saul, 1 Sam 14:24) yet when such oaths were broken, God’s punishment fell (2 Sam 21:1; 1 Sam 14:37). An oath was a powerful thing.

God did want people to break the oaths they made to other gods. In Jeremiah 44 the prophet told the Jews living in Egypt to give up their idolatry. However, the people had taken oaths to serve a false goddess called the Queen of Heaven (Jer 44:25). When they refused to break these oaths, Jeremiah pronounced a curse on them from the Lord God Almighty.

“I swear by my great name,” says the LORD, “that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, ‘As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives’. For I am watching over them for harm... they will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed” (Jer 44:26-27).

In Jesus’ day, people had clever ways of getting around making an oath binding. They did not swear directly in God’s name, since that would be dangerous when they did not really intend to keep the oath. So they swore by heaven, or the temple, or the altar or their heads. Jesus taught that this was hypocrisy (Matt 5:33-37 and 23:16-22). He told the people not to swear

at all, but to say only the truth always. Swearing a lie with a powerless oath came from the evil one. James echoed these words in James 5:12.

This does not mean that Jesus refused to speak under oath. When he was before the high priest, the priest said, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus answered, “Yes, it is as you say” (Matt 26:63-64). Paul also was not shy to call God as a witness that what he was saying was true (Rom 1:9-10; 2 Cor 1:23; Gal 1:20; Phil 1:8; 1 Thes 2:5,10).

From this we can conclude that a Christian should be known to be so truthful that he does not need oaths to convince others that he is telling the truth. He or she tells the truth always whether under oath or not. However, a Christian should not be afraid to swear by God or call God as witness because he or she is always truthful and has nothing to fear from God. A Christian realizes that God has commanded his people not to swear by any other god. To do so would be to disobey God and so lose God’s protection.

Today Christians sometimes swear in the name of God on a Bible when people require proof of what they say. Anyone who swears like this should know that Almighty God will punish those who use his name in vain. Missionaries need to teach about God’s judgement on liars and his forgiveness if they repent. They should also pray that God will prove himself by punishing liars as he did in Acts 5:1-11 to Ananias and Sapphira. These are part of the signs and wonders God will do to prove himself to people.

e) *Worship of Sun, Moon and Stars*

God forbids and condemns the worship of sun, moon and stars in Deut 4:19; 17:3; 2 Ki 17:16; 21:3; Job 31:26-28; Jer 8:2; 19:13; Ezek 8:16; Zeph 1:5

f) *Idolatry as harlotry*

Idolatry and worship of other gods is called prostitution or harlotry in the Bible. It is using people’s love and devotion, which is supposed to be reserved for God alone, on other beings unlawfully. A good passage on this is Jeremiah 3:6-14. That is why idolatry arouses God’s jealousy, and is one of the reasons why he wants all people delivered from the worship of false gods.

g) Results of idolatry and worship of gods

God says that anyone who engages in making, setting up or worshipping other gods is under a curse (Deut 27:15). To the Israelites about to enter Canaan, Moses warned about anyone who worshipped other gods, “All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. The LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster” (Deut 29:20-21). One of the manifestations of that curse was that God would shut the heavens so that it would not rain (Deut 11:16-17). Another result was that when that person wanted to get guidance from God, God would let him be led astray by false advice (Ezekiel 14:4-10). The apostle Paul wrote that when people worship false gods, especially when they know better, God allows them to go deeper into sin, which will finally result in wrath being poured out against them (Romans 1:23-32). Paul also warned that people who practise idolatry are among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21). The book of Revelation says the same (Rev 22:15).

The prophet Jeremiah confessed that because of the offerings people offered to other gods, all the fruits of their fathers’ labour was eaten up as they had to offer their flocks and herds and even their sons and daughters as sacrifices (Jer 3:24). People often spend a lot and become poor trying to satisfy the demands of the gods.

Thank God that when Jesus died on the cross, he took the curse on himself, (Gal 3:13). God’s curse that would have fallen on us for worshipping other gods or for any other sins we have committed, is taken by Jesus instead, and removed from us when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This also applies to curses that people have invoked upon themselves when they made oaths to serve other gods and spirits. Anyone who breaks such an oath in order to follow Jesus Christ will not suffer the curse because Jesus has taken the curse on himself in order to set such a person free.

h) The Fate of the gods

We have seen that God has cursed those who worship false gods. The gods also curse those who abandon them. But God himself has cursed the gods. His curse is greater than theirs, and we can speak it against them to cancel their power.

God says, “The idols will totally disappear” (Is 2:18). “In that day men will throw away to the rodents and bats their idols of silver and idols of gold

which they made to worship” (Is 2:20). “These gods who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (Jer 10:11).

6. Ancestors

a) Who is an Ancestor? All ATRs believe that people continue to exist after death. Most believe that the dead continue to have a relationship to their relatives who are left behind. Ancestors are linked to the very family, clan and tribe that they were born into.

Most ATRs believe that when a person dies he enters the spirit world where he has more powers than before. Since he is still a member of his family, clan or tribe, he can use his new powers to help or punish his people. The range of his authority depends on what his position was while he was still alive, whether his influence extends to just the family, to the whole clan or even to the whole tribe (like royal ancestors). Some ancestors were so powerful in their lifetime they even became divinities after they died (like Sango among the Yoruba).

In most ATRs, not every person who dies becomes an “ancestor” to be consulted and given offerings. Usually the person must have lived a good life and have had children. Sometimes he must have died in old age and have contributed to the progress of his people. Men ancestors are consulted more often than women. In some groups, there is a ceremony after the person’s death whereby his relatives install him to ancestor status and make his shrine. In some tribes, a young person, even if he has no children, may become an ancestor spirit if he was outstanding, and old people who have no children can also become ancestors. But not in every tribe.

b) The Living Dead

There is a difference between ancestors who are still personally remembered by someone still alive, and ancestors whom nobody now alive remembers. As long as there is someone living who remembers the person, the ancestor is what Mbiti calls the “living dead”. This may be for three to five generations of descendants. During that time, Mbiti says, the ancestor is in a state of “personal immortality”. He still has some place in the *Sasa*. But when the last person who remembers him is dead, he slips totally into the *Zamani*. He is now in “collective immortality”. Even if he was great

enough to still have his name remembered in genealogies and rituals, his personality is lost to the living.

In Nigeria we can see this in that ancestors no one remembers are not thought to be reincarnated into new children, and in some ethnic groups, the bones of ancient ancestors can be disturbed, displaced or abandoned in favour of those of the more recently dead. For example, the Fali people near Mubi have large communal graves hollowed out in the ground where all the people from the same family are buried. If the grave becomes too full, someone goes down inside to remove the bones of those who died a long time ago so that there will be room for new corpses.

In some tribes, there are ceremonies or festivals to celebrate all the ancestors, both known and unknown (e.g. the Egungun festival of the Yoruba). Also, kings and chiefs may continue to be remembered by name and get sacrifices even after many generations, as in the ancestral stool houses in Ghana.

c) The Ancestors and the Divinities

In some societies in Africa, there are practically no divinities and all religious activity centres on the ancestors. In others (like the Akan), the divinities are less important than the ancestors. In others (like the Yoruba) the divinities play a bigger part than the ancestors. It is reported that there are one or two tribes in Africa that do not communicate with departed ancestors and deal only with divinities, but this is extremely rare.

Most groups have both divinities and ancestors. Where divinities are strongest, many functions are attributed to them. Where ancestors are strongest, people pray for more things to the ancestors than to the divinities. West Africa, more than other parts of Africa, is known for having several tribes with strong divinities.

In some parts of Africa, the ancestors who are no longer the living dead are considered to be the spirits that live everywhere in the world, or that cause sickness and madness. In some tribes, great ancestors have become the divinities. The living dead are often invoked to drive away evil spirits.

d) Interdependence of the Living and the Ancestors

In Traditional belief, the living and the living-dead need each other and do things for each other.

1. Duties of the Living to the Living-Dead

First, the living relatives must give the dead person a proper burial. If not, the spirit of the deceased will give them sickness and other trouble, because he will not be received into the land of the ancestors.

Second, the living must regularly remember and “feed” the living-dead by offering sacrifices of food, drink and animals to them at the appropriate times.

Third, the living should consult the ancestors on important issues (usually by some form of divination) like marriage, use of clan land, in times of trouble or when the ancestors communicate in other ways, and the living should do what the ancestors say.

Failure in any of these can lead to the ancestor afflicting a person with sickness and trouble. People both love and fear the ancestors, because although they are relatives, they are unpredictable and can cause a lot of damage and expense. Nobody wants to hear from them or see them in visions or dreams too often. There are sometimes ceremonies to make them leave people alone.

2. Duties and Activities of the Living-Dead

According to ATR, the ancestors are the guardians of the group’s morals, customs, traditions and history. They are the owners of the land, in which they are also buried. As such they can punish wrongdoers and those who change the customs or reveal the group’s secrets. They can show their displeasure if the land is sold or used contrary to their wishes. People are usually reluctant to do anything that is thought to displease the ancestors.

The ancestors also need to have the family, clan and tribe preserved so that they will not be forgotten. Therefore they use their powers to give children, good crops, health and protection to their people. The ancestors come back to the family through new children who are born.

The ancestors communicate their wishes to the living by several means. They may appear visibly, usually to elders or close family members. They may appear in dreams, communicate through divination, spiritists or “prophets”. They may possess mediums who give their message. In some tribes they are thought to visit their families in the form of an animal, such as a python, dove or lizard. They also show their pleasure or displeasure by

omens, miracles, calamities, hauntings and the behaviour of a child in which they are reincarnated.

Often people try to communicate with the dead when there is trouble. They ask by divination what caused the trouble. If an ancestor caused it, they ask why, and what they should do to appease the ancestor so that the trouble will be taken away. Messages from ancestors are usually in the form of warning or rebuke. Ancestors are also sometimes asked to act as mediators to carry the prayers of their people to God.

Many societies recognize that sometimes changes must come. There is often a way of clearing these changes with the ancestors or “informing” the ancestors so that they will not be annoyed. When people are convinced that a change is needed, they can do the necessary ceremony to get the ancestors’ co-operation.

e) Life After Death

It is usually believed that when someone dies, he has to go on a journey to the home of the dead. Therefore he may be buried with money, food or other things he may need for the journey. A light may be placed on the grave for several nights. In the past, very important people like kings would be sent on that journey with attendants and wives so that they would still be important in the next world. These people all had to be killed to accompany him. This is hardly done now. Usually animals are killed instead.

To some people, such as the Igbo, the land of the dead is under the earth. Others believe they live in the sky, while others tell of a fairly distant place in this world, often to the east. For example, some Bachama used to say that their ancestors lived in the Danubi forest in Ganye Local Government Area. Some Fali near Mubi believe that the dead live in large trees which become sacred. However this may be, the ancestors still know and see their living people at all times wherever they are, but especially when they are in the family land near where the dead are buried. The ancestors may punish people who stay away from home too long.

When the deceased gets to the land of the ancestors, he is received by those already there unless he was very wicked or died a shameful death. He delivers the messages sent by the living to the dead. But if he has not had a proper funeral or is cast out by the ancestors, he becomes a roaming ghost, molesting people in the world.

The world of the ancestors is often considered to be very like this world. People farm and cook and fetch water and sometimes quarrel. Sometimes there are even weddings and giving birth. Many societies in Africa don’t believe much in rewards and punishments after death, though they may say that a very wicked person like a witch will not be received by the ancestors. On the other hand the Yoruba and tribes related to them believe in a judgment by God after death followed by assignment to the good or bad heaven. There are other tribes too that believe in a place like hell for the wicked.

Part of the person is believed by many groups to be able to come back and be reborn in the family. However, that does not mean he is not still in the world of the ancestors where he can be consulted. There is nothing like bodily resurrection or the end of the world in ATR generally.

f) Festivals and Cults for the Ancestors

For most African societies, a funeral is not a one-time affair. It is usually followed by a second ceremony a week to a year later aimed at putting the spirit of the deceased permanently to rest. Sometimes there is a third or fourth ceremony as well. In some parts of Africa, the second ceremony may even be many years later. It establishes a distance between the living and the dead, so that the dead person should not haunt them. The ceremony may also help to install the dead man as a ceremonial ancestor. After this, the relatives can cease the mourning period and the possessions of the dead person can be inherited by others. The widow may remarry. This is called the last mourning, or in Hausa, *sadaka*. In some tribes, all the last mourning ceremonies for all the people who have died that year are held at or around the same time, perhaps in dry season when people have time for ceremonies.

Many groups also have regular or annual festivals for the ancestors, when food is left out for them and rituals are done before their emblems (pots, stools, metal rods, stones, staffs etc). Often at this time, the masquerades of the ancestor cult (supposedly visiting ancestors from the world of the dead) come out. Women usually have to keep indoors when the cult is out.

The ancestors also have a part in yearly and life cycles. They are consulted and invoked each year for the various stages of farming (getting rain, planting, growing, harvesting) and for hunting or fishing. They are also invoked and consulted at the points of change (rites of passage) in people’s

lives such as birth, initiation, marriage and death, and in times of community crisis like war or epidemic.

CHRIST AND THE ANCESTORS

g) *The Bible Forbids Consulting the Dead*

People who contact the spirits of the dead are called mediums or spiritists. The Hebrew terms are *yid'oni*, a spiritist (KJV says wizard or familiar spirit) and *'ov*, a medium (KJV says familiar spirit).

This practice is forbidden in Deut 18:11; Lev 19:31; 20:6,27; and Is 8:19-20. The passage in Isaiah mentions that the people should consult God, not the dead, for guidance. Other practices concerning the dead are also forbidden. These are cutting one's body for the dead (Lev 19:28), shaving for the dead (Deut 14:1) and offering part of the harvest to the dead (Deut 26:14).

Involvement with the spirits of the dead may be forbidden because of the likelihood of contacting demonic spirits and being deceived and enslaved by them.

h) *Can the Ancestors Do What ATR Says They Do?*

Kwame Bediako, the Ghanaian scholar, argues that since it is the community of the living who decide who is qualified to be an ancestor and who raise the dead person to that status, ancestor spirits do not have independent existence as powers. If the community that honours them disappears, they also disappear. Therefore, their power comes from the place given to them by the living. Belief in the power of the ancestors is useful in keeping the community orderly and intact, but that does not mean that the real ancestors actually have those powers.

In fact, since the ancestors originate among men and not from the world of the divine, and since they could not even overcome death themselves, they too need to be saved and they are too weak to help us. Bediako concludes that the actual ancestors cannot do any of the things (punishment, guidance, blessing and mediation) that they are believed to do. It is God who has been blessing us all along.

i) *The Bible's Picture of the Unbelieving Dead*

The Bible pictures the unbelieving dead to be in a dark place, "the grave", where they know nothing about what is going on in the world and they are

completely weak. They have not been able to take anything from this world. They are suffering, from worms and/or fire and they are not able to send any message to the world or do anything in the world (see Luke 16:27-31; Is 14:9-10; Eccl 9:5-6; Ps 49:16-20; Ps 88:4-5,10-12; Matt 25:30; Mk 9:47-48).

j) *The Bible's Picture of the Believing Dead*

Even in the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament, the believing dead (the saved ones) are pictured as not in "the grave". They are in "life". They are living powerfully. They are in God's presence praising him. Jesus said God is not God of the dead but of the living (Matt 22:31-32). They are like Moses and Elijah who appeared in glory during the transfiguration of Jesus. At the resurrection they are imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Cor 15:42-44). Some people think that the "cloud of witnesses" in Heb 12:1 is the saints who have gone before and that they can see us. However, they are not mediators to God and they do not bring blessings on the living. These functions are reserved for Jesus alone (1 Tim 2:5; Eph 1:3; Heb 9:11).

The real "living"-dead, that is, the believing dead who are in glory, do not need to be consulted or remembered by the living in order to maintain their power and personal immortality. They are in no way dependent on the living and get all they need directly from God.

k) *Can the Dead Ever Appear or Communicate to the Living?*

There are two times in the Bible when dead believers talked with people on earth. The first was when Saul called for Samuel in 1 Sam 28. The practice was forbidden and counted as a sin. But God allowed Samuel to go, to deliver God's message to Saul. Here it should be noted that 1) this sin contributed to Saul's death (1 Chr 10:13); 2) Saul's question was not answered; 3) Samuel was not happy to be consulted by Saul; 4) Samuel's words agreed with previous messages from the Lord.

The second time was when Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus at the Transfiguration. They were not summoned or sought by a medium. God just sent them. They were glorious and bright, and they encouraged Jesus.

From these two cases we may conclude that God might at times send the dead (especially the believing dead) to deliver a message of rebuke or encouragement to the living. It must not be sought after by the living. It will always agree with the word of God. Other communications that seem to be

from ancestors are not really from them. They are likely demons pretending to be ancestors to deceive people. The Bible says that Satan can even appear as an angel of light.

l) Jesus Fulfills the Functions of Ancestors

As Kwesi Dickson says, “Jesus never ceases to be one of the ‘living dead’ because there always will be people alive who *knew* Him, whose lives were irreversibly affected by His life and work.” If we do not have the ancestors there in the spirit world to help, guide, protect and discipline us, we have someone even better, that is, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Kwame Bediako, in his book *Jesus and African Culture*, (the last section before the conclusion) outlines how having Jesus is better than relying on the ancestors. Below are some of his points.

The ancestors are trusted because they are one of us. They had no choice about this since they were born into our family. But Jesus voluntarily and willingly became one of us. He was not ashamed to call us brothers. So he cares about us and knows about us more than any human ancestors (Heb 2:11-18). His supreme loyalty to us has been demonstrated.

Another benefit is that Jesus is more powerful to help us than any ancestor could be. He is not from earth, like them, but from heaven (Jn 8:23). He is not just human, he is also Almighty God. He has been able to conquer death and come back to life. Therefore he can give us much more help.

The benefits given by Jesus are more than the ones which people think the ancestors give. Not only does he give physical help for health, fertility, discipline and protection from enemies, he also provides forgiveness of sins, intercession in heaven, the Holy Spirit to give us power over daily sin, and eternal life (Heb 9:12). He places us in a new nation, the people of God, and gives us brothers and sisters from every nation and tribe.

To this we can add that Jesus is also more powerful to discipline people when they do wrong than the ancestors are. Many times we forget this, but it is something a missionary needs to make a part of his teaching. God disciplines those he loves to make them more holy and righteous (Hebrews 12:5-11). But he also takes vengeance on the wilfully disobedient. Hebrews 10:30-31 says,

For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “the Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

m) What About Honouring our Ancestors?

All over the world, people do things to show how they honour, love and appreciate their ancestors who have died. This does not affect the dead person himself, but it is good to do so from the standpoint of the living.

1. We should show love and respect for elders and parents while they are still alive (Lev 19:32; Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1-3).

2. We should recognize and mourn their death respectfully, because it is not a small thing for someone in the image of God to die and go into eternity. Funerals help the living to face the loss, accept it, and recover. They can also be a testimony to others and a time to preach the gospel while people are thinking about death.

3. We should remember and speak of the good example of those who have passed on, to encourage the generations coming behind. People sometimes dedicate churches, hymn books, pulpits etc. in memory of a departed loved one in gratitude for his or her godly life and to let his example be remembered. Of course, any of these things should not be done to show off wealth just so that selfish people will approve of us.

Funerals function in any society to help the living get through their mourning and to bring out the lessons to be learned from the life of the one who has died. Christians can agree with these. In some societies, the community may also expect a feast, so the funeral serves to display the wealth of the bereaved family. Christians should not boast and do things for worldly show, but they might want to entertain others in thanksgiving to people and to God. Some people think that a funeral helps the dead person in the next life, but according to the Bible, it is only what a person does in his lifetime that affects his eternal destiny.

In some circles, it is suggested that Christians may pray *to* their ancestors since this is part of the “communion of the saints” just as the Roman Catholics pray to saints. The Bible does not teach this practice and it contradicts the prohibition of contacting the dead.

Praying *for* ancestors is not mentioned in scripture. Those who do it show that they realize that the ancestors cannot save, but need to be saved themselves. Whether or not it can do any good is another question. The Roman Catholics pray for the dead because they think they are temporarily in purgatory. There is no purgatory in the Bible, so Protestants do not pray for the dead. The Muslims pray for the dead because they believe that God could decide to change his decision and transfer someone from hell to heaven at any time. But the Bible teaches that God's judgement is correct and permanent, so there is no transfer.

However, someone who is troubled about the state of his ancestors who died before hearing of Christ should certainly pray to God about his concern and ask God to comfort him on the issue. We have to trust God that he will always do what is fair and right with them.

n) What About Reincarnation?

The Bible says, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement" (Heb 9:27). The second death is to be cast into the lake of fire, from which no one escapes. For the final judgement, all those in the sea and the grave are brought out. The implication is that they have been there since they died (Rev. 20:12-15). Both punishment and life for those who have died is eternal (Mk 9:47-48; Jn 3:16). Paul expected at his death to go straight to be with Christ (Phil 1:23). After someone dies, he has no more part in this world (Eccl 9:5-6). Therefore, reincarnation is not possible. No one comes back to live in this world again after he or she dies.

7. Chieftaincy

a) Nature of Chieftaincy

Not all African societies have overall traditional rulers. There are tribes such as the Igbo and Ewe that have only local community leaders but no king. There are many groups, however, that have great kings who are significant as far as Traditional Religion goes, such as the Akan, Yoruba, Bachama, and many others.

In many tribes, a new king is chosen by a group of elders or "kingmakers". It is not always the son of a king who succeeds him. Often the new king is chosen by rotation from a number of royal clans or families or from eligible men in the royal clan. However, in some societies the king is chosen by

other methods. Today in Nigeria, sometimes chiefs are chosen by government officials or emirs. In some tribes, the people elect the new chief e.g. Ngas.

Often the king rules by the authority of the ancestors, or sometimes the authority of the gods. During the installation he establishes direct links with them. The Ashanti do this by raising and lowering the new king three times on the stool of his greatest royal ancestor. Many Nigerian tribes, for example in Adamawa State, do it by having the chief-elect stay for a week secluded in the ancestral shrine where the ancestors either kill him if he is unsuitable or empower him. This makes the chief the main mediator between the royal ancestors who still take care of the kingdom from the spirit world, and the people. The people fear and obey the king because he represents the power of the ancestors. During his installation he goes through rituals to empower him and make him a new person, as if he is being initiated. Sometimes the king himself becomes an ancestor or a god through the installation rituals.

Any king who tries to rule without doing the rituals linking him to the spirit world loses his traditional power source and people may not agree to trust him as the ruler, or permit him to be king.

In such societies, if the king is not obeyed and kept safe, the ancestors can retaliate, so the well-being of the chief is necessary for the well-being of the whole tribe, in getting rain, crops, health, children or wealth. Therefore there may be many taboos for the chief to observe. As a god, he may not be expected to need food or sleep, so sometimes people must not see him sleeping or eating. Some chiefs may not touch the earth, some may not go out at night, or see the ocean or rivers or eat certain things. There is a lot of magical protection placed on the king to protect the nation.

The king may be seen as owner of the land as deputy of the ancestors. Therefore he is responsible to say who can use land, either for farming, building houses or building churches.

As gods, some chiefs are not expected to die. The death is kept a secret until the successor is appointed. They say, "the king has gone elsewhere" (Akan). Sometimes the chief's body is dried (Bachama, Dassa) or buried in charcoal (several Borno tribes) to preserve it. The skull or other parts of the body may be kept in the shrine. The funeral may be very elaborate, considering that the dead chief is now in the spirit world where he can

affect the whole tribe, so he needs a great entrance into the world of the dead.

b) Consequences of Christianity on Chieftaincy

If the power of a chief comes from the ancestors, and Christianity removes ancestor power from over people, then Christianity has removed the chief's power base. Christianity says all authority comes from Christ alone. This brings conflict. Christians cannot bow to the power of the ancestors or gods.

Christ is the real one who provides rain, fertility, guidance, blessing and discipline, and these are available, not through kings or priests but directly to the people of God (the church) and to every believer.

The Bible agrees that there should be rulers and that these powers are ordained by God. In God's plan, rulers must base their power and authority, not on the ancestors but on submission to Christ and true service to the people. Christ's idea of kingship was different from Pilate's. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36), and "If anyone wants to be first he must be the servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Jesus as our king died on the cross to save us. This is the model Jesus gave of kingship. Ceremonies and taboos cannot make a true leader. Submission to Christ and self-sacrifice do.

Bediako points out that God's kind of leadership is non-dominating. Just as the early Christians refused to worship the Emperor, we too cannot bow to ancestor power, nor use it to dominate others. Thus a modern-day chief who wants to follow Christ must be a servant leader under Christ.

c) Modern Chieftaincy is Weakened

Mbiti points out that traditional chieftaincy and its power base is linked to the *Zamani* and the traditional world view in which the past is much more important than the future. In the modern world, many Africans look to the future, not the past, for hope. They are also hearing different teachings about what gives power and success. The authority of the ancestors is losing hold. As the common people get education, and wealth through commerce, it becomes harder to keep them spiritually dependent on the king for their well-being. Only a chief who makes himself a messiah for the future can gain a big following in areas where social change has been great. Where social change is slower the unifying effect and loyalty to the king may still be strong.

Colonial rule tampered with traditional rulership and introduced alternate rulers. This began the weakening of the institution of chieftaincy. Politicians are the new messiah figures. Sometimes they also try to tap the divine status of ancestors, especially politicians who were founders of modern nations (like Nkrumah). They may try to imply that they must be obeyed because they are the ancestors of the political nation.

d) Evangelism and Chieftaincy

If a chief realizes that Christianity will destroy his power base of respect for the ancestors or gods, he may oppose the gospel. In that case, the missionary and his converts must make special effort to contribute to the well-being of the community and respect the chief even though they cannot bow to the spiritual power behind him. Special prayer must be made for the chief so that he will be set free from other powers and be able to lead his people aright.

When a chief is converted, he needs special discipling. He needs to understand Jesus' idea of leadership and how to get the power he needs to be a good leader from God. It may be difficult for a young evangelist alone to disciple an elderly chief. The missionary should look for a person of equal age and/or rank with the chief who is strong in faith to help him. Perhaps special conferences for Christian chiefs could be arranged to help them understand their role in God's plan.

8. Mystical Powers

Africans believe in spiritual or unseen power, which may or may not be linked to specific divinities and spirits. Most people think that originally it comes from God, and it is just "there", available for use by anyone who knows how to tap it.

a) Divination

A very common use of this power is in divination. Divination is the art of finding out hidden, spiritual or future knowledge by some signs. It is sometimes presided over by a divinity such as Orunmila and Ifa in Yoruba.

Some common examples of the use of divination are to find out which ancestor has reincarnated in a child, what or who has caused a death,

sickness or other trouble, what is the remedy, how to find lost items, how to plan or make decisions for the future, and who are the witches and wizards.

One may decide to become a diviner due to instructions received in divination or dreams, a call through sickness or trouble, by inheriting the profession from a parent, or by some personal interest. In some tribes, medicine men and traditional healers are also diviners because divination is usually used for diagnosis and prescription. In other groups, the diviners and healers are different people.

A diviner learns the art by watching another do it. Among some ethnic groups, diviners go through more formal training. For a Yoruba *babalawo*, for example, there is an apprenticeship which may last from three to twelve years, depending on the age and skill of the apprentice. There is an apprenticeship fee to pay, and the apprentice may also do other labour for his master. At the end he must prove his powers and pay for the initiation rites. His training includes how to use the divination methods, especially memorization of the Odu verses and the stories that go with them for Ifa divination. Not all divining methods need as much training as Ifa, however.

Many divination methods are used in Africa. Some of them are: water gazing (on a bowl of water containing medicine), mirror gazing, reading a fowl's entrails, drawing lots, throwing down cords to which nuts, shells, seeds, bones or other objects are attached, or Ifa where palm nuts are passed from one hand to another to get a pattern. The results of all these have meanings which the diviner learns to interpret during his training. Some diviners also interpret dreams, contact spirits for knowledge or allow a spirit to speak through them when they are in a trance.

Muslims do divination, sometimes with patterns drawn in the sand or diagrams as keys written in Arabic. Christians have used a Bible or cross and the name of God to do incantations and divination, although the Bible forbids divination.

Besides these means, some people have oracles where a voice comes out of a cave or hole to answer people's questions. It was reported that the Igbo oracles in pre-colonial times used a system of spies to let the oracle (actually a man) know the problems of people who would be coming.

b) Magic and Medicine

There has been considerable discussion as to what is the difference between magic and religion. A common distinction is that in religion people pray and submit themselves to the decision of God and the gods. But in magic, people command the powers. In religion they say, "Thy will be done." In magic they say "My will be done." Therefore, magic is more self-centred. Most people in every religion mix religion and magic, because people want to get their own desires. In religion, the spiritual powers are begged and they may not agree, but in magic, the powers are manipulated and it is always supposed to work. People often say that God created magic powers for them to use to solve their own problems.

Scholars identify various kinds of magic. A common one is imitative magic where the thing done or used is like the thing you want. For example, a little knife charm protects from knife wounds or a spotted leaf is used to cure a rash or an image of an enemy is stuck with pins. Another type is contagious magic. This is when things that were once in contact are thought to still influence each other. For example, the magician gets hair or fingernails from a victim and attacks them to attack the person. But not all magic is like these.

Medicine is the substances, charms, herbs or other objects used by the medicine man to bring about the desired effect. Some are swallowed or rubbed into cuts in the body or used to wash the body, but many are just worn or kept near the thing or person they must work upon. Medicine has its own taboos and requirements which must be observed by its owner so that it can work. For example, some medicines don't work if they are carried over water, and some won't work if brought near an unclean place like a latrine.

Magic and medicine are considered either good or bad depending on how they are used. "Good" medicine is used for healing, protection and success. It can be used privately by an individual (like rings, charms tied on the body) or communal, (like things to protect houses, villages and chiefs). Some herbal medicines can be used by anybody without a specialist or any incantations. These are not the ones we are considering here, as they do not have to interact with occult spiritual powers in their use.

"Bad" medicine and "black magic" are used to harm enemies or their property. People who use it extensively, either against their own enemies or hired against other people's enemies, are called sorcerers in the technical

sense. A sorcerer attacks because of hatred. For example, a Yoruba sorcerer can make an image of a demon and place it near his victim to send the demon to harass the victim. Often actual physical poison is used. Spiritual power is also used in sending needles, snakes or wild animals to kill and in causing other disaster or trouble. Traditionalists tend to believe that every bad thing that happens is due to the activity of sorcerers or witches. This makes people afraid. Everyone believes he has enemies because everyone has trials in life.

c) Oaths, Vows, Curses and Covenants

Most Africans believe that there is great power in the spoken word. To predict an evil future for someone is considered to be like actually causing it to happen. It is a curse. The curses of certain people, such as elders, are considered to be very powerful. If the elder dies before revoking a curse, there are sometimes rituals that can be done to beg him to change his mind after death. People believe that otherwise, the evil thing he or she predicted will certainly come to pass.

There are ways in which evil predictions can be increased in power so that they will be very sure to happen. The words of cursing can be combined with medicines and rituals to make them binding. There are also ways to cancel the curses of others spoken against you, with medicines or more powerful counter words.

Oaths are often used to confirm promises. People who swear an oath expect to be severely punished by the spiritual powers by which they swear if they do not keep their promises. This helps people to tell the truth and be faithful.

Oaths are likewise used to settle disputes. The person giving testimony about the truth of a case swears that he is telling the truth. If it turns out, however, that he or she is lying, the power by which the oath is made will punish the person. It is therefore considered important that words of promise or testimony be backed up by a greater power that will punish liars. As we saw in chapter five, oaths are often made on shrines or in the name of gods or spirits.

On the other hand, if someone knows that the other person is lying, and forces him to swear a dangerous oath which results in his death, the person who forced him to swear might be considered wicked for causing his death.

It can be dangerous to call for an oath unless you have public support for the consequences.

Covenants are a kind of oath where a person promises to do something for another in return for some benefit. In ATR, people sometimes make covenants with certain spiritual powers in which they promise to serve, worship and /or sacrifice to the powers in return for protection or some other benefit. An example is those tribes in Northeast Nigeria in which men can make a covenant with the spirit of a wild animal. The spirit gives them invulnerability as long as the animal lives, and the person protects that animal. Another example is the oaths that some people make when they enter a secret society. They promise to keep the secrets of the society and perform the rituals in return for spiritual power. Usually if such covenants are broken, the person is liable to die or suffer other dire consequences. A curse falls on him.

Even something as common as becoming an apprentice or joining a trade guild or market may require oath taking. The new person enters into a covenant and invokes curses on himself if he or she betrays other members of the trade.

d) Witches

Most scholars and many African cultures make a difference between sorcerers and witches. Witches in this sense do not use “means”. They do not use medicine or any physical things to attack people. They are not usually hired by others to harm people. Their work is invisible to the natural eye. Sorcerers, on the other hand, use medicines. However, many tribes use the same name for witches and sorcerers, and do not distinguish in this way, and in some groups witches do use medicines.

Most witches are believed to be women, though in some tribes they can also be men. They cause sickness and death by taking on their spiritual forms and attacking other people. Each tribe has its own beliefs about how witches do this, but often the beliefs of one tribe get spread to other groups as well.

The beliefs about witches given below are common in Nigeria. But in other parts of Africa many of the details of belief may be different. For example, not everyone sees the “eating” that witches do as eating. Sometimes the way witches are described as destroying the lives of others is expressed with other words.

Many groups believe that witches do their work mainly at night while their bodies are asleep. It is believed that their souls fly about, sometimes on or as birds (e.g. owls) animals (e.g. cats) or insects (e.g. fireflies). They go to meetings in the tops of tall trees. They capture the souls or spirits of other people and take them for communal feasting. Members of the witches group are expected to bring victims in turn and may be punished or killed if they do not. The person whose soul has been captured may dream of being attacked and wakes up sick and weak in the morning. As the witches spiritually suck his blood and eat his body, he wastes away and dies.

There are several ways a person allegedly gets witchcraft powers.

1. By inheriting it from a parent. In some tribes it is inherited only by girls from the mother. This type of witch does not usually start practising until after puberty or until the mother activates the witchcraft somehow. In other groups, men can also inherit witchcraft.
2. By touching or eating witchcraft substance, maybe given to the person unknowingly. This may be specially treated food. Children can be initiated this way before they know any better. Many parents are very strict about where and what their children eat for this reason.
3. By purchasing the power from other witches.
4. By invitation and coercion from other witches. The other witches torment the person until she agrees.
5. By having it forced on her by demons.

Some witches are believed to join voluntarily, mainly so as to protect themselves or families from attack, or to obtain some benefits like children or money. But some are forced into it and some tribes believe a person can be a witch without realizing it. If she realizes it, she may not want to do it but is forced by the witchcraft craving for human soul flesh, and by threats from other members of the witches group. The group is sometimes believed to be like a club with rules of admission, official membership and officers.

Certain types of people are usually accused of witchcraft. They are mostly women, and usually close relatives or neighbours of those who accuse them. They are the mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, co-wives, and old and

ugly women. Some people think that a very old woman stays alive so long by “eating” the souls of babies. Also, people who are very skilful or successful at anything may be suspected of getting their success from witchcraft.

Sometimes people confess to being involved in witchcraft. Of course, confessions forced by threats and torture cannot be relied upon. Some scholars (like Dr. A. Omoyajowo) consider other confessions to be manipulated from confused women by “prophets”, caused by hallucinations, mental illness, a desire to frighten others or a desire for attention. Confessions are often connected with dreaming. Women may believe or be persuaded that they are witches because they dream of flying, eating, fighting or killing. Such dreams can be caused by physical and psychological factors as well as spiritual experiences. The dreamers may also be deceived by demons. Not every person who is persuaded to confess is actually a witch. On the other hand, there are many genuine cases of witchcraft confession, especially when a witch is converted to Christ. If the person confessing to witchcraft knows that she or he has hated others and desired their death, that person is guilty and needs to go through confession and repentance in order to escape from a wicked way of life.

Traditional society has developed various methods of combating witchcraft. Some diviners or traditional healers specialize in finding out which witch is responsible for a sickness and get her or them to release the soul back to the victim before he dies. The work of certain secret societies such as Oro, is to hunt out and punish witches. There have been specific witch-hunting societies or movements, like Atinga, which was banned by the Nigerian government in 1951. Ordeals are often used to test people for witchcraft, sometimes in which suspected witches drink a poison or a cock drinks it on their behalf. When poisons are used, the suspected witch may show the symptoms whether she is guilty or not. People may also be required to take various kinds of oaths that will bring punishment on them if they really are witches. Sometimes a corpse is examined after death to find out if the inner parts of the body show signs that the person is a witch. Some tribes believe that certain conditions of the inner organs are evidence of witchcraft. Or there may be other signs surrounding the death and funeral that are taken to indicate that the person was a witch. Individuals and homes use charms and amulets to drive away witches and protect themselves from attack.

Because these methods of detecting witches can lead to the punishment and death of innocent people, they are very dangerous. The only safe and true

way to fight witches is by the prayers of true Christians. Demons are always telling lies, but only God knows and acts on the truth in the spirit world. The methods used by unbelievers to find witches, such as divination, are also forbidden in the Bible. If someone is accused of being a witch, and she denies it, she should not be hated or rejected. Pray for her and show her love, trusting God to give you wisdom and protection. If she is innocent, but she is treated as guilty, she may be tempted to actually go into witchcraft to punish the people who have treated her so badly. Or she may reject all Christians as wicked.

As Christians and missionaries we need to be concerned for the salvation of witches. We need to let witches know that Jesus can forgive and deliver them from their powers. Churches need to be encouraged to receive and disciple former witches. When a witch or sorcerer repents and confesses, he or she needs special prayers of deliverance. It is not a good idea to make too much publicity out of such people. They are new in the faith and need to grow before being exposed to public attention and maybe attack or temptation to pride. They need people who will stand with them to pray for their spiritual protection and help them to develop godly habits. They need to experience love from fellow-believers instead of hatred.

e) Secret Societies

Secret societies are often also called cults. They may centre around worship and contact with the ancestors, or with divinities, “bush devil” or other occult power. Often only men can join. There are also cults for women or that have both male and female branches. People must be initiated into them. Members take an oath not to reveal the secrets of the cult. They must not reveal how the strange noises (like the noise of the bull-roarer) or other manifestations and masquerades are done by the members, because non-members believe these are completely supernatural manifestations and so they fear and obey. They have special rituals and feasts, and often powerful means of spiritual protection.

Cult members are usually expected to support and help each other in everything. This can lead to abuses if some members are doing illegal or wicked things which other members must help them with. Cults are often agents of social control. They may punish people who do what is not expected of them, such as people believed to be witches, thieves, adulterers or greedy people. They may also punish women who do not obey their husbands, and at times, anybody who has offended a cult member in any way. Some people join secret societies so as to be protected from the

punishing activities of the cult. Others join because the cult promises power and wealth. Such cults and secret societies cause great fear and have been outlawed in some countries, but they still exist.

CHRIST AND MYSTICAL POWERS

f) The Bible Condemns and Forbids the use of Mystical Powers, “Good” or “Bad”.

The English terms used to translate the Hebrew and Greek words in English Bibles are not always used the same way as we are using them in this book. (In Appendix II you can find a discussion of the Greek and Hebrew words used for occult practices.)

God commanded the Israelites not to do divination (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10-11). He said that the diviners would find out lies, not the truth, from their divination (Is 44:25; Jer 27:9-10; Zech 10:2). The Hebrew words for divination mean basically the same thing as they do in Africa. Although the Bible does not describe the methods in detail, divination included casting lots, using omens and reading signs. The Israelites and their neighbours also told the future by interpreting signs and positions of the stars (astrology). God calls that error (Is 47:12-15).

God also commanded them not to practice sorcery (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10-11). The Hebrew word for sorcery or witchcraft means to use spiritual powers to harm others. There is an expression for casting spells, which means to tie a knot. It was a way of spiritually tying up or binding something by spiritual means. It is condemned in Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 47. Wicked king Manasseh was condemned for divination and sorcery (2 Ki 21:6).

Another group of people condemned by God were those who communicate with the dead (Deut 18:10-11; Jer 27:9-10; Is 8:19). The King James Version sometimes translates this as “woman with a familiar spirit” or “wizard”. Actually, they were mediums or spiritists. They communicated with spirits of the dead to find things out.

The most common word used for evil occult powers in Greek in the New Testament is closest to what we have described in this book as sorcery, that is, using spiritual means or even poisons to harm others. The penalty for engaging in such is to be cast out of God’s kingdom (Gal 5:19-21; Rev

22:15). Another word used in Acts 19:19 carries the idea of being involved in hidden or forbidden things.

The Bible does not speak specifically about people who do what witches are believed to do in Africa except perhaps in Ezekiel 13:18-23. There, women are rebuked who sew charms on their wrists to ensnare people and bring them under their power. We are not sure what these women were doing. However, antisocial and cruel attitude which is typical of witchcraft is clearly condemned in the Bible.

There were many occult practices going on in the cultures surrounding the people of Bible times. The Bible does not describe them very exactly. This is probably so that no one would be tempted to copy them. It is also likely because the devil has so many ways of deceiving people that the exact occult practices of the Canaanites would not be exactly like what we have today. It is obvious that even from tribe to tribe in Africa, what happens is different. God gives us the general principles which we must apply to each culture.

g) The Origin of Mystical Powers

The Bible reveals that mystical powers are real. They operate on two principles: demonic power and deception.

1. Demonic Power

In Acts 16 we have an example of a girl who was a diviner. She got this power from a “python spirit” or “spirit of divination” (v 16). This spirit was driven out of her by Paul in the name of Jesus Christ (v 18). This shows that it was a demonic spirit.

The Bible states clearly that demons are able to perform miracles, called “counterfeit miracles” because they are done with evil power for evil reasons. The thief (Satan) only comes to steal, kill and destroy (Jn 10:10). Therefore all his miracles are aimed at trapping, deceiving and eventually destroying people. The magic of the magicians of Pharaoh helped him resist God which led to his defeat (Ex 7:11; 8:7. Note 8:18). Here are other verses showing Satan’s power:

Deut 13:1-3 - If a prophet or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder and if the sign or wonder which he has spoken takes place and he says, “Let us follow other gods ... and let us worship them, you must not listen to the words of that

prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Matt 24:24 - For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible.

2 Thes 2:9-10 - The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

Rev 13:13-15 - He performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

Rev 16:14 - They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle.

Rev 19:20 - But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast.

We also know that demons are powerful because of their names (principalities, powers, rulers) and because of the struggle needed to resist them (Eph 6:10-21). Thus we can see that to involve yourself in any way with mystical powers is to open yourself to demonic powers which want to deceive and destroy you.

2. Deception

Besides the deception which the demons do with miracles to make people follow them (like Simon in Acts 8:9-10), those using mystical powers also use tricks and lies to make people think the mystical powers are greater than they really are. This makes people so afraid that they can get sick or even die from fear alone.

When Paul met Elymas the sorcerer, he said (Acts 13:10) “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery.” This shows both the demonic power and

tricking used by Elymas. Some examples of tricks are, sending spies to know the person's problem before he gets to the diviner, making strange noises such as with the bull-roarer to make people think it is the sound of a spirit, the use of drugs, and sleight of hand tricks. For example, some people can make it look as if they pulled something out of another person's body, while really the thing was hidden on them and they skilfully got it into their hand at the exact right moment. This takes practice, but it can be done, as many people have confessed. Some magicians use psychological manipulation. They make people confused by frightening them so they can more easily deceive them.

When someone has been delivered from bondage to evil spirits or is talking to spirits during deliverance ministrations, if he is not careful he may believe all that the demons tell him about the powerful things they have been doing. Much of this is bragging and lies on the part of the demons to make people fear them. Jesus told us plainly that the devil is a liar (Jn 8:44). The demons are not all-powerful, and God keeps them from going too far. They cannot create life, do real good or give real blessing. In the last days, God allows them to use more power, perhaps to make people choose their sides for the final battle.

h) God's Provision Instead of Mystical Powers

People use mystical powers to meet some needs in their lives. But mystical powers are forbidden and destructive. God has good ways of meeting these needs. "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth and he adds no trouble to it" (Prov 10:22). Instead of mystical powers, we have the power of God himself with us, in the indwelling Holy Spirit.

1. Guidance: God promises to guide his people (Prov 3:5-6; Ps 25:8-9,12-14; 32:8; Jn 14:26; Rom 8:14 and many other passages). He gives guidance through his written word (the Bible), through conscience, the advice of godly Christians, circumstances, through prophets, dreams and visions given by the Holy Spirit. Guidance is promised to us, so when we pray and trust God, we at times have to go ahead and make our decision in faith (James 1:5-8). This guidance from God depends on a close friendship between God and the believer. Therefore unbelievers can't always get guidance this way. If they use the above means they may still go astray.

2. Protection: God promises to protect his people from both physical and spiritual dangers. (see below on Welcoming Trials). Jesus has all authority (Matt 28:18). He is far above all powers (Eph 1:20-22; Col 1:16-19; 1 Pet

3:22). He has disarmed and disgraced these powers (Col 2:15) and set his people free from the slavery they were in to Satan through fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). The Bible promises that God protects his people (2 Thes 3:3; 1 Pet 1:5; Jas 4:7; Eph 6:16; Is 54:17; 1 Jn 4:4; Ps 121, Ps 91). Again, this protection depends on a close and trusting relationship between the person and God (e.g. Ps 91:14). It is not automatic and it cannot be forced, but is based on love.

3. Healing: God has made provision for healing his people. He heals our diseases (Ps 103:3). He has instructed us to pray together for healing (Jas 5:14-16), and promises to heal. He is the one who has provided medicines that work chemically according to the principles he built into the universe (like panadol, penicillin etc). However, even these medicines do not work without God's constant upholding of the universe according to those principles and unless he grants the body power to heal. Health is more than the absence of sickness. It comes from total wholeness in being rightly related to God. Some sicknesses have physical causes and some purely spiritual. Some sicknesses are both. The Bible mentions them separately (Matt 4:23-24) and we need discernment.

4. Prosperity and Success: God has promised to supply all our needs when we surrender all we have and all we are to him and for his programme in the world (Matt 6:33; 7:7; Phil 4:19; Eph 3:20). This means that we are not the ones who decide what we want. We don't just go to God to get our own desires (Jas 4:2-3). We seek God's will and desires, and he will give us everything we need to carry out his will. This is not attractive to unbelievers because they want their own will. But it is true prosperity with no regrets.

i) Christian Attitudes Required

Christians are new creatures in Christ. Many of the attitudes which make unbelievers resort to mystical powers are no longer to be found in Christians. Some of these are hatred, jealousy, revenge and fear.

1. No Hatred

The Bible tells us that we are not to hate other people. Even in the days of the Exodus, God commanded, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt" (Lev 19:17). If another person has done wrong, God wants us to tell him, and then leave God to deal with him. In 1 John 3:15 says, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in

him.” People who curse others may or may not be able to kill the people they attack spiritually, but in God’s sight they are still murderers.

2. *No Jealousy*

Jealousy is one of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:20). It is also breaking the tenth commandment against coveting what your neighbour has. If a person is jealous, it means he or she feels inferior or cheated. This is a symptom of lack of faith in God to meet all our needs and to love us fully.

3. *No Revenge*

A believer loves and forgives his enemies. He does not need to find out who they are by occult means. God is protecting him and will reveal it if necessary. If justice needs to be done against a wicked person, God himself will do it. “It is mine to avenge, I will repay” (Rom 12:17-21; Deut 32:35; cf. Lev 19:18). Like the Psalmists, Christians can cry out to God for justice against their enemies (e.g. Ps 3). God may not act immediately when we want, but he will surely act in justice at the right time.

4. *No Fear*

God says we should not fear what the unbelievers fear (Is 8:12-13). Because the God who protects us is so great, other people or powers cannot touch us apart from his loving will (Num 23:23; Ps 27:1; 1 Jn 4:4). We do not fear man or powers, but God (Matt 10:28). We must not cast away our confidence (Heb 10:23,35) but trust always (Is 12:2). God tells us to have faith, and the shield of faith will turn back the flaming arrows of the evil one (Eph 6:16). Fear is the opposite of faith and fear is what usually pushes people to use mystical powers.

If these bad attitudes are erased from our lives by faith in Christ and enjoyment of his love and salvation, there is no more need for mystical powers. Instead of hatred, jealousy, revenge and fear, Christians love and trust. This involves:

5. *Renouncing all Occult Involvement*

The new believers in Ephesus burned their magic books (Acts 19:18-20) and king Josiah broke the idols (2 Chr 34:4-5). Christians do not really trust God fully until they are ready to destroy their other objects of spiritual trust, and renounce and cancel dependence on any covenants or ceremonies done before. Jesus bears the curse on those who break such pacts for his sake. The missionary, however, must not destroy occult objects without permission of their owners or force converts to destroy them. The convert

will only grow strong if he takes the step for himself. The missionary can encourage and support him in this.

6. *Welcoming Trials*

Instead of fear when trouble comes, Christians are called to rejoice (Jas 1:2; Rom 5:3). We can do this because we know that all things work together for our good (Rom 8:28). Trials will add beauty to our character (Jas 1:3-4; Rom 5:3-5; Heb 12:5-11) and train us for greater usefulness and glory in future. We do not see trials just as the work of Satan but as opportunities from God.

7. *Joining in Spiritual Warfare*

Christians are not expected to be passive but to work toward defeating the work of Satan in the world. Our armour in Ephesians 6:10-21 shows that holiness of life (truth, righteousness, faith, salvation), readiness to witness and confess Christ (preparation of the gospel and sword of the spirit) and prayer, equip us for this warfare. The disobedient Christian can be hurt by mystical powers (e.g. Ezek 21:21-24) but the obedient Christian will overcome them (1 Jn 2:13-14). Spiritual warfare involves helping to cast out demonic powers. It also involves taking up the cross. The cross is death to self. Strangely, if you lose your life for Christ, only then will you save it.

8. *Doing Good to All*

Galatians 6:9-10 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” We can safely do good to others because we are so secure in all the good the Lord is doing to us.

j) *The Bible’s Teaching About Vows, Oaths and Covenants*

The Bible agrees with ATR that it is a serious thing to speak words. God created the whole universe merely by speaking. He still works that way, for whatever God says automatically comes into existence (Is 55:11). Sometimes, the words of people also make things happen. For example, to the Israelites who said, “If only we had died in this desert,” when God asked them to enter the promised land, God said, “I will do to you the very things I heard you say: In this desert your bodies will fall” (Num 14:28-29). However, the Bible teaches that the words of men are often overruled by

God. “An undeserved curse does not come to rest” (Prov 26:2). If people pronounce things that are different from what God has decreed, they will not come to pass. For example, in Jeremiah 28 the false prophet Hananiah prophesied in the name of the Lord that the people taken in exile would come back to Jerusalem in two years. But his speaking these words had no effect. Likewise, when Jesus predicted his death, Peter’s “positive confession” was, “This shall never happen to you Lord.” Nevertheless, because the death of Jesus was God’s will and plan, the words of Peter could not change it. In fact, Peter was following Satan in saying something contrary to God’s will (Mt16:22-23). Lamentations 3:37-38 says, “Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?”

Christians should be careful about what they say, and how they judge and condemn others. Jesus said that we will give account for every idle word. But Christians do not need to fear the words, incantations, curses and covenants made against them when they know they are obeying the Lord and seeking to please him. God can cancel ungodly covenants (Is 28:15,18).

See also the material on oaths and covenants in chapter Five.

k) “Christian Magic” Approaches

There have always been attempts to make use of the power of God to get guidance, health, prosperity and protection by manipulating some means and not by a loving relationship with God. Books of magic incantations in Egypt before the time of Christ contained the name “Jah” along with other powerful words. The seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16 used the name of Christ for exorcism and it did not work. Instead they were attacked. The name or words have no guaranteed power apart from the person’s relationship with Christ. Sometimes, however, God could work powerfully in response to an unbeliever using his name, in order to reveal himself and his power to the unbeliever so that the person can repent and be saved.

The girl with the demonic divination spirit was saying “These men are servants of the Most High God who are telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16:17) But Paul was grieved. He did not welcome the advertisement because it came from a demonic source and he stopped it. Simon of Samaria claimed to use God’s power for his magic, but Peter said he was captive to sin (Acts 8:9-25).

Treating God as a source of power, where the person says “My will be done” rather than “Thy will be done”, is wrong and can lead to demonic invasion of the person using it. The true power of God comes only through a personal friendship with God, which in turn comes only by repentance, faith in Christ, surrender and holiness.

9. Life Cycle And Religion

There are two kinds of cycles in African life. Since most people are farmers, there is the yearly agricultural cycle. Then there is the cycle of events through the main stages of each person’s own life.

a) The Agricultural Cycle

Since most people depend on their crops for their livelihood, making sure that the farms are productive is a major concern. There are usually rituals at each stage to make sure the ancestors and other spiritual powers bring fertility to the farms.

First is the coming of the rains. The chief or chief priest or some other specialist makes sure the rains begin. In some tribes they do rituals for this every year. In others it is only when the rains fail to come on time. In West Africa, in the tribes farther north the person in charge of making sure there is rain is much more important than for groups near the coast who regularly get a lot of rain. In coastal areas they may have someone who stops rain.

In some tribes there are rituals over the farm instruments like hoes and cutlasses before the work begins. In some, the seed to be planted must be kept in the ancestor shrine or blessed by the priest before planting. There may be rituals at the fields to protect the farmers. Charms are often used to protect the farmers from snake bite and injury, and to keep away thieves, insects and animal pests from the farm. Food may be offered to gods or ancestors at the farms when people are working there to beg for protection and fertility.

In some tribes, there are taboos at certain seasons, such as the taboo against blowing horns or beating drums so as not to disturb the ripening grain.

When the firstfruits are harvested, there is usually a ceremony to dedicate some to the gods and ancestors responsible for making them grow before

anyone else eats of it. Then when the final main harvest is gathered in, there is often another festival to thank these powers and rejoice over the harvest.

In this we see that Traditional societies are fully aware of their helplessness in ensuring good crops and safety, and their dependence on spiritual powers for this. We also see the importance attached to being properly thankful when these powers produce the harvest.

If our presentation of Christianity makes people trust in tractors, fertilizers and modern methods, we have done spiritual damage. These things are all good. However, we know that God is responsible for rain, safety and fertility. Since the Christian goes directly to God and not through spirits and ancestors, rural Christians need to have their own ceremonies to replace the traditionalist ones, putting trust directly in God and thanking Him for the harvest. In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to have firstfruits and harvest (Pentecost) festivals (Deut 26). He declared himself to be the source of agricultural success (Lev 26:3-10 25:18-22; Deut 11:13-15; 28:3-5,8,11-12 etc.). He also commanded generosity (allow gleaning, sabbatical and Jubilee years. See Deut 26:12).

Cultures that are cattle rearers or fishermen have different yearly cycles than farmers. The missionary needs to study them and see the part played by the religion in these cycles. For example, cattle herders usually have more free time during the rains because they do not have to take the cows so far to look for grass, but they are very busy in the dry season. They may have most of their religious festivals during the rains. They may also need rituals to make sure the cows give birth and that the calves survive. Fishermen are also busier in the dry season.

b) The Individual Life Cycle

In most traditional societies there are rituals or ceremonies called “rites of passage” by anthropologists. When a person is passing from one stage of life to the next, these ceremonies separate him from the former stage and initiate or incorporate him or her into the next stage. Such ceremonies are usually found surrounding birth, puberty, marriage, childbearing and death. For certain individuals there are also ceremonies for installation or initiation to chieftaincy or other special positions.

1. Pregnancy and Birth

When a woman is pregnant, a lot of precautions are needed to make sure that the pregnancy is protected spiritually and physically. Usually the

ancestors are invoked. There may be special foods for the woman to eat or avoid, sacrifices to make and other taboos, such as places and times of day the woman should not go out. For example, some people believe a pregnant woman should not go to a river lest water-spirits replace the human spirit of the child in her womb, or she should not go out in the afternoon when forest spirits are abroad for the same reason. There may be sacrifices to the gods with promise of more if the child is safely born. In some cultures there may also be special rituals to perform before it can be announced to other people that the woman is pregnant.

There are many customs for delivery. Often if delivery is difficult and delayed, people believe the mother might have committed adultery and she has to confess before the baby will agree to come out. Evil powers can also cause hard delivery so some steps might be taken to counteract them.

In some tribes the placenta is important. It may be buried under a tree and the fate of that tree affects the fate of the child. Some people believe a corpse must be brought home to be buried where the placenta of his birth was buried if his spirit is to find rest.

Children’s names may reflect the circumstances of their birth, a god they are devoted to, or an ancestor who people believe has been reincarnated in them. Some tribes have no naming ceremony but many have it seven or eight days after birth. Until then, mother and child usually stay indoors. The naming provides the transition of the child from the spirit world to the human community. The child is related to the ancestors and clan and the community at large. In some tribes his hair (ghost hair) is shaved off and he or she is introduced to things and work they will meet in the world.

In some tribes, such as Yoruba, the new child may be taken to a diviner to find out what is the proper future for the child. The diviner might reveal, for example, that the child is to worship a certain divinity, observe certain taboos, and follow a certain profession in life. (This may be according to the plan made between the child and his *ori* before birth, which the child will not remember but the diviner can reveal).

A missionary should discuss with the new believers to find out what they think would be the Christian way of doing things like having special prayers for pregnant women, conducting naming ceremonies for the children of Christians or dedicating babies to God. Then the missionary can encourage the believers themselves to organize such events. Parents want to

place their children under spiritual protection, and it should be the protection of the true God. If Christianity neglects these things, the parents will be very tempted to use the traditional methods which involve traditionalist beliefs.

Christian parents must be taught that God's Holy Spirit and God's word are now their source of guidance and Christ is their protector. To use non-Christian diviners is not an option for a Christian. Any converts who have any reason to believe that such divination or protections were done over them as children need to renounce all these influences in the name of Jesus Christ, and reject any predictions made by diviners about their future in favour of the plan of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for their lives.

2. Initiation and Puberty Rites

The transition from childhood to adulthood is often important. Many tribes have ceremonies to mark the event. The purposes may include:

- 1) To make the person brave, teach him or her to endure and not be cowardly or weak in the trials of life. For this, there may be beating and other physical pain, hunger, no bathing, sleeping on bare earth and frightening by spirits.
- 2) To give sex education to prepare the young person for marriage and procreation.
- 3) To give family life training - how to relate to spouse and in-laws, childrearing, housekeeping or men's duties.
- 4) To teach co-operation and obedience needed for community living.
- 5) Initiation into religious mysteries, especially establishing a personal relationship with the ancestors or divinities, and taking responsibility in their worship.

Sometimes the ceremonies symbolize removal (seclusion) and rebirth into adulthood. Boys are more often initiated than girls, though many tribes have rites for girls like cutting the body decoration, female circumcision, removing the front teeth or the fattening room. In many tribes the boys' rites include circumcision. Other tribes do not circumcise their males at all. In some tribes all boys must be initiated into the men's secret society before they are considered to be men and are allowed to marry. In other tribes, there may be secret societies for women to be initiated into. Sometimes, initiation is not for everybody. Only certain people are invited or apply to belong to a special group and undergo the initiation.

Because of the ancestor and ATR related nature of many puberty or initiation rites, often Christians do not want to participate. This may make them look weak or childish in the society. Some people have suggested that baptism as initiation, or confirmation, should be made into bigger events to substitute for traditional initiation. But this might make those who are not born again attracted to these ceremonies. Also, baptism may not come at puberty since a person might not accept Christ until later. In many tribes, due to modernization, initiation rites are fading away, and if a Christian refuses to participate, in the long run he will likely be accepted by his people. But in the short run, he may have to suffer some disgrace for Christ. A missionary needs to be prepared to give support to those refusing to participate. There might be some negotiations with the elders to see if any substitute community service or other work could be done by Christians instead. The new Christian community also needs to take action about training their young people in good sex education and family life preparation from a biblical point of view.

In addition, however, new Christians need to see that what they have gained by being born again by the Holy Spirit of God is a much greater spiritual initiation than what they would gain by going through the traditional ceremonies. The spiritual side of initiation aims to put people in touch with the spiritual powers and realities. But being born again fills a person with the very Spirit of God and makes him or her a child of the Lord God Almighty of the whole universe. It gives the person a relationship with Jesus Christ, who, as we have seen, does all that gods and ancestors are believed to do for us, and much, much more. It is when the spiritual resources that the Christian has are tested against the spiritual powers of those who have been traditionally initiated, that people will clearly see that the Christians have gone deeper spiritually. A missionary needs to encourage the converts to test their "spiritual initiation" in Christ by standing up against the attacks of ungodly spirits. When their Jesus Christ proves himself stronger than the powers of the others, both the Christians and the unbelievers will see whose initiation is really greater.

Initiation gives people a special "insider" status because of the secrets which cannot be revealed to non-initiates. Christian initiation (that is, being born again by the Spirit of God) also has its secrets, but they are secret, not because they must not be told (they are freely spoken of), but because they cannot be understood by anyone who does not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to interpret them (see 1 Corinthians 2:7,14). This is a much more

powerful kind of secrecy, controlled by God alone. It proves that Christians have a special relationship with God.

3. Marriage

Marriage is the automatic result of being accepted into adult society. In traditional thinking, every able-bodied person must get married. It is a sin not to do so, because it is a refusal to continue on the life of the family. Most of the religious rituals may have been already done in puberty or initiation rites. But in some tribes, a diviner should be consulted as to whether this is the correct partner, and sacrifices should be made to make sure the marriage will be blessed with children. Fertility is the major concern because the overriding purpose of marriage in traditional life is bearing children. The wife may also be required to make some pledge of loyalty to the man's ancestors, who are expected to discipline her for unfaithfulness. In some tribes (e.g. Igbo) the two fathers of the couple bind themselves to friendship in the shrine. The masquerade may be used to frighten and discipline a girl into marrying the man her father chooses, and to make her obey her husband. There are also gods kept by men that punish wives for unfaithfulness.

On some mission fields a problem has arisen because the tribe may not want to recognize any marriage that does not include traditionalist rituals. This will change with time. Again, it might work to negotiate with the elders for substitutes for the traditional rituals for Christians.

Converts need teaching about Christian marriage. The courtship customs of the tribe should be respected unless they involve dealing with forbidden spiritual powers, or unless they involve sexual activity between people who are not married to each other. It is often hard to know when people are considered to be married. The converts themselves should decide this. For example, a custom that lets many men sleep with a girl before she or her father chooses whom she should marry cannot be compatible with Christianity, but a custom that lets a man visit and sleep with his "fiancée" (or wife?) in her father's house before he finishes paying the bride price and takes her to his own house might be allowable if the relationship between them is strong enough to need a divorce to break it. The converts from that tribe will have a better idea of when the couple could be considered "married" in the Christian sense. It may not always be possible to have a church ceremony at that point, though that would be ideal.

Because of the importance of marriage in traditional society, a missionary who is not married may be misunderstood by the people at first. They might get the idea that if their children become Christians, they too will not marry, so they prevent their children from coming for teaching. They might suspect the missionary of immorality.

On the other hand, the Bible teaches that it is not necessary for everyone to be married. Some people can decide not to marry so as to have more time for God's work (1 Cor 7:32-35; Matt 19:11-12). Sooner or later the converts need to understand this. Also, many tribes insist on early marriage, when the girls are around 12 or 13 years old. This means that girls do not get much education, and often have medical problems. They may get married to unsuitable partners and regret it later when they are mature and understand the Christian idea of marriage. A missionary cannot change traditional attitudes to marriage quickly. He needs to teach patiently and not try to change everything at once.

4. Death

The transition of death is from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors. This passage usually has the most ritual. The purpose of the ceremonies is to get the soul of the departed accepted by the other ancestral spirits, and to placate it so that it will not harass those still living. The rituals and customs have already been described under the section on ancestors.

What should happen about funerals when people become Christians? We do want to encourage people to have funerals, because people need to face the fact that their friend or relative has died and to go through a mourning process and recovery. Christian funerals are also a testimony both to believers and unbelievers about the hope a Christian has after this life. We do not mourn like people who have no hope. However, we do not do funerals or remembrances with any thought that it can affect the person who has died. If unbelievers take the corpse of a Christian and do a traditionalist funeral for him, it will not affect his salvation. But if a Christian knows that he does not want the family to bury him in the traditional way when he dies, he should give clear instructions to his relatives in front of witnesses before his death. When the Christian community has the opportunity of conducting the funeral, this is a great opportunity for them to teach the unbelievers about the hope the Christian has at death. The Christians should rally around to help in the funeral for a believer as if they were the family. Actually, spiritually they are his or her real family. However, they should

make sure the unbelieving relatives are shown respect and love, and given the chance to show their own love for the deceased. Remember that they are in grief too. If the Christians make enemies of the relatives over the issue of the funeral, it can harm the good testimony they wanted to give.

A believer may come under serious pressure from his unbelieving family to do a traditionalist funeral for his unbelieving relative who has died. If he does not take part, it looks as if he did not love his relative. The missionary and other believers will have to encourage and support him through the time of persecution he is likely to face if he tries to avoid traditionalist practices. He should try to support his family to some extent, such as helping to feed the guests who will come, to show love to his relatives, but he cannot participate in any of the rituals that show a wrong belief about the spiritual world. He may not be able to stop others who are not believers, from doing these rituals, but he can do his own service in the church to mark the fact that he is mourning.

10. Practical Steps In An Approach To People In African Traditional Religion

There are various practical approaches we can take to evangelizing people in ATR. Some useful suggestions are given below.

a) Learn the local ATR

Find out what is important to the people, the names of the gods and powers, what these gods are like and how they operate, and how the people practice their religion. This is to find out in what areas the ATR already believes the truth, and what areas are different from the Bible. It also helps you to know the spiritual enemies you are facing. Besides this, you want to find out the spiritual needs which the people are aware of (felt needs). There are points in the gospel message that will meet these spiritual needs and you can start with these to present the gospel so as to catch the people's interest.

It will be very hard for you to learn the ATR if you do not speak the language of the people, because many of their religious ideas and concepts may not be easy to translate or explain in another language. As you hear people talk about their concepts, you will build up your own picture of what they are trying to say. You may also find out that when they translate one of

their concepts into another language, they use a word that does not really mean the same thing in the new language.

Every missionary learning language and culture needs at least one friend who is willing to explain things to him. The missionary learns by observing and asking questions wisely. Write down what you learn each time you ask a question or see something happening.

For example, in the Case Study: A Pioneer Team in Zambia by Phil Eakins (in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* by Winter and Hawthorne, page 682ff) the missionaries spent two years learning language, world view and culture before they started preaching. They discovered that the spiritual needs the people were feeling were to get in close touch with God again, and to get protection from a certain type of deadly evil spirit called *Isaku*. So the missionaries started their presentation by telling the people that they had a Spirit stronger than *Isaku*, called the Holy Spirit. Then they said that God had come down to earth in the form of his son Jesus, to give this Holy Spirit. When the missionaries had victory over evil spirits, people saw their message was true. Many of the people became Christians because they could see how the gospel met their needs.

b) Concentrate specific prayer on your task

Pray specifically against the gods and powers you have discovered to be at work in this group of people. Pray for specific individuals who have influence over others such as the chief, elders, family heads, and priests, and for individuals you are trying to witness to. Hours should be devoted to this regularly. These powers are blocking the people's minds from being able to understand your message and they need to be weakened.

c) Teach through the Bible

Start with the Old Testament to work through passages where the same or different values to the ATR are taught. Note and teach carefully where the Bible is different from the ATR and emphasize the points of sameness. You may also find out that they have some important spiritual needs which they do not feel (e.g. for forgiveness and deliverance from God's wrath). You can then plan how to do your teaching so as to make the people realize that they have these needs. Then they will see the importance of the gospel when you present it later.

The missionaries of the New Tribes Mission take time to learn the language and culture just as the missionaries did in Zambia above. Then they teach

through the Old Testament for several months, covering ideas like the origin of the world, origin of Satan and sin, God is the only God, sins God hates, death for sin and sacrifice as substitute for sinners. This is all taught in the stories of Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, etc. all the way to the New Testament. By the time the story gets to Jesus, many people understand enough to know that they need a saviour. They understand why they need to accept him, and so they do. The process is shown in the video *Ee-Taow* which is produced by New Tribes Mission and the Bible lessons are published in a set of eight books. Other missionaries have adapted the method for a shorter period of time by using fewer stories but with the same general idea.

d) Appeal to personal experiences of the High God

These are usually remembered from childhood. The Lausanne Occasional Papers number 18 suggests this:

In talking with Muslims and men from ATRs, one evangelist frequently asks individuals if they had ever talked to God or felt that he answered them. Many people reply that when they were very young it was so. Then he asks why they think it stopped, or why they may now feel far from God. They frequently feel it is because of sin.

The evangelist then uses this to discuss the person's need of Christ.

e) Relate the death of Christ as the one who bears the curse

Some people have covenants or agreements with certain gods or spirits, which they are afraid to break because of the punishment the god will put on them. But Jesus bears that curse for them if they turn to him.

f) Do not emphasize the future heavenly rewards

Wait until you see people are interested in it. Try to create that interest, but demonstrate salvation's present benefits. If they are not afraid of the life to come, salvation from hell will not look interesting to them. Because ATR tends to be "people-centred" and "this world centred", a religion whose main benefits are in the next life will not replace ATR. It might only be added to ATR. ATR will still be used for help in this life while Christianity might be seen as mainly for help in the next life. The power of Jesus over the powers of evil right now, means much more to people in an ATR background. That power should be stressed and demonstrated.

g) Minister at points where people usually resort to ATR

People turn to ATR during sickness, other problems and crucial points in the life cycle. When there is a traditional ritual for something, there should

be a Christian alternative for believers. Rather than making up these alternative ceremonies yourself, discuss with the new believers about what they think would be appropriate in their culture. Teach the parts of the Bible that might help them to think about these issues. Pray with them about it. Then let them decide and plan what to do. If they are used to doing this, even when you are gone, they will be able to carry on the Lord's work when various situations arise.

h) Plan ways for Christianity to demonstrate love

Christians need to show love for the wider community and respect for those in authority. Even though the converts cannot obey the spiritual power of the chief, they should show that they still care for the community. For example, they could sponsor a clinic or help build a road.

i) Identify with local culture and concerns

The missionary needs to show by his or her example that their way of eating, dressing, talking etc. and their problems are important to the missionary and to God. At the same time, don't keep on doing things from your own background that are offensive to them. Don't eat what they think is abominable or follow customs that look bad to them. Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-10, be ready to give up your freedoms so as to win them.

j) Communicate in ways they understand

Use their type of music, their language, and leadership style. Use the teaching methods they are used to and easily grasp.

It is not always the best to teach by lecturing or preaching most of the time. Traditionalists respond well to drama. You can enlist some of them as actors to act out some of the Bible stories you teach to the rest of the group. They also like story telling. Tell Bible stories in a dramatic way. Use traditional stories that teach good points, or use such stories and adapt them to teach Bible truth. Allow discussion and questions during your teaching. Especially with elders, don't project yourself as the one who knows everything while they know nothing. You will get a lot of good ideas for how to help them understand the gospel if you let them teach you their stories and wisdom.

You teach a lot by your example too. In everything you do, from how you cook to how you respond to problems, ask yourself what this might be communicating to the people about Christ.

Music is also powerful. Songs written by the converts in their own language using their own music style are more powerful than songs brought from outside. The words can come from scripture or their own experience. Bring them examples from tribes whose music is similar to their own, and encourage song writing by any means you can. As they sing these songs during the day, their minds will be gradually changed. Encourage groups who sing these local Christian songs to go about from place to place teaching the new songs among the people group, or put the songs on cassette and circulate them among the people.

k) Work around the people's schedules

Do your evangelism and teaching at the time of day when you will not disrupt their work much. Plan your extended teaching and evangelism for times of year when they are less busy (for example in dry season for farmers). If they have a Sunday market in their area, hold your main teaching and worship service on another day of the week.

l) Help overcome fear with power encounter

Teach and demonstrate spiritual warfare and victory over demonic forces. Many times traditionalists can only be convinced that Jesus is more powerful than the gods and traditional powers by seeing a contest between them. When Jesus wins the contest, people know he is the one they should follow. An example is the experience of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Today we have examples of casting out demons and praying for healing or rain in the name of Jesus when the name of the local gods has failed. Sometimes the missionary is led by God to defy the powers by allowing them to attack him to prove that they are powerless. When people are won to Christ, they also need to definitely renounce the covenants and relationships they have had with other spiritual powers. Most of them need some kind of deliverance from these powers.

Power encounter can convince people initially, but more teaching is needed after people are convinced or they will go away if their own miracle gets delayed. Converts need to learn to fight these battles for themselves. Teach the converts who they are and their spiritual rights in Christ so that demons will not intimidate them. Then if demons try to oppress and harass them, they will know how to get free through the power of Jesus Christ.

m) Deal with the illiteracy problem

Your first teachings to people who cannot read must use other forms of communication such as story-telling, drama, preaching and the use of

pictures. Every missionary should start collecting pictures that will be useful in his or her work. Sometimes teaching charts such as *The Heart of Man* are useful. Another type of teaching chart that can also be used, the *One Mediator Teaching Chart*, is illustrated in Appendix I.

God has revealed himself to us in a book. Every Christian has the right to read that book and hear directly from God through it. Therefore, missionaries translate the Bible and teach people to read. Many traditionalists are illiterate, so any missionary to them should have some idea about how to teach literacy. Most literacy textbooks have a teacher's guide along with them which missionaries should study, or they can go to watch literacy classes to learn how to teach them.

There are specialists who do Bible translation. They are people like the Wycliffe Bible Translators, Nigeria Bible Translation Trust (NBTT) and the Bible Society. These organizations can also train people from other missions to do the work. They train people how to write literacy primers (textbooks) as well.

When teaching adults to read, it is important not to treat them as if they were children. Make it a "meeting" more than a "class". Get books for them that are written about things that interest them like farming, government, folk tales and Bible stories.

n) Replace the functions of traditional religion

Study the functions given in the introduction of this book. Make sure your presentation of the gospel replaces all these functions with Christian alternatives, so as not to disrupt society too much and look anti-social. For example, teach and demonstrate how Christianity upholds respect for elders and honesty. Provide alternatives for healing with special prayers and medical clinics. Teach about the Christian's hope in the face of death. Encourage the use of music, dance and art to depict Christian themes instead of traditionalist ones. Organize Christians to help the community.

o) Use reproducible methods

One of your objectives as a missionary is to teach the converts to carry on the work. They can adapt to their own culture and know their language better than you as an outside missionary. If the church is to be planted as a healthy, reproducing body among them, you need to raise up leadership from among the converts who can carry on the work beyond what missionaries can do and after missionaries might have left. One way you

teach the converts how to do the work of the ministry is by your example. They get their idea of how to do ministry from what they see you doing. But Jesus did not just let the disciples watch him. He discussed the ministry with them and sent them out to do it themselves. You too should involve the new converts in the work as soon as possible.

A missionary who uses methods that the converts cannot use is teaching the converts that ministry is not for them. For example, if the missionary does most of his evangelism using films, which require a projector and a generator, the converts cannot get these things, so they will feel they cannot do evangelism. If the missionary bases his appeal to people on giving out used clothes, the converts may not have access to these either. Thus if the missionary leaves, the work stops. The same will happen if the missionary is the one paying the pastor and funding all the church programmes.

A missionary who refuses to depend on methods and materials which the converts do not have access to will usually find his/her work is going more slowly at first than that of a missionary who uses them. He may not be able to reach so many people as fast because he is hampered by lack of transport and materials. But he is starting a movement among his few converts that can multiply by itself. After some years, his work will be more solid than the work of a high-technology missionary. This is why it is not always such a bad thing for a missionary to be too poor to buy a lot of equipment. Jesus had no equipment, but he started a world-wide movement by training a few disciples.

p) Work through the local authority structure

Many missionaries trying to evangelize traditionalists have been frustrated because when they preach, the women and children say that they cannot believe without the permission of their household head. Sometimes young men will not believe without the permission of their age group leader or their fathers. If the missionary ignores this authority structure and tries to get people to disobey so they can become Christians, several undesirable things may happen. The missionary will be regarded by the leaders as preaching rebellion and being a threat to orderly society. They will persecute him for this. The converts will be viewed as rebels and useless people. Responsible faithful people will not want to believe. The missionary has started to destroy one of the functions of traditional religion at the very beginning before he can do anything to replace it.

Often the only group of people who can believe the missionary's message without consulting the household head are young men who are married or about to marry and may be able to establish new rules for their own families. It is better to start with them than with small children. However, when these are the only converts, it may be hard to find wives for the converts and many of them may backslide in order to get married. The married ones may have their wives removed by their in-laws.

This is why it is worthwhile in the beginning of your ministry to make friends with the family heads and spend time teaching them and the others before you ask for conversion. Then the family heads will understand what the new teaching is about and will be less hesitant to give permission for their people to follow it. If some of the family heads or age group leaders themselves are the first to embrace the faith, everyone else will feel free to do so. Then the orderliness of society is preserved. Other elders will also consider Christ. But if only young people are converted by disobeying their families, the elders will likely resist Christianity. The missionary may often be left responsible for supporting the young converts too, because their families will no longer take care of them. You want to avoid this kind of situation if you can. Preach to all levels of people: children, youth, women and elders, but make sure you befriend the elders and explain to them what you are doing and what your message is about.

Don't be discouraged if the elders keep people from responding at first. Keep teaching everybody. Many of them will secretly believe, so that when things change and the elders finally give permission, they will all be ready to come out for Christ. Pray for the breakthrough to come.

Look for situations where the society is undergoing change, such as when people have just moved to a new location or there is political upheaval. At such times, the authority of elders and tradition may be weaker and people will be freer to make individual decisions.

Reasons Most Often Hindering Traditionalist Elders From Accepting Christ Or Embracing Christianity

Since the missionary wants to befriend the elders who can give permission to the others to believe, it is important for him to understand some of the problems that make elders want to reject the gospel. Some of these problems can be avoided if the missionary makes the correct approach right from the beginning.

1. He (or she) feels one needs to be literate to practice Christianity fully, but he is too old to learn to read.
2. He fears Christianity means educating his children, which means they will go to the city and leave him alone in old age.
3. He feels it would be irresponsible and unkind to divorce all his wives but one.
4. He is told he will not be given leadership positions unless he has only one wife, which would degrade him.
5. Without the labour of many wives and children, he cannot be a prosperous farmer.
6. He fears that if everyone stops worshipping the ancestors, serious disasters will befall the family and the ancestors will suffer.
7. A Christian heaven without his ancestors sounds unattractive.
8. He may not feel a need for Christ because he thinks his gods, ancestors and charms supply all his needs.
9. He fears he will be defenceless against sorcery and witchcraft if he is not allowed to use charms. (It seems God does not act as fast as charms or curses).
10. He will not be able to host communal labour in his house or farm, or take part in community social events if he must eliminate alcohol from his life.
11. If he lives in an area where chieftaincy is controlled by Muslim or Traditionalist rulers, he will never be given community leadership roles if he is a Christian.
12. He may have a covenant with some spiritual power with very serious consequences such as death if he renounces that loyalty.
13. If his parents are still alive, he may want to put off conversion until after he has buried them because he knows the tremendous social pressure that

will be brought to bear on him to bury them with traditional rituals. He is afraid he would not be able to resist these pressures, and so he would be disgraced in the church.

14. He fears that the customs and traditions of their tribal culture will disappear and be lost if he and others do not stay true to passing them on.

15. He is afraid that without the backing and sanctions of the ancestors, or at least of the threat of what the ancestors and spirits will do to the disobedient, he will no longer be able to control those under him such as his wives, children, and others if he is a leader.

16. He is looking forward to the power he will have when he inherits the priesthood of the family or clan divinities, and when he dies and becomes an ancestor.

17. He fears he will not be properly buried or received in the land of the ancestors, and will be forgotten by future generations if he becomes a Christian.

18. He fears that his family will no longer be given their share of the things provided by the community for festivals, such as the meat of sacrifices and beer. Even if he has decided to forego this, his relatives may complain bitterly.

19. He fears he will be seen as an irresponsible blabbermouth by others in his tribe because it is well known that Christian converts tell the missionaries all the secrets of the tribal religion, when it is a serious offence to reveal them.

20. It looks degrading to him that in Christianity, men and women practice the rituals together.

21. If there are no older men in the church, he feels it is for women and children only.

22. It is hard to submit to greatly younger pastors.

These fears need to be addressed if the traditionalist is to be won. An evangelist has to think about what his answers are to these problems. More

important, the Holy Spirit needs to convince an elder that he is in such spiritual danger that no matter what, he needs to follow Christ.

Unexpected Reasons Of Traditionalists For Wanting Christianity

On the other hand, people may be interested in Christianity, but not for the reasons you think they should be. For example, John Mbiti (in *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*) says that his people, the Akamba, like to get new names and titles. They viewed Christian baptism as an opportunity to take a new (Christian) name, which identified them with the technology and prosperity of the Western world. Many of them wanted to be baptized for this reason, but the missionaries thought they were interested in the forgiveness of their sins.

There are other things that attract traditionalists to Christianity. Some like it because they have been oppressed by Muslims or other Traditionalists, so they want to annoy their oppressors by becoming Christians. Some are attracted by Christian music, ceremonies and festivals. Young people may be looking for freedom from control by their parents. Some people are looking for development, power and economic prosperity. Some are looking for medical help or education. Others come because of the free used clothes given by the missionaries, or they hope to get employment with the mission. Sometimes if the missionaries fail to give these things, the converts fight with them, and sometimes they leave Christianity or look for another denomination that will promise these things. Jesus never disappoints if they are looking for what he gives (forgiveness, heaven, peace, spiritual protection, guidance and provision for daily needs) but if they are looking for other things, Christianity or the missionaries may disappoint them bitterly.

Many times, a convert who wants to become a Christian for what we might consider to be a shallow reason, can turn into a very good Christian if he is properly disciplined. He or she needs teaching to understand the true benefits given by Christ. We cannot always know people's motives when they accept Christ, but we can teach them, disciple them and pray for them that in the end they will bear good fruit.

Basic Concepts Needed By Traditionalists For Understanding The Gospel

An evangelist was once told by a group of traditionalists that they would not like to go to heaven and be with Jesus, but preferred to go to the land of the ancestors and be with their forefathers. If their ideas about life after death are correct, they are right. But they could say this because they did not understand what hell is like and where the dead are. They did not understand how wonderful Jesus is. There are many beliefs like this, which make the gospel sound useless or bad to traditionalists. As we do our teaching and evangelism, we must be patient to gradually change some of their ideas and bring them to understand the true concepts so that the gospel makes sense.

The concepts listed below are some that might need to be taught. Even people who claim to be Christians or Muslims may still have a basically ATR world view. They may have some of the Christian concepts but not have related them to the ATR world to which they resort in times of crisis. As we as missionaries investigate the beliefs of the people, we may find that the people need more light on some of the following areas:

1. God's desire to be close and intimate with men (God is often seen by Traditionalists as remote, sometimes due to men's sin or because he is so great, but without real motivation to reunite with people).
2. God's justice, which requires that every sin be punished by death. (ATRs usually recognize that God allows a substitute to take the punishment for sinners, but they do not realize the punishment is so great and irreversible. They know, however, that animal substitutes are not enough to pay for the death of a human being).
3. Satan and his kingdom of spirits as totally evil and dangerous, never doing any good to man although they often seem to help. (ATRs usually believe that the spirits can be helpful).
4. It is not the actual ancestors doing what ancestors are thought to do in ATR. Demons pretend to be ancestors to control people.
5. God hates and is opposed to other "gods". These gods belong to Satan's evil and rebellious realm (gods are usually seen in ATR as God's deputies, working as intermediaries and under His command).

6. God's power over evil spirits and over nature is directly accessible to people who are on God's side (no need for intermediaries and medicine men). His power is also much greater than these forces. (Power Encounter is usually needed).

7. Sin removes God's protection so that evil powers can attack the disobedient. (It is not mystical power, taboos and rituals that keep up the protection).

8. God sometimes seems slow to help or punish because he has a good plan. To become impatient and go to other powers for help is unnecessary and brings ultimate disaster. One needs faith, which God loves, to wait. (Many in ATR feel God takes too long for retribution and in sending help).

9. Eternal life is not just continued existence similar to what we have in this life, and there is no reincarnation. The concepts of eternal death and hell, heaven, resurrection and the last judgement need clarification or presentation.

10. The Holy Spirit as the new "God With Us" enabling us to live holy lives and not live under law.

11. Baptism as the Christian initiation, open to all who believe. It includes physical water baptism, which is a symbol of the powerful Spirit baptism of those who believe. The Holy Spirit initiates a believer into the mysteries of God.

12. Acceptable relations with God are interpersonal (love, faith, trust, obedience) rather than ritual (taboos, rites, incantations).

13. People can have joy, peace and enjoyment from fellowship with God Almighty as his own children.

Two other main stumbling blocks, forbidding alcohol and polygamy, must be kept in mind. These two things are the basis of social and economic life in many societies, and to get rid of them is, at least at first, to be poor and outcast. As "law" they are too difficult for most older people, because to do away with them results in serious loss of prestige and influence. This is one of the reasons why most converts are young people.

A missionary needs to think through and study how strict the Bible is on these things. Does the Bible really say that polygamists and/or their wives cannot be baptized, take communion, or have any church responsibilities? Is alcohol always wrong? Is it usually harmful in the local culture? If it is, what substitutes can Christians have to fulfil the social uses of alcohol so that Christians can still function in society?

Other topics that need to be taught but maybe not at the initial evangelism stage:

14. The true nature of original sin (many ATRs believe in pre-existence of the human soul. They think one may be suffering for sins and covenants with spirits made in the pre-existent state which one cannot totally undo in this life.)

15. The New Covenant has taken over the Old Covenant (many "spiritual churches" in Africa maintain a lot of Old Testament practice including such things as barring menstrual women from church, blood sacrifices, and forbidding "unclean" foods).

16. The Body of Christ is the Christian fellowship. (Community identity is a common concept but people's main group loyalty needs to be transferred from tribe, clan and physical ancestors to spiritual ancestors and people of God).

17. The true nature of greatness is not wealth, children or position in society but the approval of God.

18. Everyone who has come to know God is responsible to take the good news of salvation to others who have not heard it or have not accepted it. (There is nothing like evangelism in most ATRs).

Of course, like all new Christians, converts from ATR need to be taught the Bible's teaching on prayer, holy living, fellowship and other aspects of the Christian life.

Since so many traditionalists are illiterate, any evangelistic teaching aimed at them needs to be in a form adapted to non-readers. However, many of these concepts need to be introduced to literate Christians or Muslims still holding traditionalist ideas as well.

Here is a possible outline of evangelistic Bible lessons aimed at helping the traditionalist learn the new spiritual ideas and overcome the objections he has so that he can become a Christian. Even with the best lessons, no one will be converted unless the Holy Spirit works in his or her heart. Therefore, much prayer is needed. The Bible story should be told by the teacher, using some visual aids such as pictures, objects, drama, or what the people will understand. During the story, the teacher brings out the points mentioned. The people should be able to repeat the story back to the teacher and go and tell others as well.

Basic Bible Teaching

1. THE STORY OF CREATION

Scripture: Genesis 1-2; Isaiah 44:24

Points: God created all spirits, people and things

God had no helper in creation

God loves us and desires our friendship

Friendship with God is truly satisfying

2. THE ORIGIN OF SATAN AND THE DEMONS

Scripture: Is 14:12-15, Ezek 28:12-17, John 10:10; Col 1:16; Rev 12:9

Points: God created Satan

Satan rebelled and became evil

Some of the angels joined Satan and became demons

Satan is a liar, a murderer and our enemy

3. THE STORY OF THE FALL OF MAN

Scripture: Genesis 3; 1 Tim 2:14; Rom 5:12

Points: The result of sin is death

Satan is a liar, our enemy

Man has a choice

Man lost God's friendship

4. THE STORY OF NOAH

Scripture: Genesis 6-11; 2 Pet 2:5,9; 3:6-7

Points: God punishes sin with death

God's judgement may be slow in coming but it is sure

God's rescue of the godly may take time but it is sure

Mention the tower of Babel as the origin of tribes

5. THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-8; 15:1-7; 16; 17:15-22

Points: God loves us and desires our friendship

God has a plan to bring the whole world back to himself

Abraham left his old land and family and God promised him a new one

6. THE STORY OF OFFERING ISAAC

Scripture: Genesis 22, Heb 11:17-19

Points: God allowed a substitute for Isaac

Abraham's faith that God would provide a lamb

7. THE STORY OF JOSEPH

Scripture: Genesis 37; 39-50

Points: God gives guidance

God's plan may take time but will surely happen

People need to be patient and wait for God in faith

We must not take revenge into our own hands

8. THE STORY OF THE EXODUS

Scripture: Exodus 1-14

Points: God's judgement is slow but sure (on Egypt and Amorites)

God allowed a substitute sacrifice for the firstborn

God loves people and wants to rescue the oppressed

9. THE STORY OF THE LAW AND THE GOLDEN CALF

Scripture: Exodus 19-20,32-34; Lev 5:14-6:7; Deut 18

Points: God told his people what he hates (other gods etc.)

God prescribed sacrifices for sin

People easily disobey God since Adam

God punished but showed mercy when Moses prayed

God promised to send another prophet like Moses

10. THE STORY OF BALAAM

Scripture: Num 22-25; 31:16

Points: Divination and evil powers cannot harm God's people

Sin removes people from God's protection

11. THE STORY OF KING DAVID

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16, 24; 2 Samuel 5, 7

Points: God keeps his promises though it may seem to take a long time

God promised an eternal king from David's family to bring justice to the earth

12. THE STORY OF ELIJAH

Scripture: 1 Kings 18; 2 King 9:22

Points: The gods are in competition with God

God is vastly more powerful than the gods

God wants us to chose him and reject the gods

God controls the rain

13. THE STORY OF THE EXILE

Scripture: Deut 28:15,36-37; 2 Kings 17:5-23; 2 Chron 36:15-23; Lev 26:27-45

Points: God's judgement may be slow but it is sure and thorough

God especially hates idolatry

God can still forgive and restore any time people repent

14. THE STORY OF THE COMING OF JESUS

Scripture: Luke 1:26-35; 2:25-32; 8:22-25; Mk 9:14-27

Points: Jesus is the promised king who brings us justice

Jesus is for all nations, including us

Jesus is the Son of God, (more power than man)

Jesus has power over evil spirits and nature

15. THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Scripture: Deut 18:14-19; Luke 16:19-31

Points: Jesus is the promised prophet who gives us guidance

Jesus taught the powerlessness of the dead toward us

The dead now know the truth and wish they could tell us to believe in

Jesus, but they are not allowed to

We should listen to the message of the Bible to know the truth

Fate of ancestors who never heard

Believing dead go straight to God

16. THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Scripture: Matt 27:32-54; 28:1-10; Heb 9:11-12,24-27; Jn 5:25-29

Points: Jesus is the high priest who brings us to God

Jesus was the sacrifice as substitute, whose blood paid for us

Jesus rose to show that the sacrifice was accepted

People too will be raised, some to life and some to condemnation

People can live and die only one life, after comes judgement

17. THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Scripture: John 14:15-26; Acts 1:8; 2:1-13; Gal 5:22-26

Points: The Holy Spirit replaces Jesus as "God with Us"

The Holy Spirit gives us guidance and comfort

The Holy Spirit gives us power to serve God

The Holy Spirit gives us power to live holy lives

18. MANY PEOPLE JOIN THE BELIEVERS

Scripture: Acts 2:37-47; 16:29-34

Points: The people repented of their sins

The people believed in Jesus

The people were baptized

The believers loved and cared for each other

The people were from various tribes (ethnic groups)

19. PAUL WORKS FOR GOD

Scripture: Acts 26:9-23; 2 Cor 11:23-29; 12:9-10; 2 Tim 4:7-8

Points: Paul repented and believed in Jesus

Paul suffered a lot to work for God

Paul rejoiced in the suffering because he was close to God

Paul knew God would reward him

We may have to suffer for God, but God will reward us

20. THE END OF THE WORLD

Scripture: 1 Thes 4:13-18; Rev 20:10-15; 21:1-4; 22:3-6,12-15

Points: Jesus is coming back to this world from the sky

People will be resurrected

Jesus will judge everyone and reward and punish

God's people will live with him forever in joy

Wicked people will go to the lake of fire

Case Studies

The case studies are all based on true stories.

1. A wife in a polygamous home was a Christian. She gave birth to several boys, and finally had a beautiful baby girl that she had been longing for. One morning she woke up to find that her baby had died in the night. She

believed her mother-in-law, an ugly old woman, had killed the baby by witchcraft. The old woman even said something that made people believe that really she killed the baby. The mother found it very hard to understand why God would allow a witch to kill her beautiful baby.

How would you counsel this mother?

2. A missionary heard that one of the believers was sick, so she went to visit him. She carried him to the hospital. When he seemed to be better, the hospital discharged him. Later he became worse. Christians, including the missionary, visited him and prayed with him. Shortly before he died, the believer told the non-Christian members of his family that his soul was caught by a witch. The Christians and the missionary did not learn about it until after the young man died.

What could the missionary and the Christians have done to help the young man express his fears before he died? What could Christians say to such a person to help set him free from fear of witches?

3. A lady who was being taught by a missionary had a child with a sore leg. The relatives had told the mother that it was not a natural sickness, and they wanted to treat it traditionally. The missionary, however, persuaded the mother to let her take the child to the hospital. He was cured there and the mother was happy. Later, however, the child was being worried by epilepsy and the missionary took them to the hospital again. This time the child was not totally cured at the hospital. The mother later joined a “spiritual” white-robed church to get healing for the child, and was no longer interested in the missionary’s teaching.

Did the missionary make any mistakes in handling this case? Could she have handled it better, and if so, how?

4. A missionary was in serious need of firewood. There was a lot of dry wood in the village ancestral shrine, but no one could take it or the ancestors were believed to punish the person. The missionary wanted to use the firewood. The villagers did not forbid him, but warned him that if he did, the ancestors would make him terribly sick.

What should the missionary do? How would the case be different if the villagers themselves refused to let him take the firewood?

5. A missionary was asked by some of the people he was trying to evangelize to come and help them do communal farming. He noticed that before they began work in the farm, they offered some of the food they had brought by placing it on the ground and asking the ancestors to give them strength and protection for the day’s work.

Later other villagers asked the missionary to help them organize a communal farming group.

What should the missionary do about the custom of offering to the ancestors before starting the day’s work?

6. Some missionaries came to a traditional village where the gospel had never been preached before. They preached about Christ to the whole village, including the chief and elders. So the chief and elders met to talk about the new message. They decided to nominate one person from each family to join the missionaries for instruction. They would study the lives of these nominated people to see if the Christian message benefited them. If it did, the rest of the village would join. If not, they would reject the message.

What should be the missionaries’ reaction be to the decision of the elders?

7. A missionary was working in a village where one day a man from another place brought an idol or “bush devil” to the village. Very soon, people started falling down in fits of spirit possession at any time in any part of the village. The priest (the man who brought the bush devil) said that anyone who came to do an initiation ceremony and paid the fee could be protected from these possession fits. Several people were initiated and joined the cult. When the cult came out at night they demanded that every lantern in the village must be put out.

Should the missionary take any action? Towards his converts? Towards the whole situation?

8. The mother of a convert had a familiar spirit. This spirit used to possess the mother and pass messages from the spirit world to people in the family. The spirit had been passed down through the family from generation to generation. It would designate who was next in the family to be its medium after the present medium died. If the person designated refused he would fall sick or run mad. The spirit had designated this convert as the next medium. The convert was afraid.

What can the missionary do to help the convert?

9. A missionary started a teaching and evangelism programme in several traditionalist villages. He went from village to village in his land rover to do the teaching, and also gave used clothes and medical help to the villagers. He approached the villages as a unit and did not ask for individual decisions until the elders had understood and agreed. Several villages decided to embrace Christianity, so churches were established in them. However, the missionary had to go back to his country and he left local evangelists in charge of the work. The local evangelists did not have money to keep the land rover repaired, so soon they had no vehicle to go around in. They had no drugs to keep the medical work going, and they had no way of getting used clothes. When the villagers saw that these things were not forthcoming, they all left the church and decided to become Muslims.

What did the missionary do right and what did he do wrong? Could the sad situation at the end have been avoided, and if so, how?

10. A convert who was a senior man with two wives went to live in an unreached village. From the teaching he had received in his former church, he gathered the villagers and taught them the gospel. As an older man, he had their respect and they looked to him for teaching and advice. He took good care of his family and they were all Christians.

Should the missionary in that area allow this man to continue as leader of the new church since he is a polygamist? Why or why not?

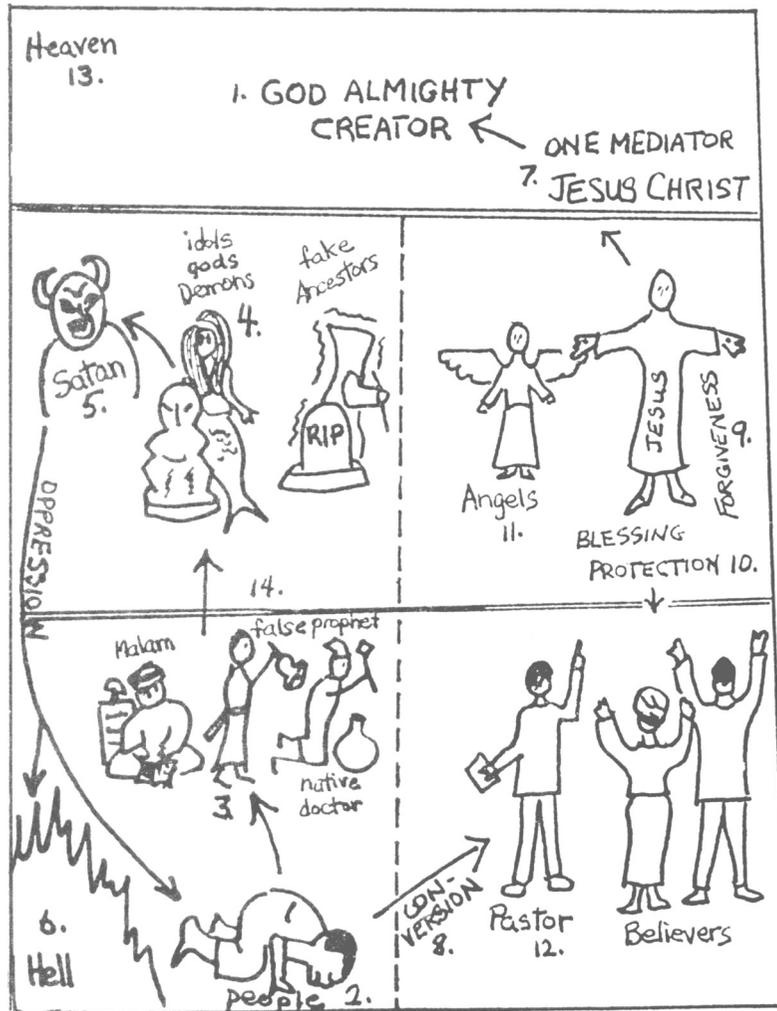
11. One day thunder struck the mission compound where a missionary was staying. The thunder did not do any damage, but the next day the traditionalist priests of the village came to tell the missionary that they needed to do a sacrifice in the mission compound. According to them, whenever thunder struck it was the way the gods or ancestors showed that they were displeased with the village. If sacrifices were not made, the gods would bring even greater punishment on the village. The missionary told them to wait until he could first see the village chief. Before he went to see the chief, the missionary looked up all the verses he could find in the Bible about thunder to see what God's view of thunder is. There he found that thunder is the voice of the Lord. He reasoned that if the Lord was speaking to them in the mission compound, it must be a message of blessing and not a curse. He explained this to the chief, and the chief persuaded the priests

that sacrifices in this case were not necessary. And in fact, it turned out to be a blessed year for the village.

What principles did the missionary follow which made him able to find a good solution to the situation? What might have happened if he had handled the case differently?

Appendix 1

One Mediator Teaching Chart



This teaching is intended for people who are new converts from Traditional Religion or who have been exposed to some Christian teaching already. The teacher must prepare by reading this lesson and looking up all the Bible verses in the Bible before teaching. These verses should be read aloud

during the teaching. The learner(s) can read them if possible. If this will make the teaching too long, there are two things you can do. Either divide the lesson into more than one teaching time, or, the teacher can look up all the verses and decide to read only one on each section, and give explanations while just talking about the other verses.

1. Start with God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, at the top of the chart. Everybody knows that he exists, even if they don't worship him directly. He is different from all other gods in that he is the creator. When the Bible wants to make a difference between God Almighty and all other gods, it says that he is the creator. Ps 96:5; Jonah 1:9 and Acts 14:15 are examples of this. He is all-powerful and completely good.

2. Down at the bottom we have ordinary human beings. They have many problems in life, and need help from the spiritual world. Many times, however, they don't go to God Almighty directly. They feel he is far away and maybe not interested in them or not in touch with them directly.

They are right about this, for the Bible itself tells us the reason for the separation between God and Man. In Isaiah 59:1-2 it says that our sins have made a separation between us and God so that he cannot answer our prayers.

But people still have their problems and they have to get help somewhere. Maybe the problem is sickness, lack of children, poverty, no work, poor crops or many other things. So people try to get spiritual help by going through some mediators.

3. First they go to human mediators. You see there are two lines right across the chart. The top line divides God in Heaven from the rest of the world. The line closer to the bottom divides the world that we can see from the things that we cannot see. The human mediators are in the world we can see. They are people like native doctors, *boka*, *Babalawo*, diviners, magic healers, idol priests or whatever they are called in each area. The Muslim *Malam*s who make charms and magic are also in this group of people, and so are the false "prophets" who tell people to bring gifts before they will pray for them. These people all usually demand payment for their services, and this adds to the problem of the person who needs the help.

These human mediators take the problem on to some spirit mediators. These mediators are called gods, spirits, ancestors, saints, etc. The human

mediators will also be calling on God but we will see why their cry cannot reach to God Almighty.

The Bible tells us that the gods and idols are really demons (Ps 106:37-38 and Deut 32:17). What about ancestors and saints? The Bible teaches that nobody who has died can make anything happen again in this world.

Luke 16:19-31 is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man made an appeal to Abraham to send somebody to preach to his brothers, but Abraham refused. You see now that the rich man was dead, he had no way to communicate with or affect the world of the living.

In Isaiah 14:9-10 the king of Babylon dies and goes to the world of the dead. There he is greeted by all the other kings who have died. This is what these formerly great men say: “You also have become weak as we are, you have become like us.” Now they are dead, all their power is gone.

In Ecclesiastes, the author is talking about life “under the sun”, that is, in this world. What he says applies to this world only. He says the dead know nothing, that is, they know nothing as regards to this world. See what it says in Eccl. 9:5-6

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

All this shows that people who are dead have no power to do anything in this world again.

If this is true, where do the messages and actions that are supposed to come from dead people come from? They must come from demons too. In fact, Paul tells us in 1 Cor 10:20 that all the sacrifices made by pagans are made to demons and not to God. See how these demons are cheating people by making them think their grandfather is getting a sacrifice, when really the demons get the whole thing!

The real ancestors are not pictured on this chart, only the demons who pretend to be ancestors to deceive men. The real ancestors go to God when they die to be judged. He is perfectly fair and right, and he decides where they should be and what should happen to them. (Christians also have a set

of wonderful spiritual ancestors starting from Abraham and including all the people who have also had faith in God.)

The demons are all under their leader, Satan, and they report to him. Satan is called the “god of this world”. When the human mediators call to God, it is really the god of this world who receives those prayers.

4. The demons receive the prayers of people through the human mediators. Of course, they don’t pass these prayers on to God Almighty. They pass them over to their master Satan. This is very serious because Satan is the enemy of man (1 Pet 5:8 and Rev 12:9). He is a liar, a murderer, and a thief who comes to kill and destroy (John 8:44; 10:10a). Is it good to let your enemy know what your problems are? Of course not! He will use that knowledge to bring about your downfall. But people who take their problems to the human mediators get their problems betrayed straight into the hands of their worst enemy, Satan.

5. Satan can work miracles, and many times people get what they think is help for their problem. However, Satan’s “help” is deceptive (2 Thes 2:9-10). Satan really wants to trap people and make them his slaves (2 Tim 2:26). Satan may solve one problem but give people another problem to make sure they keep coming back to him. He also uses his power to harden people’s hearts against the gospel. When people reject the true God, they get involved in more and more sins and problems (Rom 1:21-32). Satan is happy because he knows if he can just keep people on his side until they die, they will stay forever in hell.

6. Everything on the left side of the chart - Satan, the demons, the human mediators, and the ordinary people who seek spiritual help through them, will end up in hell forever (Rev 20:10, 15 and Rev 21:8).

7. But there is a way to escape from this terrible situation. There is a way to really get through to God Almighty and all His love and power. That is through the real Mediator. The Bible says in 1 Tim 2:5 that there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Jesus said in John 14:6 that he is the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Him. In Hebrews 9:24 it tells us that Jesus has entered heaven to appear for us before God. And in 1 John 2:1 we are told that Jesus is our “advocate”, our lawyer who pleads for us before God. This is why we can now come straight to God without fear (Heb 4:14-16). Jesus

also does for us all the things we hoped the ancestors would do. (See the chapter on Ancestors earlier in this book to expand this teaching).

8. If people can be converted, to turn away from the other ways of help and go to Jesus only, they can find this true way to God. The Christians at Thessalonica had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes 1:9). This was the message that Paul preached (Acts 14:15). When the people at Ephesus believed, see what they did (Acts 19:18-19). They confessed their evil deeds and burned all their charms and magic books, because they now trusted in Jesus alone.

There is a difference between a Christian and other people. Other people decide what it is they want, and go and tell the human mediators or the spirits. Thus, the people are the ones trying to get their own desires and will. But Christians try to find out the will of God. They want to please God, and they ask for things that God will be happy about. They can submit to God like this because they know he loves them and will take good care of them.

9. Jesus died to take our punishment in God’s sight for all the sins we have committed. When we come to him, we can then be forgiven. This removes the gap separating us and God. We can now come to God without fear or hindrance (Eph 2:18; Heb 7:23-25). We don’t need any other mediator than Jesus.

10. By going to God through Jesus (and he is God Himself), we get the true blessing that gives us all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3) and brings no other trouble with it (Prov 10:22). We also get protection from our enemy Satan and all his powers (2 Thes 3:3). No weapon formed against us will prosper (Is 54:17) and we are shielded by God’s power through faith (1 Pet 1:5).

11. The angels are God’s messengers that come to help us too (Heb 1:14). However, we are not supposed to pray to them or worship them (Col 2:18-19 and Rev 22:8-9). We do not see them, but we know that God sends them to help us. They are not mediators because they cannot take messages from us to God.

12. The pastor is not a mediator either. He is a fellow believer with us and he strengthens us and teaches us so that we will stay true to Jesus. (Eph 4:11-12)

13. Besides all the blessings and help Jesus brings to us here and now, he also will take us to heaven to be with God forever after this life. He is our Lord. We can ask him to help us with our needs, but he is the one we obey. If he knows that what we are asking for is not good for us, or if he has another better plan that we don’t know about, we obey him and wait for him to bring answers to our prayers at the right time. If we have to endure for a small time in this life, what is that compared to enjoying forever in heaven? Do not let impatience and lack of endurance push you over to Satan’s side. If you are on that side, you will have to endure FOREVER in hell fire.

14. Look at what God has to say in the Bible about the human mediators (Deut 18:9-14; Isaiah 8:19-20; Ex 22:18 and Lev 20:27). All their work is forbidden. (In fact, the Israelites were not to allow such people in Israel). God says that astrology too cannot help us (Isaiah 47:13-15). Why did God forbid their work and hate it so much? He did so out of love for us. He does not want us to be caught in Satan’s trap. He wants us to turn instead to the one true Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Appendix 2

Biblical Terms For Mystical Powers

The terms used in some translations of the Bible do not always correspond exactly with the way we use those words in ATR. For example, the “witch of Endor” was not a witch as witches are known in ATR. She was a woman who had dealings with a spirit. The Hebrew term, *’ov*, means a medium or the familiar spirit she deals with. The spirit comes up from the ground and is used to divine and contact the dead. It is used in the Bible eight times of the spirit and eight times to describe of the medium herself. The woman at Endor is called a “mistress of an *’ov*”. A word usually found with *’ov* is *yid’oni* from *yada* ‘ to know. It means “a knowing one”. The KJV translates it as “wizard” but the NIV as “spiritist”, that is, it had to do with knowing secrets more than cursing people.

There are two words used for divination. The first one, *qasam*, means to distribute, to determine by lot, to divine. Something was manipulated to get the answer. This was the practice of Balaam, the Philistines, Babylonians, Canaanites, Ammonites, and false prophets of Israel. It was prohibited in

Deuteronomy 18 and elsewhere. The nouns made from it to mean divination are *qesem* and *miqsam*. The other word is *nahash*, to practice divination, divine, learn by omens, observe signs. It could involve interpreting things that happened by themselves. The noun *nahash* is divination or enchantment, such as Balaam tried to do. *Kisheph* means to practice sorcery, in the sense of using spiritual powers to harm others.

Habar means to unite or join. Besides being used in the normal sense, it can mean tying a magic knot or making a spell or charm. The noun *hever* can mean a charm or incantation.

The Greek word used in the New Testament, for example about Elymas and Simon of Samaria, is *magos*. It could mean a wise man like the wise men of Persia that Daniel knew, and like the wise men from the east that came to see the baby Jesus. They claimed to know things from interpreting the stars and dreams. But it also often meant a person who used spiritual powers to do evil, so that sometimes in Greek, the word *magos* could be used to mean evil. The Greek noun *mageia* means magic as Simon practised it, and the verb *mageuo* means to practise magic. This was considered to be a sin by Christians in the early church, just as it is today.

The New Testament uses a group of words to describe occult arts based on the word *pharmakon*, meaning poison, medicine or drug. It could also mean a charm, just as “medicine” sometimes means in Africa. A person who practiced magic arts could be called a *pharmakeus* or a *pharmakos*. He was someone who made and used poisons, whether physical or spiritual. The verb, to mix poisons, potions or practice magic, is *pharmakeuo*. These are the words used in Gal 5:20 and Rev 22:15. The work of the *pharmakos* therefore is closer to what we describe in this book as sorcery.

In Acts 19:19, the new believers at Ephesus confessed their *perierga*. This term meant things belonging to magic. The same root was also used to describe people who poked their noses into what did not concern them.

In Galatians 3:1, Paul asks the Galatians, “Who has bewitched you?” He was asking them why they should have left the true way of salvation by grace to try to earn their salvation by works. The word for bewitch used here is *baskaino*. Another meaning of this word is to envy. The idea is of someone who sees something good which he is jealous of, and so he puts a curse on it.

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