

Dr Alexander Jebadu SVD

FAR FROM BEING
IDOLATROUS:
ANCESTOR VENERATION

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After summiting the thesis to my moderator at the Pontifical Gregorian University, on April 2, 2006 I sent one of its copies to Francis Cardinal Arinze who at the time was the president of the Pontifical Commission for Interreligious Dialogue. In a letter sent along with the thesis I told him that in this study I argued that, first, ancestor veneration is one of the very important values of the traditional religions that still plays a significant role in the lives of many Christians around the world especially in Asia, Africa as well as in other part of the world. According to many scholars, ancestor veneration is common to almost all indigenou religions. In Indonesian, for instance, they also claim that this religious piety of ancestor veneration remains at the core of Indonesian praxis in all the five universal or scriptural faiths recognized by the Indonesian government – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. Ancestor veneration is still widely practiced among Indonesian ethnic groups of Flores, Sumba, Timor, Bali, Jawa, Batak, Mentawai, Nias, Dayak, Toraja, Maluku, Melanesia and Papua, just to mention a few examples. In Indonesia this religious piety is still practiced both by people who have embraced Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism as well as by educated people such as former presidents of Indonesia – Megawati Sukarno Putri and late Abdurahman Wahid¹ (+31 December 2009). Based on my findings in this study, ancestor veneration is in fact not a religion in itself but only an aspect of a complex religious system. In addition, it was widely practiced in the world of antiquity such as ancient Egypt at the time of Faros, among ancient Indo-Europeans before Christian faith spread to Europe at the first century, and in ancient Semites – ancient people of Middle East – before the birth of Islam at the seventh century.

¹ Henri Chamber-Loir and Anthony Reid, *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia*, Honolulu: University Hawai Press, 2002, pp. xvii.

Second, ancestor veneration is far from contradicting Christian faith. It is not a practice of superstition as well, and it is not an idolatry as many as claimed by many. In this book, conversely, I argue that if this religious piety is well studied, it can be embraced as an integral part of the living out of Christian faith. They can be remembered and loved as the Church loves and honours her saints. I believe, this religious piety will enhance the growth of God's Kingdom in Asia and Africa as proclaimed by the Church.

For Christians in Flores, Timor, Sumba, Dayak, Batak, Toraja, Papua, (Indonesia), Melanesia, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central Africa, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Madagascar, China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, the Indigenous of Australia and Latin America as well as all Christians in other part of the world, which till today have been dubbed by many as people who embrace a so-called double-religion or dual religion simply because they practice their Christian faith and the values of their traditional religions side by side, this book will set them free. What they have been practicing is not a dual religion or a double religion and it must not be called so. Ancestor veneration is an aspect of religious practice that has a special place in Catholic faith and worship.

On May 4, 2006 Francis Cardinal Arinze responded to my letter. Writing from the Vatican City, he briefly thanked me and spoke high of my thesis as a study concerning a topic that is still very relevant: "You have treated a topic of wide interest. May the Lord bless and reward you with Easter joys and graces."

An abstract of this book entitled "Ancestral Veneration and the Possibility of Its Incorporation into Christian Faith" was published in *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, Vol. 36 No. 3, Utrecht, Nederland, 2007, pp. 246-280. Another abstract entitled "Ancestor Veneration in the Rainbow of Religious Pluralism" was published in *Studia Missionalia*, Vol.58, Gregorian and Biblical Press, Roma, 2009, pp. 157-190. While the Indonesian version of the book entitled *Bukan Berhala: Penghormatan Kepada Leluhur* (Ancestor Veneration Is Not An Idolatry) was published in May 2009 and the first print was sold out only in 4 months – May, June, July, August and September 2009 and it was reprinted again in November 2009.

I am aware that I managed to accomplish this study because of the help of numerous people to whom I am deeply indebted. I would like to express my whole-hearted gratitude to Prof. Christopher Shelke, SJ, for his creative and scholarly guidance, constant support and personal rapport. I also wish to thank all professors of the faculty of Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

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some light as to how their dear religious tradition of ancestral veneration should be well integrated in the Christian faith they have already embraced with whole hearts.

Ledalero, January 8, 2010

Fr. Alex Jebadu SVD

CHAPTER I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

1. 1. Problem Mapping of This Study

Religious practice that centres in honouring or venerating ancestors or the living dead still to this modern day plays a significant role in the life of many Christians around the world especially in Asia, Africa as well as in other part of the world such as Latin America, Melanesia and Australia (Aborigines). Before the Second Vatican Council it was not uncommon for Christians to believe that all cultures and other religions including the so-called traditional religions were regarded as evil. They were considered as satanic creations. They were by their nature the opposite of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Therefore missionaries of the Church who went to Asia, Africa and Latin America told the indigenous people to accept Christian faith as the only true religion and abandon their own. Many of them, in the process, did not comply with the demand. The Chinese Rite Controversy in 18th century in China is the best example in which Chinese emperors and their courts protested against the Church's policy that condemned the Confucian and ancestral rites, prohibiting native Christians from participating in the rites of ancestral veneration.

While many others chose to abandon their traditional religions publicly but still held and practiced it privately, even to this present day. Interestingly, after those hundreds of years traditional religions are still able to show their vitality and survive from the suppression and expulsion by the Church or by any other social entities. Many forms of traditional religions have come along and lived side by side with Christian faith. This reality gives us a hint that those traditional religions must have some good intrinsic values that have a capacity to nourish and nurture the life of their practitioners.

1.2. Goal and Scope of This Study

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church has renewed her view on other religions, on indigenous religious practices and cultures. While still firmly holding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation and the necessity of being incorporated into the Church as a means to gaining salvation, the Catholic Church admits some truths and good values in other religions and cultures and ever since the Church encourages her members to embrace the good values of other cultures and love other religious faith traditions through a means of inculturation and inter-religious dialogue.

In *Nostra Aetate*, for instance, the Church clearly declares: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in other religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women. Yet it proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 1:6).....The Church, therefore, urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussions and collaboration with members of other religious faith traditions.....” (cf. NA. 2).

Because of the new attitude of the Church inspired by the Second Vatican Council, traditional religions in the form of ancestral veneration still continue to play a significant role in the life of many Christians in Asia, Africa as well as in Melanesia and Latin America to this very present day. To some extent Christians in those part of the world – Asia, Africa, Melanesia and Latin America – practice a sort of a “double religion” or a “double standard of faith.” They, for example, receive both Christian initiation and their own indigenous initiation. They can pray and ask God’s blessings through a means of Christian prayer and also through a means of their own indigenous religious piety that centres on venerating, respecting, remembering and loving their ancestors in which they raise their petitions to the ancestors for blessings and protections in a two separate-parallel ways.

Toward this religious piety, it seems that not all people, including the pastoral agents of the Church, are in accord. There are some who are in favour of it and there are some others who are not. Those who agree with this indigenous religious piety see no contradiction between Christian faith and ancestral veneration. This group normally calls the ancestral veneration as a kind of traditional religions, of tribal religions or of traditional religions. But uninterestingly, till today the Church still does not have two fundamental things. **First**, the Church lacks of practical theology explaining that indigenous religious practice in the form of ancestral veneration is not contradictory but in accordance with the Christian faith. **Second**, the Church still lacks of a pastoral guidance that helps pastoral agents and Christians integrate harmoniously their indigenous piety in the form of ancestral veneration into Christian piety.

While those who have a negative view on the indigenous piety in the form of ancestral veneration have a proclivity to regard it as a idolatry, superstition, animism or necromancy. People who practice it are Christians by day and animists by night as stated by the President Pontifical Council For Cultures in its

survey on the Non Belief and Religious Indifference in March 2004. Without followed by an effort to studying and understanding the matter in depth, all these claims will remain unfounded.

This study has a least three goals. **First**, it intends to present religious phenomena in the form of ancestral veneration and its significant role in the life of Christians in Asian and African Continent. This study will focus more on the practice of ancestral veneration by various ethnic groups in these two continents. The results of this study, however, are still applicable to other various ethnic groups in other part of the globe – Latin America, Melanesia, Aborigines-Australia – where religious piety that centres in honouring, remembering and invoking the intermediary help of the ancestors still plays a significant role. **Second**, this study aims to develop a theological arguments/bases/foundations as to why the Asian and African indigenous piety in the form of ancestral veneration is not contrary with the Christian faith and so it should be embraced as part of the Christian piety. **Third**, this study also aims to set a practical theology and guidance for the Catholics in Asia and Africa or Catholics in any other parts of the world – such as indigenous Catholics in Latin America, Melanesia, Aborigines-Australia – and help them how to integrate this indigenous religious piety into Christian prayer and worship.

1.3. Organization of This Study and Its Methodology

This study is structured into 6 chapters:

First Chapter will display the problem mapping of the study, its goal, scope and methodology.

Second Chapter will display the relevance and the need for a practical theology of the living dead or the ancestors and reasonable veneration to them in the Asian and African Christian Churches. Descriptive and argumentative methods are employed here since this chapter aims to demonstrate that ancestral veneration has two universal fundamental truths, namely, its presuppositions of belief in life after death and of belief in the Supreme Being – God. To a simple logic, the dead are not venerated and invoked if the living do not believe that the dead are still alive in another world. Ancestors are never worshipped as God or gods but venerated as God's friends who are believed to be with Him in the heavenly realms. To achieve this goal, this chapter displays customs and beliefs of various traditional societies around the world regarding the nature human soul as presented in the studies of Herbert Spencer and Edward Burnet Tylor as well as some other scholars. This chapter is followed by the display of the maltreatment toward ancestral veneration in the historical records and the ambiguity of the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches today in dealing with ancestral veneration. Then this chapter ends with the display of three new theological approaches – biblical, Christological, ecclesiological – to properly understand

the ancestral veneration as presented by Fr. Roman Malek SVD and our critical evaluation upon the first two theological approaches, while favouring the last one – the ecclesial approach.

Third Chapter will display the fact that belief in the living dead and veneration to them are not only a widespread religious practice in various traditional societies in Asian and Africa today, but also throughout the world of antiquity. Ancestral veneration was, in fact, part of the religious piety of ancient Egyptians, Romans, Babylonians and in early Christianity, and then it slowly developed and transformed into a new form that is so-called devotion to the holy angels and saints. This chapter ends with a description explaining the nature of religious piety that centres in honouring the ancestors of the living dead. It will argumentatively prove that ancestral veneration is not idolatrous nor superstitious nor necromantic. Ancestors, in ancestral veneration, are not worshipped as God or gods but only honoured, venerated and loved because of their close relationship with God in the afterlife, exactly like what religious piety in the Catholic tradition that is called devotion to the holy angels and saints. In ecclesial approach, this chapter comes to a conclusion that ancestral veneration has a devotional character. The methods used in this chapter, suffice it to say, are description and exposition.

Fourth Chapter aims to display what, why, how and where is the place of the devotion to the angels and saints in the frame of the Catholic religious traditions as a spring board of displaying the religious piety of honouring, venerating and loving the living dead as a kind of devotion in chapter five. Description is the main method applied in this chapter.

Fifth Chapter aims to demonstrate that ancestral veneration is a devotion to the holy living dead, exactly like the devotion to the holy angels and saints in the Catholic religious traditions. Ecclesial theology of the Communion of Saints – the tripartite Church – is exposed in this chapter. The Church's concept of the Communion of Saints should include ancestors who are believed to be in heaven with God. They are the integral part of the triumphant Church in heaven and, together with the blessed Christians, they are worthy of being venerated and invoked by the pilgrim Church on earth, at least by their Christian living kin. Then this thesis ends with a conclusion that if ancestral veneration is well understood, it will definitely have double benefits to the Church. First, it helps the Gospel of Jesus Christ become incarnated in Asian and African land. Second, it can enrich the piety of the Church and serve as great stimulation of the growth of the Church in Asia and Africa, and not as an obstacle as some speculate. Third, it makes the Church truly Asian and African since ancestral veneration still plays a significant role in these two continents. In order to achieve these benefits, the Catholic Church, then, is

called to study ancestral veneration in depth and incorporate it into Christian Catholic devotion. The methodology employed herein is expository and argumentative.

1.4. The Limitations of This Study

- (i) There are various kinds of primal or traditional religions such as magic – both black and white – shamanism and necromancy, to mention only a few. As clearly stated previously, this study limits itself to studying a traditional religion that centres on the veneration of ancestors.
- (ii) This study does not base itself on an ancestral veneration of a particular tribe but on ancestral veneration in general that is still widely practiced by most Asian and African Christians. The question raised in this study does not focus on whether or not the traditional religion in the form of ancestral veneration still exists. Instead, it focuses on why it still exists, despite the suppression and expulsion in the past, and becomes part of the religious piety of Christians in Asia and Africa.
- (iii) This study also will not treat an ancestral theological issue having been widely debated by many African scholars and theologians. That is, Ancestor as a possible Indigenous Model of African Theology in which Jesus Christ is viewed as an Ancestor or Proto-Ancestor for the African local Churches or also for Asian particular Churches. Based on my observation, I believe that theological reflection concerning why peoples in Asia and Africa still in various ways communicate with their ancestors and approach God through their intermediation is more urgent than theological reflection regarding the need to address God or Jesus Christ as Ancestors or Proto-Ancestor.
- (iv) Ancestral veneration is still also widely practiced by some indigenous Christians of Aborigines in Australia, Melanesia and Latin America. Despite that fact, this study, however, – in bringing up examples here and there – will lean more to Christians in Asia and Africa. Even so, we presume that the theological reflection on ancestral veneration offered by this thesis can be universally applied.

CHAPTER II

THE RELEVANCE OF THEOLOGY OF

ANCESTRAL VENERATION

FOR THE ASIAN-AFRICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

There are at least two truths of ancestral venerations, that is, faith in the continuation of life after corporal death and faith in the existence of God as the only source of all life, both of the temporary life of man on earth and the everlasting life beyond death. Therefore, needless to say, religious piety that centres on honouring, loving and remembering the living dead is as old as human faith in the continuity of life after the corporal death and in God as the guarantor of human immortal life after death. Human life does not perish or disappear at the event of death. Instead, it continues in a new and different form. Based on this reality, ancestral veneration will continue to be part of man's religion as long as man continues to believe in the existence of the human soul, in its continuation after corporal death and in the Absolute Being as its guarantor.

As a matter of fact, such a belief is an integral part of the Judeo-Christian faith. Therefore, if this religious piety is well studied, it should not be suppressed or reprimanded or refuted as frequently occurred in the past, and it should not be an obstacle to the growth of Christian faith especially in many parts of the world where ancestral veneration is still widely practiced. Conversely, it can be nicely incorporated in the frame of Judeo-Christian faith and help foster the growth of the Church.

In order that this ideal be realized, there is a need to develop a practical theology explaining what and how ancestral veneration should be properly treated and why it is still relevant both to its practitioners and to the Church, and where its right place is in the economy of salvation in the frame of the great Judeo-Christian faith. This chapter aims to explore and lay out this ideal.

2.1. Ancestral Veneration Presupposes Faith in Life after Death

A very simple truth is the fact that there would be no ancestral veneration if there was no faith in the existence of the human soul and that this human soul continues to live after the corporal death. In order to verify this axiom, let us explore the work of Herbert Spencer and Edward Burnett Tylor regarding their theory of the human soul and of ancestral veneration.

2.1.1. Ancestral Veneration in the Work of Herbert Spencer

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a British philosopher and sociologist. As a sociologist he continued the branch of sociology pioneered by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) which he developed more extensively and systematically by using a large amount of collected ethnological materials. But precisely because of the sociological method he employed, his scientific-religious theory has a more distinctively sociological character than the *fetishist theory* of his predecessor Auguste Comte. The latter had very little specific social character and based his theory more on metaphysics. Herbert Spencer, on the other hand, had introduced a new important sociological factor in his scientific-religious theory, namely the ancestors.² One of his great contributions is that he used a sociological theoretical system to unfold the origin and development of religions which is clear in his *Principles of Sociology* (London, Vol. I 1876, Vol. II 1882, Vol. III 1896). The first 19 chapters of the Volume I deal with ideas regarding human life, death, resurrection, souls, spirits, afterlife, and cults of spirits. Chapter 20 is entitled “The Veneration of Ancestors in General” and is somewhat like a summary of the previous chapters.³ The following is what Herbert says regarding ancestral veneration:

- 1) Observing the totality of human population consisting of tribes, societies and nations, we find that almost all of them hold a firm faith in the resurrection of other “I” of a man after his death.
- 2) Within this category of peoples, we find that almost all human societies certainly believe in other “I” of dead man and hold that he – the other “I” – continues to live for a long time after death.
- 3) A group of people in various societies also practice certain rituals of reconciliation which are carried out not only at funerals but also at certain prescribed time-intervals after funerals.
- 4) Then, there is a group of modern people who have very advanced ancestral cults.
- 5) We, in addition, encounter a category of people who venerate the distinguished ancestors in a more special way than they do to the less important ancestors.
- 6) Finally, there is a category of people who venerate ancestors as their mediators.⁴

² Guglielmo Schmidt SVD, *Manuale di Storia Comparata delle Religione* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1934), p. 95 This book was originally written in German by Fr. Dr. Wilhem Schmidt as a manual for teaching at universities, seminaries and for private studies. It was translated in Italian by Giuseppe Bugatto. English translation is mine.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 96. English translation is mine.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97. The numeration here is from Fr. Wilhem Schmidt and the English translation is mine.

In the following chapters of his book, Herbert Spencer tries to demonstrate that other expressions of religions had their origin in the cult of ancestors. Thus, chapter XXI treats idolatry and fetishism, chapter XXII treats zoolatry, chapter XXIII treats cult of trees, chapter XXIV treats cult of nature, and in chapter XXV, as a conclusion, Herbert Spencer argues that the origin of gods or divine figures – God or Supreme Being – can be traced in the same way.⁵ In other words, Herbert Spencer says that human belief in God derives from human primitive awareness of life's continuation after death believed to be sustained the Supreme Reality – God – who is the creator and owner of everything including immortal life after death. Therefore, religion, according to Herbert Spencer, is more or less created by man to meet his longing for immortality. With this in mind, Herbert Spencer makes the following synthesis:

“Thus we find that in the existence of the supernatural beings of this kind, namely ancestral spirits, – as also in the existence of supernatural beings of every other religion – there is always a room where a human personality hides itself. All that exceeds from ordinary or savage things is imagined as something supernatural or divine. Thus a man can surpass above any other men and women. This eminent man can be an ancestor in time immemorial who still lives in the memory of the living. This ancestor is believed to be the founder of the tribe. He can be also a famous, powerful and belligerent leader. He can be a medical magician of great fame or an inventor of something new. But he also can be a person who is not biologically related to the tribe. For instance, he can be a notable foreigner, a master of arts and of sciences or a representative of a superior race who has imposed his power through a conquest. If in his origin, this ancestor is either one of these distinguished figures, and if during his life he was approached with filial piety this sentiment of respect usually will get augmented or increased after his death, and conciliation of his spirit obtains more attention than the consolation of other spirits that are less important, and in the end, this sentiment transforms into a right and proper cult. Then Herbert Spencer says that there is no exception for this rule. Using the phrase ‘ancestral veneration’ in a broad sense, in the way all forms of veneration of the dead are understood, whether they are related by blood or not, we can conclude and affirm that the veneration of the ancestors is the root of all religions.”⁶

Spencer's theory of religion has been largely criticized because he based his work on the theory of evolution. It did not gain favour in the spheres of the scholars of history of religions because it

⁵ Ibid., 97

⁶ Ibid., pp. 97-98

was evident that his point of departure is evolutionary theory. In addition to this opposition, there is ample evidence of inaccuracy in his documentation, in the years of publications and in the pages of the work quoted.⁷ Actually, Herbert Spencer was one of the principal proponents of evolutionary theory during the mid-nineteenth century, and his reputation at the time rivalled that of Charles Darwin. Spencer argued that the application of evolutionary theory is not limited only to biological organisms but also to philosophy, psychology and the study of society.⁸ Spencer's method is, broadly speaking, scientific and empirical. Because of the empirical character of scientific knowledge and because of his conviction that everything is in a process of evolution, Spencer held that knowledge is also subject to change. Thus, he writes, "In science the important thing is to modify and change one's ideas as science advances." In addition, Spencer's method was also synthetic. The purpose of each science or field of investigation, in his opinion, is to accumulate data and to derive from these phenomena the basic principles or laws which gave rise or birth to them.⁹ As a result of his view that knowledge about phenomena required empirical demonstration, Spencer held that we cannot know the nature of reality in itself and, therefore, there is something that is fundamentally "unknowable." Consequently, since we cannot know anything non-empirical, we, then, cannot know whether there is a God or what God's character might be. Though Herbert Spencer was a severe critic of religions and religious doctrines and practices, his general position on religion was agnostic. Theism, he argued, cannot be adopted because there is no means to acquire knowledge of the divine, and there would be no way of testing it.¹⁰

Now it becomes clear that Spencer's work regarding ancestral veneration aims to demonstrate the simplification of religion. That is, every great modern religion is a result of a long process of evolution of human quest for immortality. Religion developed from simple forms – such as of ancestral veneration – to more complex and heterogeneous ones. There are at least two things worthwhile noted here. First, if ancestral veneration are simply early forms of any great modern

⁷ Ibid., pp. 98-99

⁸ William Sweet, "Herbert Spencer" in *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/spencer.htm>, p. 1. In his work, Spencer treated religion as part of the study of society or sociology.

⁹ Ibid., p. 3

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4. It might be good also to know the milieu in which Herbert Spencer grew up. Spencer's father, George, was a teacher, unconventional man, and their family were Methodist 'Dissenters,' with Quaker sympathies. From an early age, [Herbert](#) was strongly influenced by the individualism and the anti-establishment and anti-clerical views of his father.

religions, they should be automatically extinct when they develop to modern and complex forms. In other words, people should automatically abandon primal religions, such as venerations to the living dead, once they encounter and embrace a more developed religion. Yet the facts tell us that great modern religions do not replace the practices of less complex religions such as those in the forms of ancestral venerations. The Indonesian archipelago, for instance, was consecutively penetrated by universal religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism around the middle of first millennium AD, Islam around the 14th century and Christianity around the 16th century. As a result, almost all Indonesians have embraced at least one of these great religions. Yet up to this present moment, respect for the deceased ancestors and devotion to them remain at the core of Indonesian religious praxis in all the five universal, scriptural and constitutionally recognized Indonesian great religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism.¹¹ Further, despite the fact that Herbert Spencer treated ancestral veneration simply to make a simplification of religion, he did testify that the widespread practice of popular religion that centres at venerating ancestors since time immemorial is based on a human belief that human life continues after the corporal death. Since time immemorial, the belief that the soul continues to live after death and still has a capability to interfere with the affairs of their living relatives is widespread.

2.1.2. Human Soul in the Frame of Edward Burnett Tylor's Animism

The second scholar who gives scientific testimony that ancestral veneration presupposes faith in life after death is Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917). He is one of the founding figures in the modern study of religion as a cultural phenomenon and of the more general topic of cultural anthropology. He wrote extensively on the hows and whys regarding language, myth, magic, superstition and religion. While at Oxford, he created the list of courses which would be necessary to receive a degree in anthropology. Tylor developed his idea of cultural evolution by arguing that earlier stages of a society's state could be discovered by studying "primitive" cultures – cultures which he called "survivals" because they have survived while other cultures have progressed. Particularly noteworthy in the study of religion is Tylor's arguments regarding Animism. According to Tylor, animism is a belief system which embodies everything in the world with a soul of some sort – but, more importantly, it is also the basis for all

¹¹ Henri Chambert-Loir And Anthony Reid “Introduction” in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid (ed.) *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia* (Honolulu: Asian Studies Association of Australia / Southeast Asian Publication Series,2002), pp. xvi-xvii

religious systems.¹² Consecutively, Tylor's concept of religion, animism and the human soul as well as the contribution of his theory of animism to ancestral veneration will be explored.

2.1.2.1. Definition of Religion

Tylor says that the first requisite for a systematic study of religions of primitive cultures is to lay down a rudimentary definition of religion. By requiring a definition as belief in a supreme deity or judgment after death, the adoration of idols or the practice of sacrifice or other partially-diffused doctrines or rites, no doubt will cause many tribes to be excluded from the category of religious. But such a narrow definition, according to Tylor, has the fault of identifying religion rather with a particular development than with the deeper motive which underlies them. So, in order to be able to include all religions of primitive cultures with their deeper motives, it is essential to set a minimum definition of religion as the belief in Spiritual Beings or animism.

It is essential to know that Tylor was a rationalist. In his anthropological studies, he found primitive religions neither fantastic nor unintelligent. Nor did he emphasize the imaginative and emotional side of the primal religions. Tylor's basic argument was against those who saw in smaller-scale societies either a degeneration or borrowing from large-scale ones, and those who claimed that not all primitive cultures had some sort of religion.

With this in mind, Tylor defended the minimum definition of religion by saying that based on the immense mass of accessible evidence, one has to admit that *the belief in spiritual beings appears among all primitive cultures* with whom Tylor attained a thoroughly intimate acquaintance. However, were it distinctly proved that non-religious cultures exist or have existed, these might be at least plausibly claimed as representatives of the condition of man before he arrived at the religious state of culture.

2.1.2.2. Animism

According to Tylor, the doctrine of Spiritual Beings, under the name of animism, embodies the very essence of spiritualistic as opposed to materialistic philosophy. Realizing the fact that the term animism is derived from a Latin word *anima* meaning *breath* or *soul* and that the belief of animism is probably

¹² "Edward Burnett Tylor's Biography"

http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/general/bldef_tyloredward.htm?terms=cal

Or http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/pqrst/tylor_edward.html

one of man's oldest beliefs, with its origin most likely dating to [the](#) Paleolithic Age, Tylor admitted that animism is not a new technical term. But this term is seldom used in a colloquial language. He avoided naming his theory *Spiritualism* because, although this term in a general sense refers to animism or souls, the word *Spiritualism* has some sort of defection. The word *Spiritualism* has become the designation of a particular modern sect who holds extreme spiritualistic views. Therefore it can not be taken as a typical representatives of all spiritual views in the world at large. The term *Animism*, conversely, can accommodate the general belief in spiritual beings including the term *Spiritualism* which suggests extreme spiritualistic views.

Tylor claimed that Animism characterizes tribes which are very low in the scale of humanity and hence ascends into the midst of high modern cultures after being modified by the process of transmission, but from its beginning to its present form, it preserves an unbroken continuity. Doctrines adverse to it are usually due not to early lowness of civilization but to later changes in the intellectual course or a divergence from a rejection of ancestral faiths. Such a new development in the form of rejection of or divergence from traditional ancestral faiths does not affect the present enquiry as to the fundamental religious condition of mankind. Animism, Tylor said, is, in fact, the groundwork of the philosophy of religion, from that of primitive men to that of civilized men. Although it may at first sight seem to be a bare and meager definition of religion, it will be found sufficient, for where the root is, the branches will generally be produced. In other words, "the belief in Spiritual Beings" (Animism), considered as a minimum definition of religion, is the basis or root of all great religious systems.

The theory of Animism divides into two great dogmas that form parts of one consistent doctrine. *The first dogma* is the one that concerns the souls of individual creatures. The souls of individual creatures (human souls) are capable of continuing their existence after death or after the destruction of the body. *The second dogma* is the one that concerns other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities.

Tylor affirmed that Spiritual beings are held to affect or control or influence the events in the material world as well as men's life here in the world and in the hereafter worldly life. They hold intercourse with humans and receive pleasure or displeasure from human actions. And due to this, the belief in the existence of spiritual beings leads naturally to active reverence, honor and propitiation. Thus, Tylor drew a conclusion that animism, in its full development, includes the belief in souls and in controlling deities and subordinate spirits. Throughout his anthropological studies, Tylor found that the *moral element*, the one great element of the religions of the higher or civilized nations that forms its vital part, *is indeed little represented in the primitive religions*.

But Tylor argued, it is not that primitive peoples have no moral sense or moral standard. For both are strongly marked among them, if not in a formal precept, at least in the traditional consensus of their society which we call public opinion, according to which certain actions are held to be good or bad, right or wrong. The problem is that ethics and philosophy, that are so intimate and powerful in modern cultures, seem scarcely yet to have begun in primitive cultures. Without some sort of ethics or moral precepts, no matter how simple they are in their forms, the primitive peoples would not have been able to survive as societies.

2.1.2.3. The Origin of Belief in the Human Soul

Tylor noticed in his cultural studies that all primitive peoples believed – and till today many modern men do – in the existence of the Spiritual beings. But the question is from where this belief stemmed. There are two possible answers: human biological phenomena or the actual unity of what follows.

2.1.2.3.1. Human Biological Phenomena

Tylor said that during the early stages it seemed that primitive peoples were impressed by two groups of biological problems. *First*, the biological problem in regard to what it is that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one. What causes waking, sleep, trances, diseases and death? *Second*, what are the human shapes which appear in dreams and visions?

Looking at these two groups of biological phenomena, the ancient philosophers of primitive peoples probably made their first step by the obvious inference that *every man has two things that belong to him*, namely, *a life* and *a phantom*. These two are evidently in close connection with the body, that is, ***the life*** as *enabling the body to feel, to think and to act*, and ***the phantom*** as *being the image of the body* or as *second self*. Both are perceived to be things separable from the body: ***the life*** is able to go away and leave the body insensible or dead, while ***the phantom*** can appear to people at a distance from the body.

2.1.2.3.2. The Unity of Life and Phantom

Tylor said that since both the life and the phantom belong to the same body, they also belong to one another and become the manifestations of one and the same soul. They are believed to distinctive but form only one entity and the result is the conception that is called *an apparition-soul* or *a ghost-soul*. This, at any rate, corresponds with the actual conception of the personal soul or spirit among the primitive peoples which may be defined as follows:

1) A personal soul is a thin unsubstantial human image. 2) It is a sort of vapour, film or shadow in its nature. 3) It is the cause of life. 4) It animates the thought in individual person. 5) It independently possesses the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner, past or present. 6) It is capable of leaving the body far behind, capable to flash swiftly from place to place. 7) It is mostly impalpable and invisible, yet it can manifest physical power, and especially can appear to men waking or asleep as a phantasm separate from the body of which it bears the likeness. 8) It continues to exist and appear to men after the death of that body. 9) It is able to enter into, possess and act in the bodies of other men (cf. *Shamanism*), of animals and of things.

Tylor made a note that though this definition or description of the nature of the human soul is by no means of universal application, it is sufficiently general to be taken as a standard, modified more or less by divergence among any particular people.

2.1.2.4. Samples of Popular Beliefs in Human Soul

Out of the vast mass of evidence, some details of the beliefs of the primitive peoples are selected to display the theory of the soul, the relation of the parts of this theory and the manner in which these parts have been abandoned, modified or kept up along the course of cultures.

2.1.2.4.1. The Concept of Soul as Shadow

To understand the popular concepts of the human soul or spirit, it is instructive to notice the words which have been found suitable to express it. The ghost or phantasm seen by the dreamer or the visionary is an unsubstantial form. It is like a shadow or reflection, and thus the familiar term of the *shadow* comes in to express the soul.

1) Thus the Tasmanian word for the shadow is also the word for the spirit. 2) The Algonquins describe a man's soul as *otahchuk* which means "his shadow". 3) The Quichè language uses *natub* for "shadow, soul". 4) The Arawak word *neja* means "shadow, soul, image". 5) The Abipones word *loàkal* serves for "shadow, soul, echo, image". 6) The Zulus not only use the word *tunzi* for "shadow, spirit, ghost," but they consider that at death the shadow of a man will in some way depart from the corpse to become an ancestral spirit. 7) The Basutos not only call the spirit remaining after death the *seriti* or "shadow" but they think that if a man walks on the river bank, a crocodile may seize his shadow in the water and draw him in. 8) While in old Calabar there is found the same identification of the spirit with the *ukpon* or "shadow" which for a man to lose is fatal.

Tylor concluded here saying that there are found among primitive cultures not only the types of those familiar classic terms, the *skia* and *umbra*, but also what seems the fundamental thought of the stories of shadowless men still current in the folklore of Europe and familiar to modern readers in Chamisso's tale of Peter Schemihl. Thus the dead in Purgatory as taught by the Catholic Church knew that Dante was alive when they saw that, unlike theirs, his figures cast a shadow on the ground.

2.1.2.4.2. The Concept of Soul as the Cause of Life

Other attributes are taken into the notion of soul or spirit with the special regard to its being the cause of life.

1) Thus the Caribs, connecting the pulses with spiritual beings and especially considering that in the heart dwells man's chief soul, destined to a future heavenly life, use the one word *iouanni* for "soul, life, heart". 2) The Tongans supposed the soul to exist throughout the whole extension of the body but particularly in the heart. 3) The Basutos say of a dead man that his heart is gone out, and of one recovering from sickness that his heart is coming back. 4) This notion corresponds to the Old World view of the heart as the prime mover in life, thought and passion. The connection of soul and blood, that is familiar to the Karens and Papuas, appears prominently in Jewish and Arabic philosophy. 5) To the educated moderns, the idea of the Masusi Indians of Guiana may seem quaint: that is, although the body will decay, "the man in our eyes" will not die but wander about.

2.1.2.4.3. The Concept of Soul as Breath

The act of breathing, characteristics of the higher animals (humans) during life and coinciding so closely with life in its departure, has been repeatedly and naturally identified with the life or soul itself. 1) West Australians (Aborigines) used one word *waug* for "breath, spirit, soul". 2) Certain Greenlanders reckoned two souls to man, namely, his shadow and his breath. 3) The Malaysians say the soul of the dying man escapes through his nostril. 4) Many tribes of Indonesia use the word *nyawa* for "breath, life, soul".

The conception of the soul as breath in fact also exists in Semitic, Aryan and in the main streams of the philosophy of the world. 1) The Hebrew word shows *nephesh* "breath", passing into all the meaning of "life, soul, mind, animal". While *ruah* and *neshamah* make the like transition from "breath" to "spirit"; and to these words the Arabic *nefs* and *ruh* correspond. 2) The same is in the history of Sanskrit *atman* and *prāna*, of Greek *psyche* and *pneuma*, of Latin *animus*, *anima*, *spiritus*. 3) Slavonic *duch* has

developed the meaning of “breath” into that of soul or spirit. The Gypsies use the word *dùk* for “breath, spirit, ghost”. 4) The German *geist* and English *ghost* too may possibly have the same original sense of “breath”.

Tylor noted that if anyone thinks that such expressions are merely a metaphor, they may judge the strength of the implied connection between breath and spirit by cases of the most unequivocal significance. 1) Among the Seminoles of Florida, for instance, when a woman died in childbirth, the infant was held over her face to receive her parting spirit and thus acquire strength and knowledge for its future use. 2) At the death-bed of an ancient Roman, the nearest kinsman leant over to inhale the last breath of the departing. 3) The Tyrolese peasants believed that a good man’s soul issues from his mouth at death like a little white cloud.

2.1.2.4.4. The Difficulty in Understanding the Mystery of Soul

Tylor also made a conclusion that in primitive cultures, men did believe in the existence of the human soul, but at the same time, they found it difficult to fathom and describe it in a human language. This is clear in the perplexity of combinations they gave explaining the mystery of the soul in different terms such as spirit, soul, image, shadow but still referring to the same thing: soul.

1) The Fijians, for instance, distinguished between a man’s “dark spirit” or shadow which goes to Hades (Hell) and his “light spirit” or reflection in water or a mirror which stays where he dies. 2) The Malagasy say that the *saina* or mind of a man vanishes at death, while the *aina* or life becomes mere air, but the *matoatoa* or ghost hovers around the tomb. 3) The Algonquin of North America believed in the duality of the soul: *One soul* goes out and sees dreams, while *the other soul* remains behind. At death, one of the two abides with the body, and for this the survivors give offerings of food, while the other departs to the land of the dead. 4) The Dakotas of Northern America believed that man has four souls: one remains with corpse, one stays in the village, one goes in the air and one to the land of the spirits. 5) The Karens distinguished between the “là” or “kelah” for personal life-phantom and the “thah” for the responsible moral soul. 6) Khonds, more or less under the influence of Hinduism, have fourfold divisions of souls: *The first soul* is the one that is capable of beatification or restoration to Boora the Good Deity. *The second soul* is attached to a Khond tribe on earth and is reborn generation after generation, so that at the birth of each child the priest would ask who has returned. *The third soul* goes out to hold spiritual intercourse, leaving the body in a languid state, and it is this soul which can pass for

a time into a tiger and transmigrates for punishment after death. *The fourth soul* dies on the dissolution of the body.

2.1.2.5. Animism Treated in Psychology

Based on the findings in his cultural studies, Tylor also claimed that primitive peoples believed in the existence of three other kinds of souls, namely souls of animals, souls of trees or plants and souls of inanimate objects. All three kinds of souls are recognized by a natural extension from the theory of human souls. But today the notion of souls of beasts or plants or inanimate objects is seen to be dying out. While animism seems to be concentrating itself on its first and main position regarding human souls. However, the doctrine of souls also has undergone an extreme modification in the course of cultures. Soul is rarely treated as *apparitional souls* or *ghost* as seen in dreams or visions. Today soul has become an immaterial entity. Tylor said that it is like “the shadow of a shade”. What Tylor meant by this is that the theory of soul today is becoming separated from the investigation of biology and mental science.

People today talk about the phenomena of life and thought, of the senses and intellect, of the emotions and the will, on a groundwork of pure experience that is known as “*psychology*” which no longer has anything to do with *soul*. The place of soul in modern talks is in metaphysics of religion and its role is to furnish an intellectual side to the religious doctrine of the future life. The conception of the human soul is continuous from the philosophy and religion of the primitive peoples to the philosophy and religion of the modern professor of theology. The soul’s definition has remained: it is an animating, separable, surviving entity and the vehicle of individual personal existence. The theory of soul is an integral part of religious philosophy which unites the primitive fetish-worshipper and the civilized Christians in an unbroken line of mental connection. The divisions which have separated the great religions of the world into intolerant and hostile sects are for the most part superficial in comparison with the deepest of all religious schisms, that which divides *Animism* from *Materialism*.¹³

¹³ All this part is summarized from the work of Edward Burnett Tylor “Religion in Primitive Culture” in Michael Lambek, ed., *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Boston: Blackwell Publisher, 2002), pp. 21-33. The system of numeration is mine. Despite the negative tone of E.B. Tylor’s language in dealing with primal cultures, his work does give us a great testimony regarding a wide spread belief in the existence of human souls or human spirits, along with other spirits world or celestial spirits and the continuation of life of the soul after the corporal death. As criticized by Wilhem Schmidt and many others, using theory of evolution as the paradigm, EB. Tylor’s study of animism aimed to search the origin of all great modern religions which he came with a great simplicity of

2.1.2.6. Tylor's Animism and Ancestral Veneration

Like Herber Spencer, his contemporary, Tylor's theory of Animism is based on his findings that all primitive peoples believe in the existence of human souls which are capable of continuing their existence after the death of the body and becoming spiritual beings that no longer destined to die. They even still affect human life in the material world and have intercourse with their living relatives. They can receive pleasure or displeasure from human actions. This kind of belief is, in fact, still widely practiced by many in Africa, Asia and Latin America which is ancestral veneration. Ancestral veneration does presuppose the existence of human souls and their capability to continue their existence after the corporeal death. As we demonstrate later, contrary to what E.B. Tylor claimed, ancestral veneration is not first of all a primitive form of religion or a religion in an early form and that ancestral form found in the modern world today is a primitive culture or a primitive religion that fails to reach a higher development. Instead, veneration of the ancestors is never religion in itself but an integral part of a great universal religion. Accordingly, the indigenous religious piety that centers on honoring or venerating the ancestors still plays a significant role in the life of peoples who at the same time embrace other great religions such Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, to mention only a few. Therefore, ancestral veneration in many ways and many forms still continues and will continue even in glamorous modern society marked by sophisticated technologies and advanced sciences. Since it is still practiced and it is part of the religious life of people in today's modern world, ancestral veneration can no longer be viewed as a sign of backwardness or primitiveness. Instead, it is an integral part of the religion of man of every age who is destined to face corporal death, yet still believing in the immortality of his soul. This immortal soul still continues to live in the nether world and in many ways it is still capable of relating with his living relatives.

2.1.3. Belief in Two Worlds Represented by Night and Day

A quite universal belief in the continuity of life after death can also be found in some legends and myths. We take Egyptian, African and Australian legends and myths as samples. First of all, in the religion of ancient Egyptian, the Absolute Being as the creator of universe and the single source of life for all creatures is the Great Mother. In Egyptian, she is called by name Apt or Kheb or Ta-Urt. This

conclusion: All religions, through a long process, has evolved from the belief of the existence of human spirit or soul. See also Wilhem Schmidt, *Ibid.*, "Manuale...." pp. 115-141

Great Mother was the One who *gave birth* (created) everything. Among *the children* (things) to which she gave birth (created) at the beginning were *Sut* and *Horus* who were born twins. These two were the primary elements of all things, that is, darkness and light or night and day. *Sut* was the power of darkness, while *Horus* was the power of light. In one representation, the two elements were imaged by means of the black bird of *Sut* and the white or golden bird of *Horus*.¹⁴ In the religion of ancient Egyptian, it was commonly understood that there are two elements, darkness and light, as symbols of sombre temporary life on earth and bright eternal life after death.

The category of temporary life and permanent life after death also is found in African traditional religions. Among the Zulu, for instance, there is a legend relating that in the beginning there were two mothers in a bed of reeds who brought forth two children – one black and the other white. The woman in the bed of reeds was Mother-earth (Absolute Being) who had been duplicated in the two Mothers who brought forth in space when this was first divided into night and day. Another version of the mythical beginning with a black and white pair of beings was found among the natives of Central Africa. The black man, they say, was crossing a bridge, and as he looked around he was greatly astonished to find that a white man was following him. These are the powers of darkness and day-light, who were portrayed in Egypt as the *Sut-and-Horus* twins, one of whom was the black *Sut* and the other was the white *Horus*.¹⁵

The aborigines of Victoria in Australia likewise say that the moon was a black fellow before he went up into the sky to become light or white. *Horus* in Egypt was the white man as an elemental power, the white one of the *Sut- and-Horus twins*, who is sometimes represented by an eye that is white. Whereas the eye of *Sut* was black. In the mythos, *Horus* is divinized as the white god. The children of *Horus*, who are known to mythology as the solar race, are the *Khuti*. These are

¹⁴ Gerald Massey “Elemental and Ancestral Spirits: The Gods and the Glorified” in *Ancient Egypt: Light of the World* <http://www.theosophical.ca/Book3AncientEgypt.htm>, p. 6 of 55 pages. This article is published by Canadian Theosophical Association established in 1924 which still has a link with The Theosophical Society in Adyar, Chennai, India. Their main website: <http://www.theosophical.ca/index.htm>, founded H. P. Blavatsky (one of the pioneer of New Age Movement). The movement sounds like a kind of neo-paganism; yet there are basic religious and spiritual truths in it which are still compatible to Christianity. According to the foundress of the Theosophical Society, the welfare of man is dependent on his recognition of the Divinity of his essential nature and when he forgets this, he lapses into materialism. The Theosophical Society was founded for the express purpose of preventing materialism from proceeding to such lengths as to destroy civilization.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7

the white spirits, the children of light. The solar race at last attained supremacy as chief of all the elemental powers and in the eschatology the *Khuti* are the glorious ones. The *Khu* sign is a beautiful white bird. This signifies a spirit, and the spirit may be a human ghost or it may be the spirit of light. Thence *Horus*, which is the spirit of light in the mythology or the glorified human spirit, is called the *Khu* in the eschatology. *The symbols of whiteness*, such as the white down of birds, pipe clay, chalk, flour, the white stone, and other things employed in the mysteries of the black races and in their mourning for the dead, derive their significance from white being emblematic of spirit or the spirits which originated in the element of light being the white spirit. The turning of black men into white is a primitive African or indigenous Australian way of describing the *transformation of the mortal men into spirit*. With the blacks of Australia, the secret wisdom is the same as that of the dark race in Africa. When a black person was buried, the word *Animadiate* was uttered which denoted that he was gone *to be made a white man*. But this did not mean that he became a European. Instead, it simply means that the dead man has gained a white glorious life after the corporal death.¹⁶

In a legend of creation preserved among the Kabinda, it is related that God made all men black. Then he went across a great river and called upon all men to follow him. The wisest, the best, the bravest of those who heard the invitation plunged into the wide river, and the water washed them white. These were the ancestors of white men. The others were afraid to venture. They remained behind in their old world and became the ancestors of black men. But to this day the white men come (as spirits) to the bank on the other side of the river and echo the ancient cry of “Come thou hither!” saying, “*Come, it is better over here!*” These are the white spirits called white men by the black races who have gained a glorious life after death.¹⁷

2.1.4. Belief in Soul and Afterlife in Several Traditional Societies

The customs regarding how traditional societies take care of their sick, how they deal with sickness and how they manage the burial of their dead also give us clues concerning a universal belief in the existence of the human soul and its life continuity after the death of the body. The following traditions are to be explored as our samples.

¹⁶ Ibid.,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 8

2.1.4.1. Prayer of the Living Dead in Egyptian Tradition

In ancient Egyptian tales, the dead in their tombs are depicted as being able to pray and converse about their life on earth and as having the power of leaving the sepulchre and mixing once more with the living on earth. The ancient Egypt's *Book of the Dead* – containing a story in a form of prayers recited by the dead in one of the ancient literatures of the Egyptians – is based upon a resurrection of the soul in Amenta and its possible return to the earth at times as a ghost for some particular purpose. In Amenta, the deceased prays that he may emerge from the world of the dead to revisit the earth. He asks that he may come forth with breath from his nostrils and with eyes which can see. We can see here that the persistence of the human soul in death and its transformation into a living and enduring spirit is a fundamental postulate of the Egyptian Ritual and of the religious mysteries. The burial of the mummy in the earth is coincident with the resurrection of the soul in Amenta which is followed by its purifications and refining into a spirit that may be finally made perfect. In the opening chapter of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the departing soul of the deceased pleads that he may be conscious in death to see the lords of the nether world and to inhale the “incense of the sacrificial offerings made to the divine host - sitting with them”. He prays: “Let the priestly ministrant make invocations over my coffin. Let me hear the prayers of propitiation”. He also pleads that when the *Tuat* is opened he may “come forth to do his pleasure on earth amid the living”. The Egyptians know nothing of death except in the evil that eats out the spiritual life. The real dead for the Egyptians are those that do not live a spiritual life. Those are the ones who are considered dead in the spirit world. All prayers and invocations of the living, their oblations and sacrifices are offered not to the *mummy* of the dead person but to his eternal soul. Their funeral feast was a festival of rejoicing and not of mourning. When *Unas* makes his passage it is said: “Hail, Unas ! Behold, thou hast not departed dead, but as one living thou hast gone to take thy seat upon the throne of Osiris”. The sacred rites were duly paid to the departed not merely “in memory of the dead”, but for the delectation of the re-embodied *ka* or soul that lived on in death. The dead were designated the ever-living. The coffin was called the chest of the living.¹⁸

2.1.4.2. Testimonies of Some Traditional Societies Regarding the Soul of the Living

Dead

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 26-27

All ancestor devotees believe that their dead are still living. The ancestral spirits whom they invoke and propitiate were once human and they are not animistic forces of external nature. Their belief in a personal continuity has ever been firmly based not merely on floated ideas but on phenomenal facts. They believe that the living dead are still able to reappear themselves to their living relatives. And evidence of their reappearance in human guise is universal.

1) The Karens say that a *Lâ* or ghost sometimes appears after death yet it cannot be distinguished from the deceased person. 2) According to the Eskimo, the soul or spirit exhibits the same shape as the body it used to belong to, but it is of a more subtle and ethereal nature. 3) The Tonga Islanders held that the human soul was the finer part of the body - the essence of the body that can pass out, like the fragrance that passes out from a flower. 4) The islanders of the Antilles found that the ghosts vanished when they tried to clutch them. 5) The Greenland seers described the soul as pallid, soft and intangible when they attempted to seize it. 6) The Zunis believe in what is the so-called "transmigration of souls". Based on this belief, they say that when a corpse had been burnt they still called upon the spirit to come back to the world of the living. It is held by them that the spirit lives on, although the dead body is reduced to ashes. 7) The Central African tribes hold that there is something beyond the body which they call pure spirit and that every human being at death is forsaken by the spirit. Hence, in their veneration of the dead, they do not venerate the grave but the living soul. All the prayers and offerings of the living are presented to the spirits of the dead. 8) It is common for the Yao to leave an offering beside the head at the top of their beds intended for the spirits who it is hoped will come and whisper to the sleeper in his dreams. Their spirits appear to them in sleep and also in waking visions. 9) The Banks Islanders pray to their dead men and not to animistic spirits. 10) The Vateans call upon the spirits of their ancestors whom they invoke over the *kava* bowl - that is, the divine drink which is taken by the seers for the purpose of entering into rapport with the spirits. 11) When the Zulu King Cetewayo was in London he said: "We believe in ghosts or spirits of the dead because we see them". But when asked whether the Zulus believed in God, he said they had not seen Him. For them the ghost demonstrates its own existence, while God is but an inference. 12) The Amazulu also affirm what King Zulu said: "We worship those whom we have seen with our eyes, who lived and died amongst us. All we know is that the young and the aged die and the shade departs". 13) It is a funeral custom of the Amandebele, one of the Bantu tribes, to

introduce the spirit of a deceased person to his father, his grandfather, and other relatives, of whose conscious existence and personal presence no doubt is entertained. 14) The Peruvians declared that the reason why they buried property with their departed friends was because they had seen those who had long been dead walking adorned with the clothes and jewels which their friends had buried with them. 15) West African have been so sure of their conscious continuity hereafter that when they were slaves in far-off lands they have killed themselves on purpose to re-visit and re-live in their old homes. 16) The Manyema tribe of Africa exulted in the assurance that after death the suffering ones would be able to come back when they were set free to return and haunt and torture those who had sold them into slavery during their life on earth. 17) The Karens hold that the dead are only divided from the living by a thin white veil which their seers can penetrate. 18) The Kaffirs, when fighting, used to leave open spaces in their line of battle for their dead heroes to step in and stop the gap in fighting for them shoulder to shoulder and side by side.¹⁹

2.1.4.3. Customs of Preventing the Soul of the Dead from Returning

There is a class of customs intended to prevent the dead from returning in spirit. The living will do anything in their power by way of propitiation, bribery, and flattery for the dead not to come back. All they needed in this life was supplied to them for the next food, drink, clothes, horses, weapons, slaves, and wives in abundance. For if the dead were in need of anything it was feared that they might pursue and haunt the living.

With this belief in mind, 1) the Zulu Kaffirs say that diseases are caused by the spirits of the dead to compel the living to supply them with offerings of meat and drink. 2) It was a custom of the Fijians to pour out water after the corpse to hinder the ghost from coming back since water is seen as the element opposed to breath or spirit. 3) The Siamese break an opening through the wall of a house, pass the coffin through, and carry the corpse round the house three times to prevent the spirit from finding its way back. 4) The Hottentots make a hole in the wall of their hut and carry the dead body through it, closely building it up immediately afterwards. They used to run a stake through the bodies of their suicides, bury them at the cross-roads, pin them to the cross and not allow them to walk or wander as ghosts. 5) An Australian aborigine will cut the

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 28-30

right thumb off the hand of his dead enemy, so that the returning ghost shall not be able to handle a spear or club if he should come back. 6) In a Greek legend, when Clytemnestra put her husband to death, she took the precaution of having him “arm-pitted” - that is, of having his hands cut off and bound fast under his arms, which was a Greek mode of doing an irretrievable injury to the ghost of the dead. 7) The Iroquois, on the death of a nursing child, take two pieces of cloth, steep them in the milk of its mother and place them in the hands of the dead little one so that it may not return in spirit from need of food to haunt and trouble the bereaved parent. They also think that the sleeping infant holds intercourse with the spirit world. Therefore, it is a custom for the mother to rub the face of the living child with a pinch of ashes at night to protect it from nocturnal spirits. 8) In Lapland, the mothers, when committing infanticide, cut out the tongues of the little ones before casting them away in the forest, lest the poor innocents should be heard crying and calling on them in the night. 9) The Chinook Indians declare that the dead wake at night and get up in search of food. 10) The Algonkins bring food to the grave for the nourishment of the shade which remains with the body after death. In doing this, they had an object, which was the ghost in reality and not a hallucination to be resolved into nothingness by any philosophy of dreams. 11) The necessity that was felt for providing the dead with food will account for the Buddhist doctrine of non-immortality for the man who has no children. In this way, the Manes - the spirits of the living - need provisioning. It is believed that the proper person to supply them is a son, and he who dies without a son to perform the sacrifice may be left like the poor souls in the Assyrian story who succumb to hunger and thirst and thus die out altogether as neglected starvelings. 12) It is said in the Dattaka-Mimansa: “*Heaven awaits not one who is destitute of a son*”. 13) The Inoits likewise have a custom of giving a new-born son the name of someone who has lately died, in order that the departed may have rest in the tomb. This is a mode of adopting a son for the service of the dead where the deceased may have had no son to make the offerings.²⁰

2.1.4.4. The Customs of Giving Offerings to the Living Dead

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the deceased prays that he may take possession in Amenta of the funeral meals that were and continue to be offered to him by his living friends on earth: “Let me have possession of my funeral meals. Let me have possession of all things which are ritualistically offered for

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 30-31

me in the nether world. Let me have possession of the table of offerings which was made for me on earth, the solicitations which were uttered for me that I may feed upon the bread of *Seb*". In the vignettes to the Ritual and other scenes it is noticeable how the female mourners expose their breasts and as it were offer their nipples to the mummy on its way to the dead. This agrees with the scene in a funeral procession of the *Badyas* in which women lean over their dead companions and squeeze their milk into the mouth of the deceased. King Teta in the Pyramid texts exults in Amenta that he is not left to suffer from hunger and thirst as a *Manes*. He is not like one of these poor starving. Homer describes the spirits as rushing to lap or breathe the blood poured out in sacrifice. When Odysseus entered Hades and the blood was poured out, the shades that drank of it were revived and spoke. The Zuni Indians of today reverence certain images or fetishes of the ancestral souls or spirits, images which they treat as their representatives of the dead. These are dipped into the blood that is offered in sacrifice. While performing this rite they will say: "My father, this day you shall refresh thyself with blood. With this blood shall you enlarge your heart!"

The Peruvians spread the funeral feast expecting the soul of the deceased to come and eat and drink. The Bhils, among the hill tribes of India, offer "provision for the spirit". The North American Indians paid annual visits to the place of the dead, and made a feast to feed the spirits of the departed. The Amazulu prepare the funeral meal and say: "There then is your food, all ye spirits of our tribe, summon one another. I am not going to say, 'So-and-so, there is your food', for you are jealous. But thou, So-and-so, who art making this man ill, call the spirits: come all of you to eat this food". There were economical reasons against carrying the worship back too far when worship consisted mainly in making offerings. A Yao will excuse himself from giving to his grandfather. He gives to his father, and says: "O father! I do not know all your relatives. You know them all: invite them to feast with you". Thus he makes his offering once and saves expenses.²¹

2.1.4.5. Customs of Communicating with the Living Dead

Belief in the living continuity of the soul after death also has lead many traditional societies to be able to communicate with their living dead in many mysterious ways. 1) A native Australian Birraark or medium lies on his stomach beside the dead body so as to speak to the spirit of the deceased, receiving and reporting the messages given to him by the dead man. The Birraark of the Kurnai were declared to be initiated into their mysteries by the spirits or mrarts whom they met in the bush. They say that it was

²¹ Ibid., pp. 31-32

from the spirits of the dead they obtained their replies when they were consulted by members of the tribe. 2) The Mandan Indians arranged the skulls of their dead in a circle. Their widows knew the skulls of their former husbands and the mothers knew the skulls of their children. The skulls were placed in the form of the spirit-circle in which the women sat for intercourse with the souls of the departed. 3) John Tanner bears witness to the reality of these phenomena amongst the Indian Medamen. He was himself inducted into the state of abnormal seership, and saw a spirit in the shape of a young man, who said to him: "I look down upon you at all times, and it is not necessary you should call me with such loud cries". 4) The Marian Islanders held that the spirits of the dead returned to talk with them. The dead bodies of their ancestors were desiccated and kept in their huts for the purpose of spirit-communion and oracles were supposed to be given from their skulls. This is probably one of the reasons why the ancient Egyptians kept making and preserving mummies. 5) A custom of the Acagchemen Indians is peculiarly enlightening in relation to totemic spiritualism. At seven years of age, the children are or used to be thrown into a trance by the medicine-men in order that they might learn from the spirit of the living dead in the guise of the zootypes such as a bird or reptile and adopt one as the child's own personal totem. The personal totem seen by the child in a trance was a prototype of the spiritual support extended to the novice by a protector in the spirit world.²²

2.1.4.6. Customs of Spiritual Medium

In several traditional societies, it was and still is, widely believed that a certain group of people have a special call or gift as the mediator between the living and the supernatural agent such as God, gods, the spirit worlds and the spirits of the living dead. In various and mysterious ways they can invite or demonstrate the existence of the supernatural beings and communicate with them. While those who do not have access to the world of supernatural beings have to make use of others.

1) Thus, the Egyptian priesthood pre-eminently exemplifies the idea that the incarnating power made use of certain persons as sacred agents, either male or female, for such a purpose. Hence, the higher order of priests were known as fathers in god. They were supposed to share in the divine nature with power to communicate a sort of *holy spirits* to others who desired to partake of its benefits. It is like the insufflation of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by modern religious impostors in Christianity today. The spiritualistic medium was originally revered not because he was a priest or king, not on account of his earthly office, but because of his being an intercessor with the super-human powers on behalf of mortals. 2) Among the Zulu Kaffirs, the mere political chief has been known to steal the

²² Ibid., p. 37

medicines and fetish charms, the information and the magical vessel of the diviner and seer, on purpose to confer the sacred authority on himself and then to put the spiritual ruler to death and take his place. 3) Among the Hottentots, the greatest and most respected old men of the clan are the seers and prophesiers or the mediums of spirit intercourse. Their practical religion consists of a firm belief in sorcery and the arts of the living medicine-man on the one hand, and on the other belief in and adoration of the powers of the dead. 4) Among the aboriginal races, the spirits of the dead are accepted as operative realities. They are dreaded or adored according to the mental status of the spiritualists. The sorcerers, the magi, the medicine-men, the witches and witch doctors are the spirit mediums employed as the accepted and established means of communication with the supernatural beings. Also witches, wizards, sorcerers and shamans who had the power of going out of the body in this life were feared all the more after death by many tribes because they had demonstrated the facts which caused such fear and terror. They had also been their exorcists and layers of the ghost whose protective influence was now lost to the living. One way of denoting that such beings were of divine descent was signified by the custom of not allowing them to touch the ground with their feet. This was not an uncommon kind of taboo applied to the divine personage as representative of the god. It was a mode of showing that he was not from this ordinary world but from another world or something between earth and heaven. 5) The Japanese Mikado was carried on men's shoulders because it was detrimental to his divinity for him to go afoot. One account of him says, "It was considered as a shameful degradation for him even to touch the ground with his foot".²³

2.1.4.6.1. Female Spiritual Medium

In some societies, the greater number of the mediums or possessed persons were women. It is the same today in modern spiritual phenomena. It is said of Yao people:

Their craving for clearer manifestations of the deity is satisfied through the prophetess. She may be the principal wife of the chief. In some cases an unmarried woman or a virgin will be set apart for god or spirit. The god comes to her with his commands at night. She delivers the message in a kind of ecstasy. She speaks with the utterance of a person raving with excitement. During the night of the communication her ravings are heard resounding all over the village. It was as a medium for spirit communication that the witch or wise woman attained her pre-eminence in the past yet is considered to have evil character today. Witchcraft is but the craft of wisdom. Witches were the wise in a primitive sense and in ways considered to be magical for assignable reasons.

²³ Ibid., pp. 38-40

But witchcraft and wizardry, magic and “miracle” would be meaningless apart from primitive spiritualism. The witch as abnormal seer and revealer was the most ancient form of the mother's wisdom. The spirit medium was the nearest approach to a human divinity. He or she was the born immortal who in this life demonstrated the existence of a soul or spirit beyond or outside of the body for a life hereafter. And as he or she was the demonstrator of that soul, they were the first to be accredited with the possession of such a soul, and this possession constituted him or her as born immortal.²⁴

2.1.4.6.2. Male Spiritual Medium

The divine man was the diviner, the seer, the sorcerer, the spirit medium with all the early races. In the Marquesan and the South Sea Islands the divine man was supreme, whether he was a priest, a king, or only a person of inferior birth and station. If he had the supernormal faculty, the *mana*, he was the human representative of divinity on that account. Among the Solomon Islanders, there is nothing to prevent any man from becoming a chief, if he can show that he is in possession of the mana - that is, the abnormal, mediumistic or supernormal power. With the Pelew Islanders the divine man is a spirit medium called a *korong*. They distinguish between the born *korong* and a person who may be temporarily possessed. The office of *korong* is not hereditary, and when the *korong* dies, the manifestation of the spirit in another medium is eagerly awaited. This is looked upon here, as elsewhere, as a new incarnation of the god, which shows that the reincarnation was one of *the power and not the personality* of the *korong*. It was the power of seership, not the individual soul of the seer that returned in the new avatar. The wizards who are revered by the Australian Kurnai are those who can “go up aloft” and bring back information from the spirits of the departed commonly known in many lands as “the ancestral spirit”.²⁵

2.1.4.6.3. Spiritual Medium as Protector

The spiritual medium ruled as a seer, a sorcerer, a diviner, a healer, who foresaw and uttered oracles, revealed superior knowledge by supernal power, and was looked up to as a protector, a guardian spirit, because he was held to be in league with the spirit world. He was seen as a divinity in a human form. The divine kings, the spiritual emperors, the gods in human guise, the “supernatural” beings, the intercessors for common people, whether male or female, were incalculably earlier than the physical

²⁴ Ibid., p. 41

²⁵ Ibid., p. 42

force hero, the political ruler or the ritualistic priest. Hence it is among the most undeveloped races, like the African and Melanesian, that these religious phenomena still preserve their early form. The spiritual medium was looked upon as a being loftily transcendent, a channel of communication for the gods and glorified in their intercourse with mortals. The Eskimos are not only willing but anxious that their *Angekoks* or spirit mediums should have sexual intercourse with their wives, so that they may secure children superior to those of their own personal begetting. The *Angekok* is looked upon as a medium for the descent of the holy spirit, and as such he is chosen to initiate young girls into the mystery of marriage. Those men who afterwards take the young women for wives consider this connection with the divine man a preparatory purification for motherhood. With other races it was looked upon as a religious rite for the bride to cohabit with the holy man or medium on the night before her marriage. There are instances, as on the Malabar coast, in which the bridegroom pays the holy man to lie with his wife the first night after marriage. With the Cambodians, the right to spend the first night with the bride was the prerogative of the priest. The Burmese extended families each have their spiritual director, to whom they send their daughter before her wedding night, and, according to the official phrase, "pay him the homage of the flower of virginity". A Brahman priest complained to the Christian missionaries that he was the spiritual purifier in this sense to no fewer than ten different women, not one of whom was his own wife. Descending from the chief as a medium to the man whose supremacy was acknowledged on account of his courage, we find that it was the custom of the Spartans for a husband to select a hero or brave man to lie with his wife to beget heroic offspring.²⁶

From what has been explored so far, it becomes clear that the so-called ancestral veneration depends entirely on the ancestors being considered living, conscious, acting and recipient spirits, and not as corpses mouldering in the earth. This is the sole reason for all the sacrificial offerings, the life, the blood, the food, the choicest and costliest things that could be given to the dead. Those whom we call "the dead" are to them the veritable living in superhuman forms possessing superhuman powers. With this in mind, the Egyptians consider Amenta in their ancient religious traditions as the land of the ever-living. Sacrifices to the dead are not senselessly offered to the senseless corpses, but to the spirit personages that are still alive and are supposed to be needing material nourishment from the well-known elements of life. While we can not prove or guarantee that the spirits of the living dead really need material nourishment, it should be kept in mind that this is not a central issue. The central point is that people almost universally hold that human souls still continue to live after the death of the body

²⁶ Ibid., 43-44

and the living assume that they still need things as their living relatives on earth do. The simple logic is that the living will never treat their living dead as such if they do not believe that their souls are still alive in the netherworld.

2.2. Ancestral Veneration Presupposes Belief in the Supreme Being

Ancestral veneration at its core also presupposes faith in the Absolute Being or God. Ancestors of the living dead are venerated because of their close relationship with the Supreme Being. They are assumed to have been with the Creator of life in the great beyond. They have become God's good friends and in many ways can play a role as His messengers. Because of their vantage of being with God, the living dead are believed to be able to communicate His will, help, protection and grace for the living on earth. Therefore, negatively speaking, the living dead are not worshipped but venerated or praised in connection with God as the Ultimate Being. In other words, without the Supernatural End – God – ancestors or the living dead are meaningless and – needless to say – can not be venerated. Because without God, they are not more or less than their living relatives on earth. Let us examine some facts from the many traditional religious traditions for the meat of our argument here.

The ancient Egyptian religious tradition clearly distinguishes two main classes of spirits or superhuman beings, namely, "the Gods and the Glorified". *The first class* were elemental powers divinized. They are superhuman powers born from the Great Mother called Apt or Kheb or Ta-Urt in Egyptian language. The Great Mother is the bringer forth of the four fundamental elements: earth, water, air and heat – which is another way of explaining the Absolute Being as the creator of all and the source of life for all creatures. *The second class* are the spirits of humans commonly called the ancestral spirits. They were once mortal which were propitiated as the spirit-ancestors which were called Manes of the dead in the ancient Egyptian Ritual book. The Egyptian deities were not the expanded ghosts of dead men as Herbert Spencer thought. Egyptian gods such as *Sut, Horus, Shu, Seb, Nnu; Ra, and Osiris* were gods and they were not expanded from any dead men's ghosts. The Egyptians had no god who was *derived from a man*. On the other hand, no human ancestor ever became a deity. It was the same in Egypt as in the rest of Africa, the spirits of the human ancestors always remained human. The glorified dead never became divinities. But there is a possibility that god reveals or is portrayed in human likeness. The elder Horus, for instance, is known as the divine child in a human shape. The god Atum in name and form is recognized as perfect man. But both of them are entirely impersonal

- that is, neither originated in an *individual child* or *personal* man. Neither was a human being divinized. It is only the type that was anthropomorphic.²⁷

The two categories of spirits are separately distinguished in the Hall of Righteousness when the Osiris pleads that he has made *oblations* to the gods and *funeral offerings* to the departed (Ritual Book chapter 125). The following citation from the same chapter of the Ritual Book furnishes a brief epitome of the Egyptian religion. On arriving at the Judgment Hall, the devotee would say: “I have propitiated the great god with that which he loveth. I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, a boat to the shipwrecked. I have made *oblations* to the gods and *funeral offerings* to the departed”. The statement shows that the divine service consisted of good works. It is primarily of charity. The gods and the glorified to whom worship was paid are: (1) The Great One God (Osiris), (2) the Nature-Powers or Gods and (3) the Spirits of the Departed. But the order in its development was: (1) The Elemental Forces or Animistic Nature-Powers, (2) the Ancestral Spirits and (3) the One Great God over all who was imaged phenomenally in the *Kamite trinity* of *Asar-Isis* in matter, *Horus* in soul, *Ra* in spirit, which three were blended in the Great One God. In the Hymn to Osiris (line 6) the ancestral spirits are likewise discriminated from the divine powers or gods. When Osiris goes forth in peace by command of *Seb*, the God of Earth, the *mighty ones* or gods bow their head, while *the ancestors* are in prayer. The Egyptian gods and the glorified were fed on the same diet in the fields of divine harvest, but are entirely distinct in their origin and character. 1)The glorified are identifiable as spirits that once were human who have risen from the dead in a glorified body known as *Sahus*. 2) While the gods are spirits or powers that never had been human, they were recognized, represented, and divinized as superhuman. The ghost, on the other hand – when recognized – was human still, however changed and glorified. But the Mother-earth had never been a human mother. The god of the Pole as *Anup*, the moon god *Taht*, the sun god *Ra*, had never been spirits in a human guise. They were divinized, and therefore worshipped or propitiated as the superhuman powers in nature, chiefly as the givers of light, food, and drink, and as keepers of time and season. These, then, are the goddesses and gods that were imagined by the human mind as powers that were impersonal and non-human. Hence they had to be envisaged with the aid of living types. Spirits, once human, manifest as ghosts in human form.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 1-5

It follows that the gods were primary and that worship or extreme reverence was first addressed to them and not to the ancestral spirits.²⁸

When criticizing Herbert Spencer's theory – that ancestral veneration is the root of religions and has slowly evolved to their present monotheistic forms – Wilhem Schmidt argued that monotheistic religion had already existed in many ancient traditional cultures. In other words, Schmidt said, it is not true that the present monotheistic religions are the result of a long process of evolution of ancestral veneration. Because, Schmidt further argued, besides the belief in the ancestral spirits, the traditional societies also still believed in the existence of various divine figures or gods who do not originate from the ancestors. They even clearly distinguished the ancestral spirits from spirit worlds or gods.²⁹ In addition, Schmidt again said that probably the founder of the clan or the first parent of all humanity was the first figure who lessened the role of the Supreme Being who came into the scene to mediate between Him and man, pushing the Supreme Being to the extent that man slowly began to feel that God is not near but far away. He is too powerful and very strict in His moral demands and punishments when His moral laws are broken. Therefore, man started finding trustful figures – the ancestral spirits – who could mediate between humans and God.³⁰ There is no way we can assume that this theory is true or not. There are at least two notes that need to be kept in our mind.

First, if ancestral veneration is the ancient form of the present modern monotheistic religion – as theorized by Herbert Spencer – ancestral veneration should have been extinct or disappeared as soon as the present modern monotheistic religions came into existence. Second, if ancestral veneration was born of the feeling that God is too great for man to approach and therefore he needs trustworthy figures, ancestral spirits – as claimed by W. Schmidt – then ancestral veneration should be abandoned by its practitioners once they are instructed that God is not far away, that He is loving and merciful despite that at the same time He is powerful or fearful. The fact tells us that ancestral veneration is still a phenomenon in many societies, including the ones that have long embraced the modern monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam. The

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 5-6

²⁹ Guglielmo Schmidt SVD, *Manuale di Storia Comparata delle Religioni*, Ibid., p. 112

³⁰ Ibid., p. 114

answer to this problem is that ancestral veneration is an integral part of any theistic religion, because it presupposes faith in the Supreme Being.

In regard to this, Henri Chamber-Loir and Anthony Reid give us a further answer. After studying a widespread phenomena of ancestral veneration throughout the Indonesian archipelago, they said: “In no society in Indonesia and probably in the world is the worship of ancestor a religion of itself. It is only one part or one aspect of religion. As ethnologist Hans Schärer (1963) remarked, we find no support in Dayak religion for the assumption that worship of the sacred dead is the beginning of the religious development, and from it, first spirit-worship and then the worship of a god or God developed. It is impossible to point out the ‘source’ of religious development...They conceived of religion as an essentially coherent and autonomous system derived from the knowledge of a unique god. The worship of the dead is based only on the conception of God and can only be understood in relation to it.”³¹ Probably this is the reason why so many traditional societies in Africa and Asia as well as at other parts of the world find it no wrong to venerate their living dead, while at the same time embracing one of the great modern theistic religions. And the Catholic Church should find a way to support this religious piety and incorporate it into the great Judeo-Christian faith.

2.3. The Maltreatment Toward Ancestral Veneration in the Records

It is not a secret that there are abundant historical records revealing stories about the lack of understanding toward the ancestral veneration in the past and even to this present time leading to suppression of its practices.

2.3.1. The Chinese Rite Controversy

Probably, out of many historical records regarding maltreatment toward ancestral veneration, the first famous example worthy to be noted is The Chinese Rites Controversy in China. Because of the space limit we can not discuss this controversy here at length. But suffice it to say, it is about different interpretations of ancestral veneration in China by Church missionaries.

³¹ Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, “Introduction”, *ibid.*, p. xviii

The controversy began with the arrival of the Jesuits on mainland China in the late 16th century led for most part by Matteo Ricci (1582-1610) from Italy. The missionaries had to decide how to interpret the Chinese traditional ancestral veneration rituals. They had to discern whether the ceremonies performed in honour of the dead were merely political secular rituals or whether they were religious rituals having some sorts of belief that contradicted the Catholic faith tradition. In the Directive of 1603, Ricci described the Jesuit position on Chinese ancestral rites saying that they were not superstitious in nature since they had not been conceived as such. But later on he recognized that there were a variety of beliefs associated with the ancestral rites that might not be compatible with the Christian faith. He qualified his statement by saying in his later writings that “perhaps” the ancestral rites were not superstitious.³²

After the death of Matteo Ricci (1610), the Pope gave other missionary groups permission to establish Missions in China: Dominicans (1631), Franciscans (1633), Augustinians (by 1680-s) and Parish Mission Society (1683). The arrival of these new missionary groups not only increased the likelihood of more Chinese converting to Catholic faith, but also increased the possibility of disagreement in interpreting the Chinese traditional ancestral rites – a disagreement that later on came to be known as the Chinese Rite Controversy. This controversy which began in the 17th century in the mission field of China spanned over 300 years. It involved not only the Bishop of Manila in the Philippines but also numerous popes, numerous cardinals serving at the Congregation for the Doctrine and the Faith, 2 apostolic delegates, 160 scholars at Sarbonne, the Kings of Spain, Portugal and France, Jansenists, Preachers Fenelon and Bossuet, the writers Leibnitz and Voltaire, the Jesuit confessor of Louise XIV, 2 Chinese emperors of 17th century and the 20th century Chinese and Japanese government officials. The controversy which formally began in 1633 did not end until 1939.³³

There were 3 major points in the controversy: 1) Whether the ancestral veneration ritual was civil in nature or if it had religious significance. 2) Whether the ceremonies performed in honour of Confucius by Chinese scholars at the time was secular or religious in its character. 3)

³² Beverly J. Butcher, “Ancestor Veneration Within the Catholic Church” in Tripod Vol. XVI No. 92 March-April 1996, Published by The Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 17-18. The controversy also is displayed at length in George Minamiki SJ, *The Chinese Rite Controversy from Its Beginning to Modern Times* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985). The entire book described the problem in detail with its intricacies and pain faced both by the missionaries and by Catholic Chinese and non-Christians as well.

³³ Ibid.,

Difficulties were encountered by missionaries in coming to agreement on the best Chinese word to express the Christian concept of God. Although all three issues involved in the Chinese Rite Controversy are important, the first issue is with what we are here more concerned. Before the rite controversy was put to rest in the 20th century, the Church had issued numerous decrees regarding the matter. The decree of 1645 proposed by the Spanish Dominicans passed judgement against the Jesuits who had claimed that Chinese ancestral veneration rituals were secular in nature – in other words they were not religious and therefore the Chinese Catholics could be allowed to participate in such rituals. Conversely, the Dominicans, supported by the Holy See, claimed that the Chinese ancestral veneration rituals were religious in nature – and they were not compatible with the Christian faith and therefore Chinese Catholics should be banned from performing as well attending such ancestral ritual ceremonies. In 1939, the Church ended the controversy with an ambiguous statement, declaring that ancestral veneration rituals including the one to Confucius are performed to demonstrate honour and respect. The decree also states that in former times the rites may have had pagan connotations, but with the passing of the centuries they were merely civil expressions.³⁴

There are two quick evaluations we need to make here. 1) In my opinion, the Jesuits' position claiming that Chinese ancestral veneration as merely secular or civil – backed up again by the Holy See 300 years later – is not right. It is not secular simply because it was performed by civil society or government. In the old days, as it is still in many societies today, there was no separation between religious and secular matter. 2) The Dominicans were right in claiming that Chinese ancestral ritual is religious in its nature, yet it is not incompatible with the Judeo-Christian faith. Ancestral veneration or veneration to the living dead in general is religious in its nature and can be incorporated in the Christian faith and can help foster the growth of the Church, if it is properly studied. This point will be explored more in the proceeding chapters.

2.3.2. Traditional Religions Through The Perspective of Christianity

It was not uncommon in the old days for the Christian faith to be imposed over local cultures and religions. Instead of elevating their primal beliefs and cultures, people in Asia and Africa as well as at other part of the world were told to leave their religious beliefs and cultures. In the

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 18-21

Philippines, for instance, all the tribal religious symbols were considered pagan and therefore must be burnt. People were forbidden to attend their native rituals. To become a Christian meant to forget their cultures, roots and beliefs. Interestingly, people were taught about the same God and other spiritual beings (angels and saints) but in a totally different language and different frame of philosophical thinking. People were introduced to the same God and other spiritual beings in a language they could not understand.³⁵ Instead of simply believing in God, people were taught to believe in the Christian God who had been rationalized: He is one in three persons. One person became man but still divine. Instead of believing in the traditional healing spirits and venerating and appealing to their good ancestors, people were taught to call upon angels and saints with whom they were not familiar. Because of this, Benigno P. Beltran dares to say that the Trinitarian aspect of Christianity has not, and probably will never, penetrate the consciousness of the tribal people of the Philippines and of Asia and of Africa by and large because the Christian faith has not been explained it in a way they can understand.³⁶

There are many lamentations upon the fact that Christian faith has been imposed excessively at the expense of African cultural values. Many Africans, as interviewed by Luarenti Magesa, argued that Christian missionaries had looked down on African (and Asian) religions, dismissing it as evil and pagan.³⁷ When talking about dialogue with primal religions, Fr. Ennio Mantovani mentions “ancestral veneration” as one of the classical examples of possible misunderstandings made by Christianity or any of the other great religions. He says that in Christianity, people obey God by, among any other means, honouring their father and mother as the Bible commands. If the dead in a given culture are an integral part of the community, then rituals – ancestral rites – to express and consolidate good relationship with the dead parents must also bring honour to God as much as the observance of the fourth commandment in Judeo-Christian faith. As a

³⁵ Oscar Alunday, Dialogue: “A Philippine Primal Religion” in Leonardo N. Mercado and James J. Knight, eds., *Mission and Dialogue: Theory and Practice* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989), pp. 37-41

³⁶ Benigno. P. Beltran, “Dialogue: The Poor in Smokey Mountain of Manila” in Leonardo N. Mercado and James J. Knight, eds., *Mission and Dialogue: Theory and Practice* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989), pp. 6-15

³⁷ Laurenti Maggesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 34

consequence, the omission of – and the condemnation of – those mortuary rituals in such a culture might be a disobedience to God.³⁸

2.3.3. The Struggles of Protestant Churches

By and large, Protestant Churches till today are still very cautious of and suspect the ancestral veneration as a religious practice that is contrary to the Christian faith. In Taiwan, for instance – according to the survey of a Lutheran Brethren missionary named Joel Nordtvet – ancestral veneration is considered as one of the most important hindrances to the spread of the Gospel. Therefore, traditionally new [Chinese](#) Christians are told not to continue their ancestor practices after they are baptized. Often a ceremony is held for the burning of ancestral tablets to make a complete break with these practices. Consequently, Christians are usually seen by traditional Hakka Chinese as being unfilial to their ancestors and unfaithful to their religious cultures. For the non-Christian Chinese, becoming Christians amount to cutting themselves off from their family lines. Joel Nordtvedt, however, while on one hand positively claiming that ancestor is not idolatry, judges ancestral veneration as a sort of religious practice rooted in a lack of understanding of the spirit worlds. Therefore, he further says, new Chinese Christians should be taught that Ancestral veneration is not necessary and misleading.³⁹

On November 16th 2002, a seminar held at Aletheia University in Tam-sui, Taiwan, brought together a number of scholars and clergy of Presbyterian Church to seek Christian way to face the common Taiwanese practice of [ancestral](#) veneration. In this seminary, some Presbyterian pastors and scholars said that if a broad view of the place of ancestors in a family system is taken, then their veneration can become a strong force for family unity. However, they further stated, much care must be taken in the degree to which Christians can be accepting of the veneration rites. One of the concerns brought up in the seminar is that if the ancestors – in

³⁸ Ennio Mantovani, “Dialogue with Primal Religions” in Leonardo N. Mercado and James J. Knight, eds., *Mission and Dialogue: Theory and Practice* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989), pp.48-59

³⁹ Joel Nordtvedt, “A Christian Response to Hakka [Chinese Ancestor](#) Practices”. Joe’s article is posted on this web: http://members.aol.com/taimission/hak_ance.htm (virtual version, no page). Despite his positively acknowledgment that Ancestral veneration is not an idolatry, Joel Nordtvedt is totally wrong in saying that ancestral veneration is a result of a lack of understanding of spirit worlds and therefore its practice is not necessary and misleading. As we will show in the following chapters, both ancient societies and today’s traditional societies – who still practice ancestral veneration – have a clear distinction between the spirits of the living dead and other spirits or spirit worlds. Ancestral veneration is an important religious practice and it is part of the core of the Christian faith, despite the fact that it is done in various ways based on the customs of a given society (The article of Joel Nordtvedt was originally published in the *January 1995 edition of Taiwan Mission*).

ancestral veneration – are to be regarded as gods or spirits whom humans worship. In response to this concern, Li Chiao, the Presidential office consultant of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, warns that if that is the case an important line has been crossed, since from the perspective of Christian theology, human beings are created and limited, but God is unlimited and singular. All Christians confess that there is no god but God. While *Tzeng Chong-ming*, a professor at Taiwan Theological College in Taipei, says that the problem of [Ancestor](#) worship is difficult to solve because the whole thing has gotten tied up with the idea of idolatry and it is difficult to separate the two. He points out that the Church should avoid lumping the ancestors with idols. Ancestors are not the same as "gods". Since even Taiwan's traditional folk religion makes a distinction between ancestral spirits and the spirit worlds, gods or God, and so Christians, too, should have differing attitudes towards them. Chong-ming says that many peoples of Asia and Africa believe that there is a need for people to be provided for after they have died. Ancestral rites have grown from this belief. The process of moving from the state of "family member" to "ancestor" does not separate one from the living. The [Ancestor](#) continues to dwell with the family. This can have a deep religious significance, but, he says, since the Protestant Reformation most talk of the dead among the living in Christian theology (Protestant Church) has been suppressed. Chong-ming is backed up by *Professor Tzeng Chiong-fa* from Tainan Theological College in Tainan City. Chiong-fa places some of the blame for the conflict between Christianity and Taiwan's folk culture at the feet of the foreign missionaries who spread the gospel and founded the churches in modern Taiwan. They were acting on assumptions based in the Protestant Reformation of 16th Century Europe when they condemned religious practices they did not take the time to understand. They should have taken the time to differentiate between those things that pertain to the ancestors and those which pertain to the One True God. The harmful result of the foundations they lay here, Chiong-fa further says, has produced alienation between Taiwan's Christians and their native cultures. But despite the positive tone of these scholars, a cursory survey of church practices in Taiwan finds that 60% of Presbyterian clergy adamantly opposed ancestral veneration by their members. More than 70% of the Presbyterian ministers surveyed indicated that they operate by the principles of gradual progress in dealing with the continued presence of ancestral veneration materials in the homes of Christian believers.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Gu Hao-ran, "Taiwan Christians Discuss The [Ancestor](#) Question" (translated by David Alexander)

Dr. Jack Partain, a professor a religion professor at Gardner-Webb College in Boiling Springs, North Carolina in USA, also gives a report regarding the dilemma faced by Protestant Churches in Africa in accommodating African Ancestral Veneration into Christian rituals and theology, as it is clear in the title of his article “Christians and Their Ancestors: A Dilemma of African Theology”. Partain notes that cult of the ancestors is the most common and essential activity in African traditional religion. Deceased ancestors are believed to remain close by. They are still part of the family, sharing meals and maintaining an interest in family affairs, just as before their death. Rites in honour for the dead are simple and omnipresent. The presence of the "living dead" is often acknowledged particularly at meals or when drinking. Small portions are set aside or spilled on their behalf. In times of extremity, expensive gifts may be offered to them to gain relief or enlist their help. Even African believers, who have assented to orthodox Christian belief and joined in the denunciations of the ancestor rites, still privately retain their loyalty to the tradition, especially in times of serious misfortune or death.⁴¹

Partain, then, goes on describing the dilemma or controversy among African theologians regarding the significance of Ancestral Veneration. Many theologians agree to incorporate ancestral veneration into Christian theology, while many others do not or at least are hesitant. Desmon Tutu, for instance, says that “a Christianity (in Africa) that has no place for them (ancestors) speaks in alien tones.” John Mbiti adds that “until Christianity can penetrate the spirit world, it will for a long time remain on the surface”. According to African theologians, the main tenets of traditional thinking about the spirit worlds do not really conflict with Christianity at all, but in fact parallel the New Testament understanding of a spirit-inhabited world. There is no

http://www.pct.org.tw/english/news2647_4.htm (virtual version, no page). This report of Gu Hao-ran was originally published in *Taiwan Church News* 2647, November 24, 2002. It seems that compared to the Catholic Church and Anglican Church, the Protestant Churches by and large has a difficulty to accommodate ancestral veneration because of two main reasons. First, Protestant Spirituality places no room for praying for the living dead since they do not accept the idea of purgatory as a place of purification of the living dead at which they are in need of prayers of their living relatives. Second, Protestant Churches places no room for praying through and with the living dead who are now with the Lord in heaven since they do not accept the special roles of the saints as intermediaries between God and the living or militant Church.

⁴¹ Jack Partain, “Christians and Their Ancestors: A Dilemma of African Theology” <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1078>, (virtual version, no page). Before teaching in Boling Springs, North Carolina, Dr. Partain taught at the Baptist Seminary of East Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, for 13 years. This article appeared in the *Christian Century*, November 26, 1986, p. 1066 or at www.christiancentury.org.

reason for Christian thought to be bound to a rationalistic, materialistic and scientific world view, as a group of them declared (1962): “It is not part of the Christian Gospel to impart a particular metaphysic, but to speak to each man where he is. . . . It is necessary to present the Gospel in a form which meets that large area of human experience which is essentially irrational”. The theologians also agree with the traditional belief that death is not the end of the story. Relations with a dead person, indeed, are different from relations with someone who is living. But there is a continuity. Death is but another passage. Family ties are not severed by death . The tribe or clan lives on. A more prominent approach is to define the relationship with the ancestors in terms of the communion of the saints. With this in mind, African protestant theologians, then, call to revive and give a new prominence of communion of saints from within the African context as John Taylor put it in a question in 1963: “Is it not time for the church to learn to give the Communion of Saints the centrality which the soul of Africa craves?”⁴²

Many other African theologians, however, still want to go easy with this endeavour. Despite the fact that ancestral veneration is very central in African traditional religions, they are still aware that this agenda is extremely delicate. They say that biblical evidence concerning relations with the dead is scant. Some traditional notions about ancestors cannot be accepted by Christians. For instance, Christians cannot accept the view that ancestors have power over living family members and deaths are caused by ancestors. And divination, a primary preoccupation of the ancestral cult, is entirely unacceptable. So, with all of these in mind, Partain ends his writing, saying that by incorporating ancestors into Christian theology, African theologians clearly flirt with danger. But the relationship to ancestors is so basic to the African sense of selfhood and society, and the pastoral problems created by negative and foreign approaches to the issue so widespread and destructive, that theologians feel compelled to attempt such a synthesis.⁴³

2.4. New Theological Efforts to Properly Understand the Ancestral Veneration

As we have seen, ancestral veneration had been widely misunderstood and misinterpreted in the past, and as the consequence of such a misunderstanding, it was condemned as magic, idolatry and polytheism. Belief in ancestors was mistakenly identified with beliefs in the spirit worlds,

⁴² Ibid., pp.3-4

⁴³ Ibid.,

especially the evil ones as popularly known in black magic.⁴⁴ On dogmatic level ancestral veneration was judged as a religious practice that was against the First commandment,⁴⁵ and on the moral level it was contrasted with the Fourth Commandment and considered as an obstacle to conversion to Christianity.⁴⁶ But neither those attempts to abolish ancestral veneration nor the increasing urbanization has managed to shake it. Both in traditional societies and many modern societies, ancestral veneration continues to play a significant role in the life of its practitioners.⁴⁷ It will not be shaken, for ancestral veneration is one of the most important elements of religious traditions in many cultures.⁴⁸ Probably due to this same truth, Carol R. and M. Ember say that – despite the fact that culture is subject to change – people normally cannot be expected to change an aspect of their culture (such as religious belief) that is central to their lives.⁴⁹

It has been obvious, then, that there is a fundamental truth in a religious piety known as ancestral veneration, that is, a belief in the existence of human soul, in its immortality and in the Absolute Being as its guarantor, and any maltreatment or any effort in the past to suppress it is

⁴⁴ In the following chapter we will further clarify those misunderstandings and prove that ancestral veneration is not magic nor idolatry nor polytheism.

⁴⁵ Ancestral veneration was judged as a violation of the First Commandment because ancestral veneration was misunderstood by Christian as a kind of worship. Ancestors or the living dead according to Christianity are merely humans and are not divine and do not become divine figures after death and consequently they can not be worshipped as God. But the fact is that ancestors or the living dead are never treated as divine figures in traditional religions and they are not worshipped but only venerated.

⁴⁶ Again, ancestral veneration was judged as such here because it was misunderstood as a worship, while according the Fourth Commandment, the living are to only respect and honour their living parents – and are not to worship them – and that commandment to respect and honour one’s parents does not prolong or go beyond death. In other words, God in the Fourth Commandment does not require the living to continue honouring and respecting their parents after their death.

⁴⁷ The Chinese who immigrated to the United States of American, for instance, still continue to hold and practice ancestral veneration. We can confer the story of a Chinese American Yang Ni entitled “Chinese Ancestor Worship in the USA” published by Tripod Vol. XVI No. 92 March – April, Holy Spirit Study Centre: Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 5-14. Or another example is “Chinese American Teens on Ancestor Worship Today” sponsored by the National Museum of Asian Art For the United States. These young Chinese Americans volunteer to set up a kind of Ancestor Worship Centre in the USA. These Chinese teenage students, who are mainly from Experimental School in Reston, Virginia and the Gaithersburg Chinese School, attended a series of workshops sponsored by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery - from Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, to learn about archival research, documentary photography, storytelling, and interviewing techniques — and the investigations began. The teens spoke with relatives in Taiwan to track down family photos and ask about funeral practices there. They also interviewed parents and other members of the local Washington-area Chinese community. They visited nearby temples and took photographs of current ritual practices. For further information, one can log on: <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/teen/research.htm> .

⁴⁸ Roman Malek, SVD, “Ancestor Worship I (General)” in Karl Müller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen Bevans, Richard H. Bliese, eds., *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History and Perspective* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 20-21

⁴⁹ Carol R-M. Ember, *Cultural Anthropology* (New Jersey, Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, 1999), p. 28

a blunder. Being aware of this truth, many Protestant Churches in Africa and Asia today have been trying to embrace ancestral veneration into Christian faith and considering to revive the article of faith – the Creed of the Apostles – of the “Communion of Saints as a path to let it get in.”⁵⁰ While the Catholic Church has implicitly opened her bosom to embrace ancestral veneration through the Second Vatican Council in which the Church officially admits the truths and all good values in other cultures and religious traditions. But it seems that till today there is no pastoral guidance as to how ancestral veneration should be treated in the life of the Church and how it should be incorporated into the Christian faith and worship.

Regarding how ancestral veneration should be treated, Fr. Roman Malek SVD briefly distinguishes three approaches as follows:⁵¹

2.4.1. Biblical Approach and the Critic toward this approach

A theological-biblical approach to ancestral veneration can be constructed on the basis of 1) *Wisdom 3:1-9* (sort of a religious counselling for the Jews in Alexandria influenced by helenistic cultures. Here they are told about the state of lives or souls of the just immediately after death in Sheol with the souls of the wicked until the Judgment, when they will be brought out to be with God)⁵², 2) *2 Mac 12:44f* (regarding the Israelites praying for their dead which presupposes that they believe that certain people might unworthy to go directly to heaven and accordingly need some sort of purification and in dire need of prayers of their living relatives), 3) *Lk 16:19-31* (regarding the parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Lazarus. The rich man is suffering in hell, while Lazarus is happy in the bosom of Abraham in heaven), 4) *Jn 11:26* (regarding eternal life after death promised by Jesus to those believing in Him during worldly life) and *14:1-14* (Last Supper Discourses in which Jesus proclaims Himself as the way, life and truth for all those believing in Him), 5) *1 Cor 15:15-52* (regarding the resurrection of Christ as the guarantor for the resurrection of the dead at the end of time or at the last Judgment), 6) *1 Thes 4:13f, 18* (regarding the hope for the Christian Dead. The author counsels his Christian community that death is not the end of life for Christian but a new passage), 7) *Heb 11:39-12:29* (regarding

⁵⁰ Ibid., cf. Jack Partain, p. 4 or Gu Hao-ran, p. 3

⁵¹ Ibid., Roman Malek “Ancestor Worship I” (General)...Ibid., pp.18-19

⁵² Adison G. Wright, S.S. “Wisdom” in Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer SJ eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 560

Christian examples of life, of disciplines and of disobedience that effect the eternal life after death) and 8) *1 Jn 3:2f* (regarding the picture of life after death with Jesus' life as its model)⁵³.

All of the biblical texts quoted above generally talk about the beliefs of the Hebrews in eternal life after death and in God as its guarantor. Yet they do not indicate any that the Hebrews had customs in which they invoked the help of the dead who were believed to have been with God – the point which is very central in African and Asian ancestral veneration. Due to the fact that ancestral veneration does not have its similarities in the Hebrew Scriptures, Eugène Lapointe said:

Coming to the Bosotho traditional *worship* (my suggestion: this word 'worship' here should be read *veneration*) of their ancestors, my first response would be to say it is impossible to reject altogether. My reason being that I do not see how it – ancestral veneration – can be condemned as totally wrong, although I cannot find anything similar in the Bible. We may find sacrifices and prayers offered for the dead in the books of Maccabees, but a *worship* or prayer to ancestors cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. Although the expression 'the God of our fathers' is often used, it is to God that the Jews pray, not to their ancestors. Jesus the same, because there is no *worship* of ancestors in the Bible does not mean that such worship is condemnable...⁵⁴

Therefore, these biblical quotations listed by Roman Malek SVD cannot be employed as point of departure in treating and understanding ancestral veneration. That these certain biblical texts happen to deal with the relationship between the living and the dead is the facts that can not be denied and they are coherent with the beliefs of traditional religions. But the problem is that what if the traditional religions have religious customs that do not have its coherence with Hebrew and Christian traditions, and at the same time the beliefs and customs of the traditional religions are not contrary to the literal expressions of the Hebrew and Christian Bible? The wise answer to this question would be that – as indicated by the Second Vatican Council – the truths and good values found in other cultures and other religious traditions such ancestral veneration cannot be turned down simply because we cannot find its parallel in the Hebrew and Christian Bible. Conversely, they should be embraced in order to enrich the Judeo-Christian faith. Various

⁵³ The brief biblical commentaries in brackets from number 2 to 8 are mine

⁵⁴ Eugène Lapointe, OMI, "African Ancestors Veneration and Christian Worship" in *Journal of Mission Studies*, Vol. II – No. 2 – 1995

biblical references as quoted by Roman Malek as model used to approach ancestral veneration would be appropriately treated as a sort of ancestral veneration in Judaism and early Christianity than as a point of departure in treating or approaching ancestral veneration in traditional religions.

2.4.2. Christological Approach and Critic toward this Approach

A Christological interpretation – an approach proposed by Bènèzet Bujo – treats ancestral veneration within the context of redemption. Ancestor veneration can describe a “memorative-narrative soteriology”. Jesus, after all, showed solidarity with the ancestors of goodwill (*descensus ad inferos*) so that they would find their fullness of life only in Him. That means that although righteous ancestors have never heard of Him, they have died in Christ and share community with Him. All righteous ancestors are secure in Christ, and the vitality passed on to their descendants flows from Him alone. According to this view, the practitioners of ancestral veneration can pray only to their ancestors and ask for their intercession through Christ. Hence ancestral veneration is an expression of solidarity within the *corpus mysticum* of that Christ who alone constitutes the future.

Another Christological approach would be based on the principle that Christ, through the incarnation and the work of redemption, is the only true brother and ancestor. Here the community of saints, who are also ancestors, pneumatologically speaking, and the human community with the redeemer are regarded as the foundation of Christian ancestral veneration. In this context, the Eucharist – the Lord’s Supper – is celebrated as an “ancestral ritual”.

While it is not impossible to view Jesus Christ as an Ancestor or Proto-Ancestor since He is the source and origin of all life – as it has been proposed by many African theologians – the image of Jesus as an ancestor is not without difficulties. And one of the difficulties is that ancestors in the common understanding of traditional religions are only human beings or creatures, while Jesus Christ is God or creator of the ancestors. Because ancestors are human beings or creatures, in traditional religions they are only venerated, remembered and asked for their mediations by their living relatives. Jesus Christ, on the other hand – since He is God – is not venerated but worshipped. In traditional religions, ancestral veneration has a devotional character like devotion to the saints in the Judeo-Christian faith.

In addition, Christological reflection which tries to view Jesus Christ as Proto-Ancestor and theological reflection which tries to understand the religious nature of ancestral veneration are two distinct subjects – one can not be replaced by the other. In Christology, Jesus Christ is viewed as Ancestor because Jesus plays a role similar to the role's of the ancestors of the Asians and Africans. One of the aims of this Christology is that Jesus Christ would be more familiar to indigenous Christians in Asia and Africa because Jesus has a role that is also pretty much played by the ancestors such as: protector and mediator. Ancestral veneration on the other hand deals with the fact living faith that multitude of ancestors are still alive in the 'underworld'/in heaven with God and still continue to influence the life of the living on earth. Ancestors are believed to play a role as God's emissaries for the living.

2.4.3. Ecclesiological Approach

Ancestor veneration is rooted in the relationship between the living and the dead. This relationship is also manifested in the veneration of saints. In this way ancestor veneration is reconciled with the Catholic Church teaching regarding the community of saints(cf. LG 49-51). The living and the dead form a close "communion", and the community of saints includes the community of the ancestors (cf. Eph 1:10) of the traditional religions.

This is an ideal approach in treating the ancestral veneration of traditional religions. Ancestral veneration is rooted in the relationship between the living and the dead, precisely like the relationship between the living and the dead in the concept of Judeo-Christian faith – the Communion of Saints.⁵⁵ Both ancestral veneration in traditional religions and saint veneration in Judeo-Christian faith have a devotional character which will be further explored in chapter IV and V. But prior to treating these two proceeding chapters, we need to explore ancestral veneration as a popular religious practice in chapter III.

⁵⁵ The only problem would be this: By defining communion of saints as a spiritual bond between the living and the dead which is based upon union with God in Christ through baptism, a question comes to whether this holy company includes all ancestors who had never heard or had never known Jesus Christ or only confessing Christians. Are saints limited only to Christian heroes? Or Do they also include the holy figures of the Old Testament World – as held by the Orthodox Churches such as judges, prophets – and the holy figures of the traditional religions or of other great religions such as Buddha (according to Hinayana/Theravada), Laotze, Confucius etc, provided they are believed to be with God in heaven? This difficulty will be further explored in Chapter V.

CHAPTER III

ANCESTRAL VENERATION

AS A POPULAR RELIGIOUS PIETY AND ITS NATURE

In the previous chapter the two principal truths of ancestral veneration on which ancestral veneration lays its foundation – faith in the continuation of life after corporal death and faith in the existence of God as the only source of life – were explored. This chapter aims to further demonstrate that religious piety that centres in remembering, honouring and loving the living dead is a popular religious piety and still plays a significant role in Asian and African Churches as well as in other Asian and African major religions. In other words, this religious piety is still widely practiced by Asian and African who claim to have embraced and espoused the Judeo-Christian faith for centuries. Toward this religious practice a bunch of question can be raised. For instance, why is it still widely practiced? Is it wrong to do so? If it is not, where is its proper place in the frame of Christian Catholic veneration? With these burning questions in mind, various attempts of many scholars to understand the character and nature of ancestral veneration will also be displayed.

3.1. Ancestral Veneration As a Popular Religious Piety

3.1.1. Its General Characteristics⁵⁶

As stated in the previous chapter, ancestral veneration, first of all, has something to do with people's world view and cosmology, with their belief concerning the human soul and the afterlife, with their regulation of inheritance and succession in their society.⁵⁷ In East Asia ancestral veneration has long been accommodated as part of the religious practice of Buddhism, and ancestral rites form a major part of the religious practice of Confucianism. It is generally acknowledged that ancestral veneration functions to uphold the authority of the elders, to support social control and to maintain the stability of

⁵⁶ The main material for this section is taken from "Ancestor Worship" by Helen Hardacre in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 263-264, aided by some other sources I found elsewhere as well as my own commentaries.

⁵⁷ Consequently ancestral veneration varies from one society to another, from one ethnic group to another and suffice it to say, it is far from uniformity – and like any other religious cultural traditions it cannot be "uniform" – but still have the same fundamentals. It is pretty much like many other great world religions. Christianity, for instance, with its so many branches and each branch has different views and outlooks on a certain things, is far from uniformity but at the same time they more or less still have some common fundamentals.

social values.⁵⁸ Especially in China, ancestral veneration is heavily motivated by an ethnic filial piety and obedience to elders.

The institution of “ancestral veneration” is properly regarded as a religious practice and not as a religion in itself. Ancestral veneration is not the only religious practice of a society, rather it exists as part of a more comprehensive religion or religious system.⁵⁹ It is generally carried out by kinship groups and seldom has a priesthood separable from the rest of the groups. There is no attempt to proselytize outsiders. Its ethical dimension primarily refers to the proper conduct of family or kinship relations. It does not have formal doctrine as such. Where texts exist, such as in the case of Chinese Society, they are mainly liturgical manuals. In addition, there is religious formal training for the members of the society and young ones who are supposed to carry on the religious traditions.

The ancestors or the living dead in general are believed to possess power somewhat equivalent to that of a deity, and hence they are considered to be able to influence their living kin to the same extent like the deities. Some conception of ancestors is strongly influenced by ideas of other supernatural beings in the society’s religious system. Ancestors are approached in prayer and asked to intercede blessings or allay misfortune, yet normally their effectiveness is regarded to be limited to the bonds of kinship. Thus, a member of a certain lineage prays only to the ancestors of his or her lineage. It would be regarded as nonsensical to pray to ancestors of other lineage. Members of other lineages, accordingly, are excluded

⁵⁸ This may be true for traditional societies who have not been sufficiently influenced by modern values and cultures such as democracy and individualism, to mention only two. But that is not the case for ethnic groups or societies which have embraced modern values and have espoused one of the major world religions but still continue to practice ancestral veneration. In many modern ethnic groups of Asia, ancestral veneration is not so much motivated by the desire to uphold the authority of elders or to support a stable social control. In modern society, social control is pretty much upheld by law. In contemporary Indonesia, for instance, almost all of the practitioners of ancestral veneration are those who have been Christians and Muslims for centuries. Cf. Henri Chambert-Loir And Anthony Reid “Introduction” in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, eds., *The Potent Dead...Ibid.*, p. xvi-xvii.

⁵⁹ That is why, like many other Christians, I intentionally use the phrase “ancestral veneration” or “veneration of the living dead” here and avoid employing the phrase “ancestor worship” or worship of the living dead” since ancestral veneration is never a religion in itself but only one aspect of it. Cf. Henri Chambert-Loir And Anthony Reid “Introduction” in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, eds., *The Potent Dead...Ibid.*, p. xviii; Helen Hardare, “Ancestor Worship” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 263; or E.N. “Ancestor Worship” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol.1 (Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton Publisher, 1973-1974), p. 835, or Igor Kopytoff “Ancestors as Elders in Africa” <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/Fdtl/Ancestors/kopytoff.html>, 12-13, or Maulana Karenga “Ancestor Veneration” in <http://www.senytmenu.org/ancestors.htm#faq>, p. 1. The practitioners of ancestral veneration still have some kind of belief in a supreme deity or in many deities that are higher and more powerful than their human living dead, even though in practice it is difficult to distinguish when a religious act – say for instance a bow – is regarded as an act of worship and when it is deemed as an act of veneration.

from the ancestral rites of kinship groups of which they are not members.⁶⁰ The religious attitudes involved in veneration of the dead include respect, love, sympathy, sometimes fear, and the one religious attitude that is especially dominant in Chinese ethnic groups is filial piety.

The ancestors or the living dead venerated⁶¹ through elaborate ancestral rites are those who in their lifetime had held positions of importance, with a good record of moral conduct, such as heads of families, lineages, clans, tribes, kingdoms and other social groups. Depending on the manner in which kin are organized into social groups, ancestral spirits venerated may be limited to only one sex – male ancestors – or may include both sexes – male and female ancestors. Among ethnic groups that trace descent only through males, for example, only male ancestors are significant,⁶² since the titular positions are normally held by males.

The ancestral spirits venerated also vary in nearness or remoteness in time from the living community. In some societies only the spirits of recently deceased are given attention. While in others, all ancestral spirits, both near and remote in time, are included in veneration. In still other societies, one ancestor that is real, honorary or mythical, may be the main focus of attention; and he is usually regarded as a hero.⁶³

Religious practice of ancestral veneration also includes all of the attitudes and acts usually associated with the veneration of gods and other spirits. According to some scholars, ancestral spirits are anthropomorphic conceptions that are similar to other supernatural beings. That is, the ancestral spirits are viewed as having qualities and capabilities of man but with a supernatural potency. Thus, it is imagined that the ancestral spirits can see, hear, feel, understand and communicate with the living. They can make a moral judgement. They are wishful, wilful, joyful, angry, stern, permissive, kind, cruel

⁶⁰ But in practice, there are always some exceptions. For many Taiwanese ethnic groups the inheritance of property also motivates the obligation to venerate the living dead who bequeathed it. An old man dying without a direct descendant can name as his heir a member of his lineage, perhaps one of the sons of his brother or even a stranger or a son of his friend. If the young man agrees to take the property, he must carry out veneration for his benefactor in return. For further information, see: Emily . M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973), pp. 150-155. Another example would be the contemporary Indonesian political leaders who visit and pray at the graves of their founding fathers asking for the nation their spiritual guidance and help. For further information, see: Henri Chambert-Loir And Anthony Reid “Introduction” in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, eds., *The Potent Dead*....Ibid., p. xv-xvi

⁶¹ E.N. “Ancestor Worship” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*.....Ibid.

⁶² This aspect varies from one society to another depending on its view regarding clan, social life and marriage, to mention only a few. According to people of Manggarai, an ethnic groups of Flores – where I am from – tracing descent only through males, women are legally incorporated into the clan of their husbands and enjoy the same full right as males in almost everything. After they die they are venerated equally as the male ancestral spirits by their living kin.

⁶³ E.N. “Ancestor Worship”Ibid.

and sometimes capricious. In a word, they are imagined to have all other emotions and traits of human beings. Almost all of elements of religious practices that are customary with regard to other kinds of supernatural beings are also found in rites of ancestral veneration such as respect and propitiation in the forms of prayers, offerings, sacrifices, maintenance of moral standards and festivals of honour that may include pageantry, music, dance and other forms of art. Where ancestral spirits are believed to directly control the affairs of the living, their continued favour is sought through established periodic rites; and their special aid may be requested at times of crisis. Perhaps the only truly distinctive ritual acts of ancestral veneration are commemorative ceremonies held annually or at other fixed intervals, and maintenance of graves, monuments or other symbols commemorating them.⁶⁴

The motives for acts of piety toward ancestral spirits are also diverse, and they are different from devotional acts toward gods or toward other spiritual beings in the sense that ancestral spirits in some measure are still regarded to be the members of the living kin. Consequently they are still believed to actively participate in the life of the living community. Gods or other spiritual beings, on the other hand, may be venerated; but they are never treated as part of the living human community. The rituals directed toward ancestral spirits include the aim to maintain communion with them in ways that reflect human regard for the deceased elders and desire to aid them in their spiritual existence. These rites and devotional acts also seek to gain spiritual and practical benefits for the living. The powers that the ancestral spirits possess vary greatly from society to society, as do the powers of other supernatural spirit beings. Their powers may be weak or strong, generalized or specific. In many societies, their supernatural roles include that of being intermediaries between the living community and the gods. In some societies where neglected ancestral spirits are thought to be harmful to the living, the motives of ritual observance may include or emphasize the desire to get protection from them.⁶⁵

3.1.2. Its Widespread Practices

This section aims to describe the practices of veneration of the living dead in various cultural areas and their importance to African and Asian Christianity as well as to other African and Asian religious traditions. Is this kind of religious piety unique only to African and Asian societies? Proposing this question, this part of the thesis will also demonstrate that religious piety, today commonly called veneration of the living dead, was part of the popular religious piety for the ancient Indo-Europeans, the ancient Babylonians, the Ancient Egyptians, the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians.

⁶⁴ E.N. "Ancestor Worship"Ibid.pp.835-836

⁶⁵ E.N. "Ancestor Worship"...Ibid.

3.1.2.1. In Africa

Like in any other traditional societies, an ancestral veneration practiced by various African ethnic groups normally forms only one aspect of an African people's religion, and, suffice it to say, it is never a religion in itself.⁶⁶ According to Diane B. Stinton, the vital role of ancestors in traditional African thoughts is beyond dispute, and it is apparent in numerous literatures that deal with African Religions and African Christianity.⁶⁷ Bénézet Bujo, one of the African theologians, claims that the notion of communion with the dead is central to the world view of African peoples, citing evidence from funeral rites, initiation rites, hunting ceremonies and others.⁶⁸ In most African societies, ancestral spirits are commonly viewed as an important part of the roster of supernatural beings. Especially in the old kingdoms and near kingdoms of sub-Saharan Africa, the spirits of kings and paramount chiefs were often regarded as generalized ancestors and were venerated by all members of society. Spirits of the heads of clans, spirits of a mythical couple and the spirits of founders of lineages as well as of deceased heads of individual families were also venerated. Ancestral spirits of kings and high chiefs were believed to have power over matters of concern to the entire society, such as rain and the growth of crops and cattle, whereas spirits of the heads of families, of lineages and of clans were believed to have power to influence matters of immediate concern to the particular social groups.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Helen Hardacre, "Ancestor Worship", ...Ibid. p. 265

⁶⁷ Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 112. In addition to the list of literatures given by Stinton, see also: Simon Bockie, *Death and The Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Antony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press, Inc., 1997); Mariasusai Dhavamony, S.J., *Jesus Christ In The Understanding Of The World Religions* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2004), pp. 32-40; Wande Abimbola, "The Place of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa: The Yoruba Example" in *African Traditional Religions in Cotemporary Society* ed., Jacob K. Olupona (Minnesota: Paragon House St. Paul, 1991), pp.55-56; Francis O.C. Njoku, cmf, *Essays in African Philosophy, Thought and Theology* (Enugu, Lagos: Claretian Institute of Philosophy Nekede Oweri, 2002), pp: 232-236; Luigi Vannicelli, "Il Cristianesimo e Le Religioni dei Bantu" in *Evangelizzazione e Culture III: Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia*, Roma 5 – 12 October 1975 (Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 1976), pp. 76-85; Declan Brosnan, OSA, "Anthropological Catechesis of the Birom, Jos, Nigeria" in *Evangelizzazione e Culture III: Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia*, Ibid., pp. 107-114; Eugene Lapointe, OMI, "Africans' Ancestors Veneration and Christian Worship" in *Journal of Mission Studies*, Volume II – No 2 – 1995, pp. 207 – 218, Charles Nyamiti, African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches, in *C.U.E.A: African Christian Studies*, Vol. 9 Num 3 September 1993, pp. 14-35, H. Exc. Mgr. Cyprien Mbuka, CICM, Auxiliary Bishop of Boma (Dem. Rep. of Congo), "Proclamation and Dialogue with the African Traditional Religions (Part I), <http://www.sedos.org>, p. 5, It also might be good to keep in mind that – as stated in Chapter I (regarding the limitation of this thesis) – it is beyond the scope of this section of the thesis to display every detail of ancestral veneration practiced in numerous ethnic groups in African continent. The reader is assumed to already have some knowledge about ancestral veneration. The aim of the author here is only to show the reader that ancestral veneration as a popular religious piety is widespread in Africa.

⁶⁸ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*....Ibid.

⁶⁹ E.N. "Ancestor Worship"...Ibid., p. 836

A result of African Traditional Religions and Cultures Studies promoted by several Episcopal Conferences of Africa indicates that the religious practice of ancestral veneration, sense of communion between the dead ancestors and the living, the links with the dead and the cult of ancestors, belief in life after death, symbolic acts showing communion with the dead, belief in the continuity of life and communion between the living and the dead, the strong bonds between the living and deceased relatives, prayer to ancestors in times of crisis are religious values universally acknowledged in many African countries till today. They are Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo Democratic Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia where the study was made.⁷⁰

Regarding the significant and vital role of ancestors in African thoughts, cultures and religious practices, Jean Marc Ela also makes similar affirmative comments. He says, for instance, that in many traditional societies, the cult of the dead is perhaps that aspect of African Culture to which the African is most attached – the heritage clung to above all else. Indeed, the cult of the ancestors is so widespread throughout Africa that it is impossible to avoid the questions this practice raises for Christian life and reflection.

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3.1.2.2. In Asia

As in the African continent, the significant role of ancestors in the traditional thoughts and religions of Asian peoples is also beyond dispute; and it is apparent in numerous literatures that deal with ancestral veneration and Asian Christianity.⁷² Among the many sources dealing with the study of ancestral

⁷⁰ Chidi Denis Isizoh, "Dialogue With African Traditional Religions in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Changing Attitude of the Catholic Church, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/changing-attitude.htm> (virtual version, no page)

⁷¹ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*....Ibid.

⁷² In addition to Henri N. Smith and Chi-Ping Lin cited below, see also: Daniel J. Adams, "Ancestors, Folk Religion and Korean Christianity" in Mrk R. Mullins and Richard Fox Youn, eds., *Perspectives on Christianity in Korea and Japan: The Gospel and Culture in East Asia* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), pp. 95-114; Jan-Martin Berensten, "Ancestors Worship in Missiological Perspective" in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), pp. 261-285; Gove Elder, "Response of Thai-Chinese Churches to the Ancestor Problem"... in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, Ibid. pp. 225-233; Daniel M. Hung, "Mission Blockade: Ancestor Worship" in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, Ibid., pp. 199-208; Myung-Huk Kim, "Historical Analysis of Ancestor Worship in the Korean Church" in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, Ibid. pp. 163-177; David Lia, "Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Worship in Taiwan" in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, Ibid., pp. 209-218; Clark B. Offner, "A Foreign Christian's Struggle with Japanese Concepts of Respect, Honour, Veneration and Worship" in Fritz Sprunger, ed., *Incarnating the Gospel in the Japanese Context* (Tokyo,

eneration in Asia, Chi-Ping Lin points out that ancestral veneration is possibly the most important traditional practice among the Chinese; and therefore, the Christian Church cannot afford to ignore this issue. Lin mentions the age-long battle on this issue between the Jesuits and the Dominican-Franciscan Priests within the Roman Catholic Church that was ended by the decree of Pope Pius XII in 1939 allowing the Catholics to participate in Chinese ancestral veneration. In the Protestant Church, the evangelicals and liberals were divided on the issue. While the evangelical missionaries opposed vehemently the ancestral veneration as idolatrous practice, the liberals, however, allowed it within the Church as a way of assimilating the Gospel into the Chinese cultures. This division of the two groups within the Protestant Church came to an end in the 19th century. Beginning in the 1960's in Taiwan, the government promotion of Chinese cultural resurgence has negatively affected the growth of the Church and caused a segment of evangelical leaders to reconsider the question of ancestral veneration. In order to assimilate the Chinese culture into the Church, Lin strongly supports the new movement known as 'Searching for Roots'.⁷³ In Korea Catholics and Protestants were persecuted and martyred at the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century because of their opposition to ancestral veneration. During the Japanese occupation of Korea (19410-1945), again Korean Christians suffered and faced martyrdom due to their resistance to the imposition of Japanese Shinto Shrine worship⁷⁴ – a religious practice that has something to do with ancestral veneration. In Vietnam, ancestral veneration – along with other religions – was considered as a kind of superstition by the Vietnamese communist government and was suppressed to a great extent, yet the veneration of ancestors has persisted despite the communist persecution and it survives till today.⁷⁵

Japan: Tokyo Mission Research Institute, 1988), pp. 74-83; Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, eds., *The Potent Dead: Ancestors, Saints and Heroes in Contemporary Indonesia* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Allen & Unwin and University of Hawaii Press Honolulu, 2002), Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in Chinese Village* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973); Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982); Jonathan Huoi Xung Lee, "Ancestral Veneration in Vietnamese Spiritualities" in *The Review of Vietnamese Studies* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Santa Barbara, California: 2003).

⁷³ Chi-Ping Lin, "Ancestor Worship: The Reactions of Chinese Churches" in *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, ed. Bon Rin Ro, (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), pp. 147-161

⁷⁴ Myung-Hyuk Kim, "Historical Analysis of Ancestor Worship in the Korean Church" in Bon Rin Ron, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices*, Ibid. pp. 163-177

⁷⁵ Nguyen Quoc Viet and Nguyen Dai Tuong, "Religions in Communist Vietnam" <http://geocities.com/suthatcsvn/hmrights/religions/chapter2.html> (virtual version, no page)

Let us now take a closer look at some ancestral veneration practiced in various Asian ethnic groups. In Melanesia the spirits of the dead are held to be important and in some societies are the focus of much attention. A good example would be the ancestral veneration of the Manus of the Bismarck Archipelago where Sir Ghost, the spirit of the living male head of the household, was tutelary god of the family and supervised the behaviour of its members. Only the spirits of the newly dead were venerated; and when the head of the household died, the old guardian god of the family was replaced. The skull of the deceased household head was placed above the entrance in the dwelling, where it watched the conduct of all within, giving rewards and punishments in accordance with their deeds and protected the family from the malign influences of the tutelary spirits of other families.⁷⁶ Elsewhere in traditional societies, ancestral spirits sometime were regarded important, but nowhere were they believed to be only primary supernatural beings. In aboriginal Polynesia, for instance, where people of high social status were regarded as descendants of the gods, the spirits of kings and high chiefs had power to help them; but they were never the objects of worship to any great extent.⁷⁷

Among the peoples of Asia, the classic of examples of ancestral veneration have been in China and Japan. In China the veneration of ancestors is extremely ancient. It has been an integral part of the religious piety of the Chinese people since the Dynasty of Shia (2300-1800 BC).⁷⁸ In China reverence for elders is an act of filial piety that has been elevated and strongly supported by Confucius (6th – 5th century BC). A family is viewed as a closely united group of the living and the dead relatives. Unity of the larger kin group is stressed through a devotional act at clan temples that honours the whole ancestral spirits altogether. The prime spots where the veneration is performed are homes, temples and graveyards. The motives for the veneration of the ancestors involve concern for the welfare of the ancestors who are thought to still require the care of their living kin and the desire to gain their heavenly help for the living community. Among the special occasions for performing the act of veneration to ancestors would be funerals and commemorative ceremonies including the death anniversary of the dead,⁷⁹ as well as engagement and wedding ceremonies. Both engagement and wedding ceremonies are held in the ancestral hall in which the ancestors are informed about the ceremonial event. The new daughter-in-law is introduced to them and the family requests their help

⁷⁶ E.N. "Ancestor Worship", in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 1, Ibid. p. 836

⁷⁷ E.N., "Ancestor Worship", in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 1, *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Jae-Suk Lee, "Il Confucianismo e Il Taoismo," (manuscript) lectures at the Faculty of Missiology – Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 2005, p. 5

⁷⁹ E.N., "Ancestor Worship", in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 1, *Ibid.*

and guidance for the bride and groom.⁸⁰ Ancestral veneration can be divided into *domestic veneration* and *lineage veneration*. Domestic veneration – also called domestic cult or domestic ritual – is ancestral veneration that is performed in the family houses. The veneration revolves around the tablet of the recently dead which are venerated in order to serve their needs. During the period of domestic veneration the ancestors are portrayed as living but dependent on the community of the living. Lineage veneration – also called lineage ritual – is ancestral veneration that is carried out together by a lineage. The hall where the lineage ritual is held is the ancestral hall or ancestral shrine. The ancestors who are venerated at the ancestral hall are those who have been dead long ago. This group includes the founding fathers of the clan or the earliest ancestors who are too remote from the living kin to be remembered. They are venerated by the group as a whole as symbols of its agnatic unity.⁸¹

In Japan, ancestral veneration is closely associated with Buddhism. Even though Japan has also been influenced by the social-religious ethic of Confucianism and some elements of Shinto, Japanese generally view ancestral veneration as having its own particular religious tradition. Like in China, Japanese ancestral veneration consists of elaborate funerals and many commemorative rituals at home, at temples and at graves. In addition to these special occasions, a great annual ceremony is also held to honour all spirits of the dead together and in which they are invited to come to the homes of their living community.⁸²

3.1.2.3. Ancestral Veneration in the World of Antiquity

This section aims to show that religious piety that centres in venerating, honouring, caring and loving the dead, in fact, is far from being unique only to the present day ethnic groups of the African and Asian continents. It was also a popular religious piety of the ancient Indo-Europeans, the ancient Babylonians, the ancient Egyptians, the ancient Hebrews and early Christians. Even to this day, it still survives in the likeness of the secularized-commercialized “Halloween” widely celebrated annually in Europe and North America.

3.1.2.3.1. Among Ancient Indo-Europeans

First of all, Indo-European group of races extends from Northern India to the Atlantic, and they speak kindred languages and have similar religions and social institutions. Races belonging to this group are

⁸⁰ Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Ibid. pp. 94-95

⁸¹ Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1982), pp. 86-147, see also E. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead... ..*, Ibid. pp. 92-138

⁸² E.N., “Ancestor Worship”, in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 1, Ibid.

the Arians of Northern India, the Iranians of Media and Persia, the Phrygians of Asia Minor and Armenia, the Hittite-Mitanni Group (once lived in northern Syria), the Slavs, the Greeks, the Latins, the Celts (once occupied the Northern Italy and the Alpine regions), the Teutons (includes the present Icelanders, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Dutch, Flemish, British and Germans). These are regarded as the main branches of Indo-European races, frequently called the Aryan race, though less correctly, since that name in fact only refers to Indo-Iranians.⁸³

3.1.2.3.1.1. Names for Spirits

The early Aryans, like other ancient peoples, understood soul as breath, wind, vapour, smoke, shadow and power. This understanding is evident in the names used for spirits in various Indo-European races such as follows: *atman* (Sanskrit meaning soul), *athem* (Germanic meaning soul), *athach* (Iranian meaning breath), *mànas* (Sanskrit meaning mind), *menos* (Greek meaning force) and *minerva* – from *menes-ova* (Latin meaning force). In the Vedas the collective term for spirits of the dead is *pitàras* meaning forefathers or *patres* in Latin, *pravashis* in the Avesta (sort of a Holy Book of Zoroastrianism). The word *fravashi* means ‘expression’ because the soul is thought to be the inner nature of man. In Greek the word *pneuma* means primarily ‘breath’ and then ‘soul’ and *psuchè* likewise means ‘breath’ and ‘spirit’.

In Latin *anima* means ‘breeze, breath and life,’ while *animae* refers to only the spirits of the dead. The ancient Romans also had what they called *Genius* stemming from the word *gigno* which means ‘beget’. According to the ancient Romans, in addition to the soul, every man has his *genius* and every woman has her *juno*. The genius was believed to be a sort of guardian-spirit who was born with a man and may have shared the man’s experiences in life and in death – an idea similar to the concept of *ka* in the ancient religion of Egypt. The spirits of the dead altogether were called *di manes* which means “kind gods” – an euphemism used to avoid mentioning their actual names.

The Celts of Gaul called their dead *dusii*, the word having the same root as the Lithuanian *dwase* which means ‘breath or spirit’ and *dùsas* which means ‘vapour’ and with the Old Slavs *duchù* which means ‘breath or spirit’ and *dusa* which means ‘soul’. The Great Russians called their dead *roditeli* which means ‘parents’, and the White Russian called them *dzjady* which means ‘grandfathers’. The Goths called their

⁸³ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1921), pp. 60-66

deified ancestors *anses*. This probably still has the same root as the Sanskrit *àsu* which means 'breath or life' and with Sanskrit *àsura* and Avesta *ahura* which means 'god or lord'.

All these names demonstrate that the ancient Indo-European religions did not perceive the spirits of the dead as something immaterial but as having an ethereal substance like the living body. This sort of belief is confirmed by narratives that the dead can appear themselves to the living and that they can communicate with the living and receive the offerings given to them by their living kin.⁸⁴

3.1.2.3.1.2. Powers of the Dead

In the view of Indo-Europeans, the future life was imagined as essentially similar to the present visible life. The dead were thought to dwell in communities and still carry on the same occupations they once had on earth. They were still in need of food, clothing and shelter, and they were not able to provide these needs for themselves but depended on the generosity of their living kin. Hence there was everywhere the need for sons to keep up the ancestral cults; and if there were no sons, others were adopted to perform their functions.⁸⁵ Along with these notions, the ancient Indo-Europeans also believed that after the corporal death the discarnate souls still continue to live on and gain certain powers as follows:

1) *The spirits of the dead possess superhuman powers of motion.* The souls are capable of moving at will and at any time with a great rapidity from one place to another. In the Avesta, it is said that when *fravashis* or ancestor spirits are summoned they come flying like well-winged birds. Thus the assumption that spirits of the dead can come when called to receive the offerings made by the living presupposes an extraordinary power of locomotion on the part of the dead.

2) *Spirits of the dead show themselves in the winds.* Since they were themselves 'breath' and 'wind', it was natural to think that they should reveal themselves in atmospheric phenomena. Thus, in ancient India and Persia, for instance, there was a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' winds. "Good winds" referred to the souls of friendly dead, while 'bad winds' referred to the restless souls of those whose proper funeral rites had not been held.

3) *Spirits of the dead can occupy inanimate objects.* The low caste tribes of India used to prepare small images to receive spirits of the dead. The noble Romans kept in their atrium the portraits of their

⁸⁴ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp.69-71

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 72

forefathers. The Celts had standing stones believed to be the dwelling places both for gods and the *manes* – spirits of the dead. All the Indo-European races believed that the tombstone had an intimate relation to the souls of the dead so that offerings were placed upon it.

4) *Spirits of the dead can occupy plants.* Among the Romans and Greeks it was customary to plant trees upon graves and it was believed that the souls of the dead inhabited these trees.

5) *Spirits of the dead can obsess the living.* The spirits of the dead were regarded hostile to the living, jealous of their health and well being and anxious to bring them into the same situation as themselves. In regard to this, the Rig Veda and the Arthava Veda contain a strong infusion of demonology. In VIII section 6 there is a long list of ghosts and all kinds of goblins among whom are thought to be the restless spirits of the dead. In the Vedic period in India the dead were more feared than loved and were believed to be constantly seeking new recruits for the kingdom of Yama. In Homer, the costly ceremonies of cremation were made to secure that the spirits of the dead might go to Hades quickly and would no longer trouble the living. Among the Romans it was believed that spirits of the dead wandered by night seeking to smite the living with fatal diseases.

6) *Spirits of the dead can possess the living.* Dreams were widely believed to be due to possession by the dead. In various parts of Greece there were chasms seeking to communicate with the underworld. Among the Celts, those seeking hidden knowledge would sleep on graves in the hope that they would be inspired by the spirits of the dead. A higher form of spirit-possession is when a man's mind is controlled by the indwelling spirit so that he becomes a medium through whom the will of the spirit is communicated. This is akin to the inspiration of prophets by gods. The phenomena of telepathy, of mind-reading and foreboding, of hypnotism and divided personality were understood by the Indo-Europeans to be due partly to possession by gods and partly to possession by spirits of the dead.

7) *Spirits can appear to men in bodily form.* The Indo-Europeans also believed that the dead can appear to the living but through a medium who has power to materialize spirits. Such spirits of the dead are usually divided in three groups:

First, the souls of those who faces untimely death, namely, miscarriages, children facing death in infancy, youths who died unmarried, married persons who died without children and women who died in childbirth.

Second, souls of those who suffered a violent death such as the murdered, suicides and those who died in war.

Third, the souls of those who did not receive funeral rites or did not receive the proper rites. These souls are believed to have a tendency to appear again to the living because they failed to enter the underworld in peace and are envious of the living. In Persia, such unhappy souls are all classified under the general name 'daeva' which includes human evil spirits. In Greece, the three classes of appearing souls were known as *àòroi* for the untimely death, *biothànatoi* for those having faced violent death and *àtaphoi* for those unburied dead. The ancient Romans also held ideas that souls of unhappy dead are apt to appear to the living.

8) *Spirits of the dead can possess superhuman knowledge*. It is believed that the dead are wiser than the living and that they know everything that is going on with their living relatives. They know when the offerings are prepared for them and when they are called to be present. They know the prayers addressed to them by their descendants. They know the future. With this in mind it is, then, understandable why in Homer all the ghosts who appear to the living are described as being able to deliver prophetic oracles. The entire 11th book of *Odyssey* is about the predictions which the shades – spirits of the dead – make to Odysseus.

9) *Spirits of the dead are able to bless the living*. Even though it is believed that the dead can be angry, nevertheless they also are believed to be generous in giving their blessings to their descendants when properly appeased. The Vedas, for instance, frequently speaks of the 'fathers' as blessing their posterity. In Persia, especially in time of drought, the *fravashis* are believed to fight for the interests of their living kin by hurrying up to the heavenly lake named Vourukasha and fighting with one another for water, not for themselves but for their own families, their own villages, their own tribes or their own countries in the living world. In Greece the bride, before leaving home, used to offer a sacrifice to ancestors for fertility and blessing upon her new family.⁸⁶

3.1.2.3.1.3. Veneration of the Dead

Because of the special superhuman powers gained by the dead, ancient Indo-Europeans regarded the dead as belonging to the class of gods – leading to their veneration, yet they were not confused with the powers of nature: The spirits of the dead formed a distinct class of superhuman beings alongside the

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 73-90

nature-spirits. In the Vedas, for instance, *dèvas* (gods) and *pitaras* (ancestors) are carefully distinguished. Both are believed to be divine and invited to the offerings. In Greece they were called “the ancestral gods”, in Rome “the parental gods” or “the good gods” and in White Russian “the sacred grandfathers”.

Veneration of the dead among the ancient Indo-Europeans can be categorized into *individual veneration* and *collective veneration*. In individual veneration, the ancestors who were addressed individually by their names were limited to the first three generations of ascendants, namely, the great-grandfather/mother, the grandfather/mother and the father/mother preceding the living kin. These were the ancestors that one still knew, and these alone were honoured by calling their names after death. That is why in India, the water is offered only to ‘three ancestors’. The Greek *goneis* (begetters), the Latin *parentes* (parents), the Great Russia *roditoli* (parents) and the White Russia *dzjady* (grandfathers) all include only three generations of ascendant that precede the living kin. Beyond these immediate ancestors whom the living kin had known in life, there was no individual veneration of the dead. Remote ancestors faded away into a mass of discarnate spirits of the dead. In India these remote ancestors were known as *pitaras* (forefathers), in Greece *δεοί πατροφοι* (the ancestral gods), in Rome *di manes* (kind gods). They were invited collectively to be present at the sacrifices but were not addressed by name. Unlike the three immediate ascendants, the remote ancestors were only venerated occasionally as a basis of unity for a tribe or community. If an individual remote ancestor was venerated, it was because of his or her distinguished role or service that he/she had rendered in his or her lifetime. Thus, a hero cult most likely arose from here.

The veneration of the dead was more of a family religious affair or a popular religious piety (*sacra privata*) than as an official public religious practice or worship of the great gods of the State (*sacra publica*). Only when a tribe or community was united in the veneration of a common ancestor or hero did the veneration of the dead taken on a national character. In addition, usually it was the duty of the State also to provide offerings for the spirits of the dead who had left no descendants to venerate them; and to this extent, veneration to the *di manes* in ancient Rome became *a sacra publica*.⁸⁷ The gladiatorial games of the ancient Romans were originally established by the Etruscans for honouring the dead. The Etruscans believed that when an important man died, his spirit needed a blood sacrifice to survive in the afterlife. In Rome, the first recorded gladiatorial games were held in 264 BC. Decimus

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 114-116

Junius Brutus Scaeva staged them in honour of his dead father. They were held between three pairs of slaves in the Forum Boarium. The ceremony was called a *munus* which means ‘a duty paid to a dead ancestor by his descendants with the intention of keeping alive his memory’. The ceremony of *munus* was held for notable dead people and was repeated every fifth year after the person’s death.⁸⁸

As for the times of the sacrifice to the dead, the third, sixth and ninth days after entombment were regarded as of special importance among the Aryans, the Prussians and Lithuanians. The three-day interval between these commemorations corresponds to the three days that elapse between the day of death and the day of interment. In Greece the *τρίτα*, the third day after burial, and the *ένατα*, the ninth day after burial, were considered to be of special importance for which a meal was poured upon the grave. It was widely believed by the Greeks that the spirits of the unburied, of those who died untimely deaths and of the unmarried appeared to the living on the night of the death day or on 6th day after the funeral.

The ancient Romans also had a celebration on the third day after entombment and a very special one on the ninth day after entombment called *novendialis*. It is said that the attendance of the members of family during these nine days of mourning was so important that military conscripts were exempted from service and even high officials were excused from their duties. The nine days of mourning ended on the ninth day with offerings of food to the dead and a banquet called *cena novendialis* for the living; and for the wealthy, there was a ceremony called *ludi novendialis* (funeral games). After this ceremony was done, the *manes* (spirits of the dead) were believed to get settled in Orcus and to not come back to trouble their living relatives. Among the Indians such a feast was *Ekoddishta Sraddha* (ten-day celebration) which immediately followed the cremation. During cremation, libations of water were poured out to alleviate the heat and extreme thirst of the spirits whose bodies were being consumed by fire. Among the Iranians the equivalent of these ceremonies is *âfrîngân* (homage). The Teutons considered the third and seventh days after burial to be of special importance. Besides the nine-day offerings after the interment, later offerings or celebrations were made on fixed dates. Among the Indians, Greeks, Romans and Teutons, on the 30th day after burial a special sacrifice was offered for the *manes* (the spirits of the dead). For the Lithuanians, the 30th day marked the end of the mourning period.

⁸⁸ “Ancient Roman Gladiators” in Wikipedia, <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gladiator> (virtual version, no page).

Besides these informal and private family celebrations, the ancient Indo-Europeans also held official public and national sacred seasons of the dead. In Rome, for instance, the nine *dies parentales* were observed annually from the 13th to the 21st of February and the birthday of the deceased. During these days, tombs were repaired and ornamented, food was spread out for the dead, temples of the celestial gods were closed, matrimonies might not be performed and officials excused themselves from their normal daily duties. This ninth day of celebration was called *Feralia* (feast of the ghosts) and was considered as the holiest day for the Romans. The Greek equivalent of this feast was the *Anthestēria* festival which was also celebrated at the end of February. In India its equivalent was *Sraddha*, and among the Iranians it was *Hamaspahmaedaya* which took place from March 10th to 20th. If the *Parentalia* celebration of the ancient Romans was held in honour of one's deceased parents, the Roman *Lemuria* observed on May 9th, 11th and 13th was held in honour of the deceased of the entire household fellowship in which the spirits of the dead of the entire household were believed to wander around and to need to be appeased by their living kin.

The Roman *Larentalia* was observed on the 23rd of December to honour the *lares* or ancestors believed to have a role as protectors or tutelary spirits. The festival was a sort of All Souls' Day in which offerings were made to all the dead, especially those who had no living relatives. In India it was known as the *Astaka* festival, and among the Iranians it was *Farvardigan*. Among the Celts it was the *Samhain* feast held at the winter solstice. When the vegetation lay in the sleep of death, it seemed to be the most appropriate time for the commemoration of spirits of all the dead. To this day, some Slavs still hold a sort of ancient All Souls' Day in November in which they invites all spirits of the dead and gods to taste an annual banquet offered by the living. Today, these various forms of the *Luarentalia* have absorbed by the Church into All Saints' Day and All Souls Day observed on the 1st and 2nd of November. They have been removed from the winter solstice in order to avoid conflict with Christmas.⁸⁹

3.1.2.3.2. In Ancient Egypt

3.1.2.3.2.1. Concept of Soul

In ancient Egyptian, the word for 'breath' was *du*, regarded as the vital principal in man and believed to have the chief seat in the heart or in the entrails. At the moment of death *du* separated itself from the

⁸⁹ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp. 142-147. See also Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Greco-Roman Religions* (Mineapolis, USA: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 68-78

body and became a *ba* which means 'spirit'. The *ba* does not exist until after death. At the funeral of the dead person a *du* is transformed into a *ba* through ritual ceremonies performed by the officiating priests. In the ancient arts of Egypt *ba* was represented by a human-headed bird with arms holding in one hand a sail – an Egyptian ideograph for 'win' or 'spirit' – and in the other hand the *ankh* or an emblem or symbol of 'life'. This spirit-bird is often depicted in tombs, on coffins and mummies, as hovering over the dead or as perching in a tree and interestedly watching its own funeral.

Another ancient Egyptian concept about soul is the *ka* or 'spiritual double'. Formerly it was understood that *ka* was the second ethereal soul that rose at death to heaven while the *ba* remained with the corpse in the grave. This speculation led to the conclusion that ancient Egyptian anthropology would then have a trichotomy of human nature, that is, body, soul and spirit. More recent scholars reject this view and hold that *ka* was a sort of guardian spirit in every person, like the Roman *genius*, who accompanied and guarded a man from birth through life and into the afterlife. *Ka* was understood as the invisible and spiritual duplicate of a man that was born with him and shared his fortunes from that time onward. When a man died, he was said to go to 'his *ka*' or to 'be with his *ka*'. It was believed that the *ka* protects the dead man from enemies in the other world, introduces him to the gods and provides food for him. In the Pyramid text (§1357) the dead man and his *ka* are picturing as dining together at the same table.⁹⁰

3.1.2.3.2. Powers of the Dead

The survival of the human soul after death was a fundamental article of Egyptian belief in all ages. After the corporal death, another new life continues. With this fundamental belief in mind, the Egyptians continued to embalm their mummies, build their tombs and make offerings to the dead, hoping that the spirits of the dead would benefit by these religious practices.

The future life, whether in tombs, in Hades or in Heaven, was conceived as identical to the present life. Thus, a king, for instance, remained king, dwelling in his palace, ruling over his people, waited upon by his officials and slaves. The noble continued to be a noble with his broad estates and large family. The head of the house still maintained his authority over his wives, children and slaves. Along with these

⁹⁰ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, *ibid.*, pp. 154-156. As for the image of *ka*, see also A.R. Williams, "Modern Technology Reopens the Ancient Case of King Tut" in *National Geographic Magazine*, June 2005, pp. 14-15. In King Tut's burial chamber there is a map painted on the wall picturing his journey to the next world. After the funeral procession, Aye – the new king of Egypt – symbolically revives the dead king – Tut. Nut – the sky goddess – welcomes King Tut to the realm of the gods and then Osiris – the god of afterlife – embraces King Tut along with his *ka* who is depicted as a man exactly like him.

beliefs, the Egyptians believed that in the great beyond spirits of the dead gain certain powers as follows:

1) *The Spirits of the dead can control physical objects.* Souls of the living dead were believed to be able to occupy statues, just as gods were believed to occupy images. It was believed that the spirits of the dead were able to control statues in order to reveal their will to their living kin through them. One of the many stories regarding spirits of the dead revealing their will through statues is the nodding statue of King Ahmose I (1580-1557 BC). An inscription discovered in Egypt in 1898 relates that in the reign of Ahmose I a certain Nesha received from the king an estate which he bequeathed to his descendants, adding that it should not be divided. In the reign of Ramses II (300 years later), the courts permitted the division of the estate. But Pasar, son of Mesmen, appealed the case of the statue of deified Ahmose I as it was being carried in procession and the statue by nodding confirmed his claim to the estate.

2) *The spirits of the dead can control animals.* Like any other ancient races, the ancient Egyptians also believed that the spirits of the dead may enter into animals especially those prowling around the tombs. The so-called *Coffin Texts* of the Middle Empire contain magical formulas by which the deceased may transform himself into certain birds or animals.

3) *The spirits of the dead can re-animate the dead bodies.* Ancient Egyptians believed that the souls still hovered near their mummies or even inhabited them. With this belief in mind, it was important for the welfare and peace of the soul that the mummies be preserved. However, by inhabiting the mummies, the souls could not revive their dead bodies.

4) *The Spirits of the dead can obsess and possess the living men.* The Egyptians of old also held a belief that the dead were envious of the living and therefore they would enter the bodies of the living causing disease and death. People who were obsessed by the spirits of the dead could also speak under the influence of the spirits of the dead.⁹¹

3.1.2.3.2.3. Veneration of the Dead

Like any other ancient races, belief concerning the survival of the human soul after the corporal death and the gaining of superhuman powers after death also led the ancient Egyptians to regard their dead – especially the kings – as belonging to the class of gods, yet they were not equal to the gods. This is clear from the distinction made by the Egyptians between their deified dead kings and the gods. That is,

⁹¹ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp. 156-165

while the gods were called 'great gods', the deified dead kings were only called 'good gods'. Because of their high status gained after death, they were at times venerated to some extent as were the great gods. However, despite the high status of the dead – and they accordingly were at times venerated to the same extent as were the great gods – ancestral veneration in ancient Egypt never became a national religion but remained as one important aspect of its religion.⁹²

Among the customs of ancient Egyptians that indicate their great love, honour and respect for the dead were their elaborate preparations of the corpse for burial, the building of great tombs and the sacrifice of food. The ancient Egyptians believed that the proper burial for the dead was important in order to allow them to live again in the afterlife. Most ordinary ancient Egyptians were probably buried in the desert. Their bodies would be wrapped in a simple cloth and buried with some everyday objects and food. Those with more wealth would be able to afford a better burial. The graves of some craftsmen and workers have been found containing mummified bodies as well as bread, fruit, amulets and furniture for the afterlife. Nobles and very opulent people were often buried in a 'mastabas' – a kind of tomb that has an underground burial chamber and an above ground offering chapel. Beginning with the dynastic period, the Egyptians carefully mummified their dead kings and laid them in gigantic tombs known as pyramids. In the tomb's chambers were built shelves or tables for offerings for the deceased. Several pyramids were inscribed with the so-called Pyramid Texts containing myths of gods, hymns, magical charms to rouse the spirit of the dead and to give it vitality in the other world, the ritual of mummification and of burial, the ritual for the presentation of offerings at the tomb pyramid and collections of prayers to the gods on behalf of the dead. Especially in the pre-dynastic period they were buried with the dead jars and bowls of food and drink so that they might not face hunger in the other world, flint knives and harpoons so that they might hunt and defend themselves, clothing and ornaments, slate palettes for grinding green malachite face-paint, a bag for holding the pieces of malachite and even a draught-board for their amusement. Already at this period models were deposited in graves instead of the real articles. For instance there were found models of boats instead of real boats, models of cattle instead of real cattle.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., pp. 175-177

⁹³ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp. 178-199. See also: "How other Ancient Egyptians Were Buried" in <http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/pyramids/about/otheregy.html>. As for the imitation instead of the real gifts given to the dead at this period, it is one of the ancient evidences that most likely offerings for the dead are symbolic by their nature. This point will further explore in chapter V.

3.1.2.3.3. In Ancient Semites

Hebrews, Canaanites, Aramaeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Arabs and Ethiopians – based on their languages, customs and beliefs – are grouped by ethnologists under the general name of ‘Semitic races’. Some similarities in their cultures, beliefs and institutions have spurred many scholars to draw a conclusion that these races were once a close kin to one another and that their religious and social institutions were owned by their forefathers in their original home in the Arabian desert where they once lived together before their dispersion.⁹⁴

3.1.2.3.3.1. Concept of Soul

All ancient Semitic races believed that man consists of two basic elements, namely, ‘flesh’ called *basar* in Hebrew and ‘breath’ called *nefesh* in Hebrew, *nafs* in Arab, *nafas* in Ethiopia, *napishtu* in Babylonia and Assyria. The ‘breath’ was believed to be the seat of knowledge, appetite, emotion and activity of the man. Accordingly it was identical with ‘person’. In all Semitic dialects, the word *nafshi* or ‘my breath’ means ‘myself’. The ‘breath’ was thought to dwell in the blood because it was observed that when the blood was shed life went out of a man. The ancient Arabs surmised that the *nafs* flew out of a man who was dying of wounds and all Semitic races did not eat blood of slaughtered animals for fear that they might be possessed by the spirits of these animals. The heart as the main receptacle of blood in the body was also thought to be the dwelling place of ‘breath’ and as the centre of its intellectual faculties. Another word for ‘spirit’ found in several Semitic languages is *ruh* which means ‘wind’ or *ruah* in Hebrew and *ruha* in Aramaic. In Arabic this word only means ‘wind’, while in other Semitic races such as Babylonia and Assyria it is not found.⁹⁵

3.1.2.3.3.2. Powers of the Dead

All ancient Semites believed in the continuation of the disembodied ‘*nefesh* or *ruah*’ or discarnate spirit of man. The ancient tombs at Nippur and Tello in Babylonia contain the usual offerings to the dead. In

⁹⁴ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., p.200. It would be good also to note the false use of the word ‘Semitic’ or ‘Semitism’. In public parlance it is not uncommon that people use the terminology of ‘Semitic’ as exclusively referring to the Jews. When talking about ‘antisemitism’, for instance, they mean ‘anti or hate toward the Jews or the Hebrews. Semitic in fact refers to all nations – Arabs and Ethiopia – that have the same root of language that is so-called ‘Semitic Language’. Therefore, ‘antisemitism’ in its literal sense means an attitude that is against both Jews and all Arab Nations. For further information on this matter see Odon Vallet, *Piccolo Lessico delle Idee False sulle Religioni* (Milano: Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2005), pp. 19-21. The Original title of the book is *Petit Lexique des Idées Fausses sur les Religions*, published in Paris: Editions Albins Michel S.A., in 2002, translated from French into Italian by Laura Passerone.

⁹⁵ Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp. 200-201

the oldest Palestinian tombs the dead were buried in an embryonic position or an unborn child position – an indication of faith that death was a birth into another life.

The spirits of the dead were thought to retain their former lives in the world. Those who had led unhappy lives on earth or had faced untimely death were believed to grieve over their misfortunes in the other world and to return to disturb the living as a revenge. In addition to these, spirits of the dead were believed to gain some superhuman powers such as follows:

The spirits could easily move from one place to another. The spirits could take possession of inanimate objects and dwell in them as their abodes. It was common for the Arabs to erect a heap of stones or a standing stone – called *nusb* in Arabic or *massēba* in Hebrew – believed to be occupied by the souls of the dead just as the stones in the sanctuaries were believed to be occupied by the gods. The Babylonians erected statues at the entrances to the temples and houses as the residences for the ghosts of the dead. Arabs as well as the Babylonians believed that spirits of the dead and Jinn often revealed themselves in the forms of animals – particularly of serpents and owls. Spirits of the dead could take possession of the living causing all kinds of diseases and insanity. In Arabic the name for ‘insane’ was *majnûn* which means ‘possessed by Jinn’. The Babylonians believed that the unhappy spirits of the unburied or of those who died an unnatural death could enter the body of their living relatives and cause some disturbances in the form of diseases or pain and that they could be driven out only by powerful incantation in the name of the great gods and by promising to give them offerings of food and drink. Yet at the same time, spirits of the dead could give a prophetic inspiration to the living through a medium.⁹⁶

3.1.2.3.3. Veneration to the Dead

As in other ancient races, belief concerning the continuation of life after the corporal death and the superhuman powers gained after death in the other world also led ancient Semites to take special care to honour and respect their dead. Their well-being was ensured. It was widely believed that without burial spirits of the dead could not rest. The Babylonians believed that spirits of the unburied were among the most dreaded evil spirits. A proper burial for the dead, accordingly was viewed as a necessity for their well-being in the other world. At their tombs were offered food and drinks. Among the Arabs the cooking-pot and dishes of the deceased were broken, his camel was lamed and all were tethered

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.202-204.

near the grave. Prayer to the dead was also common among the ancient Semites. The spirits of the dead could be called up by magic arts to assist the living or to reveal the future.⁹⁷

In 1999 a group of German, Italian and Syrian archaeologists found a preserved royal tomb in the ancient city of Qatna, Syria. The 3,300-year-old tomb revealed a story about King Idanda of Qatna who – together with his royal family – used to dine regularly with the dead in an underground room of his palace at a memorial feast called *kispum*. From this archaeological finding, scholars believe that veneration of the dead played a central role in state and family religion in Mesopotamia from the third millennium B.C. through the time of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Israelites in the first millennium B.C. The celebration of *kispum* was made to mark the eldest sons as heirs to their fathers, whether that meant sitting on a throne and ruling a kingdom or merely leading a family and inheriting its house and land. It also tied the mutual dependence between the living and the dead. The dead were believed to need food and drink from the living, while the living were believed to need the blessings from the ancestors who mediated between the gods and the living. Remembering the dead was believed to keep the spirits of the dead happy and bring good fortune to the living. It could even help the living to win a battle or war.⁹⁸

3.1.2.3.4. In Early Christianity

We do not have extravagant records regarding the attitudes of early Christians toward the dead, their religious practices in connection with the dead and festival for the dead, except those in Rome. From the history of the Roman Church we know that early Christians were persecuted badly because of their faith, leading many of them to hide themselves in the catacombs. As a result, they found themselves praying and worshipping God while being surrounded by the tombs and bodies of their dead relatives and friends. Because of their situation, they sought to pray among the bodies of dead Christians, often using a coffin or tomb for an altar on which they celebrated the Holy Eucharist. Sometimes they witnessed miracles in connection with the bodies of dead Christians, such as healing or observing sweet-smelling myrrh exuding from their bones. These experiences, combined with their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of all Christians, eventually lead to the veneration of saints and their relics. Early accounts of martyrs include Christian witnesses making great efforts to obtain the remains of the martyrs, even though the Roman persecutors sometimes tried to

⁹⁷ Lewish Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, Ibid., pp. 205-210

⁹⁸ Karen E. Lang, "Unearthing Ancient Syria's Cult of the Dead" in *National Geographic Magazine*, February 2005, pp. 108-123

prevent them from doing so. It also became common for the early Christian faithful to continue to ask their Christian leaders to pray for them, even after their Christian leaders had died, as they believed that their dead Christians were still alive in another world and were still able to pray for them and that their prayers would still be effective.⁹⁹

I am deady convinced that religious piety of the early Christians in the Roman Church that centred on honouring, loving and remembering its dead Christians – martyrs and saints in particular – was one example of the early inculturation process of the Christian faith. Veneration of the martyrs and saints was the transformation of the ancestral veneration or the cult of the dead widely being practiced in Roman societies and in other Indo-European societies at this period of time. This transformation process, indeed, has fostered the rapid growth of a fledgling religion called Christianity, and at the same time it put to death the indigenous veneration of the dead that was richer in term of variety and popularity. It had a domestic dimension which was celebrated based on the blood ties – such as the *Parentalia* festival of the pre-Christian Romans – and national or public dimension – such as the *Lemuria* festival of the ancient Romans All were simplified and uunited in one All Saints’ and All Souls’ Day and in feast days of countless great saints to whom the majority of Christians did not have a close relationship based on blood ties – a psychological factor that is very important in the religious life of all races. We will come back to this point in chapter V.

3.2. The Common Role of Ancestors

Now, after exploring the widespread practices of ancestral veneration in various ethnic groups in Africa and in Asia as well as in the world of antiquity, we can pose a question: Why is this kind of religious piety so important at least to its practitioners? What are the roles of the ancestors in the view of many peoples of Africa and Asia who still revere ancestral veneration as an important part of their religious piety?

Jean Marc Ela, based on his studies among the Kirdi people of Cameroon, view ancestral veneration as very important. After noticing the increasing urbanization that poses a threat to ancestral veneration and how young people today distance themselves from traditional customs or are even unaware of them, as a response Ela poses a question as to how the traditional cultural inheritance can be maintained in Christian practices as society changes. He underlines the importance of “an African vision

⁹⁹ “Veneration of the Dead” in http://www.fact-index.com/v/ve/veneration_of_the_dead.html (virtual version, no page)

of humanity” enshrined in honouring the ancestors and urges the Church to consider how Christianity in the West could benefit from studying Africans’ communion with their ancestors. Ela, in this regard, is in accord with Bujo’s observation that ancestral veneration is one of the fundamental pillars of religions for many ethnic groups on the African continent. With this conviction in mind, Bujo says that anyone who would propose any theology, for instance, an ecclesiology, a Christology or a sacramental theology from the point of view of ancestral veneration, would have to pay particular attention to those living dead, whose commemoration is regarded by their descendants as indispensable and beneficial or even salvific for their earthly existence.¹⁰⁰

Now if that is the case, what is the place and role of the living dead in African societies? Charles Nyamiti, a Tanzanian theologian, observes that – despite the divergences of the practices of ancestral veneration from one African ethnic group to the other and the fact that not all Africans practice ancestral veneration – there are enough evidences shared by most African societies regarding important roles of the ancestors or the role of the living dead in general. He lists 5 cardinal roles as follows:

1) Kinship between the ancestor or ancestress and his/her earthly kin. In most cases the **ancestor** is also the *source of life* of his/her terrestrial relatives. **2) Superhuman or sacred status** of the ancestors acquired usually – but not invariably – through death. Such status includes superhuman vital forces and other qualities obtained through special nearness to the Supreme Being. **3) Mediation** between God and their earthly kin because of their supernatural status and proximity to God. **4) Exemplarity** of behaviour in community. Hence, no one can enjoy ancestral status without having led a morally good life according to African moral standards. **5) The Ancestors enjoy right or title to regular sacred communication with their earthly kin** through prayers and ritual donations (oblations). This communication is a sign of love, thanksgiving, confidence and homage to the ancestors from their earthly relatives. The ancestors are expected to respond benevolently to such prayers and rituals by bestowing bodily and spiritual goods to their living kin as a sign of love, gratitude, faithfulness and respect toward them.¹⁰¹

Peter Sharpong, a Ghanaian theologian, also adds the central conviction of the African peoples concerning the requirements for becoming ancestors. That is, not everyone who dies automatically becomes an ancestor but only those who fulfil specific conditions. *First*, the person is to pass through

¹⁰⁰ Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*... Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Dr. Charles Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches” in *C.U.E.A: African Christian Studies*, Volume 9 Number 3 September 1993, The Journal of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, pp. 21-22, see also Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, Ibid. p. 113

critical stages of life to attain adulthood, which is generally determined by marriage rather than by age and which assumes procreation. An unmarried person then, no matter how old, is disqualified from becoming an ancestor because of not having transmitted life to another person and is therefore considered a 'useless person whose name should be blotted out of memory'. *Second*, the person is to die a natural death, excluding tragic deaths such as those caused by accidents, suicide, unclean deceases or in childbirth. *Third*, the person is to have an exemplary life by tribal standards, demonstrating good character and behaviour according to traditional morality.¹⁰²

As samples of what have been claimed by Charles Nyamiti and Peter Sharpong regarding the common roles of ancestors in African societies, let us take a closer look at ancestral veneration of Akan people in Ghana and of BaManianga people in Kongo. In his book entitled *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Trenton, 1997), Anthony Ephirim-Donkor reports that according to the view of Akan people of Ghana, ancestors have a role as a mediator between God and their living kin. Because the ancestors – the Akan believe – having lived, died and been resurrected and vindicated, have achieved something that no human beings has, that is, immortality. They have reached the highest state of existence comparable to God, though they are not God since they can not create or alter the created order. However, they have achieved eternal existence after first achievement as elders. Like their earthly counterparts in relation to the king, the ancestors function in a like manner in relation to the ultimate King – God.¹⁰³ According to Simon Bockie, BaManianga also share this belief. In regard to this, Bockie says that the important role of ancestors in BaManianga people's day-to-day thinking and actions lies in their concept regarding who exactly an ancestor is. In order to understand that concept – he further says – one must return to the BaManianga interpretation of the 'first man' created by God (Nzambi). And so, he explains it as follows:

"God created the 'first man' to be His surrogate – *alter sui*. Yet, the first man failed in carrying out his duty. But what the first man failed originally to be is precisely what the ancestors are now. To become an ancestor means to regain the status that the first man lost. Before death, we are just ordinary beings with no godlike image. But after death we find ourselves in the process of becoming God's surrogates or little gods, namely, complete human beings. Humanness begins with God and extends to the ancestors. It has to do with the liberation of ordinary men from oppression, death and bondage of the established human power. God created us to be free from

¹⁰² Stinton, *Jesus of Africa...*Ibid., p. 113

¹⁰³ Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc., 1997), p.140

human evil, to have dominion, power and authority. Until BaManianga can claim to have this power, dominion and authority, they are not yet human beings. But after being liberated from the oppression and evil of this world, the ancestors have power and authority, for they are now full human beings. Aware of their complete humanness, the BaManianga take the opportunity to surrender to them their day-to-day troubles because they (ancestors) now possess authority to overcome human oppression. Using their power to improve welfare of their living brothers, they become saviors and little gods for their particular relatives. Yet each ancestor's power is limited to his own kanda. Because of their liberating role, they deserve their people's respect, prayers and veneration."¹⁰⁴

Both the reports of Anthony Ephirim-Donkor and of Simon Bockie clearly affirm that – like many other African ethnic groups – the Akan people of Ghana and the BaManianga people of Kongo believe that the ancestors hold a role as mediators between God and their living community and that the ancestors reach that noble status – mediator – as a direct consequence of their immortality as God and of their being close to God the creator who makes them perfect and ideal human beings.

3.3. The Nature of Ancestral Veneration

This section of the thesis aims to display three main prejudices or misunderstandings regarding ancestral veneration that view it as a sort of idolatry, superstition, syncretism and necromancy, and tackles these three prejudices as absolutely unfounded. Religious piety that centres on honouring the ancestors or the dead in general, on the contrary, from its very nature is non-idolatrous, non-superstitious and non-syncretistic in itself.¹⁰⁵

3.3.1. It Is Non-Idolatrous

It is not a secret that some people view ancestral veneration as being idolatrous. To mention only one example, the wide use of the phrase 'Ancestor *Worship*' in the works of many scholars especially anthropologists,¹⁰⁶ Protestants who negate the special role of the superhuman beings and semi-gods

¹⁰⁴ Simon Bockie, *Death And The Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University Press, 1993), pp. 132-133

¹⁰⁵ As for ancestral veneration is not syncretistic in a negative sense, we will treat this point at length in chapter V pages 154 to 158 (subtopic 5.3.5) in which we will further demonstrate that religious syncretism is not always wrong, instead, to some extent, it is a valid religious phenomenon.

¹⁰⁶ **Example:** Helen Hardacre "Ancestor Worship" in Mircea Eliade, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Religion...*Ibid., pp. 263-268, Jane Dawnhee and Roger L. Janelli, *Ancestor Worship in Korean Society...*Ibid.

and hold a belief in God without mediator and in salvation without mediation,¹⁰⁷ indicate that ancestral veneration in their understanding is idolatrous. Even in the Catholic Church, commonly believed to have more positive attitudes toward ancestral veneration, not all modern Catholic scholars and theologians are free from the use of the inappropriate phrase, 'Ancestor *Worship*'.¹⁰⁸ They also – either consciously or unconsciously by calling this religious piety a *worship* – still treat ancestral veneration as an idolatry. The title of their works is in contrast with the title of the works of some African scholars and theologians¹⁰⁹ who directly experience religious piety of ancestral veneration.

In addition, the conflict known as *The Chinese Rites Controversy* (1633-1939 AD)¹¹⁰ and stories regarding the persecution of Churches in East Asia – in Korea (at the end of 18th century and in the 19th century), in Vietnam (1802 – 1945)¹¹¹ – in which thousands of Christians, Catholics and Protestants alike, suffered and shed their blood for their opposition of ancestral veneration – either imposed by Chinese government or by Japanese government – strongly indicated that Christians in East Asia in this era viewed the religious practice of ancestral veneration as idolatrous. Some missionaries of the past even have mistakenly used Leviticus 19:27-28 and Deuteronomy 14: 1 to view ancestral veneration as a religious piety that is irreconcilable with faith in Israel's God and therefore have condemned the practice as magic, idolatry and polytheism.¹¹² In order to refute these prejudices and misunderstanding, we need to scrutinize the nature of idolatry and find out if religious piety that centres in honouring ancestors falls under its umbrella.

¹⁰⁷**Example:** Liao David "Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Worship in Taiwan" in Bong Rin Ro ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), Liaw Stephen, "Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Taiwanese Society and Evangelism of the Chinese" in Bong Rin Ro, ed., *Christian ...* Ibid., Lin Chi Ping "Ancestor Worship: The Reactions of Chinese Churches" in Bong Rin Ro ed., *Christian ...* Ibid.

¹⁰⁸**Example:** Fr. Roman Malek SVD "Ancestor Worship 1 (General)" in Karl Müller SVD, Theo Sundermeier etc, ed., *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 17-19, Horst Balts "Ancestor Worship II (in Africa)" in Karl Müller SVD, Theo Sundermeier, etc, ed., *Dictionary of Mission....*Ibid.,

¹⁰⁹**Example:** Simon Bokie, *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief...*Ibid., Antony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors ...* Ibid., Charles Nyamiti "African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches" (Nairobi: The Journal of the Catholic University of Easter Africa, Vol. 9, September 1993), pp. 15-35

¹¹⁰ Kim Myung-Hyuk, "Historical Analysis of Ancestor Worship in the Korean Church" in Bong Rin Ro, ed. *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Aisa Theological Association, 1985), pp. 163-177. Cf. Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (New York: Orbis Book, 1993), pp. 192-196. Cf. Hans Küng – Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Double Day and Collins Publishers, 1989), pp.38-39, also Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 192-195

¹¹¹ Jonathan Huoi Xung, "Ancestral Veneration in Vietnamese Spiritualities" in *The Review of Vietnamese Studies*, Volume 3, No. 1, 2003. See also: <http://hmongstudies.com/Lee2003.pdf> , p. 4

¹¹² Roman Malek SVD, "Ancestor Worship" in Karl Muller, ed., *Dictionary of Mission ...* Ibid., p. 17

3.3.1.1. Etymology of Idolatry

The word *idolatry* is formed from two Greek words, *eidōlon* which means ‘image’ and *latreia* which means ‘adoration or worship’. Therefore, etymologically *idolatry* means ‘adoration of images’. Scholars have tried to make different definitions of *idolatry* and *idol* and accordingly reveal the complexity of the problem. Eugène Goblet d’Aviella (1911), for instance, uses the word *idol* to mean images or statues that are considered to be conscious or animate and *idolatry* to mean the act of regarding an image as having a superhuman personality. While for J. Goetz (1962) *idolatry* is adoration of images by emphasizing the specific nature of the cult surrounding the objects of adoration, which strictly speaking expresses a feeling of absolute dependence, especially through sacrifice. While *idol* is any material object that receives a form of worship more or less structured.

The concept of idolatry, historically, stemmed from a strict monotheism of Israel; and therefore, an authentic inquiry to fathom the concept must be sought in the context of Hebrew religion and Scripture. Thus, in his research on the reactions of the Hebrew prophets to pagan religions, Christopher P. North (1958) presents two ideas taken directly from the prophets. *First*, idolatry is the worship of the creature instead of the Creator and the creature is made by man who is himself a creature. *Finally*, idolatry is a worship of an idol or *eidōlon* or image or portrait that is regarded as a substitute for the divine.¹¹³

3.3.1.2. Historical Semantic of Idolatry

In Ancient Greek literature since Homer there is rarely found the word *eidōlon*. Formed from the word *eidos* (noun) which means ‘aspect, shape.’ The term *eidōlon* has various meanings such as ‘phantom, undetermined form, image reflected in a mirror or in water.’ It also can mean an abstract image formed in the human mind such as concept or idea. Therefore in the ancient Greek world, the word *eidōlon* did not have a religious meaning. In the Septuagint – the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible – the word *eidōlon* gains its religious connotation. The word is used 70 times to translate 16 different Hebrew words such as *aven* (vanity), *elil* (nothing), *gillulim* (exciment), *pesel* (carved statue) and *tselim* (image). While in Vulgata – the first Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible – the word *idolum* is used 112 times and the word *simulacrum* is used 32 times to translate the Hebrew words translated as *eidōlon* in the Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew Bible itself uses 30 different nouns in order to talk about idols and

¹¹³ Julien Ries, “Idolatry”, translated from French by Kristine Anderson, in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* Vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 72-73

mentions 44 pagan deities. Thus in the Hebrew Bible the Hebrew words – translated as *eidōlon* in Greek Septuagint and *idolum* in Latin Vulgata – designate primarily false gods or pagan gods and do so with a scornful tone or nuance because false/pagan gods are vanity, lies, nothingness vain images, molded metal and carved wood. Therefore, in translating the Hebrew Bible, the Greek word *eidōlon* acquired a religious meaning of representing a pagan divinity considered to be a false god. Then, from this time on the use of the Greek term *eidōlon* – with the same connotation of representing false gods – passed into the Greek New Testament Bible and into the patristic era of the early Christianity.¹¹⁴

3.3.1.3. Idolatry in the Hebrew Scriptures

The formal condemnation of idolatry in Hebrew Scripture is in Exodus 20:3-5 in which the Hebrew God forbids both the worship of foreign gods and the making of images that represent Him since it is believed that the God of Israel cannot be represented by any images. The confirmation and amplification of this commandment are in Deuteronomy 4:12-19. The prohibition in this biblical passage pertains to both theriomorphic and anthropomorphic images. It is about the condemnation of idolatrous worship of Jahveh and of the worship of the false gods.

a) The Mosaic Prohibition

The second commandment in Decalogue forbids the making of the representations of the divinity (Ex. 20:4-6, Det. 4:15-19, 5:6-9, Lev. 26:1). A strict tendency took this Mosaic prohibition literally by banning any ornamentation of religious buildings. This tendency was widespread among the Pharisees who insisted the pure worship of only one God and radically opposed the danger of idolatry. Yet, despite this strictness, archaeologists discovered some ancient synagogues with animal and human decorations which indicates a liberal interpretation of those biblical passages.

b) Idolatrous worship of Jahveh

What this means is the prohibition of worshipping Jahveh through any images or symbols that are made to represent Him. There are many biblical texts that refer to this idolatrous form of worship of the Israel's God. In 1 Kings 12:28, for instance, Jeroboam represents God symbolized by a bull as the liberator of Israel during the time of flight from Egypt. The prophets fought against the use of images of Jahveh. Hosea 3:4 speaks against the use of *sacred pillars* (the stone massebah – originally perhaps a phallic symbol – representing Ball (cf. Gen 28: 18, Ex 34:13), *ephod* (an instrument used in consulting the

¹¹⁴ Julien Ries, "Idolatry", in Mircea Elidade, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Ibid., p. 73-74

deity (cf. 1 Sam 23:6-12, 30:7) and *household idols* (images regarded as the guardian spirits of the household (cf. Gen 31:19, Jg. 17: 5, 18:14)). It seems that the Israelites took the images of the gods of their neighbours and used them in their worship to represent Jahveh. So, it was a kind of inculturation which was condemned by prophet Hosea. Prophet Jeremiah went even further, telling the people of Israel to forget the Ark of Covenant and not make another copy of it (Jer 3:16). The argument launched by the prophets is that all tangible representation of God is dangerous, limited as well as can be misleading, since the visible image is distinct from the great, powerful and mysterious God.

c) Idolatry as worship of false gods

It must be admitted that the forefathers of Israel held a monotheist practice but still practiced in polytheist reality. In their religion, they chose to worship only one true God called *Jahveh* and vowed not to worship the other gods – the gods of their neighbours – even though they acknowledged that these other gods also existed. For instance, 1) Joshua recalled that the father of Abraham and Nahor served other gods (Jos. 24:2 and 14). 2) Upon their return from Egypt, the Hebrews who settled in Canaan came under influence of the surrounding pagan culture and were tempted to adopt their gods (Jgs 10:6, 1 Sam 7:4, 12:10). 3) Kings of Israel often advanced polytheism by the introduction of foreign wives who kept their gods (1 Kgs 11:7, 11:33). 4) Amos accuses his contemporaries of worshipping two astral divinities called Sakkuth and Kaiwan (Am 5:26). 5) Shaken by the triumphs of the Assyrians and Chaldeans during the reign of Manasseh (688-642 BC), the Israelites embraced the gods of their conquerors (2 Kgs 21:1-9, 23:4-14). 6) Israelites worshipped the sun, moon, the baals and the Astartes (Jer. 2:8, 7:9), Nergal and other divinities gained space in the sanctuaries (2 Kgs 17:30-31).

After 587 BC, the Israelites were exiled, followed by a spiritual reform. They were encouraged to regain their monotheistic faith and be vigilant about keeping a distance from idolatry. The prophets took the lead in an effort to attain religious purification. At the solemn unveiling of the golden calf at Bethel, a prophet rebuked King Jeroboam and announced Jahveh's threat (1 Kgs 13:1-31). Elijah and Elisha fought against the worship of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:22-40). Amos reproached his Judean compatriots for letting themselves be seduced by idols (Am 2:4). Hosea claimed that in his eyes the worship of Israel had become idolatry (Hos. 4:12-13). Isaiah attacked the idols and announced their fall (Is 2:20, 17:7-8, 30:22). One of the important points brought up by the prophets in their polemic is the nothingness of

the false gods. Idols are nothing but wood (Jer. 16:20). Hosea likens idolatry with fetishism for in his eyes the image is set up in place of God (Hos. 8:4-6).¹¹⁵

3.3.1.4. Idolatry in Christianity

The study of idolatry from the point of early Christianity is linked to the problems of the birth of Christian art and the question of images, their worship and refusal to worship them. Christians with Jewish background had strong faith traditions in monotheism. Christians who converted from paganism radically separated themselves from idols and their worship. Yet, they continued to live in the midst of a pagan population which had proliferated temples, altars, statues, sacrifices, processions and festivals in Egypt, Greece, Rome and the Middle East. The rapid growth of Christianity in the Roman empire spurred the Church to take a very clear positions in regard to pagan cults.

3.3.1.4.1. The Biblical Heritage

The opposition of the Old Testament Bible to idols passed into the New Testament Bible especially in the Epistles of St. Paul where the word *eidōlon* appears many times. Galatians 4: 8, for instance, speaks of pagan gods who have no substance. In I Corinthian 10:19, St. Paul says that when one venerates idols, he is appealing to demons (cf. Det. 32:17). Apparently, St. Paul's polemic in this matter revives the Old Testament's tendency to equalize the pagan sacrifices to demons. Revelation 9:20 denounces demonolatry – adoration of demons. Thus influenced by the Old Testament tradition, the New Testament has double views on idols: they are empty and their worship – idolatry – has demonic character.¹¹⁶

3.3.1.4.2. The Greek Apologist and Fathers

1) Justin Martyr, in his first *Apology*, says about idols: "The human form is not suitable to divinity; idols have no soul and are made from a base substance; they are works of depraved artisans and bait for thieves; they bear the names of the maleficent demons in whose apparent they are clothed." In his *apology*, Aristides of Athens condemned the Greeks for sin of worshipping created things and the barbarians who revered earth, water, the sun and the moon and created idols as divinities. 3) In his *Libellus*, Athanagoras attempts to show that making statues of divinities is not of old. With this in mind, he says: "All such statues are the works of men whose names we know. The artists have therefore made

¹¹⁵ Julien Ries, "Idolatry", in Mircea Elidade, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Ibid. pp. 74-75

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 76

gods who are younger than their makers.” In short, all these idols are no more than fragments of creation that the faithful adore in place of God the true Creator. 4) Clement of Alexandria in his *Protrepticus* convinces the worshippers of the gods about the stupidity and baseness of pagan myths. He first tries to determine the origin and nature of idols. In his opinions, idols are only blocks of wood and pillars of rock in ancient times, but then they became human representations, thanks to the progress of art. In answering the question as to where the gods represented by idols came from, Clemens says that they came from the deification of human beings and of kings by their successors. He, then, gives a theological response: “Pagan gods are demons, shadows, infamous and impure spirits. The error and moral corruption of idolatry is that it leads the faithful to worship matter and demons as divine. Idols excite lust and sensuality which were invented by demons...”¹¹⁷

3.3.1.4.3. The Latin Apologists

Tertulian addresses idolatry in *To the Nations, Apology* and *On Idolatry*. In *Apology*, for instance, he called people to stop worshipping gods once they realized that they do not exist. Tertulian reproaches the pagans for claiming that their gods became gods after death because of their merits in the service of men. The statues – he tells them – are only inert matter, just like vases, dishes and furniture, insensitive to outrage or homage. These statues – he goes on – are given over to commerce if not to destruction. Tertulian treats these matters at greater length in *On Idolatry*, which undertakes to show that idolatry is the gravest sin, encompassing all other sins. He condemns paintings, modelling, sculpture and participation in the public festival, since idolatry hides beneath seemingly innocent actions.

Both Greek and Latin apologists viewed the idea of false gods of the Hebrew Bible as demons. They claim that the demons are hiding in the shadows of idols. In his work entitled *Octavius*, Minucius Felix says that the demons hide behind statues and sacred images; and by exhaling their breath, they exercise their mysterious effects – spells, dreams and prodigies. The demons are the beneficiaries of the sacrifices. In *To the Nations* Tertulian claims that the demons use masks to deceive men, while in *On Idolatry* he curses artists and workers who fashion their bodies for the demons. Firmicus Maternus, in his work entitled *De errore profanorum religionum*, further develops the teachings of Tertulian and

¹¹⁷ Ibid. The numeration system is mine.

Minucius Felix regarding idolatry, affirming that devils exist everywhere in paganism – in idolatry, zoolatry, the deification of sovereigns and astrology.¹¹⁸

3.3.1.4.4. Saint Augustine

In 410 AD a group of barbarous people called Alaric entered Rome and pillaged it. Several Romans who remained pagans blamed Christians for what had occurred. They accused Christians of having destroyed the worship of the Roman gods and thus chased away the city's protectors. St. Augustine responded to the accusation in 22 volumes of books entitled *City of God* written between 413 and 426 AD. His works are the last great apologetic works against ancient paganism.

In the 22 Volumes of the *City of God*, especially in the first ten, Augustine launches a critique of the Roman gods, polytheism and mythology. To strike a fatal blow at the idols, he criticizes the pagan thinkers such as Varro, Cicero, Seneca, Euhemerus, Apuleius and Plato. Augustine, for instance, says that Varro's thelogy is full of false gnosis of etymologies of divine names and tripartition of gods introduced by poets, philosophers and heads of state. In his study of demonology, Augustine concluded that demons – evoked by men – take possession of idols. The *simulacra* or *eidōlon* become animate, and the work of demons can be achieved because the idol is no longer inert. An invisible *numen* or evil spirit is present. The idol serves as body for the demon. It receives life from the demon, to whom it lends itself. By this means, the demon accomplishes his revelation. For this reason, Augustine repeatedly says: "The gods are demons and worshipers of idols are worshippers of demons." Yet in book 8 of *City of God* he dampens the power of demons since they are not gods but lying angels who continue their struggle against the true God.

Through the works of St. Augustine in the fifth century, Christianity gave the final end to pagan theology, yet the Church remained vigilant in order to uproot the last stronghold of paganism and squelch its influence among the lives of Christians. To achieve this goal, three pastoral strategies were taken: (1) penitential discipline enacted against the sin of idolatry, (2) the teaching of morality and (3) the constant purification of Christian worship and vigilance regarding the veneration of saints.¹¹⁹

3.3.1.5. Idolatry in view of the Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church (UCCC) – after in No.2112 repeating the condemnation of the worship of idols in the Old Testament Bible – the Church in the UCCC No. 2113

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 77

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp.77-78

states that idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship but makes divine what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honours and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example Satanism), power, pleasure, race, *ancestors*, the state, money etc. In UCCC No. 2114 the Church further affirms that human life finds its unity in the adoration of the one God. The commandment to worship the Lord alone integrates man and saves him from an endless disintegration. Idolatry is a perversion of man's innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who – quoting Origen – transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God.¹²⁰

3.3.1.6. Conclusion

After analysing the concept of idolatry and its practices, it becomes clear that ancestral veneration is not a sort of idolatry. It appears similar to idolatry, but distinguishes many attributes and practices.

1) Ancestral veneration does not consist of the worshipping of lifeless images or *eidōlon* or idols of emptiness. Instead, it primarily consists of venerating, honouring and loving human life – the spirits of the dead – that still survive after its corporal death and continue to live and engage an enduring communion with their living relatives. This belief is also very fundamental in the Judeo-Christian faith (*cf.* the dogma of communion of Saints).

2) Ancestral veneration is not of worshipping demons hiding in images – statues, paintings or sculptures – as often claimed by the early fathers of the Church when talking about the danger of idolatry. Instead, it is of veneration of the living spirits of the dead. They are not demons or evil spirits and are distinctly different from demons and evil spirits. The carved images of ancestors¹²¹ – found in some traditional societies of Africa and Asia – are not intended to be representational or abstract but conceptual and evocative. By means of stylized form and symbolic details, the image conveys the characteristics of the ancestors and helps to make the spiritual reality of the ancestor present among the living. Thus, the carved ancestral icon enables the world of the living community and the world of the dead – ancestors – to come together for the benefit of human life.

¹²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (English translation for the Catholic Church in the United States of America, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), pp. 512-513

¹²¹ Benjamin C. Ray, “African Religions: An Overview” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 68

3) Ancestral veneration is not of the worshipping of creatures in place of God, since the living souls of the dead are never viewed, approached or treated as God. Instead they are viewed as special human beings, having achieved a higher status, a status of being closer to God, and from this status of advantage, accordingly, they are believed to be able to play an intermediary role between God and the living – a belief which is also very central in the Judeo-Christian faith, especially in the Catholic Church and Orthodox Church (*cf.* intermediary role of Angels and Saints). In addition, ancestral veneration – both in the world of antiquity such as in ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, ancient Babylonia or ancient Greece and in the world of modern Asia and Africa – is never a religion in itself. It is only one aspect of a complex religion that usually has God as an Absolute Being. Even if in the religious practices of traditional societies, ancestors are addressed more often than God, normally the living will turn to the Supreme Being as the last resort when their recourse to the ancestors fails to procure the desired effects.¹²² In other societies contact between men and God or gods is established only in extraordinary situations.¹²³ Turning to God as the last resort is an indication that ancestors or the living dead are not believed to be ‘absolute beings’ and, suffice it to say, the living do not have an absolute dependence on them. For the practitioners of ancestral veneration who have embraced one of the world’s major religions,¹²⁴ it is clear that the living do not view the ancestors as having an absolute role in the life of the living as does God or the gods of the major religion.

4) Is ancestral veneration irreconcilable with the Judeo-Christian faith and condemned as magic, idolatry and polytheism because such practice is forbidden by Leviticus 19:28 (Do not clip your hair at the temples nor trim the edges of your beard. Do not lacerate your bodies for the dead and do not tattoo yourselves) and Deuteronomy 14:1 (You are children of the Lord, your God. You shall not gash yourselves nor shave the hair above your foreheads for the dead)? According to Raymond Brown, Leviticus 19: 28 is part of the older laws (verses 26-31) which were prompted by the dangers arising from the cultic practice of Israel’s neighbours. The background of Leviticus 19:28 is the mourning customs of the Canaanites – cutting of hair, body lacerations and tattooing – probably viewed as means

¹²² Cf. C. Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches” in *C.U.E.A. African Christian Studies*...Ibid., p.16.

¹²³ Bernard Sellato, “Castrated Dead: The Making of Un-ancestors Among the Aoheng and Some Considerations on Death and Ancestors in Borneo” in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony Reid, eds.*The Potent Dead: Ancestors*, Ibid., p. 5

¹²⁴ The Hindus in Nusa Penida, Christians in Batak, Muslims in Gumai of Indonesia, for instance, do not find an irreconcilability between their ancestral veneration and the God of their official major religion. For further information Cf. .A. Giambelli, “Reciprocity, death and the regeneration of life and plants in Nusa Pendina” pp.48-68; Anthony Reid, “Island of the Dead: Why do Bataks erect Tugu?” pp.88-101; Monako Sakai: “Modernising Sacred Sites in South Sumatera...”pp. 103-16. The three articles are in Henri Chambert-Loir and Anthony, eds. *The Potent Dead*...Ibid.

of warding off the spirits of the departed.¹²⁵ Like in Leviticus 19:27, Deuteronomy 14:1 is about the prohibition of incisions or tonsure as a sign of mourning the dead. It seems they have been practiced by the prophetic communities of Canaan (cf. 1Kgs 20:41, 2Kgs 2:23). Yet in Jeremiah 16:6, 7:29, 41:5, it seems to have been regarded as normal practice.¹²⁶ Both Leviticus 19:28 and Deuteronomy 14:1 are examples of the ancient Hebrew Laws set up to measure the purity of their monotheistic faith in Jahveh by blocking the pagan customs of their neighbours, in particular the customs regarding the mourning of the dead. But in my opinion, ancestral veneration in general is more complex and cannot be regarded as irreconcilable with the Judeo-Christian faith simply because of the prohibitions in these two texts.

3.3.2. Is it Superstitious?

Another common prejudice is a tendency to view ancestral veneration as superstitious. In the eyes of Christian Protestants in China or even of Catholics who do not have a sufficient understanding concerning ancestral veneration, there is a tendency to view it all as superstitious.¹²⁷ The Vietnamese Communist government viewed veneration of ancestors and the worship of the gods of Vietnamese traditional religions as remnants of superstitious practices.¹²⁸ Whether or not those claims are true, superstition needs to be examined to find out if ancestral veneration is included under its umbrella.

In public parlance, superstition is generally understood as something irrational and illogical to the human mind. In accordance with this, Oxford's dictionary defines superstition as beliefs of certain events that can not be explained by reason or science or beliefs that can bring good or bad luck.¹²⁹ Some Examples of superstition are: "It's bad luck to walk under a ladder. It is bad luck to have a black cat cross your path." In religious context, superstition is seemingly a judgmental term traditionally used by dominant religions to categorize and downgrade the less sophisticated or disapproved religious attitudes and behaviour. In religious parlance the use of the term superstition is pejorative and not analytical since it is defined in opposition to a given culture's concept of true religion. Its specific

¹²⁵ Roland J.Faley, T.O.R., "Leviticus" in Raymond E. Brown, S.S. ed., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 80.

¹²⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy" in Raymond Brown, ed., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 111

¹²⁷ Among many examples see Daniel M. Hung "Mission Blockage: Ancestor Worship" in Bon Rin Ro, ed., *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), pp. 199-208

¹²⁸ Nguyen Qoc Viet and Nguyen Dai Tuong "Religions in Communist Vietnam" in *Forum Promotes Discussions of Vietnam's National Issues*, <http://geocities.com/suthatcsvn/hmrights/religions/chapter2.html>, p. 1

¹²⁹ Jonathan Crowther, ed., *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1199

meaning varies widely in different periods and contexts so the best approach to understanding the concept of superstition is a survey of its historical religious application rather than an abstract definition.

3.3.2.1. Its Etymology and Classical Usage

In the classical world the term superstition was used to describe any irrational religious behaviour or incorrect understanding of both nature and divinity. Greek writers from Theophrastus to Plutarch used this terminology to describe a cringing and obsessive fear of the gods – called *deisidaimonia* – as an inappropriate religious attitude. Roman philosophers sometimes echoed this criticism, but the study of the etymology of the word indicates that it once had a neutral meaning. The word ‘superstition’ stems from the Latin *superstitio* or *superstes* which means ‘surviving or witnessing’. According to E. Benveniste, *superstitio* included the idea of surviving an event as a witness and referred originally to divination concerning the past. The word also can be traced from its verb *super-stare* which means ‘to stand above’. That is why those who survived in a battle used to be called *superstitians*, since they had outlived their fellow warriors and therefore stood above them. From this neutral meaning, it shifted to pejorative. Thus in the earliest Latin literature, Plautus and Ennius already used the word *superstitio* in a negative sense to describe divination, magic and ‘bad religion’ in general. In regard to this, Cicero in his work entitled *On the Nature of the God* gives a concrete example. He called superstitious all those who prayed and offered sacrifices for the well-being of their children. For the classical Roman thinkers – Seneca, Lucretius and Cicero – *superstition* meant erroneous, false or excessive religious behaviour stemming from ignorance of philosophical and scientific truths about the laws of nature. Such ignorance was associated with the common people (*vulgus*) and with the countryside (*pagus*), so that the superstitious behaviour had its social locus in the uneducated of the Roman society. As the empire’s expanded, the term *superstitio* was applied to exotic foreign religions such as the Egyptian cult of Isis and the Jewish sect of Christianity. Its pejorative meaning became more collective: from individual Roman inappropriate religious attitude to the ‘religion of others’.¹³⁰

3.3.2.2. Early Christianity

The early Christians in Rome adopted the collective meaning of superstition and turned it back to the pagan Romans. Beginning with the third century, pagans and Christians reciprocally condemned each

¹³⁰ Mary R. O’Reil, “Superstition” in Mircea Elidade, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol.14., Ibid., p. 163. See also “Superstition in Britain”, <http://fuv.hivolda.no/prosjek/birteindresovde/> (virtual version, no page)

other's religious beliefs and practices as superstitious cults of false deities. But later on militant monotheism of Christianity took a lead and intensified the negative meanings of these charges. The Church fathers interpreted Roman statues as idols, their sacrifices as offerings to the devil and their oracles as the voices of the demons. Such false beliefs did not deserve the name of religion, because religion is, as Lactantius claimed, the worship of the true and the superstition is that of the false.¹³¹

3.3.2.3. Medieval Christianity

During this period, all religions of the Germanic tribes were viewed by the Christian missionaries in the same way. They were all both idolatrous and superstitious. Bishop Martin of Braga (Portugal, 572) wrote an epistle entitled *On the Correction of Rustics*, condemning popular magical practices, divination and worship of the rocks, trees and springs as a sort of apostasy to the devil. He also refused to use the Latin calendrical vocabulary since the days of the week were named after the pagan gods – which were demons in his view – like Mars (*Martedi* in Italian or *Martes* in Spanish), Mercury (*Mercoledi* or *Miercoles*), Jove (*Giovedi* or *Jueves*), Venus (*Venerdi* or *Viernes*) and Saturn (*Sabato* or *Sabado*). Soon afterward, scholastic theologians brought the case of superstitious error to a sophisticated level. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defined superstition as “the vice opposed to the virtue of religion by means of excess...because it offers divine worship either to whom it ought not or in a manner it ought not” (*Summa Theologiae* 2.2.92.7). Aquinas categorized idolatry, divination and magical practices as superstitious by virtue of their inappropriate object of worship: not God but demons.

In medieval times, superstition was theorized as bizarre, erroneous and excessive religious behaviour by pagan Roman thinkers such as Cicero and was seen as occurring within Christianity itself rather than in religions outside of it. Inquisition originally founded to combat organized heretical groups included the cases of superstition in its expansion. Still in the same period of history, the humanist and Protestant reform movements in early the 16th century applied the term *superstition* to the Catholic Church. Many traditional catholic religious observances were now judged as superstitious because of the inappropriate manner in which they were practiced. Catholic humanist reformer Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) criticized the externalized ceremonialism as a superstitious defamation of the true religion. He satirized clerical attachment to repetitious prayers, fasting, popular devotion to relics, saints and shrines. People might travel to see a saint's bones, Erasmus said, but did not attempt to imitate the saint's holy life.¹³²

¹³¹ Mary R. O'Reil, “Superstition” Ibid., p. 163-164

¹³² Ibid., p. 164-165

3.3.2.4. Catholicism and Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation intensified the humanist critiques of Roman Catholicism. Starting with Martin Luther's attack on indulgences (1517), new theology of justification by faith rather than by works provided the theoretical basis for rejecting Roman Catholic reliance on external devotions as 'work righteousness'. Having rejected most of the ceremonial aspects of Catholicism – from the use of holy water, saint's devotions to transubstantiation and the Mass, Protestants of all groups were in accord in their denunciations of the papist religion as magical and superstitious. But at the same time, the term superstition was also applied to describe backsliding within the Protestant Church, namely, the early Protestants who were still attached to high-church fondness for vestments and incense or lingering attachment to rosaries and shrines. As a response to the Protestant criticism, the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) made an effort to identify and eliminate some popular superstition within the Roman Church. The Catholic Church, for instance, began to discourage exaggerations of orthodox observances, such as 'desire for fixed numbers of candles and Masses as superstitious in Tridentine Masses.'¹³³

3.3.2.5. Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment Attitudes

If the Protestant Reformation viewed the entire Catholic Church as superstitious, the radical anticlerics of French enlightenment used the term in a wider sense. They regarded all traditional religions as superstitious. Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) asserts: "Superstition was born in paganism, adopted by Judaism and infested in the Christian Church from the beginning." In place of the fanaticism and intolerance associated with organized religion, *philosophies* proposed a *natural religion* that would acknowledge a supreme being but regard this creation as sufficient revelation. The scientific study of nature was proposed as a new cultural orthodoxy and the concept of superstition was redefined to fit this frame of reference. From 'bad religion' it came to mean 'bad science', assuming its modern sense of misplaced assumption about causality stemming from a faulty understanding of nature.¹³⁴

3.3.2.6. Conclusion

After treating the historical slippery use of the superstition with different meanings in different times and in different religious contexts, we can justly judge whether or not ancestral veneration is

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

superstitious. Some elements of ancestral veneration, such as excessive fear of the living dead, the belief that the dead cannot get rest when not being offered a large amount of food and drink continuously can be regarded as superstitious and it should be part of the pastoral work of the Church to trim and polish it after it is incorporated into the frame of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. But to brand the whole veneration of the dead as superstitious, illogical and meaningless would be inappropriate.

The religious piety of ancestral practices is based on universal belief of men in the continuation of life after the corporal death, in the existence of the Absolute Being as the only source of life both for the living and for the dead, and in the continuous communion between the living community in the world and the living dead in great beyond – beliefs which are very fundamental also to Christianity.

3.3.3. Is It Necromantic?

In his article entitled “Honouring The Ancestors,” Paisius Altschul states that there is a vast difference between ancestral veneration and what is called necromancy. He adds that this is a treacherous path that opens the soul up to a myriad of spirits who are capable of posing as the departed, but unfortunately it brings the soul in subjection to the power of darkness and the evil princes.¹³⁵ Altschul’s affirmation regarding the difference between ancestral veneration and necromancy along with its danger indicates that there is a group of people who have a tendency to equalize the two religious practices.

3.3.3.1. Definition

Necromancy is primarily a form of divination. It’s main purpose is to seek a communication with the dead – by magically conjuring up the souls of the dead – in order to obtain information from them about the revelation of unknown causes or about the future course of events. Questioning the corpse of the deceased with the purpose of finding out the cause of its death can be regarded as part of the facts sought. Necromancy also is often regarded as synonymous with magic, sorcery and witchcraft partly because of the diversion from its principal purpose. Divination is undoubtedly a universal phenomenon found in all cultures, but in the form of necromancy, it is relatively infrequent. Necromancy presupposes belief in a form of life after death and the continued interest of the dead in the affairs of the living.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Paisius Altschul, “Honouring the Ancestors” in <http://www.stmaryofegypt.net/honor.shtml> (virtual version, no page)

¹³⁶ Erika Bourguignon, “Necromancy” in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Enciclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 10..... Ibid., p. 345

3.3.3.2. Its Technique

The common technique employed in the practice of necromancy is the questioning the corpse to find out the cause of the death and the identification of a murderer. Other techniques of necromantic practices involve rites at the grave site with the use of some body part of the deceased – often his or her skull. The response may be revealed in the form of an utterance by the diviner or in trance state. It may also be revealed in the form of a sign involving the interpretation of an omen or the drawing of lots.¹³⁷

3.3.3.3. Necromancy in Antiquity

The ancient Greek believed that the dead had great prophetic powers and that it was possible to consult them by performing sacrifices or by pouring libations at their tombs. The visit of Odysseus to Hades to consult Tiresias, as described in book 11 of the *Odyssey*, has been also classified as an instance of necromancy in antiquity. Among the Nordic and Germanic peoples, most of the information regarding necromancy comes from the sagas and the Eddas.¹³⁸ In the ancient Ice-landic religion, Odin – god of the dead – in one account awakens a dead prophetess in order to consult her. In addition to conjurations, interpretation of the movement of rune-inscribed sticks seems to have been practiced. However, despite its popular practices, necromancy was only one of numerous techniques of divination and it was considered dangerous especially when the dead appearing to be consulted were not family members. It seems that necromancy in Iceland had been prohibited even prior to the conversion of the Icelandic peoples to Christianity.

In ancient Rome, necromancy is believed to have been adopted from Hellenistic and Oriental divinatory and magic practices which were all prohibited by Emperor Augustus. Like other forms of divination and magic which include the use of poison, necromancy was considered dangerous by ancient Romans. While in the Hebrew Bible, the account of the Witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28:1-25 is one good example of necromancy and of the prohibitions attached to it (cf. Lev 19:31, 20:6, Deut 18:11), nonetheless, such practices existed (cf. 2Kgs 21:6, Is 8:19). Necromancy is mentioned in the Talmud

¹³⁷ Ibid.,

¹³⁸ Sagas (tales) and Eddas are ancient oral literatures of Icedland or the Vikings – Norway, Sweden and Denmark – the were finally written down in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson and Seimund the Wise. The literatures record various ancient Icelandic myths, religious traditions, family feuds and human adventures. They explain how the universe was formed and how humans came to inhabit the earth. For further information, see: Henry Adams Bellows, “The Poetic Edda” in <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/> (virtual version, no page). Or “The Eddas” in <http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~cherrayne/edda.html> (virtual version, no page) or “Viking Poems and Sagas” in http://www.cdli.ca/CITE/v_sagas.htm (virtual version, no page).

among other divinatory practices. Even though it was severely condemned, its practices still existed. Magical beliefs continued throughout the Middle Ages. Between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of Renaissance, a great persecution of witches came about and one of the crimes of which the witches were accused was necromancy, conjuring up the dead as well as or with the help of the Devil.¹³⁹

3.3.3.4. Conclusion

After we treated the issue concerning necromancy, it becomes clear that ancestral veneration is quite far from being similar to it. Ancestral veneration – especially in the form currently practiced by many modern African and Asian ethnic groups – rarely associates with necromancy which is closely linked to magic, sorcery or witchcraft in its practices. The primary reason for the ancestral veneration is not to seek a communication with the dead by magically conjuring up the souls of the dead in order to obtain information from them about the revelation of unknown causes or about the future course of events as practiced in necromancy. In ancestor veneration, the dead are believed to continue to live and are still regarded as the part of the family of the living. They are believed to be the guardians of the living as well as the mediators between God and the living community. In addition, the concept of necromancy is limited of usage because it is commonly linked to its history in the western ancient traditional religions. The practice of necromancy is not found in the practice of ancestral veneration of Asian and African peoples.

3.3.4. It Is Devotional Character

Throughout this chapter we have demonstrated that religious piety that centres in honouring, loving and remembering the dead, while at the same time asking for their mediatory help, is still widely and popularly practiced in modern African and Asian ethnic groups. This same practice of religious piety of the ancient Indo-Europeans, ancient Semites, ancient Egyptians and early Christians was slowly developed and transformed into a new form that is called devotions to the angels and saints.

Ancestral veneration is never a religion in itself but an aspect of complex religions. That is why even those who have espoused one of the great world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism to mention only a few, do not find a contradiction between venerating their ancestors and worshipping the God of the established great religion. Its reason lies here: ancestors are not worshipped but honoured, venerated and loved because of their being near to God in the afterlife,

¹³⁹ Erika Bourguignon, “Necromancy” in Mircea Eliade, ed. *Enciclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 10, Ibid. p. 346

exactly like the religious piety of the Catholic faith tradition that is called devotion to the angels and saints. Like angels and saints, all those who have died and are believed to have been with God, including the so-called ancestors, are the heavenly friends of God. They can play a role as mediators between God and the living. They can become God's messengers, and protectors as well as the guardians of the living community. But prior to attaining a better understanding of the religious piety of honouring, venerating and loving the living dead as a kind of devotion which will be treated in Chapter V of this thesis, there is a need to display what, why, how and where the place of the devotion to the angels and saints fits into the frame of the Catholic religious tradition.

CHAPTER IV

DEVOTIONS TO THE SAINTS

IN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS TRADITION

4.1. Devotion as a Popular Religious Tradition

4.1.1. Definitions

Based on the origin of the word in Latin, devotion in public parlance signifies a total dedication. In ancient usage of the pagans, for instance, a man was considered devout when vowing to suffer death in the defence of his country.¹⁴⁰ Michael Walsh puts it in this way: “Devotion is a word to describe the quality of being dedicated to a task, possibly to the exclusion of all things else. It implies a sense of commitment or consecration to the matter in hand and is often – though not exclusively – applied to dedication to a religious purpose.”¹⁴¹ Thus, in religious sphere, devotion is widely understood as an ardent affection, zealous attachment, faithfulness, piety, dedication, reverence, respect, awe, attentiveness, loyalty, fidelity or love for or to some object, person, spirit or deity deemed sacred, holy or venerable. Devotion may also be thought of as action such as worshipping, praying and making religious vows. Devotion is a very common phenomenon in most religious traditions. In some traditions, sects and cults, devotion is the central religious concern or is almost synonymous with religion itself. This is the case, for example, in some versions of Chinese and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, several Hindu devotional movements and some Christian movements such as Pietism.¹⁴²

4.1.2. Devotion in Many Religions

The extensiveness of devotion, a common phenomenon in most religious traditions, becomes evident when the variety of objects, forms or expressions and characters of devotions are displayed.

¹⁴⁰ J.W. Curran, “Devotion” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV (NY: Mc-Graw-Hill, 1967), p. 832

¹⁴¹ D.Walsh, *A Dictionary of Devotions* (Frindsbury-Rochester, Kent ME24LT: Burns & Oates, 1993), p. 87

¹⁴² David Kinsley, “Devotion” in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. IV (New York: Mchmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 321-322

4.1.2.1. Objects of Devotion¹⁴³

4.1.2.1.1. Deities and Saints

Usually deities are considered as the principal objects of devotion and then a great many other things. In many African religious traditions as well as in historical traditions such as Hinduism and Confucianism, ancestors are important objects of reverent, awe and devotion. Various people, living or dead, are also objects of devotion or the focus of devotional cults. Gurus in Hinduism, saints in Christianity, the *hsien* (immortals) in Taoism, the Sage Kings in Confucianism, *imams* in Islam, *tirthankaras* in Jainism and Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* in Buddhism are a few examples of divine personages who receive devotion in the world's religions.

4.1.2.1.2. Relics

Relics associated with sacred personages are also the objects of devotion in many religions. The physical remains of the Buddha, for instance, were incorporated into *stupas*, the shrine devotional Buddhism began. To this day, parts of the Buddha's physical body are enshrined in temples. A well-known example is the Temple of the Tooth Kandy in Sri Lanka. In Christianity, especially in the late medieval period in Europe, there was a lively practice of keeping relics of the saints and martyrs which became extremely important in popular piety. Relics were incorporated into church altars and often represented the concrete, objective aspect of the divine around which the church was built. Pieces of the true cross, bones of martyrs, vials of the Virgin Mary's milk, even the foreskin of Jesus were among the relics that were the objects of popular devotion. In contemporary Christianity, the Shroud of Turin in Italia is probably the best-known example of a holy relic. In other traditions, the physical remains of saints are commonly revered, and their burial places – where miracles attributed to devotion are not uncommon – often become centres of healing cults.

4.1.2.1.3. Sacred Places

A great variety of places are also considered sacred and receive devotion. Rivers in Hinduism and mountains in Shinto are often revered. Indeed, most religious traditions associate sacredness with specific places. Certain cities, for instance, play an important role in the tradition of many religions and often are themselves the centers of pilgrimage and devotion. The city of Varanāsi in Hinduism,

¹⁴³ David Kinsley, "Devotion" in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. *ibid.* p. 322. Numeration system is mine.

Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity, Mecca in Islam and Ise in Shinto are only a few examples. Sometimes the whole geographical areas or countries are the object of devotion. The Indian sub-continent as a whole for Hindus and Israel for many Jews are object of devotion.

4.1.2.1.4. Ritual Objects

Devotion also often focuses on the ritual objects. The Ark of Covenant in ancient Judaism and the Blessed Sacrament (the Sacred Host) are examples. Sacred texts are also objects of devotion in some religions. The *Torah* in Judaism, the *Lotus Sutra* in Nichiren Buddhism, the *Ādhi Granth* in Sikhism and the Qur'an in Islam are a few examples. Indeed, the sacred or the holy or the divine has been believed to have revealed itself in so many different ways and in such a variety of forms, that at some point in religious history of the world, almost every conceivable object has received religious devotion.

4.1.2.2. Types or Expressions of Devotion¹⁴⁴

4.1.2.2.1. Meditative

Devotion is expressed in different types and takes place in different physical settings, with different moods and within different kinds of communities. It is, first of all, often meditative, emotionally disciplined and subdued, and consists primarily of the wilful directing of one's attention to the object of devotion. This is the nature of devotion, for example, as described by the *Bhagvadgītā* where Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to centre himself mentally on God in all his actions in order to make his entire life an act of devotion. There is a similar emphasis in most theistic religious traditions in which the devotee is taught to be attentive to God in all things.

4.1.2.2.2. Emotional Frenzy and Passion

Devotion may also express itself in emotional frenzy and passion. Sūfī devotion – an Islamic mysticism – is usually accompanied by music and dance. Sūfī devotional poetry is intensely passionate.¹⁴⁵ The *Bhagvadgītā Purāna*, a medieval Hindu devotional text, says that true devotion is always accompanied by shivering, the hair standing on end, tears and sighs of passion. The Hindu saint Chaitanya (1486-1533) exemplified this kind of devotion. He was so often overcome by fits of emotional devotion to Kṛṣṇa in

¹⁴⁴ David Kinsley, *Ibid.* pp. 322-323. Numeration system is mine.

¹⁴⁵ See also John Alden Williams, *Islam* (New York: Washington Square Press inc., 1967), pp. 130-153

which he would swoon or become so ecstatic, that he could barely manage the normal routines of daily life.

4.1.2.2.3. Formal and Informal Setting

The setting of devotion can be quite formal. Churches, synagogues, temples and mosques are places in which people devote their minds and hearts to the divine. In such settings devotion may be highly formalized and under the direction of professional clergy. In its formal expression devotion is often communal or congregational and arises from, or is dependent upon, the coming together of a group of people for a common devotional purpose. On the other hand, devotion in such a formal settings may also take the form of an individual who performs an act of devotion to a special saint.

Devotion may also be informal and unstructured. The best examples of this are the lives of famous saints who were great devotees. St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) in Christianity and Chaitanya in Hinduism were both characterized by spontaneous outbursts of passionate devotion in nearly any setting. Devotional communities (groups formed as a result of, or in order to cultivate devotion) also vary from the highly structured to the very unstructured. Monastic orders in Christianity and the Sufi orders in Islam, in which devotion serves a central role, are examples of highly structured devotional communities. The South Indian devotee-saints of Siva (the Nāyanārs) and Visnu (the Ālvārs) were part of unstructured traditions in which individual poet-devotee-saints wandered the countryside or resided at temples and sang devotional hymns to their lord.

4.1.2.3. Characteristics of Devotion¹⁴⁶

Although the context, objects and moods of devotion vary, there are several common characters that form the most religious devotion. These involve the emotions, the will and the mind of the devotees.

First, awe and reverence: The object, person or deity to whom devotion is directed is regarded with awe and reverence. There is a recognition, often more emotional than mental, that the object is imbued with sacred power. This awe or reverence may assume a passionate intensity, exclusivity or ardour that overwhelms the devotee.

Second, faith: Religious devotion is characterized by faith. There is conviction, trust or confidence on the part of the devotee that the object of devotion is real. The object of devotion underlies, overarches

¹⁴⁶ David Kinsley, Ibid. pp. 323-324. Numeration system is mine.

or in some way epitomizes reality. This aspect of devotion is usually associated with the will. It involves commitment, loyalty and often submission to the object of devotion.

Lastly, Single-mindedness: Devotion is also characterized by single-mindedness; It often involves mental concentration on its object. Spiritual techniques that aim at focusing and concentrating the mind are often part of religious devotion.

When religious devotion is theistic in its nature, it is further typified by the following characteristics:

First, theistic devotion involves a personal relationship in which the deity is imagined and approached as a person and is expected to respond to his devotees accordingly. In Islam, for instance, the term *manājāt*, which means “intimate converse or intimate chat,” is supposed to characterize a person’s devotion to God. The attitude the devotee adopts in this personal relationship varies and is often dependent upon how the deity is perceived.

Second, one of the most common metaphors used in the theistic devotion is that of a love relationship. The love of the devotee may be like that of a servant for the master, child for a parent, friend for a friend or lover for the beloved. In theistic devotion the mood of love – especially when the relationship is familial, erotic or romantic – introduces great intimacy, passion and tenderness into the devotional experience. When devotion is expressed in terms of a love relationship, the deity is usually believed to have an approachable role and is described as reciprocating the devotee’s love with a passionate love of his or her own. Many goddesses, for instance, are portrayed as mothers who are attentive to and fiercely protective of their devotees or children. The Lord’s Prayer in Christianity describes God as the devotees’ Father. Throughout theistic devotion, deities assume the roles of loving parent, intimate friend and impassionate lover in response to the devotee’s own devotion role.

Lastly, theistic devotion is also characterized by expressions or feelings of praise and submission. Both attitudes presuppose that the deity is morally superior to and wiser and more powerful than the devotee. In addition, usually there is a belief that the devotee has been created by the deity or is wholly dependent on the deity for his continued existence and well-being. In praise, the deity’s qualities of goodness, greatness and generosity are often mentioned. The deity is praised for bestowing various blessings, particularly the blessing of life, on the devotee, his country or nation or the world as a whole. Theistic devotion typically expresses itself by praising the deity as the source of all good things and as the embodiment of all good qualities. In Islam, for instance, the term *hamd* which means “thankful praise” often characterizes devotion.

The devotee of a deity often expresses total dependence upon his god by feelings, attitudes, gestures or acts of submission. In Arabic the word *islam* means “peace” or “one who surrenders” (to God), suggesting the centrality of this attitude in Islamic religious tradition. The Muslim term *‘ibādah* (worship) is often used to characterize devotional observances to God, clearly indicating that the divine-human relationship is like that of a master to a slave (*‘abd*). In Srī Vaisnavism, a Hindu devotional movement, the theme of complete self-surrender (*prapatti*) is central and such submission is held to epitomize *bhakti* or devotion to God.

4.1.2.4. Religious Devotion in Its Practices¹⁴⁷

Religious devotion in most religions is often associated with or expressed in the context of several common types of religious practices such as prayer, worship, pilgrimage, meditation, asceticism and monasticism, mysticism, social action and charity.

4.1.2.4.1. Prayer

Devotion often takes the form of prayer. In prayer a deity is entreated, supplicated, adored or praised in a mood of devotional service or attentiveness. In some case, a mood of devotion is cultivated before the devotee prays in order to ensure sincerity and concentration. In medieval Judaism, for instance, some authorities recommended the practice of *kavvanah* (the directing of attention to God) before prayer so that prayer might be undertaken with the proper mental inclination.

Moving and dramatic expressions of devotion are found in poems and hymns that articulate the prayers of devotees to the divine. Hymns are found in many tribal religions and in every theistic religious tradition among the world’s historical religions. Hymns, such as those central to Protestant Christianity, are devotional prayer to music. Collective prayer that is common in many religions is another example of formalized devotion.

4.1.2.4.2. Worship

As a formal expression of homage, service, reverence, praise or petition to a deity, worship is closely related to or expressed by devotion. Much worship represents a formal, periodic, structured expression of devotion. The prescribed daily and Friday prayers in Islam called *salāt*, for instance, are essentially devotional in nature. Hindu *pūjā* (worship) – which is performed in both temple and domestic settings

¹⁴⁷ David Kinsley, *Ibid.* pp. 324-325. Numeration system is mine

and which is performed by an individual or by large groups – denotes personal attendance upon and service of the deity by the worshipers. The deity is symbolically bathed, fanned, fed and entertained by the priest or directly by the devotee. It is common in worship to make an offering to the deity which is often done in the spirit of devotion.

Some forms of worship are primarily occasions for devotees to express together their devotion to their god. This is the case, for instance, in the Hindu *kirtana* and *bhajan* gathering of devotees at which songs are sung in praise of a deity. The setting is usually informal and the mood is warm and emotional. It is not uncommon for devotees to dance and leap in joy while they sing their hymns of praise.

4.1.2.4.3. Pilgrimage

In many religions, a pilgrimage is a very popular undertaking and for pilgrims their journey is an act of devotion. Making a long trip to a sacred place is a physical prayer. Through the pilgrimage the pilgrim may be making a special appeal to the deity or expressing gratitude for a blessing received from the deity. In Islam a pilgrimage to Mecca is viewed as one of the fundamental acts of submission obligatory to all Muslims.

The pilgrim may be making the pilgrimage simply to steep himself in an atmosphere of piety and devotion that is far more intense than in ordinary circumstances. The feeling of community that arises among pilgrims is often strong and the entire journey, which lasts for weeks, may turn into a devotional extravaganza with hymns being sung all day long, devotees swooning in fits of ecstasy or possession and miraculous cures or incidents being reported. The annual pilgrimage to Pandharpur in Maharashtra in India is an example of a pilgrimage that is an act of mass devotion in Hinduism.

4.1.2.4.4. Meditation

Although meditations may not necessarily have something to do with devotion, yet the practice of devotion often uses meditative techniques. Meditation usually involves disciplining the mind so that it can focus on something without being distracted by frivolous thoughts or bodily needs and discomforts. For many practitioners the goal is to achieve or to maintain attentiveness to a deity. Meditation is used to perfect, deepen, sharpen or enhance devotion. In such cases meditation and devotion sometimes become synonymous. In Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, the term *anjin* which is sometimes translated as “faith” refers to a meditative calm in which the heart and mind are quiet through concentration on Amida Buddha and his paradise. A particularly common meditative technique used to engender,

express or enhance devotion is the constant repetition of the deity's name or a short prayer to the deity. Sūfīs invoke the names of God over and over as part of their *dhikr* (a term meaning recollection that refers to devotional techniques). Eastern Orthodox Christian monks chant the Jesus Prayer "Lord Jesus have mercy on me a sinner" repeatedly. Devotees of Krishna chant his names repeatedly. In Pure Land Buddhism, devotees chant a short prayer "Hail to Amida Buddha" over and over to sharpen and concentrate their faith in Amida.

4.1.2.4.5. Asceticism and Monasticism

Asceticism and monasticism may be practiced for different reasons, but they are often undertaken in the context of devotion, especially in the theistic and Pure Land Buddhist traditions. The best example of asceticism in Christianity is that of the Desert Fathers who sought solitude in the desert in order to develop their attentiveness to God without distractions or hindrances from society or other people. Their asceticism was associated with devotion and was intended to cultivate it.

4.1.2.4.6. Mysticism

For many devotees, particularly in religious traditions, there is a deep longing to be close to the deity or to be in the presence of the deity or to be absorbed in the deity. This is also the goal of mysticism in religious traditions. Thus devotion and mysticism are often closely associated. In medieval Jewish mysticism, *devequt*, which is usually translated as "cleaving to God," is considered the highest religious state that can be attained. This state of cleaving to God is synonymous with an intense devotion in which the devotee is completely preoccupied with and absorbed in the divine. In Sufism the term *fanā* describes a stage of devotee's spiritual quest in which all feelings of individuality and ego fall away, and he or she – a sūfī or a devotee – is fully overwhelmed by God.

In Christianity, the idea of union with the divine is expressed by Paul when he says: "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), in trying to describe the intimacy of his unmediated experiences of God, spoke of a river merging with the ocean and of iron heated until it becomes one with the fire.

4.1.2.4.7. Social Action and Charity

In some religious traditions, charitable work for the poor is regarded as the most perfect form of devotion to the divine. In Christianity, several religious movements with a strong devotional character have emphasized works of charity as central to the devotional life. With the birth of active religious

orders for men by St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century and for women by Mary Ward and Vincent de Paul in the 17th century, the focus of religious life, which had earlier been cloistered, shifted from the cultivation of one's spiritual predilections in isolation from society to serving the poor and needy of the world. The same movements also occurred in the Protestant Christianity. In the 19th century several Protestant religious brotherhoods and sisterhoods were founded with the aim of serving the poor. A modern example is the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and the Sisters of Charity who till today view their ministry to the "poorest of the poor" as the way of life. Mother taught her Sisters of Charity to see Jesus in each person they serve.

The notion of service to other fellow men as being equal to the service to God exists also in other religious traditions. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, who had a strong devotional life, was once asked why he did not withdraw from the world in his search for God. He replied that if he thought for one moment that God might be found in a Himalaya cave, he would go there at once. But he was convinced that God could only be found among human beings and in service to them.

4.2. Devotion in The Catholic Religious Tradition

4.2.1. Distinction Between Devotions and Liturgical Worship¹⁴⁸

In the Catholic religious tradition, devotions have to be sharply distinguished from the Church's main liturgical forms of worship, namely, the Holy Mass and the Divine Office or the Liturgy of the Hours.

First, the Holy Mass and the Divine Office are the public acts of worship strictly directed to God. They are not only authorized by the Church but required by the Church of all her members. Devotions, on the other hand, usually have to be authorized by the Church to some degree, but they are not required by ecclesiastical statute. In that sense, they are private activities, even though in many instances they may be performed in common. **Second**, at least until the reforms introduced by the Second Vatican (1962-1965), devotions were commonly done in the vernacular, whereas the liturgy – the public worship of the Catholic Church consisting mainly of Holy Mass and Divine Office – was in Latin. **Finally**, the central act of worship of the Catholic Church has always been and still remains the Holy Mass – the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Essential to this act of Catholic worship has been an ordained minister. Thus, one could not have the Holy Mass without an ordained priest. Devotions, on the other hands, can be carried out without the aid of a member of the clergy. The Stations of the Cross performed in the Church, for

¹⁴⁸ David Walsh, *A Dictionary of Devotions*, Ibid. pp.87-88

instance, can be led by the individual Christians. Pilgrimages to holy shrines, one of the most obvious acts of devotion, have until modern times been basically solitary undertakings by lay Catholics.

4.2.2. The Church and the Care for Devotions¹⁴⁹

Being conscious of her commission to teach the truth of faith, the Catholic Church from the beginning has exercised vigilance over the public practices of devotion that make up the liturgy and also over the private practices of individual piety. The classic example which the Church exercised to teach and to decide what should be done is the story of the First Council of Jerusalem when the Apostles and presbyters held a meeting to discuss whether or not the Gentiles should have been circumcised first according to the Jewish rites in order to be Christians (cf. Acts 15:1-12).

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been problems and controversies related to devotional practices that were ultimately referred to hierarchical authority teaching of the Church for their settlement. With expansion of the Church and the multiplication of questions concerned with devotions, the Holy See eventually instituted the Congregation of the Sacraments and the Congregation of Rites with duty to investigate such matters and to reach decisions with regard to them. In addition, from time to time the Holy See sets up temporary commissions to study particular issues connected with the Church's devotional life. Several great Councils of the Church also have legislated on devotions. The Council of Trent (1545-1563), for instance, warned against the practice of devotions that do not have the approval of the Church (cf. Denz. 1821-1825). The Vatican II in the *Constitution on the Liturgy* made regulations pertaining to private or personal as well as public or liturgical devotions. The *Constitution on the Liturgy* of the Vatican II Council, echoing the *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII, notes the function of devotions in fostering the soul's closeness to God. While emphasizing the value to the individual of participating in the public devotions of the Church, both Pope and council spoke of private devotions as a necessary preparation for the mysteries of the liturgy. Normally the Church approves a devotion only after a mature consideration. At the same time the Church stoutly defends the practice of devotions against the attacks of her opponents especially the devotions that are rooted in the traditional doctrines and in the constant usage of the faithful. However, conscious of some ill effects of false devotions, the Church is constantly vigilant for signs of superstitious practices. Local ordinaries or bishops are obliged by law to watch over all devotional manifestations both public and private. They are admonished to avert any superstitious devotion and to admit nothing that does not conform to faith

¹⁴⁹ P. F. Mulhern, "Religious Devotion" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid., pp. 833-834

and ecclesiastical tradition and to avoid all semblance of commercialism in the promotion of devotion (cf. Codex Iuris Canonici c. 1261.1).

4.2.3. Qualities of True Devotions¹⁵⁰

There are at least three criteria set up by the Church to evaluate whether or not a devotion is qualified:

Firstly, a devotion must conform to the revealed truth of the Christian faith. Every devotion involves an affective complex made up of practices such as prayers and resolutions, of ideas, preferences and sentiments that have a source that is partially emotional. This affective complex may easily be vitiated by sentimentality and thus endanger the truly religious values of a devotion, because it subtly makes self-gratification a value rather than the service of God who is the prime object of the devotion. Hence the Church's concern is that all devotional life is to be firmly grounded in solid theology. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a symbol of the Saviour's love for humankind, for instance, is approved by the Church. Whereas, devotion to an object which is a mere member of the human body of Jesus are denied approval and the faithful are dissuaded from practicing such devotions. This is done so partly because of their false doctrine content as well their theatrical and extravagant elements.

Secondly, in order to intensify the soul's dedication to the service of God, a true devotion must be appealing to a human sense. The need to concretize the spiritual in the senses is, as St. Thomas says, a consequence of the fundamental unity of body and soul (ST 1ae, 101.3 ad3). Devotions are directed to God but are practiced by men. Since worship – the end of all devotions – is related to the dispositions of the worshipers, effective devotions require a humanly attractive quality. This means that a devotion must be concrete, imaginative and appealing. Thus, historically, devotions centred on the humanity of Jesus Christ have a greater normal appeal than those centred directly on the Godhead which has fewer points of immediate contact with man's sensible experience. For this reason, as taught by St. Theresa of Avila, fervour is best promoted by directing the devotee's attention to some element of the human life of Jesus such as His title as Good Shepherd, Good Friend or Brother, instead of the elements of His divine life such as Jesus Christ as the eternal Truth, the eternal Light or the ultimate Substance.

¹⁵⁰ P. F. Mulhern, "Religious Devotion" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid

Lastly, a devotion must be able to lead souls to a more profound spiritual life by its adaptation to a large number of souls and for a long period of time. A devotional practice rooted in sound dogmatic teaching alone does not necessarily make a good devotion. It must also appeal to persons. Indeed, all determination of devotions, basically, depends on the needs of souls, and appeal to souls may change because needs are conditioned by the changing circumstances of life. Therefore, a devotional practice is born, grows and spreads, but it can also fade away, languish and die. Yet the underlying elements of a devotion tend to remain and become incorporated into the life of the Church from one age to another. Thus, the portrayal of the history of human salvation must remain a constant of Christian attention and must continue to be presented through changing centuries both by the liturgy and by popular devotions such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross.

4.2.4. Three Ranks of Devotion

In Catholic religious sphere, devotion is defined as practices of piety that give concrete expression to the will to serve and Worship God by directing it to some particular object such as a divine mystery, person, attribute or even to some created reality that is related to God.¹⁵¹ This definition indicates that according to the Catholic religious tradition God is the prime object of every devotion to which service and worship are given. Other created beings such as holy figures – angels and saints – can also be the objects of devotions because of their closeness to God.

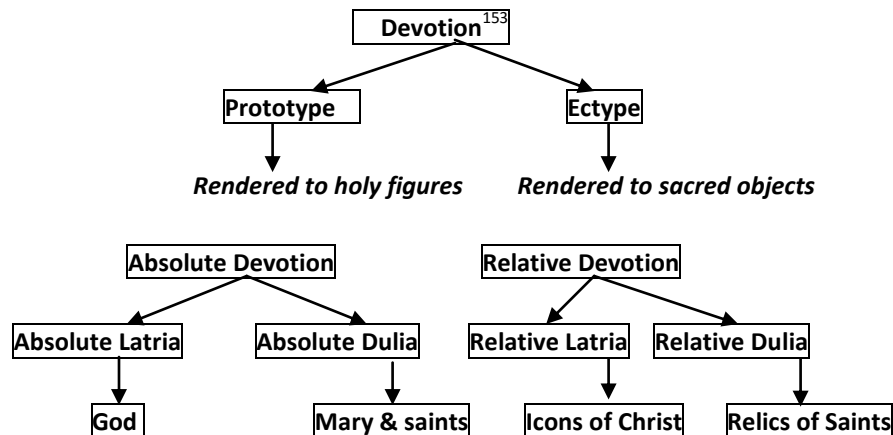
Thus, in the Catholic faith tradition, devotion can be distinguished between ranks, namely, devotion to God traditionally called **latria**, devotion to holy figures such as angels and saints called **dulia** and special devotion to Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ God who became man called **hyperdulia**.

In addition to the preceding distinction, devotion can also be distinguished between: a) *prototype* and *ectype* of devotion and b) material and formal object of devotion. A *prototype* of devotion is understood as the original and proper possessor of devotional prerogatives or excellences. A prototype in this technical sense is always a person either God or saints who are close to God. Prototype of devotion is never an object or a thing. Devotion rendered to a prototype is absolute (*cultus absolutus*). Absolute devotion is subdivided into *absolute latria* and *absolute dulia*. The *absolute latria* is, of course, always God Himself or the Godman Jesus Christ.

¹⁵¹ P. F. Mulhern, “Religious Devotion” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid., p. 832

Examples of *absolute dulia* are the Virgin Mary and all recognized Christian saints. A devotion is called *ectype* when it is regarding an object and not a person. The prime character of devotion to *ectype* is relative (*cultus relativus*). Relative devotion can be subdivided into *relative latria* and *relative dulia*. A sample of relative *latria* would be a devotion rendered to the image of Christ or the image of the Blessed Trinity. An example of relative *dulia* would be a devotion rendered to a relic or a picture of saints.¹⁵²

If we put it in a schema it would be as follows:



Another distinction of special importance is devotion based on its material and formal object. The material object of devotion refers to the person or thing honoured, while the formal object of devotion refers to the immanent reason or motive for which an honour is rendered. Since there can be no devotion without some motive or reason, material and object of devotion are always bound up together. The connection between the two may be either: 1) *per modum identitatis*, as in the case of Almighty God in whom nature and adorability coincide. 2) *per modum unionis physicae*, as in the case of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ which becomes adorable by its Hypostatic Union with the Eternal Logos. 3) *Per modum unionis moralis*, as in the case of images and relics of saints which owe their character as objects of devotion to the relation they bear to respective prototypes. Devotion *per modum unionis moralis* is always strictly relative.¹⁵⁴ The distinction of devotion offered by Pohle-Preuss is good

¹⁵² Pohle-Preuss, *Christology: A Dogmatic Treatise On The Incarnation* (St. Louis, USA: B. Herder Book Co., 1922), pp. 278-279.

¹⁵³ Pohle & Preuss use the terminology “worship” in their description. I intentionally replace it with the term “devotion” since the word “worship” in public parlance today almost always refers to “adoration” or latria which is devotion directed to God.

¹⁵⁴ Pohle-Preuss, *Christology: A Dogmatic Treatise On The Incarnation*, Ibid., pp. 279-280

to keep in mind. Throughout this thesis, however, a much simple distinction of devotion into *latria*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia* will be used more often.

4.2.4.1. *Latria*: Devotion to God¹⁵⁵

In Christian religious tradition, Christian writers found the word “devotion” to be an ideal expression of what man’s proper disposition toward God should be. St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, without departing from the traditional teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, made precise and clear what had been obscurely understood in the earlier period (cf. ST 2a2ae, 18.9;82). According to him, devotion is an act of the virtue of religion by which man is inclined to pay to God the worship to which He is entitled by right. The virtue of religion subjects man to God, the source of man’s perfection. *By religion*, man is inclined to render to God the reasonable service of creature to Creator including everything the creature has. Man is composed of a body and a soul, and soul acts through the faculties of will and intellect. These are offered to God in service by devotion and prayer. *By adoration*, the body is offered to God. *By sacrifice*, oblation, first-fruits and tithes, external things belonging to man are offered to God. *By vows*, things are promised to God in worship. *In the reception of the seven Sacraments and in the use of God’s name* (by the taking of oaths, by adjuration and by praising God’s name) man uses things belonging to God to worship God. These 11 acts – devotion, adoration, sacrifice, oblation, first-fruits, tithes, vows, the Sacraments, oaths, adjuration and praise – constitute the perfect worship of God as far as the creature is capable of giving to God His due. Each offers to God a different thing – something that man is or something that in some ways is very precious to men.

Devotion is the first act of religion and it is defined as the promptness or readiness of will in the service of God. In concrete, this mean the perfect offering of the will itself to God, for readiness of the will in the service of God is the will offered to God in worship. Just as by adoration the body of man is offered to God, so by devotion the will of man is offered to God. Devotion, besides being the first, is also the principal act of the virtue of religion. Religion is the virtue of the will, so its first and principal act is the offering of the will itself. Since devotion is the first and principal act of the virtue of religion, it must appear in every other act of religion. Devotion in this respect – like the religious virtue of charity – is love. Almsgiving as a secondary act of charity must flow from love or it is no an act of charity at all. So also every other act of religion must flow from devotion or it fails to be an act of religion. It is in this sense that prayer, sacrifice, adoration and all the rest must be devout to be truly acts of religion.

¹⁵⁵ J.W. Curran, “Devotion” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid., pp. 832-833

St. Thomas also does not hesitate to say that the virtue of religion, of which devotion is the first and principal act, is identical with sanctity. In this context he means two things: 1) detachment from what would impede union with God and 2) firmness and stability in being attached to God. Both of these are accomplished by the virtue of religion and the act of devotion. Religion as the highest moral virtue directs all actions of the other moral virtues to the worship of God. Thus, acts of justice or temperance or modesty, for instance, become in addition – by reason of the influence of religion and devotion upon them – acts of worship of God. By detaching from what would impede his union with God and by attaching to God as his Creator, man is prepared in some measure for the union of friendship with God that the theological virtue of charity accomplishes.

4.2.4.2. *Dulia*: Devotion to the Saints and Angels

Without diminishing the importance of devotional practice to God as the prime and ultimate object of all devotions (*latría*), the Catholic religious tradition also recognizes and promotes devotional practices directed to the holy angels and saints (*dulia*). The tradition of the Church's piety relating to honouring, venerating, loving and remembering the holy angels and saints was certified and well defended by the Second Vatican Council. The issue is especially treated in many documents, such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* or "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," under the subtitle "The Liturgical Year" and *Lumen Gentium* or "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church," under the subtitle "The Mystical Body of Christ as the Pilgrim Church".

The Church in the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy states that after being raised up to perfection by the manifold grace of God and already in possession of eternal salvation, the martyrs and saints sing God's praise in heaven and pray for the living members of the Church. By celebrating the days on which they died, the Church proclaims the paschal mystery of the saints who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ. The Church proposes them to the faithful as models who draw all people to the Father through Christ and through their merits the Church begs for God's favour (SC. No. 104).¹⁵⁶ In *Lumen Gentium* the Church affirms that through devotion to the martyrs and saints we are closely united with them in Christ and by our communion with them we are both brought closer to Christ and closely joined to Christ from whom as from its fountain and head flow all grace and life of the people of

¹⁵⁶ "Sacrosanctum Concilium" No. 104 in Austin Flanery, O.P., Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents of the Vatican Council II* (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), p. 150

God. We venerate them, together with the Virgin Mary and the holy angels, with a special love and piously we ask for the help of their intercession. We are inspired anew to seek the city which is to come...until we arrive at perfect union with Christ (cf. LG. No. 50).¹⁵⁷ The relationship of the living Church with the saints in heaven, provided that is understood properly in the full light of faith, in no way diminishes the worship of adoration given alone to God the Father, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, it greatly enriches the absolute devotion to God (cf. LG 51).¹⁵⁸ In regard to the communion of saints, the efficacy of their intercessions and the validity of devotional practices to the saints, the official teaching of the Church further states that the saints may be the object of veneration (*dulia*), yet they must never be the object of adoration (*latria*). Because the virtues of the saints are the virtues of Christ, praise of the saints, prayers through them¹⁵⁹ and veneration of their relics are all ultimately directed to Christ.¹⁶⁰ Persons are considered holy because of their heroic virtue of faithfully living according to God's will; and as a result they are believed to have a special relationship with God. They, accordingly, are nothing without God and can not be venerated without at the same time addressing and adoring God Himself. In regard to this, St. Louis G. de Montfort says:

“Jesus Christ our Saviour, true God and true Man, ought to be the last end of all our other devotions, else they are false and delusive. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. We labour not, as the Apostle says, except to render every man perfect in Jesus Christ because it is in Him alone that the whole plenitude of the Divinity dwells together with all the other plenitudes of graces, virtues and perfections. It is in Him alone that we have been blessed with all spiritual benediction, and He is our Master Who has to teach us; our only Lord on Whom we ought to depend; our only Head to Whom we must be united; our only Model to Whom we should conform ourselves....”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ “Lumen Gentium” No. 50 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents of the Vatican Council II* (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), pp. 75-76

¹⁵⁸ “Lumen Gentium” No. 51 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid.*, pp. 77-78

¹⁵⁹ Catholics often employ the expression “prayer to the saint(s)”. Yet, in my opinion, based on a sound Catholic theology of devotion, a more appropriate expression should be “prayer through the saint(s)”, since we can only pray to God through the prime mediator – Jesus Christ – and through other secondary mediators – holy angels and saints.

¹⁶⁰ Patrick J. Geary, “Cult of Saints” in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. IV (New York: Mcmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 174

¹⁶¹ St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Bay Shore, New York: Fathers of the Company of Mary, 1946), p. 42

Keeping this in mind, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also state: "Every authentic witness of love, indeed, offered by us to those who are in heaven, tends towards and terminates in Christ who is 'the crown of all the saints,' and through Him in God who is wonderful in His saints and who is glorified in them."¹⁶² In other words, the saints cannot be venerated apart from adoring and glorifying God Himself. In order to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding, St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes devotion to the saints in general (*dulia*) and the specific devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in particular (*hyperdulia*) from devotion to God which is also called divine worship (*latria*). In his opinion, they are formally and essentially different from each other. Their formal objects are separate and distinct. The formal object of *latria* is the *virtus religionis* or "virtue of religion" and that of *dulia* is the *virtus observantiae* (Summa Theol., 2a 2ae, qu.102 sq). *Dulia* takes at least two basic forms, that is, veneration and invocation. Veneration is respect and reverence shown to the saints for their own sake, while invocation is a calling upon them for their help in order to advance our own welfare.¹⁶³

In addition to devotion to the saints, Catholic Church's religious practice of *dulia* also includes devotion to the holy angels. Like other major religions such as Judaism, Islam and Zoroastrianism, Christian religion believes in the existence of angels who have a primary role as intermediaries between God and humans.¹⁶⁴ For the Hebrews, angels have always been depicted as part of their belief system from the earliest times. They believed that Yahwe engaged a company of unseen but real personal "messengers" who acted as emissaries from God to the Chosen People. The word *angel* itself comes from the Greek *aggelos* which stems from the Hebrew word *mal'ak* meaning "messenger". In Hebrew Scriptures, these heavenly envoys actively served the purpose of God and gave God glory in a variety of activities and circumstances, appearing in the most unexpected places and at the least expected times. God employed angels to make known His divine plan. They brought the Word of God to His people. Some prophets experienced God's will through angels.¹⁶⁵

In the New Testament Bible, angels announced the birth of Christ and authenticated His mission on earth as well as the mission of the apostles, saints and martyrs. Angels are believed to be actively involved in the daily lives of Christians. They, for instance, preside over the sacraments and are present in the important moments in a Christian's life. They will announce the Last Judgment and separate the

¹⁶² "Lumen Gentium" No. 50 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid.*, pp. 76-77

¹⁶³ Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology* (St. Louis/USA: B. Herder Book Co., 1919), pp. 141-142

¹⁶⁴ Allison Coudert, "Angels" in in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. I (New York: Mchmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp.282-283

¹⁶⁵ Charlene Altemose, *What You Should Know About Angels* (St. Louis, USA: Liguori Publications, 1996), pp.19-20.

just from the unjust. The Archangel Michael is believed to weigh the souls of the dead and help Christians achieved salvation in countless ways. Angels carry the prayers of the faithful or the Church to God. They strengthen the weak and confront the oppressed, particularly the martyrs.¹⁶⁶ According to some Church’s Fathers, such as St. Jerome, Theodore and Isidore of Savilla, and St. Anselm, the ministry of the guardian angels is not limited only to Christians as a consequence of their Baptism or justification, instead it extends to all the human race including the heathens and sinners. The Church has always firmly believed in the universal guardianship of all men because all men, at least potentially, are the children of God.¹⁶⁷

The Old Testament and New Testament Bible provide sufficient evidence to confirm Christian belief in the existence of angels and their role as intermediaries between God and humans as shown by the following graphic:¹⁶⁸

Texts	Angels’ Activities as intermediaries between God and humans
Gn 18	The exact identity of these three is not clear, yet they carry a divine message for Abraham.
Gn 22:11-12	An angel steps in to stop Abraham from sacrificing Isaac his only son.
Gn 24:7	An angel travels with Abraham’s slave to find a wife for Isaac.
Gn 19:1-12	Two angels visit the town of Sodom and Gomorrah, warning Lot to leave the cities.
Gn 16:7-12, 21:17-19	Hagar meets the messenger of God in the wilderness who comforts her and provides well-water for her son, Ishmael.
Gn 28:12	In a dream, Jacob saw angels ascending and descending a ladder coming out of the sky.
Gn 31:11-13	An angel interprets Jacob’s dream concerning the return to his land.
Gn 32:1-2	Angels rendezvous with Jacob at Mahanaim on his way to meet Esau his brother.
Gn 32:24-28	Jacob wrestles with an angel at Peniel where his name is change to “Israel”.
Gn 48:16	At the end of his life Jacob blesses his sons, praying that the angels protect them.
Ex 3:2	While Moses experiences God directly, an angel also appears to him in the burning bush.
Ex 23:20	Moses is told to lead the people out of Egypt with an angel as a guide.
Dt 32:43	Like Jacob, Moses turns to the angels at the time of his death.
Nm 22:22-35	Balaam – on his way to curse the Israelites – is stopped by an angel.
Jos 5:14	As Joshua approaches Jericho, an angel appears as commander of the army of the Lord.

¹⁶⁶ Allison Coudert, “Angels” in in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. I (New York: Mchmillan Publishing Company, 1987), p.284

¹⁶⁷ Pohle-Preuss, *God: The Author of Nature and the Supernatural* (St. Louis / USA, B. Herder Book Co., 1919), pp. 330-332, 335-337. Cf. Dom Anscar Vonier, *The Angels* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 47-48

¹⁶⁸ Charlene Altemose, *What You Should Know About Angels*, Ibid. pp. 21-28. Graphic system is mine.

Jgs 6:11-22	Gideon is commissioned by an angel to ward off the Midianites.
2Kgs 19.35 2Chr 32:21 Is 37:36	Angels, acting on behalf of Israel, curse the enemy and destroy them.
1Kgs 19:1-8	In the desert, an angel encourages Elijah and provides food to strengthen him.
2Kgs 1:3	An angel assures Elijah that he will not be harmed.
1 Chr 21:15	God orders the angels to stop the destruction of Jerusalem.
Jer	Jeremiah prays that angels accompany and guard the captives as they are led to Babylon.
Jb 4:18	Job is accused of finding fault even with angels.
Job 33:23	Elihu wonders if there be an angel or mediator to ease Job of his sufferings.
Is 6:3	When Isaiah receives his prophetic call, he is purified through a vision of angels.
Ez 1 – 10	Ezekiel is overcome with awe at visions of the Lord's majesty and the angels' splendour.
Zec 1 – 8	An angel foretells the future and interprets Zechariah's visions when he is in Babylon.
Dn 13:13-30	An angel subdues the flames for the three young men cast into the fiery furnace.
Dn 16:10-23	Daniel, thrown into a lion's den, is saved by an angel who tames the lion.
Dn 14:36	An angel delivers lunch for Daniel in the lion's den.
Dn 10:13,12:1	Angel Michael is mentioned as the chief of the heavenly host, guardian and protector of nations. He is believed to have led an attack on driving Satan out of heaven.
Dn 8:16, 9:21	Angel Gabriel appears twice to Daniel and interprets vision of the ram and goat and the seventy years of captivity.
Tb 5:4 - 12:21	Angel Raphael helps Tobit and his family. The angel, concerned about their welfare, acts as a journey companion, marriage arranger, exorcist, healer and host to a family reunion.
Tb 12:6-7	Angel Raphael asks Tobit and his family to give praise and thanks to the Lord.
Gn 3:24	Cherubim, the highest rank of angels, guard the gate of Eden after Adam & Eve are ousted.
Ex 25:10-22	Cherubs are commissioned by God to be placed by the Ark of Covenant and in the Holy of the Holies of the Salomon's Temple.
Ez 9:3,10:4	Cherubs are the bearers of God and His divine glory.
Is 6:2-3, 6:6-7	Isaiah glimpses the glory of seraphim and one of them purifies Isaiah with a burning coal.
Lk 1:26-27	Angel Gabriel was sent by God to Mary.
Mt1:20,2:13,20	An angel appears to Joseph, informs him of Mary's pregnancy & later warns them to flee to Egypt.
Lk 1:11-13	Angel Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zechariah.
Lk 2:13-14	A multitude of angels announce the birth of Christ to the shepherd and they praise God.
Mk1:13, Mt 4:11	Angels comfort Jesus after his forty-day fast and ultimate temptation in the desert.

Mt 18:10	Jesus speaks about angels' protection of small children.
Mk 12:25	Jesus provides insight into the nature of angels.
Mt 24:36	Jesus speaks about the limitations of angels because they do not know the future.
Lk 16:22	Jesus affirms that angels assist us at death just as they carried Lazarus to Abraham.
Mt 26:53	Legion of angels are at the service of Jesus.
Lk 22:43	Angels comfort Jesus during His agony in the garden.
Mt28:2-7, Lk24:23, Jn20:12-13	Angels announce the Resurrection and witness to the Risen Lord.
Mk8:38,Mt16:2 7, Lk 9: 26	Jesus says that the angels will accompany Him at His second coming at the end of all ages.
Mt13:41,24:31 Mk13:27	Angels will minister God's justice as they gather the elect on the Judgment Day.
Acts 5:19-20	Peter and John are led out of prison by an angel.
Acts 12:7-12	An angel frees Peter imprisoned by Herod.
Acts 8:26	An angel counsels Philip to pursue an Ethiopian eunuch to be instructed and baptized.
Acts 10: 3 - 48	Christian community accepts outsiders through an angel who advises Cornelius to seek out Peter who brings him and his family into the faith.
Acts 12:23	Angels protect the young community from danger by striking the adversary, Herod Agrippa, with a deadly disease.
Acts 27:23-24	While sailing to Rome, Paul meets a severe storm but an angel assures him that he will reach the port even though the ship will be lost.
Heb 1:4-14	Paul speaks of angels from a theological view, comparing Jesus' supremacy to the Angels' mission.
Eph1:21Col :16	Paul talks about the choirs of angels.
2Thes 1:7-8	In the preparation of the Second Coming of Jesus with angels, Paul urges Christians to be vigilant.
Revelation	In addition to the Epistle to the Hebrews, throughout the book of Revelation, angels are seen as in their splendour. As the heavenly host they take part in the Second coming and the Final Judgment. The angelic panorama reaches its climax and full majesty when they join with those who are saved in the "city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem".

The Church's devotion to the holy angels clearly has a strong biblical foundation. The belief in their existence and in their primary role as intermediaries between God and humans is inherited from the long revealed truth of the Biblical tradition. This tradition in turn has inspired many Church's fathers in their effort to make theological speculation about Christian faith concerning angels. St. Thomas Aquinas

(1225-1274), for instance, states that the holy angels praise and adore God unceasingly (q.107, a.3),¹⁶⁹ are capable of influencing the will of humans (q.111, a.2),¹⁷⁰ are sent for a divine ministry(q.112,a.2)¹⁷¹ and are commissioned to be the helpers of humans (q.112,a.3).¹⁷² They act as guardians and protectors of men (q.113, a.2-3),¹⁷³ guide them toward eternal life, spur them to do good and give them strength to fight against the temptation of the Devil (q.113, a.4).¹⁷⁴ In regard to this devotional tradition to the holy angels, both the Lateran Council (1215) and the First Vatican Council (1870) officially declared that angels are spiritual beings with intelligence and free will created by God at the dawn of creation. The good angels, those who remained faithful, enjoy the Beatific Vision, glorify God and are utilized by God as emissaries of the divine plan to humans.¹⁷⁵

4.2.4.3. Hyperdulia: Devotion to Mary the Mother of God

The third kind of devotion in the Catholic Liturgy is the devotion that is directed to Virgin Mary. Technically speaking, it is under the category of general devotions to the holy angels and saints called *dulia* since Virgin Mary herself is simply one of the saints. Yet from the early days of Christianity, Virgin Mary has always been venerated, honoured and loved in a more special way than all other holy angels and saints. She holds a special place in Christian life and spirituality, in Church's dogmatic teachings and in Church's liturgy and worship. In the practice of Christian faith, Virgin Mary is seen as the greatest gift given by Jesus Christ to the faithful Christians (cf. Jn 19:27).¹⁷⁶ In theology this special devotion to Mary – higher than the one directed to the saints (*dulia*) and lower than the one directed to God (*latria*) – is technically termed *hyperdulia*. Saint Thomas Aquinas explains the special devotion to Virgin Mary as follows:

¹⁶⁹ S.Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1987), p. 104. The translation is mine: "Gli angeli non cessano mai di parlare a Dio con la lode e con l'ammirazione."

¹⁷⁰ S.Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, Ibid., p. 170. The translation is mine: "Gli angeli possano influire sulla volontà dell'uomo."

¹⁷¹ S.Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, Ibid., p.182. The translation is mine: "Tutti gli angeli siano inviati per ministero".

¹⁷² S. Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, Ibid., p.186. The translation is mine: "Gli angeli inviati siano assistenti."

¹⁷³ S. Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, Ibid., pp.194-198. The translation is mine: "Ciascun uomo sia custodito da un angelo particolare".

¹⁷⁴ S. Tommaso D'Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 7: Il Governo del Mondo*, Ibid., p.200. The translation is mine: "Gli uomini vengono affidati alla custodia degli angeli per essere condotti alla vita eterna, per essere stimolati al bene e per essere premuniti contro gli assalti dei demoni."

¹⁷⁵ Charlene Altemose, *What You Should Know About Angels*, Ibid. p. 29

¹⁷⁶ John F. Murphy, STD, "Origine And Nature of Marian Cult" in J.B. Carrol, Ed., *Mariology*, Vol. III (Washington, DC: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1961), p. 1

“*Dulia* has something to do with the honour directed to the fellow-creatures. But the motive of honour to the various persons such as king, parents (and) masters, is diverse..... *Hyperdulia* is something (religious devotion) between *dulia* and *latria*. In fact, it is a devotion directed to creatures which have a special affinity with God such as the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of God. Therefore, *dulia* presents two distinct species: simple *dulia* and *hyperdulia*” (Somma Teol., q.103, a.4).¹⁷⁷

As an object of devotion, Virgin Mary is venerated, honoured, admired and loved in a way which is not much different from other devotions directed to all other saints and holy angels. Yet, because of her unique position and role in the economy of salvation, namely, being the Mother of Jesus Christ God the Son, beloved daughter of God the Father, intimately following Him in the redemptive mission of the world and becoming the perfect model of the Church redeemed by Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary is above all other creatures in heaven and on earth. Mary’s unique relationship with Jesus Christ the Redeemer spurs Christians to venerate and honour her at the first place among the holy angels and saints in heaven.¹⁷⁸ In *Mediator Dei: Encyclical on Sacred Liturgy* (1947), Pope Pius XII says regarding the speciality of devotion to the Blessed Virgin:

Among the saints in heaven the Virgin Mary Mother of God is venerated in a special way. Because of the mission she received from God, her life is most closely linked with the mysteries of Jesus Christ, and there is no one who has followed in the footsteps of the Incarnate Word more closely and with more merit than she: and no one has more grace and power over the most Sacred Heart of the Son of God and through Him with the Heavenly Father. More holy than the Cherubim and Seraphim, she enjoys unquestionably greater glory than all the other saints, for she is ‘full of grace’ (Lk 1:28), she is the Mother of God, who happily gave birth to the Redeemer for us. Since she is therefore, ‘Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope,’ let us all cry to her ‘mourning and weeping in this vale of tears’ (cf. *Salve Regina*) and confidently place ourselves and all we have under her patronage. She became our Mother also when the divine Redeemer offered the sacrifice of Himself; and hence by this title also, we are her children. She teaches us all the virtues ;

¹⁷⁷ S. Tommaso D’Aquino, *La Somma Teologia, Vol. 19: Le Altre Virtù Riducibili Alla Giustizia* ((Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1987), p. 52. The translation is mine

¹⁷⁸ Michael Schmaus, “Marian Devotion” in Karl Rahner et. al., Ed., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopaedia of Theology*, Vol. III (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1975), p. 386.

she gives us her Son and with Him all the help we need, for God "wished us to have everything through Mary."¹⁷⁹

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council put it as follows:

The Virgin Mary... is truly honoured as truly the Mother of God and of the Redeemer. Redeemed in a more exalted fashion by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the mother of the Son of God; and, therefore, she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she surpasses all creatures both in heaven and on earth. Yet, being the race of Adam, she at the same time is also united with all those who are to be saved. Indeed, she is clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church who are members of its head. Therefore she is hailed pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and its exemplar and outstanding model in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honours her with filial affection and devotion as the most beloved mother.¹⁸⁰

The fathers of the Second Council further says that Virgin Mary has by grace been exalted above all angels and saints and humanity to a place after her Son, as the mother of God who was involved in the mystery of Christ: she is rightly honoured with a special cult by the Church.¹⁸¹ In an effort to explain the entitlement of Virgin Mary to a special kind of devotion superior to the ordinary one directed to the other saints and holy angels, Pohle-Preuss distinguishes between the *questio iuris* and the *questio facti*.

As to the *questio iuris*, he explains, the higher the dignity and holiness of a person, the greater is his or her claim to our respect and veneration. Now, the dignity of the Blessed Virgin is measurably high and her sanctity is commensurate with the fullness of grace with which God has endowed her. Consequently she is entitled to a devotion which – while essentially below the one directed to God – exceeds the ordinary *dulia* directed to the saints in which, as *θεότοκος* (Mother of God), Virgin Mary outranks the angels and saints.

¹⁷⁹ Pius XII, *Mater Dei: Encyclical on Sacred Liturgy*, November 20, 1947, No. 169

¹⁸⁰ "Lumen Gentium" No. 53 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid.*, pp. 80-81

¹⁸¹ "Lumen Gentium" No. 66 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid.*, p. 88

As to the *questio facti*, Pohle-Preuss claims that Christians at all times since the institution of the Church gave Mary a special kind of devotion which is now technically known as *hyperdulia*. It is true that during the first three centuries Mary did not occupy a prominent place in the thoughts and prayers of early Christians. Her glory was overshadowed by the glory of her Divine Son. We should not wonder at this, because Godman Himself had first to be generally acknowledged before Mary could come into special devotion due to her as His Mother. Soon after Constantine the Great had led forth the infant Church out of catacombs, devotion to her began to spread. The cities of Nicaea and Byzantium (Constantinople) were officially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin by the Emperor Constantine. His mother St. Helena erected the first Churches in honor of her at Bethlehem and Nazareth. In Rome, Pope Liberius (352-366) built the famous basilica known as St. Maria Maggiore. The 3rd Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) held its sessions in a temple dedicated to the *θεότοκος*. Later discoveries in the catacombs show that devotion to her is as old as the Church. Her image appears at the beginning of the 2nd century in the catacombs of Priscilla where she is represented in a sitting posture with the divine infant in her arms, facing the prophet Isaiah who carries a manuscript roll in his left hand and points to a star with his right.¹⁸²

However, despite the central role of Virgin Mary in the economy of Salvation – the Mother of God the Son, beloved daughter of God the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit – leading to a very special devotion to her, she can't be treated at the same level as God. Veneration, respect and honour directed to her must be well distinguished from the one that should be only directed to God. In the teachings of the fathers of the Church, the distinction between devotion to Virgin Mary (*hyperdulia*) and devotion to God (*latria*) was frequently addressed in their pastoral ministry among early Christians. As an example we can mention here Epiphanius, St. Ambrosius, John from Damascus, St. Albert the Great and St. Bonaventura.

Epiphanius teaches that the Blessed Virgin Mary, indeed, is very holy, yet she is not God. Mary remained Virgin, yet she was given to the Church not to be adored, because she herself adored Him whom she conceived in her flesh. Mary can be honoured, yet she cannot be worshipped as the Father, the Son and

¹⁸² Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology*: Ibid., pp. 134-137

the Holy Spirit, although she is so holy. Epiphanius further says that saints cannot be venerated isolated from God....Mary is not God and her body is not from heaven.¹⁸³

In an effort to combat heretic teachings which denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, St. Ambrosius says: "There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit also must be adored if we adore Him who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and who was born from the flesh. Yet, people are not to do this toward Mary because she herself was the temple of God, and not Mary the Mother of Jesus was God of the temple. Therefore, He is the one who is worthy to be adored, that is, He (the Holy Spirit) enshrined as well as worked in the temple (Mary)."¹⁸⁴

John from Damascus, St. Albert the Great and St. Bonaventura also warn that Mary is not to be worshipped (*adoratio, latria*) as God and if this is done to Mary, it must be regarded as idolatry. Mary is not to be treated and approached as goddesses of the pagan religions. Because Mary became a unique figure by her title as the Mother of God. She, therefore, can be honoured, admired and loved; her mediatory prayers can be invoked and all these devotions must be done in Jesus Christ, the Son sent by the Father by the work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁵

In regard to this, the fathers of the second Vatican Council were also aware of the difference between the special devotion to Mary (*hyperdulia*) and devotion to God (*latria*), declaring: "This cult, as it has always existed in the Church, while it is totally extraordinary, it yet differs essentially from the cult of adoration which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, and is most favourable to this adoration."¹⁸⁶ About three hundred years before the Second Vatican Council (1965), St. Louis Grignon de Monfort (1673-1776) wrote:

If, then, we establish solid devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only to establish more perfectly devotion to Jesus Christ and to provide an easy and secure means for finding Jesus Christ. If devotion to our Lady removed us from Jesus Christ, we should have to reject it as an illusion of the devil; but so far from this being the case, devotion to our Lady is, on the contrary, necessary for us

¹⁸³ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Vol. I (New York: Sheed and Ward, LTD, 1963), p. 73

¹⁸⁴ Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Ibid., pp. 88-89

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 156, 275, 283

¹⁸⁶ "Lumen Gentium" No. 66 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...*Ibid, p.88

as, I have already shown, as a means of finding Jesus Christ perfectly, of loving Him tenderly, of serving Him faithfully.¹⁸⁷

4.2.5. Characteristics of Devotion to the Saints

4.2.5.1. Formal Devotion

A formal devotion is also called public devotion or obligatory devotion. It is public because it is open to all Catholic Christians and obligatory since it is supposed to be practiced by all Catholic Christians. It is formal because this kind of devotional practice is officially declared by the Church for the entire Church.¹⁸⁸ Formal devotions, usually, are broader in their scope, more clearly identifiable with the essential mysteries of Christianity and the totality of the life of the Church, and more general in their appeal to all members of the Church. Due to their essentiality, they are warmly commended by the Church and encouraged for all Christians, and their practice, suffice it to say, has taken on better organized patterns.¹⁸⁹

Formal devotions are normally dated in the liturgical calendar of the Church and are united in the official cults of the Church such as in the Eucharistic Celebration and in the Divine Office or the Liturgy of the Hours. The feasts of the Ascension of Mary to heaven, The Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Annunciation,¹⁹⁰ the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Stations of the Cross, the Apostles, the Evangelists and all other major saints are among the examples of formal devotions.

4.2.5.2. Informal Devotion

Informal devotion is also called popular devotion, individual devotion or local devotion. They are so called because these devotions are normally practiced spontaneously by Christians, either individually or in a group. People are free to practice them without being restricted to the liturgical calendar of the Church, providing they are not contrary to the official teachings of the universal Church. People are free to choose any form of devotions and practice them at any appropriate place and time they feel

¹⁸⁷ St. Louis Grignon de Monfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Art. No. 62 Ibid. p. 44

¹⁸⁸ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Penerbit Kanisius, 1988), art. 319, p. 150. Groenen's book was published in Indonesian, and the English translation here is mine. In addition to this note, Fr. Cletus Groenen – in his book – exclusively employs the category “formal devotion” and “informal devotion” to describe the characteristics of Marian devotion or *hyperdulia*. In this thesis, however, I purposely expand its use by including all devotions to the saints or *dulia* under the same category – that is, formal and informal devotions to the saints.

¹⁸⁹ P. F. Mulhern, “Religious Devotions” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid. p. 833

¹⁹⁰ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid., p.157

comfortable as long as such a devotion is the practice of faith and can nourish and nurture their love of the Blessed Trinity.¹⁹¹ The Church does not require the faithful Christians to practice these devotions.

Informal devotions are usually more limited in their object. They centre about more peripheral aspects of the mysteries of the Christian faith or are concerned with objects that are remotely connected with those mysteries. They generally have a less organized pattern of devotional practice. They also can be called private devotions and they have greater or lesser values to individual practicing them depending on their personal needs and dispositions.¹⁹²

Devotions to San Antonio of Padua, to San Padre Pio, Santiago (St. James the Apostles) in Compostela (Spain), Pilgrimages to the Lady of Lourdes (France), to the Lady of Fatima (Portugal), to the Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico), to Maria di Splendore at Giulianova (Italy), to the holy city of Rome, to Asisi, to the holy Land of Palestine, to mention only a few, are some examples of private, individual and local devotions. These devotions may be international in their appeal since they are well known worldwide, yet Catholics are never required to such devotions. San Antonio of Padua remains popular only to Catholics in Portugal, especially in Lisbon – his city of origin – and in Padua (Italy) where he spent most of his life as a Franciscan monk. He is believed to be a good helper of young people looking for a good future spouse.¹⁹³ Santiago or St. James the Apostles in Compostela is the patron of Spain and the devotion to him remains popular and strong among Catholics in Spain. He is believed to have appeared in Spain, riding on a white horse, and helped the Spanish people strengthen their Christian faith during the 800 years of Arabic occupation (711 – 1502 AD).

4.2.5.3. Formal and Informal Devotion in Comparison

If formal and informal or popular devotions are compared, we will find several differences as well as interconnections. Formal devotions are normally rigid and static. They are less warm. They have less emotional appeal. There is not much variety in their forms and expressions because they depend much on the argumentation of the official teachings of the Church. Formal devotions have their points of

¹⁹¹ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid., p. 159

¹⁹² P. F. Mulhern, "Religious Devotions" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV, Ibid.

¹⁹³ On August 12th 2005 I was visiting the Shrine of San Antonio of Lisbon in Portugal (till today the Portuguese still claim Antonio as the Saint of Portugal since he came from Lisbon). I was a bit surprised to see a lot of young people flocking to the Shrine. I was told that one of the intentions of young people going there is to ask for the help of San Antonio so that they might have a good spouse. This belief is definitely held only by some young people in Portugal or in Italy. Such belief and devotion to San Antonio may not be known among young Catholics in Asia or in Latin America and the universal Church never requires them to do so.

departure from the mysteries of salvation which are proclaimed by the Church and are responded by faith and prayers of all Christians in whole Church. In formal devotions, the Blessed Trinity is the centre of devotions. Thus, in formal devotions, Virgin Mary, for instance, is praised because she has received the full grace of salvation and become the model of salvation for all Christians. Saints are admired because of their heroism in following the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ. Devotions to Mary and other saints are a means that spurs Christians to adore God and come close to Him.¹⁹⁴

Informal or popular devotions, on the contrary, are usually more spontaneous, affective, emotional and flexible. They have a great variety in expressions, for instance, in various kinds of prayers to Virgin Mary or to other favourite saints, in using the names of the saints and making them as patrons of various social institutions. Popular devotions are generally more appealing than formal devotions. Popular pilgrimage to a place where Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared – such as Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe – is more fascinating and impressive than celebrating the Holy Eucharist on the Feast of Virgin Mary's Birth.¹⁹⁵ An Italian lady in Bari, where the devotion to San Padre Pio is very strong, jokingly told a visiting priest before the Holy Mass began: "Padre, io non credo in Dio. Credo in Padre Pio"¹⁹⁶ (Father, I do not believe in God. I believe in Padre Pio).

Popular devotions also often take various symbols from local cultures in disguise of inculturation. Popular devotions have a strong local characteristic because they are generally performed by individuals, in groups or by regions or dioceses. In addition, in popular devotions, Virgin Mary or any favourite saint is usually the main object of devotion. Praise, thanksgiving, honour and prayers are addressed directly to the saints and not through the saints to God. In popular devotions, the favourite saints are believed to be involved in and concerned with the daily needs of the devotees, as if their needs could not be met directly by God the Almighty. Popular devotions, therefore, are rooted in the daily life and daily needs of the devotees. Because of this notion, popular devotion can be viewed as a projection of a certain dreams or desires of the devotees to Virgin Mary or to any other favourite saints.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid., p. 161. The translation is mine.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 162. The translation is mine.

¹⁹⁶ This humorous account was told by Fr. Gino Jimenez, SVD at Collegio del Verbo Divino in Rome, 12/28/2005

¹⁹⁷ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid. The translation is mine.

In its historical development, there are closely interconnected relations between formal devotions and informal devotions. Historically, popular devotions preceded formal devotions.¹⁹⁸ In the history of the Church, the faithful often urged the Church to officially acknowledge their local saint (s).¹⁹⁹ So, it could have occurred that a number of popular devotions slowly became formal, but they, then, lost their appeal. A popular devotion usually fades after the universal Church makes it as a formal devotion. Yet, on the other hand, popular devotion can support and give warm character to formal devotions. Without popular devotions, formal devotions are somewhat rigid.²⁰⁰

4.2.6. Exterior Expressions of Devotion to the Saints

In Catholic religious tradition, there are at least three major visible or exterior expressions of devotional practices to the saints, that is, various prayers or invocations of saints, keeping the relics, icons, pictures and statues of the saints, and pilgrimages to their tombs or to the place of their birth, work or death.

4.2.6.1. Prayer

Prayer is probably one of the most dominant visible expression of the devotions to the saints in which the faithful invoke their intercessory help and favour. The faithful or the Church ask the saints to pray for the faithful/the Church²⁰¹ or pray with the faithful/the Church.²⁰² In regard to this, the fathers of the

¹⁹⁸ Devotions to the saints in the early Church, for instance, began with the commemoration and veneration of the victims of persecution. The earliest forms of this veneration were part of the traditional funerary *memoria* of the dead. The inclusion of the names of martyrs in the liturgies of early Christian communities and the earliest celebrations of the anniversaries of martyrs rapidly gave rise to specific devotions that went far beyond mere commemoration of the dead. These veneration – initially observed spontaneously and sporadically by the faithful at the tombs of the martyrs – later on were slowly adopted by the Church and made official celebrations. For further information, cf. Patrick. J. Geary, “Cults of Saints” in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. 4, Ibid., pp. 172-173.

¹⁹⁹ Prior to the ninth century, for instance, the process of identification and recognition of saints had been very informal. The existence of a popular devotion among the faithful was usually seen as proof of sanctity. From the ninth century on, however, Church synods insist that no new or previously unknown saints could be venerated unless their sanctity was proved by the authenticity of their lives and miracles. The determination of authenticity was the responsibility of the local bishops and the recognition meant the inclusion of the saint’s name and feast day in the liturgical calendar of the diocese. As of the 10th century, local groups increasingly sought the inclusion of the saint’s feast in the Roman calendar as well and in time this led to the customary request that the pope recognize the saint’s devotion with a solemn canonization. For further information, cf. Patrick. J. Geary, “Cult of Saints” ...Ibid., p. 174

²⁰⁰ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid., p. 163-164. The translation is mine.

²⁰¹ In the Eucharistic Prayer I (Roman Canon), for instance, the priest presiding prays on behalf of the faithful: “In union with the whole Church we honour Mary, the ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. We honour Joseph, her husband, the apostles and martyrs, Peter and Paul, Andrew....and all the saints. May their merits and prayers gain us your constant help and protection.” (cf. “Eucharistic Prayer I” in *Vatican II Weekday Missal* (Boston, USA: Pauline Books & Media, 2002), pp. 902-903.

²⁰² Every preface of the Eucharistic prayer ends with the similar following words: “Countless hosts of angels stand before You (God) to do your will. They look upon your splendour and praise you night and day. United with them,

Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), when talking about the Communion of Saints, affirm: "Once received into their heavenly home and being present to the Lord (cf. 2Cor 5:8), through Him and in Him and with Him, they (the saints) do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus (cf. 1Tim 2:5)... So, by their (the saints') familial concern is our weakness greatly helped."²⁰³ Likewise the fathers of the Council of Trent declare: "The saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men. It is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, aid, and help for obtaining benefits from God, through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who alone is our Redeemer and Saviour."²⁰⁴

As explained by Pohle-Preuss, the efficacy of the invocations of the angels and saints can be both directly and indirectly proved from the Holy Scripture. **The indirect argument** goes as follow. According to the Sacred Scripture God frequently heeded the intercessions of just and holy men while they were still living on earth. Now, the intercession of the angels and saints who have been with God are more powerful and effective than those of men, no matter how holy, who are still in danger of committing sin. If this can be effectively asked for their intercession, the same must be logically true of the angels and saints, who are friends of God in a higher sense because of their righteousness and glory. The Bible gives us a numerous examples of holy-living men's intercession such as Abraham who prayed for Sodom and God heard him (Gn 18:23s), Moses who prayed for his people and the Lord listened to his supplication (Ex 32:2), Job who interceded for his friends and God blessed them (Job 42:8) and Paul who prayed for people in danger of shipwreck and every soul got safe to land (Acts 27:34s). St. Jerome, in his effort against Vigilantius who rejected the efficacy of the invocation of saints, says:

"If the apostles and martyrs, while yet in the body and in need of being solicitous for themselves, were able to pray for others, how much more may they pray for others now after having obtained

and in the name of every creature under heaven, we too praise your glory as we say: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." (cf. "The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer IV" in *Vatican II Weekday Missal*, p. 916).

²⁰³ "Lumen Gentium" No. 49 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...* Ibid, p.75

²⁰⁴ J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Twenty Fifth Session of The Council of Trent: The canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent* (London: (London: Dolman, 1848), pp. 232-234. For other information about the document, see also: <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html>, pp. 1-3 out of 29 pages, or Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology...* Ibid. p. 146.

their crown, won the victory and triumphed? One man, Moses, besought God for forgiveness for six hundred armed men; and Stephen, the follower of His Master and the first martyr, prayed for his persecutors. Will they be less powerful now that they are with Christ? St. Paul says that he saved two hundred and twenty-six souls in the boat. Can we assume that after his death, when he began to be with Christ, his mouth was sealed and he was unable to utter a word on behalf of those who throughout the world accepted his Gospel?"²⁰⁵

The direct argument is based upon the passages of the Sacred Scripture in which men are described as successfully invoking the angels and saints. Archangel Raphael, for instance, said to Tobias: "When you did pray in tears, I offered your prayer to the Lord" (Tb 12:12). St. John beheld the elders holding "a harp and gold bowls filled with incense which are the prayers of the holy ones" (Rv 5:8) and "The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel" (Rv 8:4). Judas Maccabeus in a dream saw the high priest Onias and Prophet Jeremias – who both had died – praying for all the people of Jews: "Onias, who had been a high priest, a good and righteous man, holding up his hands, prayed for all the people of the Jews. After this there appeared also another man, admirable for age and glory, and environed with great beauty and majesty. Then Onias answering said: This is a lover of his brethren and of the people of Israel. This is he who prayed much for the people and for all the holy city, Jeremias the prophet of God" (2Mc 15:12s).²⁰⁶

There were at least four Church's fathers giving us testimony regarding the efficacy of the saints' intercession for the living Church. Origen who lived toward the close of the 2nd century and St. Hoppolytus (222) teach that it is profitable to invoke the blessed martyrs on behalf of the living and the dead. In the 4th century, St. Ambrosius says: "The angels must be honoured,... the martyrs must be implored,... let us not be ashamed to employ them as intercessors in our infirmity" and St. Chrysostom, speaking of the martyrs, says: "Not only on their festival day, but on other days as well, let us cleave to and invoke them and pray that they be our protectors, for they enjoy great confidence during this life and after death, yea, much more after death. For they bear the signs of the Christ's wounds, and when they exhibit these, they can persuade their King to do anything."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology*....Ibid. p. 147-148.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 149

²⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 150

It is clear, then, the Catholic religious custom of invoking the saints in heaven has been long practiced since the early days of the Church. In chapter V, when treating the subject “the communion of saints”, we will further explore how this invocation works.

4.2.6.2. Sacred Images and Relics of the Saints

Devotions to the saints are often expressed through veneration of their sacred images (icons, sculptures, statues) and relics. Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches are usually decorated with various icons and statues of Jesus and other saints. For Christian Catholics, these icons and statues are not merely the work of art per se, but they are also objects of emotional devotions. In front of the icons, the faithful are on their knees, burning incense and lighting candles. Oftentimes these sacred statues and sacred images are caressed, kissed, hugged, nicely clothed and carried in a procession which is attended by a large crowd led by civil and religious authority. Certain statues and sacred images are believed to have a “magical power” which can provide healings to the sick and other miracles. The use of statues and sacred images is still justified as valid by the Catholic Church till today as long as those statues and sacred images are employed as a means to provide a sacred environment, to create a concentration for prayer, meditation and contemplation, and can nurture the faith of the devotees in God the almighty.²⁰⁸

Whereas relics are understood as material remains of a saint or holy person after his or her death; the word relic, in fact, assumed a religious meaning only late in its history. The Greek word *leipsana* and Latin word *reliquiae* originally referred to any mortal remains. The Catholic Church later on employs the word to distinguish the body or body parts or whatever remains of a holy person after death, as well as objects that have come in physical contact with the saint’s body during his or her lifetime. Relics may be distinguished between real relics and representative relics. Real relics include the saint’s skin, bones, limbs, hair, instruments of the martyr’s imprisonment, the clothes he or she wore and objects he or she used, while representative relics are objects placed in contact with the body or grave of a saint by the piety of the faithful or by circumstance.²⁰⁹ In practice, unfortunately, there were some abuses or excessive expressions of the veneration to the relics of saints.

In the Middle Ages, for instance, the holy bodies in the Oriental Church were exhumed, dismembered and transported from one place to another. By the 5th century, the dismemberment of the saint’s body

²⁰⁸ Cletus Groenen, OFM, *Mariologi: Teologi dan Devosi*, Ibid., pp. 187-190. The translation is mine.

²⁰⁹ F. Chiovaro, “Relics” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. XII (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 234

and bones became an accepted practice since the Orientals of the time believed that the soul was totally present everywhere in the body and that every part of the body had thus enjoyed the vital power of the entire body. The same practice quickly spread to the Occidental Church in the 8th century, resulting in the dismemberment and dispersal of the saints' bodies throughout Italy and beyond and culminating in the foundation of a corporation that specialized in the discovery, sale and transport of relics to all parts of Europe in the 9th century and in the multiplication of false relics during the Crusades (13th century).²¹⁰ Despite these abuses, however, the veneration to the relics is biblical and almost as old as the Church itself.

Exodus 13: 19, for instance, says: "And Moses took Joseph's bones with him because he had adjured the children of Israel, saying: God shall visit you, carry out my bones from hence with you." 2 Kings 13:21 narrates: "Once some people were burying a man, when suddenly they spied a raiding band. So they cast the dead man into the grave of Elisha and everyone went off. But when the man came into contact with the bones of Elisha, he came back to life." In addition, the veneration of relics is an ancient practice in the Church. Already in the year of 156 AD, we read in the works of St. Polycarpus: "We adore Christ because He is the Son of God, but we love the martyrs because as the disciples and imitators of the Lord...Then we buried in a becoming place his remains, which are more precious to us than the costliest diamond and which we esteem more highly than gold. The Lord will grant us to assemble there as often as possible in gladness and joy, and to commemorate the birthday of his martyrdom for the twofold purpose of reminding us of those who have already gained the palm of victory and to exercise and train those who are yet to enter the conflict."²¹¹ With all of these as the background, the Church consecutively provided some pastoral guidance in the Councils of Lateran IV (1215), Lyons II (1274) and Trent (1545-1563).

In the Council of Lateran IV Canon 62, the Church forbids the sale or exhibitions of relics, lest the faithful be deceived by them:

"From the fact that some expose for sale and exhibit promiscuously the relics of saints, great injury is sustained by the Christian religion. That this may not occur hereafter, we ordain in the present decree that in the future old relics may not be exhibited outside of a vessel or exposed for sale. And let no one presume to venerate publicly new ones unless they have been approved by the Roman pontiff. In the future prelates shall not permit those who come to their churches *causa*

²¹⁰ F. Chiovaro, "Relics" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. XII, Ibid., pp. 235-237

²¹¹ Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology*, Ibid., pp. 155-157

enerationis to be deceived by worthless fabrications or false documents as has been done in many places for the sake of gain.”²¹²

In the Council of Lyons II under the Canon 17, the Church rebukes those who abuse the sacred images of Jesus, Virgin Mary and other saints:

“We utterly rebuke the detestable abuse and horrible impiety of those treating with irreverent boldness crucifixes and images or statues of the blessed Virgin and other saints, throw them to the ground in order to emphasise the suspension of divine worship, and leave them under nettles and thorns. We forbid severely any sacrilege of this kind.”²¹³

While in the Ecumenical Council of Trent the Church explains the importance of relics and sacred images, it condemns those who are against the veneration to them as well as the abuses that have crept in them:

“1) The holy bodies of holy martyrs, and of others now living with Christ – which bodies were the living members of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Ghost, and which are by Him to be raised unto eternal life, and to be glorified – are to be venerated by the faithful through which many benefits are bestowed by God on men so that they who affirm that veneration and honour are not due to the relics of saints or that these... are uselessly honoured by the faithful, and that the places dedicated to the memories of the saints are in vain visited with the view of obtaining their aid, are wholly to be condemned, as the Church has already long since condemned, and now also condemns them.

2) That the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them, on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them, or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols, but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent, in such wise that by the images which we

²¹² Paul Halsall, “The Canons of the Lateran Council IV 1215”, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html>, posted in March 1996, p. 28. This text is part of the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history. The original text is in From H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937). pp. 236-296.

²¹³ “The Second Council of Lion – 1274, Canon 17.

kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and we venerate the saints, whose similitude they bear, as by the decrees of Councils, and especially of the second Synod of Nicaea, has been defined against the opponents of images.

3) If any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod desires that they be utterly abolished, in such wise that no images of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up. And if at times, when expedient for the unlettered people, it happen that the facts and narratives of sacred Scripture are portrayed and represented, the people shall be taught, that not thereby is the Divinity represented, as though it could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be portrayed by colours or figures. Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided, in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust nor the celebration of the saints, and the visitation of relics be by any perverted into revelling and drunkenness, as if festivals are celebrated to the honour of the saints by luxury and wantonness.”²¹⁴

Under the category of devotions of Pohle-Preuss, relics are merely the material object of devotion. The formal object, which is the reason why the relics are venerated, is not found in the relics themselves but in the person (saints) to whom they belong. In other words, Pohle-Preuss argues that the respect and veneration given to a saint’s relics are directed toward the saint himself. For this reason, devotion to relics is technically termed *relative dulia*,²¹⁵ which means that devotion to the remains of saints is not an obligatory.

4.2.6.3. Pilgrimage

Another exterior manifestation of devotion to the saints in the Catholic religious tradition is pilgrimage which is usually carried out individually or in groups. It is a common phenomenon practiced by human societies, both ancient and modern, both religious and secular. People of traditional religions, for instance, used to make a regular trip to a certain places regarded sacred, such as spring of water, big rivers, rocks and giant trees, in order to offer a holy sacrifices to the

²¹⁴ J. Waterworth, Ed., and trans., *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), pp. 234-236. Numeration system is mine. The decree of the Council of Trent also can be found in [Hanover Historical Texts Project](http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html) scanned by Hanover College students in 1995, “The Council of Trent: The Twenty Fifth Session” <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html>, pp. 1-3 of 29 pages.

²¹⁵ Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology*, *ibid.*, p. 153

spirits. Hindus have a custom of making a pilgrimage to rivers deemed sacred such as the Ganga to purify themselves from sins. Muslims have a religious obligatory visit to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.²¹⁶ [Gautama Buddha](#) spoke of four holy sites that his followers may seek: [Lumbini](#) where he was born, [Sarnath \(Isipathana\)](#) where he delivered his first teaching, [Bodhi Gaya](#) where he achieved a state of [enlightenment](#) and [Kusinara](#) (now [Kusinagar](#)) where he died. As indicated earlier, [secular](#) and [civic](#) pilgrimages are also practiced without regard for religion but **are** of importance to a particular [society](#). For example, many people throughout the world travel to the [City of Washington](#) in the [United States](#) for a pilgrimage to see the [Declaration of Independence](#) and the [Constitution of the United States](#). [British](#) people often make pilgrimages to [London](#) for public appearances of the [monarch](#) of the [United Kingdom](#), etc.²¹⁷

Since time immemorial, the Jews have had a custom of making a pilgrimage to sacred places where Jahwe, their God, was believed to have appeared to their ancestors, such as Mount Moriah, Mount Tabor, Mount Sinai, Bethel, Shechem, Mamre, Gilgal, Silo, Maspha and Gibeon. A description of a pilgrimage to a central shrine is found in the prescriptions for offering the first fruits of the grain harvest (Dt 26:1-10, cf. 1Sm 1:3-7). Jerusalem became the focal point of religious gatherings after King David brought the Ark of the Covenant there. The customs of sacred pilgrimages was affirmed in ancient Israelite legislation concerning the Jewish religious feast known as three *hag* or pilgrim festivals, namely, the Feast of Passover, the Hebrew Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. These were the times when the Israelites were commanded to appear before the Lord (cf. Ex 23:8-2), a practice parallel to the Islamic *hajj*. In addition, beginning at the age of 12, every Jewish boy was obliged to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year (cf. 1Rj 12:27, Ex 34:23). Since Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, the Jews from all over the world have been making pilgrimages to the ruins of the ancient Jerusalem and wailing of it (cf. the Wailing Wall).²¹⁸

In the Catholic Church, the customs of sacred pilgrimages were begun by men and women between the 1st and the 7th centuries. Initially these voyages were made to venerate places sanctified by the life of

²¹⁶ Cletus Groenen, *Mariologi*, Ibid., pp. 187-188. Translation is mine.

²¹⁷ "Pilgrimage" from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrimage> (virtual version, no page)

²¹⁸ S.M. Polan, "Pilgrimages: In the Bible" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. XI (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), pp. 362-363. See Also Cletus Groenen, *Mariologi*, Ibid., p.189

Christ, by the lives of saints - especially martyrs or by miracles - and also to beg divine aid and to perform acts of penance or thanksgiving. After the Church was acknowledged as the official religion of the Roman Empire (313) and through the 4th century, several events fostered the idea of making pilgrimages: the honoring of the holy places in Palestine by Emperor Constantine I and his mother, St. Helena; the publicity concerning the Holy Land by Jerome; monastic life in Egypt; and then the restoring of the catacombs in Rome by Pope Damasus I.²¹⁹

Among the objects of pilgrimage, pilgrimage to the tombs of the saints became popular during the early days of Christianity. A dramatic feature of Roman pilgrimages in the 4th century was the Roman Emperor visiting the tombs of the Apostles. St. Augustine, for instance, says in one of his writings: "...the emperor comes to Rome: where does he hasten? To the temple of the emperor or to the memorial of the Fisherman?" According to Pope Leo the Great, in 450 AD Valentinian III came to Rome to seek St. Peter's intercession. In addition to the pilgrimages made to the tombs of the earliest martyrs in Rome, later on, alleged tombs of other martyrs came to be venerated, especially that of the Apostle James (son of Zebedee) whose tomb was believed to have been discovered in Galicia at *Campus stellae* or Compostella, Northern Spain, which is still quite popular today. Then the faithful began to visit and venerate the tombs of non-martyrs such as Martin of Tours in Gaul, Nicholas of Mira whose body was transported to Bari, Italy, in the 11th century and much later those of Sergius of Radonezh in Russia, Jean Maria Vianney in the Lyonnais and Mary Magdalene in Sainte-Baume.²²⁰ Regarding pilgrimages to the tombs of the saints, Bishop Jonas of Orleans (who died about 840) writes:

"We are taught that those are not to be censured nor to be called foolish, who, for the purpose of increasing their devotion, or seeking the intercession of the Apostles, visit their burial places, because we believe that not only is love for the service of God increased by this practice but men will be rewarded for the labors and journeys which they undertake for the love of God. Besides, it is peculiar to human mind to be more forcibly impressed by things seen than by things heard."²²¹

Other important Christian pilgrimage sites that have something to do with the devotions to the saints which are still popular today are as follows: [Avila](#) in Spain (St Theresa of Avila, relics), [Canterbury](#) in England (associated with [Saint Thomas à Becket](#)), [Croagh Patrick](#) in Ireland

²¹⁹ M.C. McCarthy, "Pilgrimages: Early Christian" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. XI (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 363.

²²⁰ M.C. McCarthy, "Pilgrimages: Early Christian" in *New Catholic Ency.....*, Vol. XI, Ibid., pp. 364-365

²²¹ Pohle-Preuss, *Mariology*, Ibid., p. 160

(Saint Patrick), [Cologne](#) in Germany (Relics of the Three Kings), [Częstochowa](#) in Poland (the image of Virgin Mary), [Glastonbury](#) in England (St Joseph of Arimathea), [Goa](#) in [India](#) (St. [Francis Xavier](#)), [Guadalupe](#) in Mexico (apparition of Virgin Mary), [Lisieux](#) in France (the burial place of [Saint Therese of Lisieux](#)), [Lourdes](#) in France (apparition of the Virgin Mary), [Mariazell](#) in Austria (Marian Shrine to Austria and Hungary), [Fatima](#) in Portugal (apparition of the Virgin Mary), [St. Thomas Mount](#) in India (place where St. Thomas was martyred), [Vailankanni](#) in India (16th Century Virgin Mary apparition site, [Walsingham](#) in England (Virgin Mary's apparition site)).²²²

4.2.7. The Core of Devotion to the Saints

In the Catholic religious tradition, there are at least three fundamental motivations of devotions to the saints. They are: love of the saints, imitation of their way of life and seeking the help of their intercession.

4.2.7.1. Love

Devotional practices carried out both informally by the faithful (popular devotions) and formally by the Church (formal devotions) presuppose, first of all, love and affection for the saints who have been with God in heaven.²²³ The faith and the living Church admire the virtual lives of the saints, their heroic faith and their success in following God's will when they were still on earth, leading to their glory of living with God in heaven. With the theology in mind, either consciously or unconsciously the faithful and the whole living Church in their devotions still treat the saints as true brothers and sisters in Christ. If the devotees of the saints have a desire to seek the life example of the saints and beg intercessory role, it is because the faithful love them first as brothers and sisters in Christ and vice versa. The Church's faith that "once the saints are received into their heavenly home and being present to the Lord (cf. 2Cor 5:8), ... they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us,"²²⁴ implies a belief that the heavenly saints still love their brothers and sisters on earth.

²²² "Pilgrimage" from *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia*, Ibid (virtual version, no page)

²²³ In fact, the very definition of religious devotion includes ardent affection, zealous attachment and love for or to some object or person, spirit or deity deemed sacred, holy or venerable. Cf. David Kinsley, "Devotion" in Mircea Eliade, Ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Religions*, Vol. 4, Ibid., pp. 321-322

²²⁴ "Lumen Gentium" No.49 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents*...Ibid, p. 75

When talking about the “Pilgrim Church”, *Lumen Gentium* explicitly mentions at least three times the word “love” for saints. After stressing that the Church is one in three stages – pilgrim Church on earth, suffering Church being purified in purgatory and triumphant Church in heaven – the fathers of the Second Vatican Council say: “All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same love of God and our neighbour and we all sing the same hymn of glory to our God” (cf. LG 49). In the following article of the same document, the Council of Vatican II says: “It (the Church) has always venerated them (apostles, martyrs and saints) ... with a special love” (cf. LG 50). Lastly, when addressing the possibility of abuses, excessiveness or defects which may have crept into the devotions to the saints, the Council of Vatican II again says: “The authentic cult of the saints does not consist so much in a multiplicity of external acts, but rather in a more intense practice of our love” (LG 51).²²⁵

4.2.7.2. Imitation

Another core of devotions to the saints in the Catholic religious tradition is the desire of the devotees to imitate the life examples of the saints. The heroic life and faith of the saints become a model for the faithful to follow on their journey to the heavenly homeland. In regard to this, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, when treating the Pilgrim Church, state: When we look on the lives of those women and men who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired anew to seek the city which is to come” (cf. LG 50). In the following article, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council again say: “The authentic cult of saints does not consist so much of a multiplicity of external acts, but rather....we seek from the saints examples in their way of life...” (LG 51).²²⁶ In the Church’s Constitution regarding The Sacred Liturgy, the Council Fathers of Vatican II make another appeal regarding the importance of the imitation of the saints’ life (cf. SC 111).²²⁷

In Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII even speaks quite at length about the motivation of devotions to the saints in the liturgy of the Church:

We should imitate the virtues of the saints just as they imitated Christ, for in their virtues there shines forth under different aspects the splendour of Jesus Christ. Among some of these saints the

²²⁵ “Lumen Gentium” No.49, No. 50 and No. 51 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid*, p.74-77

²²⁶ “Lumen Gentium” No. 50 & 51 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid*, pp. 77-78

²²⁷ “Sacrosanctum Concilium” No. 111 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid*, p. 152

zeal of the apostolate stood out, in others courage prevailed even to the shedding of blood, constant vigilance marked others out as they kept watch for the divine Redeemer, while in others the virginal purity of soul was resplendent and their modesty revealed the beauty of Christian humility, there burned in all of them the fire of charity towards God and their neighbour. The sacred liturgy puts all these gems of sanctity before us so that we may consider them for our salvation, and rejoicing at their merits, we may be inflamed by their example. It is necessary, then, to practice in simplicity innocence, in charity concord, in humility modesty, diligence in government, readiness in helping those who labor, mercy in serving the poor, in defending truth, constancy, in the strict maintenance of discipline justice, so that nothing may be wanting in us of the virtues which have been proposed for our imitation. These are the footprints left by the saints in their journey homeward, that guided by them we might follow them into glory. In order that we may be helped by our senses, also, the Church wishes that images of the saints be displayed in our churches always, however, with the same intention that we imitate the virtues of those whose images we venerate.²²⁸

4.2.7.3. Mediation

The last fundamental motivation of devotions to the saints in the Catholic religious tradition is the desire of the devotees to ask for the intercessory help of the saints. The faithful together with the Church strongly believe that – because of their closeness to God in the heavenly home – the saints can play a role as the intercessors for the militant Church on earth (cf. LG 49); and, therefore, the Church can ask for the help of their intercession (cf. LG. 50).²²⁹ In the words of Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, it says: “There is another reason why the Christian people should honour the saints in heaven, namely, to implore their help and that we be aided by the pleadings of those whose praise is our delight. Hence, it is easy to understand why the sacred liturgy provides us with many different prayers to invoke the intercession of the saints.”²³⁰

4.2.8. Requirements for a Sound and Right Devotion to the Saints

It is not uncommon to witness the unbalanced practice of devotions to the saints. Especially in the popular devotions, devotees often times honour and love a particular saint excessively while at the same time they are somewhat indifferent to God. Devotees, consciously or unconsciously, care less the Lord Jesus Christ than their favourite saints. In addition, devotees venerate the saints exclusively from

²²⁸ Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Art. 167, Ibid. p. 30

²²⁹ “Lumen Gentium” No. 49 & 50 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...* Ibid, pp. 74-76

²³⁰ Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, Art. 168, Ibid. p. 30

the liturgy and the social life of the Church. For instance, a particular favourite saint venerated is not seen as a member of the Church and society, and as a result its devotion loses both its ecclesial aspect and social aspect.

In order to prevent the unbalanced devotional practices, devotion to the saints, especially the popular ones practiced loosely by the faithful, must be guided by the official teachings of the Church. It should be explained to the faithful about the proper place of devotion to the saints in: 1) the whole frame of the Judeo-Christian Catholic faith (which centres in the love-mystery of God the Blessed Trinity), 2) in the life of the Church as a social entity, and 3) in the liturgical life of the Church.

4.2.8.1. Trinitarian

In regard to *hyperdulia*, a special devotion rendered to Virgin Mary the Mother of God, the documents of the Church repeatedly says that various expressions of love and honour to Virgin Mary should be a means of proclamation of the mystery of God the Holy Trinity. Since it is almost impossible to talk or love Mary isolated from her Divine Son Jesus Christ. Admiring and loving Virgin Mary should automatically propel us to know and love God the Father who has chosen Virgin Mary as the Mother of God the Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit who has endowed her the heavenly grace to its fullness. This proposition is clear in the various Marian attributes which cannot be well comprehended if they are not related to God the Holy Trinity. This truth is seen by the Church as a proclamation as well as an honour to God the Holy Trinity as Cardinal Newman once says: “The Glories of Mary are for the sake of her Son.”²³¹ Whatever angle we may look at Virgin Mary she is never really the centre of the picture. The artist may depict her alone, but she is not alone – whenever we turn our eyes to her, inevitably we think of him whose mother she is. She points men to her Son. Her whole life can only be rightly viewed in relation to God the Holy Trinity.²³² In line with this, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council also state: “Having entered deeply into the history of salvation, Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith: and when she is the subject of preaching and honour she prompts the faithful to come to her Son, to His sacrifice and to the love of the Father.”²³³ Therefore, devotion to Mary, *hyperdulia*, should propel devotion to God the Holy Trinity, *latría*.

²³¹ Quoted by O.R. Vassal-Phillips, CSSR, *Mary the Mother of God* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 1

²³² O.R. Vassal-Phillips, CSSR, *Mary the Mother of God*, Ibid.

²³³ “Lumen Gentium” No. 65 in Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...Ibid*, p. 87

Devotions to the other saints, *dulia*, should be likewise. The saints in various ways have heroically lived according to the will of God the Father, faithfully followed the guidance of God the Holy Spirit and successfully took the path of Jesus Christ God the Son in His redemptive mission of the world. This is what makes them holy and worthy of special honour and love by the living Church that is still on pilgrimage to heavenly homeland. However, love and veneration to them should prompt the faithful – the devotees – to come to know and love God the Holy Trinity. This means that the devotees, like the saints, are prompted to heroically live according to the will of God the Father, faithfully follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and always eager to take the footstep of Jesus Christ God the Son in His endless redemptive mission of the world until He comes again.

4.2.8.2. Ecclesiological and social

Cardinal L. J. Suenens in his work *Mary the Mother of God*, especially in the part treating the *cultus hyperdulia* (Marian Devotion), says that every sound Marian devotion also must have an ecclesial and social aspect in its practice. He goes on saying that it does not make sense when we love Mary but not the Church. Loving the Blessed Mother should propel the faithful to “feel with the Church” (*sentire cum ecclesia*), that is, the devotees feel that they are involved in the Church and enter into the source of grace that flows from the Church. Since Mary is also the member of the Church, it is impossible to understand the Marian spirituality without the Church and outside the Church.²³⁴ Marian devotions, then, should help nurture and nourish the faith of the faithful and involve them in the mission of the Church in the world by loving our neighbours, helping the poor and liberating the oppressed in any given society as Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, has commanded.

Devotions to the other saints, *dulia*, should be likewise. The saints who are now the members of the triumphant Church were the member of the militant Church in the world. In various ways they once participated heroically in the mission of the Church by giving their lives totally to God in and through the Church. If the members of the pilgrim Church want to honour and love the saints, they should always honour and love them in and with the Church by participating in the redemptive mission of the Church mandated by Jesus Christ – as it has been done by the saints. Say, for instance, St. Francis of Assisi is well known for his call for peace, then the best devotional practice to him would be by making

²³⁴ L. J. Suenens, *Mary the Mother of God* (New York: Hawthorn Books Publisher, 1961), pp. 75-76

ourselves as a peace-maker wherever we are, whether in our family, in the society we live in or in the world. St. John Don Bosco was well known for his ministry to the young of his time, then the best devotional practice to him would be by involving ourselves in the ministry to the young people of our own time. St. Francis of Xavier was known as a great missionary who carried message of the Gospel to many countries of the world, then the best devotional practice to him would be by involving in the missionary activities of the Church today in various ways.

4.2.8.3. Liturgical

Lastly, devotional practices to the saints are also considered sound when they are done in accord with the liturgy of the Church that centres in the Holy Eucharist in which Jesus Christ sacrifices Himself once and for all. The Church highly values all kinds of private devotional practices and individual piety as long as they hold two requirements as follows. First, private devotional practices and individual piety must be a preparation for the faithful to partake in the liturgical celebration of the Church and at the same time they – the private devotions and individual piety – become a follow-up of the liturgical celebration in the daily life of the faithful. Second, All kinds of private and public devotions must be liturgical in their character, in the sense that these devotions are to be practiced based on the Church's liturgy, accommodated/incorporated into the Church's liturgy and coloured by the liturgical prayers, liturgical readings and liturgical songs of the Church.²³⁵ In regard to the liturgical character of private devotions and individual piety in the Church, Pope Pius XII states in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*:

When dealing with genuine and solid piety We stated that there could be no real opposition between the sacred liturgy and other religious practices, provided they be kept within legitimate bounds and performed for a legitimate purpose... From these multiple forms of piety, the inspiration and action of the Holy Spirit cannot be absent. Their purpose is, in various ways, to attract and direct our souls to God, purifying them from their sins, encouraging them to practice virtue and, finally, stimulating them to advance along the path of sincere piety by accustoming them to meditate on the eternal truths and disposing them better to contemplate the mysteries of the human and divine natures of Christ. Besides, since they develop a deeper spiritual life of the

²³⁵ Niko Hayon, SVD, *Perayaan Keselamatan dalam Bentuk Tanda: Liturgi Dasar* (Flores, Indonesia: Nusa Indah, 1989), p. 34. The translation is mine.

faithful, they prepare them to take part in sacred public functions with greater fruit, and they lessen the danger of liturgical prayers becoming an empty ritualism.²³⁶

²³⁶ Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, art. 173 and art. 175, *Ibid.*, p. 31

CHAPTER V

ANCESTRAL VENERATION

IN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

In the previous chapters, we have consecutively explored the relevance of ancestral veneration, its significant role in the religious life of Christians in various parts of the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, and the maltreatments and prejudices toward this religious piety launched both by some scholars as well as by some pastoral agents of the Church. Mistakenly they claim it is idolatrous, superstitious and necromantic. It has also been demonstrated that those are not the main characteristics of ancestral veneration. On the contrary, ancestral veneration has some fundamental truth parallel with devotions to angels and saints in the Judeo-Christian faith and it, therefore, should be incorporated into Christian devotional practices.

This chapter aims to further demonstrate that veneration to ancestors – exactly like veneration to the angels and saints – is also a kind of religious devotional practice. The ancestors or the holy living dead are venerated, honoured, remembered and loved because of their closeness with God in heaven. Through them and with them the living kin can praise and worship God. In addition, devotion to the ancestors can be formal or informal, individual or communal. Like devotion to the angels and saints, in its practices there can be some elements of devotion to ancestors that are somewhat unreasonable or wrong or “unhealthy”. Whenever this occurs, the Church has a pastoral duty to encourage the practitioners to correct or abandon such unhealthy elements that may exist in their ancestral veneration. But prior to this, we will need to briefly demonstrate the Church’s concept of faith regarding the Communion of Saints and possibly to include ancestors as part of what the Catholic Church believes concerning the Communion of Saints.

5.1. The Communion of Saints Should Include Ancestors

The concept regarding the “Communion of Saints” is one of the articles of Christian faith as stated in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the communion of saints”. The word “communion” here means “fellowship,” while the word “saints” refers not only to holy men and women having been recognized by the Church through a process of canonization, but also to all the faithful on earth, in purgatory and

in heaven. Thus, “the Communion of Saints” as professed by Christians in the Apostles’ Creed means a spiritual fellowship or solidarity which binds together the militant Church – the faithful on earth, the suffering Church – the souls being purified in purgatory, and the triumphant Church – all the blessed souls who are believed to have been already with God in heaven, all in an organic unity of the mystical body with Christ as its head and with in a constant interchange of supernatural offices or merits.²³⁷ Theologians assert that the belief in the Communion of Saints was central in the life of the early Church for a long time before it became an object of theological reflection. One of the Church’s documents teaching explicitly the belief in the Communion of Saints is *Mirae caritatis* – an encyclical on the Eucharist (1902) of Pope Leo XIII. In article 12, it says:

Besides all this, the grace of mutual charity among the living, which derives from the Sacrament of the Eucharist so great an increase of strength, is further extended by virtue of the Sacrifice to all those who are numbered in the Communion of Saints. For the Communion of Saints, as everyone knows, is nothing but the mutual communication of help, expiation, prayers, blessings among all the faithful, whether they have already attained the heavenly home, or are detained in the purgatorial fire or are yet exiles here on earth, all enjoy the common franchise whereof Christ is the head and the constitution is love.²³⁸

In other words, the Church believes that there is a horizontal mutual interchange of spiritual goods among all members of the tripartite Church – the militant on earth, the expectant in purgatory and the triumphant in heaven. The militant Church on earth can pray for those being purified in purgatory and venerate those in heaven invoking their intercessory prayers.

Up to this point, we may ask: “In this ecclesiological reflection – tripartite Church – where is the place of ancestors, especially the remote ones who have never heard of Christ?” The answer to this question is that without we realize, ancestors make up the integral part of the Communion of Saints because of the following considerations. Despite the fact that they have never heard of Christ and never shared spiritual goods – the richness of Christ’s life poured out in the Sacraments ministered by the Church – during their time on earth, there is no doubt that ancestors are commonly believed to have been with God in heaven. Peoples in Asia and Africa as well as in other parts of the world believe that spirits of

²³⁷ “The Communion of Saints” in *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04171a.htm> (virtual version, no page). A long discourse of the subject on the Communion of Saints can also be found in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art.946-962 (Città del Vaticano: Liguori Publications, 1994), pp. 247-250

²³⁸ Leo XIII, “*Mirae Caritatis*,” art. 12, Rome, 20th of May 1902. Cf. F.X. Lawlor, “Communion of Saints” in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. IV (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 41

their ancestors are in Heaven serving God or in an intimate relationship with God and at the same time they continue to invisibly dwell with the family of their living kin. The Church teaches that the Communion of Saints is the Church itself,²³⁹ consisting of tripartite members – the faithful on earth, in purgatory and in heaven – with Jesus Christ as its head. If we are consequent with our Christian belief that there is only one God and one heaven and that all men are destined to only one God²⁴⁰ and one heaven, we, then, should not hesitate to believe that the ancestors of Christians of Asia and Africa as well as of Christians of other parts of the world are with God in heaven and form the tripartite Church. They are part of the triumphant Church in heaven; and as the saints or angels are venerated, these blessed ancestors can also be venerated by the living kin of the faithful on earth because of their nearness to God and their intercessory help invoked.

If we believe that Jesus Christ, God who became man, is the universal saviour of all mankind who came before and after Him, this would include good ancestors of Christians of various Asian and African ethnic groups who have never heard of Him. They also must have been saved in a special way by Christ²⁴¹ and they are now where Christ is – in heaven. In Catholicism, the Church is – as contained in the concept of Communion of the Saints – defined as a fellowship between the living – those who are still on earth – and the living dead – those who are in purgatory and in heaven. In African and Asian religious traditions likewise, human family is commonly understood as a community consisting of the living and the dead. Like Christian saints who are believed to be with Christ and to share the concern of Christ for the militant Church on earth, the saved ancestors who are with Christ also share His concern for the living. In other words, ancestors must be also an integral part of the community of heaven – the triumphant Church.

5.2. Whom Should Be Included as Ancestors

5.2.1. All The Dead Who Are in Christ

²³⁹ Cf. “Catechism of the Catholic Church” Art. 946... Ibid. p. 247

²⁴⁰ Cf. “Nostra Aetate” No. 1 states: “Humanity forms but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people of the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God ...” in Austine Flannery, OP, Ed., *The Basics Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II*, ... Ibid. p. 569

²⁴¹ As for the salvation of those who never heard Christ during their life time on earth, the Church teaches that it is exactly what the article of faith “He – Christ – descended into hell and on the third day He rose again” means. The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was “raised from the dead” presupposed that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to His resurrection. He descended there as Saviour to proclaim the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there and free all the just who had gone before Him. For further information, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 632-633 (Città del Vaticano: Liguori Publications, 1994), p. 164

One of the most debated points regarding ancestral veneration is a question as to whom should be included in the family of ancestors. In the conviction of most African ethnic groups, for instance, not everyone can become an ancestor, but only those who fulfil specific conditions. The first condition is to attain adulthood which is generally determined by marriage rather than age and which assumes procreation. An unmarried person, however old, is disqualified from ancestorhood because of not having transmitted life to another person and is, therefore, considered a useless person whose name should be blotted out of memory. A second condition is to die a natural death, excluding tragic deaths such as those by accident, suicide, unclean diseases or in childbirth. Another qualification is to have led an exemplary life by tribal standards, demonstrating good character and behaviour according to traditional morality.²⁴²

While on one hand we need to respect and acknowledge the right of any ethnic group to set up certain requirements to attain ancestorhood, the Church also should have the courage to propose that ancestorhood should be open to all the dead who are believed to have been with Christ in heaven. Either one dies young or in old age, married or unmarried. The dead person still can attain ancestorhood provided he or she has demonstrated a good life during his or her lifetime in the world. They can intercede between God and their living kin. It should be done exactly like in Christian veneration of saints. That is, certain great Christians – because of their heroic faith for instance and recognized by the Church through a means of canonization – are believed to have a special privilege as mediators or intercessors between God and the living Church. Other common Christians believed to have been in heaven with Christ – though they are not recognized by the Church through a canonization – still can become the intercessors of the living Christians, which can fall under the so-called informal devotion.

In addition, in public parlance, an ancestor is normally understood to be a person who died in old age and has blood ties with people calling him ancestor. But if we trace its origin, the word “ancestor” derives from the Latin verb *antecedere* which simply means “to go before” or Latin noun *antecessor* which means “somebody who goes before,”²⁴³ or the Italian word *gli antenati* which literally means simply “those who were born before”. Based on the literal meaning of this term as well as on the Christian belief in Communion of Saints, Christian ancestral veneration, therefore, should not be

²⁴² Diana B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, ...Ibid. p.113; Cf. Zampi Phiri SJ, “African Ancestral Veneration: Chewa Belief in Ancestors” in <http://www.jctr.org.zm/bulletins/bull56arti.htm> , pp. 2-3

²⁴³ “Ancestor” in Encarta World Dictionary 2001, http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary/18_61585462/ancestor.html (virtual version, no page)

limited to the founders of the clan or the sage tribal kings, those who were married and left descendants behind. Instead, it also should include all the family members who have died providing they are believed by their living kin²⁴⁴ that they are now with Christ in heaven.

5.2.2. Biological Living Dead and family friends

Another phenomenon generally found in ancestral veneration is the notion that ancestors are peculiar to each ethnic group. This phenomenon, according to some theologians, for instance J.S. Mbiti from Africa, is the fundamental reason why a stranger – whether a slave or a woman entering into a patrilineal family by marriage – can never genuinely convert to an African traditional religion – ancestral veneration.²⁴⁵ This is true because ancestral veneration in a sense is an extension of the living family fellowship in which members of the family share a common life-giving experience based on blood ties and psychological emotion. Naturally strangers– slaves – cannot share life-giving experience with people whom they do not know and with whom they do not have blood ties.

As for the belief in most African tribal societies that a woman entering into a patrilineal family cannot genuinely convert to traditional religion – ancestral veneration, it is not true in many other indigenous societies. In Chinese society, for instance, a girl adopted as a *sim-pua* – little daughter-in-law – is permitted a tablet in the hall if she dies. This indicates that she is counted as an integral part of the patrilineal lineage of her adopted parents and according to the customs she is supposed to marry one of the sons of the couple who adopts her.²⁴⁶ The Manggarai people in Flores – an Indonesian ethnic group where I was born – regard a woman entering into a patrilineal family as a constituted part of the family of her new husband. At a farewell ritual called *rui lo'ang* – a ceremony in which the bride is symbolically purified before leaving for her husband's clan – the family of her parents will address the ancestors and tell them that the bride from that day on is no longer counted as the member of their clan and ask them not to look for her. Then, when she arrives at the family of her husband, a similar ritual called *tempang pitak* will be performed. It is a ritual initiation in which the bride is symbolically

²⁴⁴ Normally Asian and African peoples have a certain criteria to determine whether or not a certain person can gain ancestorhood/heaven. In general only people who have conducted good character and behaviour are worthy to be numbered among the family of ancestors and venerated. People who were abusive or committed grave crimes during their mundane life are regarded as part of the family of ancestors and suffice it to say, they are not venerated. They are not asked for their help or guidance. They are not invited to participate in human affairs.

²⁴⁵ Hertz Balz, "Ancestor Worship II (In Africa)" in Karl Müller, SVD, S. Beaven, SVD, ed., *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspective*, Ibid., p. 21

²⁴⁶ Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in A Chinese Village* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 129

cleansed, officially welcomed and accepted into the clan of her husband. In the ceremony, the clan of the groom calls its ancestors to participate in welcoming and accepting the bride into the clan and to guarantee her wellbeing, day and night.

In a nutshell, while each ethnic group has the privilege to determine the rules and customs as to whom they should include in the constellation of ancestors whom they venerate, a Christian ancestral veneration, however, should include all those that are near to us because the realm of the Blessed Dead encompasses all whom we hold in affection.²⁴⁷ They do not have to be blood-related. Spouses, partners, good friends and those related by marriages should all have their places in a Christian ancestral veneration.

5.2.3. Founders of other philosophical and religious societies

When serving the Church as a missionary priest in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, WV, USA, (1998-2004) I had a Vietnamese friend who is also a Catholic priest. One day I accidentally found a couple of statues of Buddha at his rectory,²⁴⁸ and curiously asked him why he kept them in the Catholic parish. To my surprise he said: “Why not? Buddha was a good man. He was not God. He was a saint exactly like any other saints in the Catholic Church. As a saint I believe he is now in heaven with God, with the Lord Jesus; and he prays for us like Christian saints pray for us. Besides invoking the Christian saints in my prayers, I also regularly invoke Buddha.”²⁴⁹

I was quite surprised at first and could not believe what I was hearing. But after I took a course on Buddhism and studied at length the phenomenon of ancestral veneration, I came to a conclusion that what my Vietnamese Catholic friend practiced is not wrong. I believe that he is only a representative of countless Asian Christians who have embraced the Judeo-Christian faith, adored Jesus Christ as the

²⁴⁷ Cf. Maulana Karenga, “Ancestor Veneration” in <http://www.senytmenu.org/ancestors.htm#faq> (virtual version, no page)

²⁴⁸ Rectory is the residence of a Catholic priest or a group of Catholic priests when serving a parish or two.

²⁴⁹ This Vietnamese Catholic priest treats Buddha as a holy man – a saint or an enlightened one – as held by Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism which is known also as Southern Buddhism since it is mostly found in South Asian Countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia & Thailand. On the contrary, Mahayana Buddhism, which is known also as Northern Buddhism because it is mostly found in North Asian Countries such as Nepal, Tibet, China and Japan, sees Buddha not just an enlightened human/saint but he is God and Saviour. For further information, see Richard Cooler, “Buddhism” <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/crossroads/cooler/Cooler-%20Buddhism%20and%20pagan%20webpage.html> (virtual version, no page)

unique Lord and Saviour and venerated Christian saints, and who still highly revere the saints of their own traditional religions.

In response to the exposition of Julia Ching regarding the syncretistic inclination of Chinese religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Folk Religions – and the difficulty of presenting Christianity in East Asia, Hans Küng verifies the existence of syncretistic phenomena in which people of East Asia see no difficulty in embracing two or three religions at the same time. In East Asia, it is quite possible for a person to be both Confucianist and Taoist, both Buddhist and Shintoist. If Christianity is to be at home in Asia, Hans Küng says, it must become rooted, incarnated, indigenized and inculturated in East Asian culture and society which is so marked by Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism. One of the ways that can be employed in the process is to allow a possibility for people of East Asia to be Christians – confessing Christ as Lord and unique Saviour – while at the same time they still adhere to cultures and moral ethics of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism. Hans Küng calls this “Cultural-Ethical Dual Citizenship.” He indicates that it is even possible for people of East Asia to have a “Dual Citizenship in Faith” since some indigenous Asian religions, to some extent, do not contradict the Christian faith, for example, the religious concepts of the ultimate reality, of the Absolute, of God, of the world and of the meaning of human life, to mention only a few.²⁵⁰

The phenomenon of “dual citizenship in faith” as portrayed by Fr. Hans Küng, in fact, occurs not only among Chinese and Japanese in East Asia but also in various countries of Africa, in Indonesia and in Melanesia, to mention only a few. A Divine Word Missionary working among the Chimbu people in Papua New Guinea once reported:

On Sunday, the Chimbu people would honestly try to come away from this cloud mushrooming over their lives and for a while be in contact with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. In their daily worries, however, they would still feel dependent on the ancestors.

Whether we like it or not, in many good Christian congregations, people still have two ways of belief systems, co-existing more or less peacefully. Christianity has not done away with the

²⁵⁰ For further information, see Hans Küng – Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Groups, Inc., 1988), pp. 272-282. For more information regarding Julia Ching’s exposition on the syncretistic inclination of Chinese Religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Folk Religions – , and the difficulty of presenting Christianity in East Asia, see Julia Ching, *Chinese Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 186-220.

ancestral belief altogether. Still less has it tried to integrate the old beliefs or to put them in the right perspective.

The result is either dichotomy of two belief systems, one for Sunday and the other for weekdays, or a weird syncretism which does away with the core of the Christian message and with unique position of Christ in God's plan of salvation.²⁵¹

Still another missionary priest working among the Chimbu people in Papua New Guinea with a quite surprising tone reported:

Sometime Chimbu people come to the parish priest asking him to pray and say mass, because their pigs are dying, children are sick, food does not grow well, etc. But very often this is already their second step. They have already killed a chicken or pig on the 'ples matmat' (cemetery). Now they want to try the other way too, in case the first one does not work. In our thinking these two things – *Catholic Mass and ancestral rite* (the phrase in italic is mine), do not go together. In the thinking of the Chimbu people they fit in quite well... What can we do, if people use both ways of 'praying'...?²⁵²

Peter Maboloka, O.M.I., at an International Congress of Missiology held in Rome (1975), also presented a similar report when speaking about the progress of Evangelization in Lesotho, South Africa:

The Catholic Church has been successful in Christianizing 54% of the Lesotho. It has not succeeded fully in convincing them to abandon completely their pagan customs. Many Lesotho live double lives. They continue in their attachment to the Church but they also still practice the customs which the Church wants them to abandon...²⁵³

In Flores, the only island with strong Catholic presence in Indonesia, the so-called 'double standard of faith' or 'dual citizenship in faith' – to use the terminology coined by Hans Küng – is still widely practiced by Catholics. In regard to this, we have three fresh examples. First, in September 2004, the Catholic Minor Seminary of St. John Berchmans at Todabelu-Mataloko in central Flores celebrated its 75th

²⁵¹ Leo Brower, "Ancestors in Christ?" in *Catalyst*, Vol. 3 No. 2: *Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* (Goroka, Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1973), p.49

²⁵² Herman Janssen, "Dilemma Over the Departed – Ancestor Veneration: A Problem of Syncretism in Pastoral Work" in *Catalyst*, Vol. 4 No. 4: *Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* (Goroka, Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1974), p. 3

²⁵³ Peter Maboloka, O.M.I., Evangelization in Lesotho, in *Evangelizatione E Culture III: Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia*, Rome, 5 -12 Ottobre 1975 (Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 1976), p. 126

anniversary. Among the activities conducted during the celebration were two rituals of the indigenous religion of Ngada People, central Flores, called *Kaba Manu* – Sacrifice of Chicken Buffalo, and *Toa Kaba* – Sacrifice of Buffalo. *Kaba Manu* is a ritual sacrifice of chicken offered to the ancestors. While *Toa Kaba* is a ritual sacrifice of a buffalo offered to the Absolute Being – God. Archbishop Mgr. Longinus da Cunha, Pr, the bishop of the Archdiocese of Ende, Central Flores, symbolically slaughtered the animal by putting a spear on its neck. The two rituals of the traditional religion were held on September 14th 2004, distinctively and separately from the Catholic Mass done at the peak of the celebration on September 15th 2004.²⁵⁴

Second, on Sunday January 22, 2006, a landslide occurred at *Desa Ranaka* – a small village in West Flores Island – burying a number of local people. After two days of searching, the rescue workers failed to find two bodies of the victims. People then performed an ancestral rite in a bush near the place of natural disaster, asking the favour and guidance of their ancestors to help them find the bodies of their loved ones. In evening of the same day, people also attended a Eucharistic Celebration at the Church of St. Mary the Immaculate led by Fr. Michael Wangku, Pr with the main intention to ask God’s blessings so that the rescue workers might be able to find the bodies of the victims.²⁵⁵ The two rituals – ancestral rite in the bushes and Holy Mass in the Church –were performed separately by the same people with the same goal, that is, asking the favour of God and of the spirits of their ancestors to help them find the bodies of their loved ones under the giant mud of landslide.

Last, on Wednesday February 2, 2006, Fr. Semeon Bera Muda, SVD, and Fr. Remigius Ceme, SVD – two professors from St. Paul Catholic Seminary of Ledalero/Flores – celebrated a Holy Mass at Nilo, a village located near St. Paul Major Seminary, to open a reconstruction of a giant statue of Virgin Mary of about 18 meters high that had been knocked down by storm a few weeks before. After the Eucharistic Celebration was over, the local faithful performed an ancestral rite to ask the intermediary help of the ancestors in their effort to rebuild the statue of the Virgin Mary. “We need to greet and welcome our ancestors,” one of them said “because they are our intermediaries with God.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ “Toa Kaba, Korban pada Pesta Intan Seminari Mataloko” – the Sacrifice of Toa Kaba at the 75th Anniversary of Minor Seminary of St. John Berchmans in Mataloko, Flores, in *Post Kupang/Indonesia*, September 2004. The English translation is mine.

²⁵⁵ “Dua Korban Tanah Longsor di Rongket Belum Ditemukan: Keluarga Minta Petunjuk Leluhur” – Two Victims of Landslide at Rongket Have not Been Found, in *Post Kupang/Indonesia*, January 2006. The English translation is mine.

²⁵⁶ “Patung Maria Kembali Dibangun” – the Statue of Virgin Mary Is Being Rebuilt, in *Post Kupang/Indonesia*, February, 2006. The English translation is mine.

After exploring these religious phenomena, double standard in faith as claimed by Has Küng is not unique to people in East Asia, but also is found in Indonesia, Melanesia and various ethnic groups in Africa. Many Christians in Asia and Africa as well as at other parts of the world have embraced Christian faith, yet at the same time they are still linked to their own traditional religions. They venerate the Christian saints and their own “saints” – the ancestors, in two distinct separate ways. While agreeing with Hans Küng’s point that it should not be a problem for people of East Asia to embrace the Christian faith as well as the culture and moral ethics of Buddhism, of Taoism, of Confucianism and of Shintoism, we do not have to call such religious attitude a “dual religion,” “dual cultural-ethical citizenship” or “dual citizenship in Faith, ” or a dichotomy of two belief systems as claimed by Leo Brouwer and Herman Janssen, if we are able to properly understand the ancestral belief systems and put them in the right perspective.

In our effort to inculturate the spirit of Jesus Christ – the Christian faith – the Church is called to embrace, integrate and incorporate in her bosom all values of other cultures and traditional religious traditions providing they do not contradict the Christian faith. One such value is ancestral veneration. Christians of various ethnic groups in Asia and Africa should be allowed to include the holy figures from their traditional religions in Christian veneration. Ancestors, sage kings, the founder of clan, the founders of other philosophical and religious societies such as Confucius, Laotze, Mencius, to mention only a few, should be incorporated into Christian veneration of saints. Christians in East Asia or Africa should be free to approach those holy figures as the blessed who are now with Christ in heaven. Like Christian Saints, they also, together with Christ, are concerned with the welfare of the living on earth.

5.3. Elements of Ancestral Veneration Need to Be Given Some Lights

Under this subheading we will give theological lights to some points frequently debated when people are talking about ancestral veneration. Some of these points are as follows: 1) The abodes of the ancestors: Are they with Christ or in the mountain hollows? 2) The sacrifice of food and drink to the ancestors: Is it okay? 3) Man’s soul after corporal death: Does the soul of man reincarnate? 4) Do the ancestors really have power over their living kin?

5.3.1. The Abodes of the Ancestors

Most of the indigenous Christians in Africa and Asia believe that the ancestors live at or around their graves, in the valleys, in the mountains, in the homes of their living kin, in ancestral shrines, in bushes

and in big rivers. The ancestors are capable to enter into and possess human individuals or brute animals. In a nutshell, they are capable to exist anywhere.²⁵⁷ In regard to this notion of beliefs, some Christian theologians suggest that this belief should be corrected. In the light of Christian faith, they say, we should proclaim that the saved ancestors are not living in holes and hollows, in treetops, on mountain slopes or in cemeteries as common folks believe. Instead, they are where Christ is – in heaven.²⁵⁸

But where is heaven? Is it in the sky, in the stars? None of us knows for sure. When I gave a course on the role and nature of Christian saints to a catechumen with a protestant background, he curiously fired this question at me: “You just said that the saints are in our lives, in the Church. Aren’t they in heaven? How can you say that they also are with us here in the world?” In responding to the question I said: “When we talk about God it is correct to say that He is in heaven; He is in the universe; He is in our Church; He is in the mountains and valleys; and He can also be in our hearts. All are possible for God because for Him there is no time and space limit. It is also true for the saints because they are spirit beings.”

This notion also applies to the ancestors. As the spirit beings ancestors have the capacity to exist anywhere. They are definitely in heaven with Christ yet they also can be in the homes of their living kin in the world; they can be in the grave yards as well as in the mountains, in the forest and in the bushes. J. V. Taylor, therefore, is not wrong when quoting what general Africans believe in regard to various abodes of the ancestors:

Those who are dead are never gone:
They are there in the thickening shadow.
The dead are not under the earth:
They are there, in the tree that rustles,
They are in the wood that groans,
They are in the water that runs
They are in the water that sleeps,

²⁵⁷ Cf. Dr. Charles Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to the African Churches,” in *C.U.E.A: African Christian Studies*, Vol. 9. No. 3 September 1993, The Journal of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa Nairobi, Kenya, p. 15.

²⁵⁸ Leo Brower, “Ancestors in Christ?” in *Catalyst* Vol. 3 No. 2: *Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia* (Goroka, Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-Economic Service, 1973), p. 49

They are in the hut,
They are in the crowd,
The dead are not dead.

Those who are dead are never gone,
They are in the breast of the woman,
They are in the child who is wailing
And in the firebrand that flames.
The dead are not under the earth:
They are in the fire that is dying,
They are in the grasses that weep,
They are in the whimpering rocks,
They are in the forest,
They are in the house, the dead are not dead.²⁵⁹

5.3.2. Offering Sacrifice of Food

Another element commonly practiced in ancestral veneration is the offering sacrifice of food given to the dead and the way it is performed varies from one ethnic group to another. The kinds of food offered are normally the ones familiar to human meals, such as rice, mushrooms, chicken, goat, water and palm wine. One of the frequent questions launched by those who are not in favour of such practices is whether or not the dead ancestors still need to eat and drink. Perhaps the same question we need to launch regarding similar offerings directed to God such as animal sacrifice in the Old Testament,²⁶⁰ or money collected during the Holy Mass that is supposed to be united with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Altar. Did the Almighty and Powerful God needed to be regularly fed by a goat? Does God really need and accept our money offering in a literal sense or are they only the symbol of the sacrifice of our very self and our love for God?

First of all, it would be very unwise to condemn the practice of offering the sacrifice of food to the dead before we really make an effort to understand it. Based on my own experience, born and growing up in

²⁵⁹ Herman Janssen, "Dilemma Over the Departed, Ancestor Veneration: A Problem of Syncretism in Pastoral Work" in *Catalyst* Vol. 4 No. 4: *Social Pastoral Magazine for Melanesia*, Ibid., p. 16

²⁶⁰ There are plenty examples concerning animal sacrifices offered to God in the Old Testament such as sacrifice of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16), of Noah (Gen 8:20-21) and of Abraham (Gen 22:1-13), to mention only a few. Hebrew 9:1-28 speaks about the worship of the First Covenant as an archetype of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Did God the creator of the big universe really eat Abel's tiny goat? Or is such an offering simply a symbol of offering of man's heart/love to the Creator God?

a Catholic family/clan yet still holding traditional religious tradition such as the practice of ancestral veneration, I am certain that my parents and my grandparents do not mean that the dead really take their offering sacrifice in a literal sense, but in a symbolic sense. It is a sign of their love, affection, honour and obedience. It is a vivid reminder that the dead are not really dead but are still very much alive and are the invisible part of the living family. The strong concept of human community as consisting of the living and dead²⁶¹ leads peoples of Asia, Africa and Melanesia to think their dead are still very much alive in another world and treat them as if they also had a kind of life like the living on earth who have corporal needs of eating, drinking and clothing.

That the offering sacrifice of food is mostly taken symbolically rather than literally is also clear in ancestral veneration of ancient Egypt and its changes over time. In the pre-dynastic period of Egypt, jars and bowls of food and drink were buried with the dead so that they might not be hungry, and flint knives and harpoons so that they might hunt and defend themselves. Soon afterwards, the practice shifted from burying the real articles to burying only the symbolic or representative ones such as models of boats, of cattle, of hippopotami and of servants, with the intention that they would be magically turned into spiritual counterparts needed by the dead. Then in a later period, in the *mastabas* of nobles of the Old Kingdom contemporary with the III and VI dynasty, the food-dishes were reduced to tiny conventional substitutes. Instead of placing costly furniture with the dead, the walls were decorated with pictures of the things that the deceased might need in the future life. Thus, a noble, for instance, was pictured in a skiff with his wife, hunting wild fowl with a boomerang or spearing a hippopotamus with a harpoon. Peasants tilled the fields with yokes of oxen, reaped the grain and threshed it. Women ground the wheat in flour, made bread and baked it, and prepared all the other dishes for the noble's table. All the scenes of a busy agricultural and commercial civilization were represented in the netherworld. In the tombs of the New Empire, these pictures were replaced by religious texts which give the deceased instructions as to how to survive in the netherworld.²⁶²

The symbolic nature of offering sacrifice of food for the dead also can be noticed in ancestral veneration among Taiwanese. There is a difference between the offering sacrifice of food given to the ancestors at ancestral hall – a domestic altar – and the offering sacrifice of food given to the ancestors at the

²⁶¹ People of Kongo, for instance, defines clan – *luvila* – as a community of all members, alive as well as dead, descended from a common ancestor. For more information, see Simon Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers*, *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁶² Lewis Bayles Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, *Ibid.*, pp- 189-190

gravesite. Typical offerings at a domestic altar are a half chicken, cleaned, cooked, seasoned and chopped into bite-sized pieces; a pork liver, boiled, seasoned and sliced, stir-fried eggs; various soups; and cooked rice. Chopsticks and bowls are always provided. The foods offered at the graves are not soaked or cooked nor seasoned. Most of them are dry and unpalatable.²⁶³

According to Emily M. Ahern, after further comparing the stark difference of the offering given to the Supernatural beings such as *Tho-te-kong* – the lowest ranking god accessible to humans (a chicken, plucked and cleaned but still whole; a scaled, cleaned fish; noodles that have been soaked but uncooked) and *Thi:kong* – the highest ranking god who is inaccessible to humans (raw foods such as a live fish, a whole raw pig, two stalks of sugarcane uprooted whole from the ground with roots and leaves still intact, etc), the dry foods offered at the grave may mark a great distance between the ancestors as the resident of the ancestral hall and ancestors as residents of the grave.²⁶⁴ The symbolic nature of this practice is also very apparent during the mourning period during which the deceased is treated just like a living person.

In Korea, for instance, a burning cigarette is lit for the newly dead who smoked. Whenever a daily meal is prepared, a portion is placed for the newly dead person, as if the deceased were still participating in family meals.²⁶⁵ During the first eight days of the mourning period, the Manggarai people, an ethnic in Flores-Indonesia where I come from, still count and treat the newly dead as a living member of the family. At home he/she is still given a bed and a special place – chair – to sit. At meal time the newly deceased is called by name to eat. A portion of food in a plate is placed at a special place in the house. The deceased is given his/her favourite food. With these customs, we come to a conclusion that the living family members do not really believe that the dead do eat the food offering in a real sense of the word. Instead, these offering sacrifices of food are performed mainly to show love, respect and longing for the dead, and to nurture a continuous fellowship between the dead and the living kin. Psychologically, such practice is very human and it, therefore, cannot be condemned as a practice of vanity.

The Powers of Ancestors

Another aspect of ancestral veneration that is quite phenomenal is the notion that ancestors or the dead in general have some kind of power to influence their living kin. This power can be both a blessing

²⁶³ Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Ibid., pp.166-167

²⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 168-169

²⁶⁵ Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1982), p. 82

and a curse. Ancestors can guarantee protection as well as impose punishment. The ancestors can take delight in their descendants; but they also can be angry when they are forgotten or when certain social laws are violated, causing fear for the living kin. They are believed to manifest their unpleasantness by sending certain bodily or spiritual calamities – sickness, sudden death, harvest failures – to the living. Thus ancestors are experienced both as *fascinosum* as well as *tremendum*: they are tremendous and fascinating at the same.²⁶⁶ How should we properly view such religious customs and beliefs?

First of all, the view of traditional religious traditions that the ancestors have powers over the living is a direct consequence of the belief in the existence of life after death. The ancestors are still very much alive and still continue to have an influence on the lives of their living kin. Even though they are invisible, they are a constituted part of the clan, of the human community – a belief beyond doubt is shared also by Christianity when speaking of the Communion of Saints. Those who are in heaven are also the constituted part of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, and – together with Christ – still actively ‘influence’ – help, protect, pray for, guide – their brothers and sisters who are still on a pilgrimage on earth. If we believe that ancestors – the saints of the traditional religions – are in heaven with Christ and still actively help, protect, pray and guide their descendants on earth, together with Leo Bowers,²⁶⁷ we should make sure that we put the ancestors in the right place within the Judeo-Christian faith and not see them as a power independent of Christ. They cannot be used as a last resort for people who do not envisage another way out. It must be affirmed that ancestors have powers to influence the living, yet that power derives from Christ. Ancestors cannot help the living apart from Christ. Neither can they harm their living kin.

5.3.3. Death As Rebirth Into Eternal Life Vis-à-vis Reincarnation

Still another aspect of Asian and African traditional religions that the Church needs to dialogue with before embracing ancestral veneration is the belief of some ethnic groups in reincarnation of the human soul. Let us start with some examples from Africa. After death, according to the Chewa people in Kenya, ancestors reincarnate into their descendants’ offspring. It is generally believed that the Chewa ancestors come back to the living community on earth through the infant naming ceremony. Thus naming a child after a particular ancestor symbolizes the mystical union between the ancestor and the living

²⁶⁶ Cf. Dr. Charles Nyamiti, “African Ancestral Veneration and Its Relevance to The African Church,” Ibid; Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society*, Ibid., pp. 154-159

²⁶⁷ Leo Brower, “Ancestors in Christ?” in *Catalyst* Vol. Vol. 3 No. 2...Ibid., p. 53

community.²⁶⁸ According to the BaManianga people in Kongo, a living person consists of three elements: *nitu* – the physical, visible, mortal body; *kini* – the invisible body, a shade or reflection of *nitu*; and *mwela* – soul which has no form. A Manianga scholar, named Fukiau-kia-Bunseki, states that *mwela* separates itself from *nitu* and *kini* at death and looks for a chance to reincarnate into an about-to-born-baby. The BaManianga people (plural of Manianga), indeed, believe in reincarnation of *mwela*, yet some of them say that this reincarnation is true to the extent of physical resemblance. Thus a son may look, smile, talk or walk like his father or grandfather without having his father's *mwela*. Since this kind of reincarnation has to do only with physical resemblance, it is traditionally believed that the spirit of a dead person may continue to reincarnate in several generations to come. Thus, the reincarnation of a *mwela* is not seen as an event that occurs just one time but is a continuing trend.²⁶⁹ In other words, it can be understood as the process of ceaseless duplication of the soul – *mwela*. The Akan people in Ghana also widely believe in the possibility of the reincarnation of the human soul. According to their traditional belief, all people, especially ancestors reincarnate themselves into the world – mostly into their own clan or descendants – in order to complete their purpose of being,²⁷⁰ called *nkrabea*. *Nkrabea*, they say, is a reason and a purpose for every person to be born. It is a duty and mission given by *Nana Nyame* – God – that must be accomplished in the mundane life of every person. Two of these missions are to live an ethical life and to produce offspring. If the person fails to fulfil this mission, he/she must be reincarnated as many times as necessary in order to achieve what was mandated by *Nana Nyame* in the beginning. So in the end there is universal salvation for all.²⁷¹ Like many people in Africa, various ethnic groups in Asia also share some kind of belief in reincarnation. The Ch'inan people in Taiwan, for instance, believe that at some point after death, the soul of the deceased is judged by the rulers of the underworld. If he is found extraordinarily worthy, he is allowed to go to heaven. If he is found guilty, he is either punished severely or he must reincarnate into the living community in the world. However, the Ch'inan people believe that the living kin can help the guilty soul avoid the

²⁶⁸ Zampi Phiri, "Perspective on Cultural Practice and Inculcation – African Ancestral Veneration: Chewa Belief in Ancestors" in <http://www.jctr.org/zm/bulletins/bull56arti.htm>, p. 2 of 5

²⁶⁹ Simon Bockie, *Death and The Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Believe*, Ibid., pp.129-130

²⁷⁰ Anthony Ephirim Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Trenton/New Jersey-Asmara/Eritrea: Africa World Press, Inc, 1997), p. 38

²⁷¹ Anthony Ephirim Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors*, Ibid., pp. 74-75. It is believed that every soul – after the death of the body – is immediately judged by the ancestors in heaven, perhaps on behalf of God – *Nana Nyame*. If the good outweighs evil, then the person is admitted into the ancestorhood/heaven. But if found to have more evil than good, the person is denied ancestorhood. He/she has to reincarnate himself or herself into the living community in the world in order to undo the evil deeds. The couple who died childless may also reincarnate for the sole purpose of having children. For further information, see Anthony Ephirim Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors*, Ibid., p. 140.

punishment in the underworld or prevent the soul from reincarnation by performing certain rites at the eve of the funeral known as *kong-tiek*.²⁷²

Such a belief – reincarnation of the human soul – is, indeed, foreign to the Judeo-Christian faith; and the Church needs to have a courage in saying that Christianity cannot embrace the values of other religious traditions that are incompatible with Christian faith. In the view of Christian faith, salvation is, indeed, universal since it is meant for every human person, yet this is only possible in and through Jesus Christ – God who became man. Each human person – a Christian – has a call and mission to love God and his neighbours (cf. Mt 22: 37-40). This is the key to attaining immortal life with God for eternity. In the process of pursuing this eternal life in God we were given Jesus Christ as the Saviour, the perfect model and the way to salvation: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Jesus Christ warns that if we fail to freely choose to love God and our neighbours – the poor and the little ones (cf. Mt. 25:31-46, 1Jn 3:14-15) and fail to repent from this failure and accept God’s merciful love, we shall be separated from God forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and from all the blessed in heaven is called ‘hell’.²⁷³ Even if we die in God’s grace and friendship, yet still imperfectly purified in the world, we are still assured of eternal salvation. But after death we who fail to be purified perfectly in the world will undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the eternal joy of heaven.²⁷⁴ Therefore, all humans including the remote ancestors of the Asian and African peoples do not need to return to the world through a means of reincarnation of the soul in order to undo the wrong doings done in the mundane life as believed by some Asian and African traditional societies. According to the Christian faith, God the Supreme Love can purify us if we die in a state of impurity.

5.3.4. Christian Ancestral Devotion Vis-à-vis Syncretism

During the defence of a dissertation entitled *God’s Global Household: A Theology of Mission in the Context of Globalization* (February 17, 2006) at Pontifical Gregorian University, Faculty of Missiology, one of the questions asked by the moderator to the doctorate candidate was this: “In your thesis you frequently make statements such as ‘the recent interest on contextual theology has increased awareness of the value of context in doing a theology of mission’. Do you think contextual theology is

²⁷² Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Ibid., p.221

²⁷³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 1033.....Ibid., p. 269

²⁷⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* No. 1031.....Ibid., p. 269

really a new thing? Can you give us some further explanation on that?" The doctorate candidate said in response: "The answer is yes and no. It is not new because the effort to contextualize the Christian message has been always the character of the Church since it was born 2000 years ago. Each theology is contextual in its own time and situation. Yet, contextual theology is also new today in a sense that it is a rediscovery."

What concerns us here is the apparently stagnant contextualization of Christian faith in some parts of the world especially in Asia and Africa. To these two continents, Christianity was brought as a package wrapped by Greco-Roman-European cultures. In regard to this, Paul Cardinal Zoungana from Burkina Faso once remarked:

Inculturation is not something new to evangelization. Christ inculturated His Message to the socio-cultural world which was His own. The apostles and their successors inculturated it in the Greek, Roman, Western World... Our problem in Africa is that the last great phase of evangelization began hardly more than a century ago, at the time when Christianity had been inculturated in the western world for more than 19 centuries. It is this Christianity which has been inculturated in Europe which is being presented in Africa as *the* Christianity. At the present time it is desirable to strip it of all its too uniquely western aspects, to make a distinction between the Christian religion and the form in which it is presented...²⁷⁵

The frequent question raised by many in Asia and Africa today is: Why did the contextualization of the Gospel – inculturation – stop with the cultural context of the Greco-Roman and European cultural world? With this new awareness in mind, there has been a widespread effort of the local Church in Asia and Africa as well as the universal Church to make relevant the life history of Christ – Christian faith – in the Asian and African religious and cultural context. In *Ecclesia in Asia* of John Paul II, the Church, for instance, says:

The Church lives and fulfils her mission in the actual circumstances of time and place. A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the People of God on the continent are to respond to God's will for them in the new evangelization. The Synod Fathers insisted that the Church's mission of love and service in Asia is conditioned by two factors: on

²⁷⁵ This is part of the Cardinal Paul Zoungana's Presidential Opening Address to SECAM 4th Plenary Assembly, Rome, 1975. The text is edited by Chidi Denis Isizoh in *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Toward African Traditional Religion and Culture: 100 Excerpts from the Magisterial and Other Important Church Documents* (Lagos – Rome: Ceedee Publications, 1998), pp. 244-245

the one hand, her self-understanding as a community of disciples of Jesus Christ gathered around her Pastors, and on the other hand, the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia.²⁷⁶

The effort to contextualize the Christian faith into Asian and African contexts as well as to incorporate some of the noble values of Asian and African religious and cultural traditions today, however, is not without fear, and one of the fears is the danger of syncretism.²⁷⁷ With this in mind, already in 1974, Bishop Sttimio A. Ferrazzetta in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, said that the inculturation is necessary for the growth of the Church in Africa; yet it is a difficult task. It must be carefully done by persons who are well prepared; otherwise one can open the door to syncretism.²⁷⁸ In *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II also made a note: "In the process of inculturation... in all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism."²⁷⁹

Yet interestingly, despite the fear of the possibility of religious syncretism in the process of contextualization – inculturation – of the Christian faith today into Asian and African cultural and religious contexts, syncretism is in fact common among world religions. Almost no religion is mystically pure. In the development of Judaism, for instance, it took so many religious elements from its neighbouring nations such as Egypt (circumcision), Mesopotamia (myths of world's creation), Iran (angels and paradise) and Greece (Synagogue). The Church itself also has been very syncretistic since it was born 2000 years ago. Christianity is not only a synthesis between Hebrew history (the Old Testament Bible) and Greek Philosophy (platonic love and stoic asceticism), but also syncretism of later Judaism (the resurrection of the body) and Greek and Roman religion (part of the Marian cult derived from veneration of the goddess Athena and goddess Diana). God of the Hebrew *creates* but does not *generate*; the Greek and Roman gods *generate* but do not *create*; the God of Christians *creates* (the world/universe) and *generates* (a Son – Christ).²⁸⁰ Even though the Church never used the word

²⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, art. 4, given in New Delhi, India, 6th of November 1999, p. 4

²⁷⁷ Syncretism is generally defined as a mixture of religious beliefs of two or more religions or values of different cultures. In Sciences of Religion, syncretism does not have a positive or negative meaning. It is neutral. In religious context, however, people have a tendency to view it as a negative religious phenomenon since it carries a message that indicates impure, heretic, lost identity, unfaithful, unorthodox or not genuine. Cf. Mario de Franca Miranda, *Inculturazione della Fede: Un Approccio Teologico* (Brescia-Italia: Editrice Queriniana, 2002), pp. 154-156

²⁷⁸ Chidi D. Isizoh, *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Toward African Traditional Religion...* Ibid., p. 272

²⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, art. 62, given at Yaounde, Cameroon, 14th of September 1995, p. 18

²⁸⁰ Odon Vallet, *Piccolo Lessico delle Idee False sulle Religioni* (Milano: Paoline Editoriale Libri, 2002), p. 170

syncretism to portray its encounter and assimilation with the Greek and Roman cultures and religions but *inculturation*,²⁸¹ the process of that encounter is syncretistic in its nature.

Because of these undeniable historical facts, scholars in the area of religious studies, for instance Leonardo Boff from Latin America, have distinguished *true syncretism* from *false syncretism*. In their argument, *syncretism is true or legitimate* if in the process of incorporating elements of other religious traditions and cultures into the *Christian identity* is safeguarded, in which *the same redemptive reality* – Christian salvation – is expressed anew. On the contrary, if the very fundament of the Christian faith is not safeguarded, which happens in the *false syncretism*, we do not have an inculturation of the Christian faith, but have another new different faith,²⁸² in which both the Christian faith and the elements of other religious traditions lose their identities and manifest into a new different faith.²⁸³ In the process, it also can happen that the two religious traditions – the Christian faith and an element of another religious tradition – may remain as two distinct faiths standing side by side in a peaceful manner without losing their own identities.²⁸⁴ In line with this, Hendrick Kraemer also says that the

²⁸¹ “Inculturation” can be briefly defined as an expression of the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture. It has been popularly used only recently since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In missiological discussion it was probably used the first time by Fr. J. Masson, S.J., *L’Eglise ouverte sur le monde*, NRT (1962) 1032-1043. He uses the expression: “un catholicisme inculturé” (p.1038). The Final Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (Taipei, 22-27 April 1979) speaks of “a Church indigenous and inculturated.” According Fr. Yves Congar, O.P., the word “inculturation was coined in Japan as a modification of the word “acculturation.” For further information, see Arij Roest Crolius, S.J. and T. Nkèramihigo, S.J., *What Is so New About Inculturation?* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1991), p.

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²⁸² Mario de Franca Miranda, *Inculturazione della Fede: Un Approccio Teologico* Ibid., pp. 163 and 174

²⁸³ The examples of false syncretism would be the various syncretistic religious movement promoted by the New Age Movement in which they among others try to incorporate Christian faith and the oriental cosmic religious traditions. The result is, for instance, Christ of the Christian faith is viewed by the New Age Movement as *Cosmic Christ* who appears as the solar Logos. Backed by theosophical speculations on reincarnation and detached from His ontological union with God the Father, the personification of a cosmic “world teacher” of Christ can freely roam through the ages and become repeatedly manifested in a chain of spiritual personalities. At a future horizon, the same Christ is expected to return as ‘Aquarius, symbolizing the peak of evolution and the universal *avatar*. As the historical Jesus, according to the occult theories of the New Age Movement, represents the early Logos, the moment of His awakening to the “Christ consciousness” constitutes the cosmic marriage, fusion of all energies of macro-micro cosmos. In His resurrection He has finally assumed a pure vibrant body which radiates the cosmic energies of the age to come. Passion and Easter, they believe, initiate a cosmic dance of transformation, appearance of the fullness of energies of a deified human life. It is clear that the Christ taught by the New Age Movement is not the Christ of Christianity nor He is taught or believed as such in oriental cosmic religious traditions. The extern cosmic religions do not acknowledge the existence of the Cosmic Christ as promoted by the New Age Movement. For further information, see Michael Fuss, “New Age and Europe: A Challenge for Theology” in Michael Fuss, ed., *Rethinking New Religious Movements* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University – Research Centre on Cultures and Religions, 1998), pp. 655-657

²⁸⁴ The examples would be some Christian Catholics in Asia and Africa (cf. point 5.2.3) who separately venerate Christian saints and then their own traditional saints – ancestors, sage kings, and – particularly for Christians in East Asia – Laotze, Confucius or even Buddha, which can be called as dual religions or dual citizenship in the words of Fr. Hans Küng. In this case, it is apparent that a person or a group of people embrace two different faiths and

kind of syncretism that is inadmissible is that which would imply a systematic attempt to combine, blend and reconcile inharmonious, even often conflicting religious elements in a new, synthesis, which tends to propose a religious relativism with the implication that all religions are equally valid and that it does not matter what one believes.²⁸⁵ Being aware of this problem, in *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II calls Asian theologians to be wise in their theological endeavour, saying:

Theological work must always be guided by respect for the sensibilities of Christians, so that by a gradual growth into inculturated forms of expressing the faith people are neither confused nor scandalized. In every case inculturation must be guided by compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the faith of the universal Church, in full compliance with the Church's Tradition and with a view to strengthening people's faith.⁹⁴ The test of true inculturation is whether people become more committed to their Christian faith because they perceive it more clearly with the eyes of their own culture.²⁸⁶

In *Ecclesia in Africa* he makes the same appeal, explicitly mentioning the danger of (false) syncretism:

Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the church's fidelity to the Gospel and the apostolic tradition amid the constant evolution of cultures. The process of inculturation should be conducted in an ongoing manner, respecting the two following criteria: compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal church.... In all cases, care must be taken to avoid (*false*) syncretism.²⁸⁷

Let us now return to our main object of reflection – Christian ancestral veneration. Is our effort to incorporate the Asian and African ancestral veneration into Christian veneration syncretistic? The answer is an emphatic yes. As it has always happened through the life of the Church since its birth 2000 years ago, the integration of ancestral veneration into the Christian faith involves a syncretistic process. Yet, it is not a *false syncretism* but a *true, a legitimate or an admissible syncretism*. There are at least two reasons why.

practice them separately, without trying to fuse them into one new religion or incorporate one or the other to the more dominant or stronger religious tradition, which in most case is the Christian faith.

²⁸⁵ Mariasusai Dhavamony, “Interreligious Dialogue and Theological Method” in *Il Metodo Teologico Oggi Fra Tradizione e Innovazione*, Path Vol. 3 – Pontificia Accademia Teologica – 2004/1 (Roma/Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), p. 193

²⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, art. 22,...Ibid., p. 21

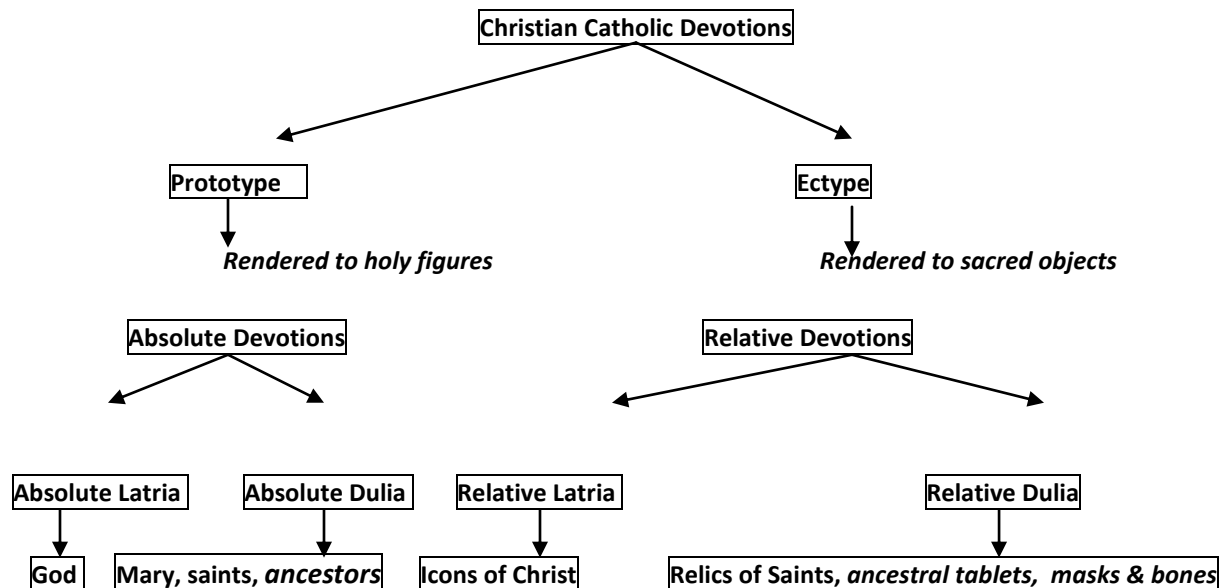
²⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, art. 62,..Ibid., p. 18. The word “false” in bracket is mine.

First, ancestral veneration is compatible with the Judeo-Christian faith. The ancestors are believed to be the blessed who have been with God in heaven and who play an intermediary role between God and the living in the mundane world, which is also what the Church believes regarding the role of its saints or all the blessed who are now in heaven with God. With all other saints of the Church, the ancestors continue to communicate with the living and pray for them, at least for their own descendants. *Second*, in the process of the incorporation of ancestral veneration into Christian veneration, the Christian faith is still safeguarded. Nothing is added or taken away from the Christian faith. On the contrary, they – ancestral veneration and Christian faith – are reciprocally enriched. That is, the ancestral veneration enriches the Christian faith by widening its concept regarding the blessed in heaven. The blessed in heaven should include all good men and women who came before Christ since the foundation of the world – African and Asian ancestors are among others, yet they have been saved by Christ in a special way (cf. 5.3.4). In other words, the triumphant Church should be extended also to the ancestors believed to have been with Christ in heaven; and with Christ they also have great concern for their living brothers and sisters – their descendants – who are still in pilgrimage on earth. At the same time, Christian faith also can enrich the ancestral veneration by purifying some of its unhealthy elements. For instance, since the ancestors are in Christ, they should not be feared. They are not cruel to the living. In case some of the ancestors had an imperfect mundane life, there is God's loving purification after death. Therefore, there is no need for the sinful ancestors to reincarnate in the mundane life in order to repair their once imperfect worldly life.

5.4. Name, Place and Characteristics of Christian Ancestral Devotion

Ancestral veneration that has been incorporated in Christian veneration, I propose, is called Christian ancestral veneration or Christian Ancestral Devotion since it is practiced by indigenous Christians in the frame of the Judeo-Christian faith and acknowledged by the Church as a valid expression of Catholic faith. If we use the schema of Catholic devotions on page.... schema of Catholic devotion with ancestral veneration would be as follows:²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ The place of the ancestors venerated falls under the devotion of *absolute dulia*, where various customs of venerating tablets, masks, bones of the dead fall under *relative dulia*. Therefore, Christians should easily notice what is essential and what is not in the ancestral veneration.



Like its counter part – devotion to the angels and saints – Christian ancestral devotion can be formal or informal.

5.4.1. Formal Christian Ancestral Devotion

Christian ancestral devotion is formal or public when it is done openly by quite a good number of Catholic Christians and it is supposed to be officially declared by the Church – I would say, at least by the local Church, and for the entire local Church. As formal devotion, Christian ancestral venerations are supposed to be dated in the liturgical calendar of the Church;²⁸⁹ again at least in the local Church where ancestral venerations are still found strong. These ancestral venerations should be united in the official liturgical celebration of the Church such as in the celebration of Holy Mass and in the Liturgy of Hours. All Saints Day and All Souls day can be extended to Ancestors Devotional Day for certain local Churches. Another possibility would be that any local Churches in Africa and Asia should be given an ample freedom to choose a day dedicated to ancestors and celebrated it formally and publicly by the entire Catholic Christians in that local Church. Special attention should be given at Lunar New Year – *Imlek* – for

²⁸⁹ How exactly the Eucharistic Celebration that integrates in commemoration of the local ancestors is done, it should be the task of the liturgists. But I would say, during Holy Mass offered in honour of the ancestors there are a number of occasions in which the ancestors could be addressed: at the beginning done either by celebrant priest or a leader of the faithful, in opening prayer, in the prayers of the faithful, in the offertory prayer, in the preface, in the Eucharistic prayer and during the homily. At my first Holy Mass after ordination, for instance, the procession of main celebrant priest and the co-celebrant priests started at the ancestral hall. There rite was begun by calling, addressing and inviting spirits of the ancestors to participate with the living family in the joy of the celebration, praising and thanking God for the gift of priesthood given to me their great-great grandson and invoking for their prayers, protections and guidance.

the Chinese, harvest time, weddings, naming of children – baptism, at funeral, mourning period, death anniversary, to mention only a few. At these special occasions, the faithful should be given time and space during the Eucharistic Celebration to address their ancestors in a traditional language prayer.

5.4.2. Informal Christian Ancestral Devotion

Christian ancestral devotion is informal, when it is done in family bound and not incorporated in the Holy Eucharistic Celebration. People should be free to practice it without being restricted to the liturgical calendar of the local Church, providing it is not done in a way contrary to the official teachings of the Church. The Catholic Christians also should be allowed to perform ancestral rites as in its original forms,²⁹⁰ providing they invoke the ancestors exactly like they invoke the Christian saints, keeping in mind that ancestors are only intermediaries between God and the living kin. Informal Christian ancestral devotion has a spontaneous character. Traditionally, ancestral veneration was supposed to be done at a village of origin of the practitioners, at the sacred ground where the ancestral shrines and tombs of the ancestors are located. But because of the change of time and culture – migration, working far away from villages or the cities of origin of the ancestral devotees – a Christian ancestral veneration should be possible to be done in a flexible manner, anywhere and any time²⁹¹ based on their needs and life situation.

Some also say that not all Africans – nor all people at my home place nor all Asians – practice ancestral veneration.²⁹² While others say that there is no uniform system of beliefs in ancestors in black Africa,

²⁹⁰ For instance, the ancestors are venerated by giving them offering sacrifice of food, drink, etc, as a symbol of prayer or a sign of love, respect and honour.

²⁹¹ In July 2005, I happened to talk with my oldest sister Emily Hamia by phone. She and her husband Francis Mari have Bachelor Degrees in Catholic Theology and they both teach Catholic catechism for kids ranging from pre-school to high school. Her oldest son of four was about to live home for the first time for university located at about 1500 miles away. According to the custom they should first go to the village of origin of her husband (patrilineal society) to invoke the intercessory helps of their ancestors at the ancestral shrine and at the ancestors' tombs. But because of the bad weather, great distance between the village and the little town where they live and work (about 400 miles distance) as well as public transportation difficulty, they could not do it. So my sister asked me if they could just invite the spirits of ancestors to their home and perform the ancestral rites there and invoking the intercessory help and guidance of their ancestors for their oldest son who was planning to live home. I said a strong yes in response. It should not be a problem because ancestors have become spirit beings. Like God, angels and Christian saints, they are not confined by time and space. They can be greeted, honoured and invoked any time and anywhere far away from ancestral shrine and their tombs. In case one no longer knows how to perform the traditional ancestral rite, it should not be impossible to pray in a Christian way and part of the prayer can be inserted with the invocations of the help and guidance of the ancestors. My sister and her husband did in accordance with my council. My point here is that ancestral veneration should be flexible and open to any change.

²⁹² Cf. Fergus J. King, "Angels and Ancestors: A Basis for Christology?" in *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*, Vol. XI-1, 21, 1994, p. 11

even in the same ethnic group.²⁹³ Still others worry that some today's young generations distance themselves from traditional customs or even are unaware of them.²⁹⁴ Zampi Phiri is concerned about ancestral veneration that is dying because of the influence of modern capitalism, people moved out from ancestral lands to distant lands, setting up family there and never participating in the clan – family ancestral festivals and ceremonies.²⁹⁵

These phenomena are not uniquely found among African ethnic groups but among various Asian and Melanesian ethnic groups as well, including among my ethnic group of Flores-Indonesia. This should not be a surprise for a number of reasons. *First*, a variety of religious expression is common in every religion. The Hindus in Bali-Indonesia practice religious customs that might not be familiar to the Hindus in India. The religious attitudes of Catholics in Portugal and Spain to some saints – say to St. Antonio and St. Jack the Apostle – are different from religious attitudes of Catholics in the Philippines or in Mexico; and we should not make any attempt to uniform such variety of religious attitude because that effort would amount to making religious expression poor or crippled. *Second*, not all Africans and Asians practice ancestral veneration? This phenomenon also should not be a surprise. In monotheistic religious traditions which allow some sort of intermediary role of spiritual beings – angels, saints, ancestors – between God and human beings, veneration to the angels, saints and ancestors is at a secondary level. It has a relative character. In a sense, it is not always necessary to invoke the intermediary role of these spirit beings. The living community are free to approach God directly without involving celestial mediators. Even in the Catholic Church, the Catholics are not obliged to venerate all the saints officially recognized by the Church through a means of beatification or canonization but only the principle ones; while the veneration of many other saints are consigned to the local Churches, nations,²⁹⁶ or religious families.²⁹⁷ The veneration to the ancestors should be likewise. Veneration to them is relative. Besides approaching God through the mediation of the ancestors, people can still approach God directly as it happens in some Asian and African ethnic groups in which ancestral veneration might not be found. *Third*, young generation today distance themselves from traditional customs – including ancestral veneration – and some others are even unaware of them? Culture and religions, Fr. Mariasusai

²⁹³ Cf. Fr. Charles Nyamiti, "Ancestral Veneration in Africa" in <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/nyamiti.html>, p. 3

²⁹⁴ Cf. D. B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, Ibid., p.112

²⁹⁵ Zampi Phiri, "African Ancestral Veneration: Chewa Beliefs in Ancestors" ... Ibid., p. 4

²⁹⁶ For instance, devotion to St. Anthony is strong in Lisbon (Portugal) and in Padua (Italy), or to Santiago – St. Jack the Apostle – in Spain, but there might be no devotion to these saints in other local Catholic Churches in other part of the world and they will never be encouraged to do so by the Church.

²⁹⁷ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 111, in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *The Basics Sixteen Documents of Vatican Council II*, ... Ibid., p. 152

Dhavamony says, are closely related, though they are distinct. Religion, in fact, finds its experience and expression by means of cultural signs, symbols and language.²⁹⁸ In other words, culture is the vehicle carrying the religious message. According to the recent findings in the area of anthropology, however, culture is subject to change.²⁹⁹ This means that the African and Asian cultures will not be always as it was and as it is today. A man's culture is a living reality and consequently it is in a continuous process of change and it is beyond our capability to stop that change. We only hope that in the process of cultural change, the values of man's religion remain as an vital force for the life of man. If the phenomenon of cultural change is applied to the Asian and African ancestral veneration, we should not be surprised to see that some young generations distance themselves from traditional religions and customs because cultures as its vehicles have changed drastically. In order to anticipate this reality, the form of ancestral veneration should be flexible and substituted by some sorts of modern cultures that fit the spirits of the young generation. The new generations in Africa and Asia should be free to practice their religious belief regarding their ancestors in a modern style and modern way. For instance, it should be possible for young generations to venerate their ancestors through a means of flowers or other suitable items instead of offering food and drink or libation. Both flowers and food offerings, more or less, carry the same meaning – symbol of love, prayer and respect for the living dead.

5.4.3. Formal and Informal Devotion in Comparison

Like in Christian devotions to the angels and saints, we will also find some differences between formal and informal Christian ancestral devotions. Christian ancestral devotions are normally rigid and static when they are integrated into the Church's Liturgy such as the Holy Eucharistic Celebration. They are less warm. They have less emotional appeal. There is no much variety in their forms and expressions because they have to follow the rules of the Church's liturgy. My first Holy Mass after ordination was done in an inculturated liturgy. It was a big joyous feast for my home parish. Before the offertory prayer, an elder came forward and stood in front of the altar and on behalf of the assembly he announced to

²⁹⁸ Mariasusai Dhavamony, "Interreligious Dialogue and Theological Method" in *Il Metodo Teologico...Ibid.*, p. 178

²⁹⁹ For instance, according to Anthropologist Herskovits, psychologically culture is the learned portion of human behaviour and sociologically it is the man-made part of the environment. See, Arij Roest Croellius, SJ, *Theologia dell' Inculturazione* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993), p. 19, for further information. According to Anthropologists Carol R. And Melvin Ember, culture is always change because culture consists of learned patterns of behaviour, and human belief and cultural traits can be unlearned and learned anew as human needs change. For further information, see Ember Carol R. Melvin, *Cultural Anthropology* (New Jersey/USA: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 321

the ancestors that the most blessed sacrificed of Holy Mass was about to begin and invited them to participate:

O all of you the spirits of our ancestors, listen to our voice!

You know we are all gathered here today singing and dancing,
because your son, your grandson and great grandson, Fr. Alex Jebadu,
has been ordained as the Lord's priest.

He has been endowed the celestial gift of priesthood.

All of you the spirits of our ancestors, therefore,
come and join us in giving thanks to the Almighty.

O you the spirits of our ancestors, we implore you.

Guide your son and grandson Fr. Alex Jebadu, in his priestly ministry.

Accompany him wherever he goes and guide him.

Do not let him be shaky in his life path.

O you spirits of our ancestors, we are all Christians now. We invite all of you:

come and join us in the celebration of the most perfect thanksgiving Sacrifice of Jesus upon the altar.³⁰⁰

When listening to this traditional prayer, people had mixed feelings. Some felt uplifted because of the invitation of the spirits of ancestors into the Christian Catholic celebration – Holy Mass. But some lamented that the prayer did not have a strong appeal to the ancestors like the ones performed outside of the Holy Mass. That is, an elder on behalf of the living community address the ancestors, holding sacrifice of food and drink in their hands. In addition, in the original forms of ancestral veneration, an elder or the head of the family presided the ancestral rites usually acts as a sort of 'priests'. He is the leaders of the sacred family and has a responsibility as a medium between the living family and the ancestors. He is the one who speaks to the ancestors on behalf of the living family. This notion is not quite apparent when the Christian ancestral veneration is integrated into the Eucharist Celebration. Even if the leader of the family is given time and space to render supplications to the ancestors in a traditional sacred language, it still does not fit in all well. The prayer is not spontaneous since it has to be prepared and carefully follow the rules of the Church' liturgy. One of the frequent complains regarding liturgical inculturation is that after integrated into the Church's liturgy the rites of the traditional religion are simplified. They are trimmed so much until they lose their richness in expression.

³⁰⁰ This prayer was delivered at my home parish in Flores-Indonesia September 25, 1995 by an elder of my clan during my first Holy Mass after the ordination into the priesthood.

In other words, they become rigid and not warm. The language used in communicating with the ancestors and the way it is done do not touch enough the emotional aspect of the human person.³⁰¹ Because of this difficulty, Christian Catholics should be allowed to perform ancestral veneration informally as it is, without integrating it into the liturgy of the Church, yet it still has a Christian character.

5.5. Exterior Forms of Christians Ancestral Devotion

Like in the Christian Catholic devotions to the saints, there are at least three major external expressions of Christian ancestral veneration, that is, *prayers* asking for the intercessory helps of the ancestors, *keeping their pictures*, tablets (particularly for the Chinese) or ancestral masks bones of the ancestors, pilgrimages.

5.5.1. Prayer with and through the Holy Living Dead

In Christian ancestral veneration, prayer is probably its most dominant visible expression in which the Christian faithful in Africa and Asia invoke the intercessory help of the ancestors who are believed to be with Christ in heaven. Christians in Africa and Asia or Christians anywhere – especially those who still dearly venerate their ancestors – ask the blessed ancestors to pray for them who are still on pilgrimage on earth. When the ancestral veneration is integrated in a Eucharistic Celebration, ancestors also should be included among other saints and their names, when possible, are explicitly mentioned. With the insertion of the ancestors, one part of the Eucharistic Prayer I (Roman Canon), for instance, would run as follows:

³⁰¹ Take for instance the *Kong-tiek* ritual of the Ch'nan in Taiwan, a ceremony held to help the newly dead who is being punished in the underworld because of his sins in the mundane life. In its original form the ritual is performed by a Taoist Priest in an open place attended by all people in the village. The Ch'nan in Taiwan believe that the journey to the underworld is long and difficult. The soul of the newly dead has to pass a bridge surrounded by dangerous monsters ready to catch the soul of the dead person passing through. The Ch'inans also believe that in underworld there is *Tho-te-kong* – earth god – who is willing to accompany the soul of the newly dead on his journey to the underworld and protect him from the dangerous monsters. Yet *Tho-te-kong* needs to be paid by the prayers and money offerings from the living family on earth. All this imaginary of the underworld is dramatized in a *Kong-tiek* ritual and it is believed it can protect the new dead from danger on his way to the underworld and help him settled there. For further information, see Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, Ibid., pp. 221-226. The idea of *Kong-tiek* ritual fits well with the Catholic Church's belief of purification after death. Now the question is how the Church incorporates the *Kong-tiek* ritual into the Catholic Church's liturgy. If the Church, for instance, decides to take it over and replace the whole dramatic *Kong-tiek* ritual by simply saying prayer or by offering a Holy Mass for the newly dead, it would be a terribly simplification to the *Kong-tiek* ritual of the Ch'nan people of Taiwan which is very rich in imagination and popular in the hearts of the Ch'nan people.

In union with the whole Church we honour Mary, the ever virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. We honour Joseph, her husband, the apostles and martyrs, Peter and Paul, Andrew ...and all the saints, *and our ancestors through whom you have founded our family and clan, you have given us life, lands and water, and all we need to sustain life in our village....*May their merits and prayers gain us your constant help of protection” .³⁰²

Another possibility would be to invite the ancestors to pray to God *with* the living community during the Holy Mass. With the insertion of the ancestors, one part of the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer IV would run as follows:

Countless hosts of angels stand before You (God) to do your will. They look upon your splendour and praise you night and day. United with them, *and with our ancestors who have gone before us, through whom you have given us abundant harvests, cattle, goats, chicken, fish,* and in the name of every creature under heaven we too praise your glory as we say: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.³⁰³

The Catholic Church believes that, that the saints – after received into their heavenly home and being present to the Lord Jesus, through Him and in Him and with Him – do not cease to intercede with God the Father for the living,³⁰⁴ should include also the ancestors who are believed to be with God in heaven. That is, like the Christians saints ancestors who now reigns with Christ also offers up their prayers to God for men. What the living need to do is to invoke the ancestors and to have recourse to their prayers, aid and help for obtaining benefits from God through Christ His Son and our Lord who alone is the Redeemer and Saviour.

5.5.2. Pictures, Tablets or relics, mask

Devotions to the saints in the Catholic Church are frequently expressed through veneration of their sacred images such as icons, statues and relics. Their icons and statues decorate the Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. These images help Christians Catholics and Orthodox alike to connect themselves

³⁰² Cf. “Eucharistic Prayer I” in *Vatican II Weekday Missal*, Ibid., The part in italic is an insert addressed to God asking for the local ancestors to pray for their descendants who are participating in the Holy Mass.

³⁰³ Cf. “The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer IV “ in *Vatican II Weekday Missal...* Ibid., p. 916. The part in italic is an insert addressed to God which tells God that the faithful on earth intends to praise and glorify God not only with the angels and Christians saints but also with their ancestors who are believed to be with Christ in heaven.

³⁰⁴ Cf. “Lumen Gentium” No. 49 In Austin Flanery, Ed., *The Basic Sixteen Documents...*Ibid., p. 75

with the living saints who reign with Christ in heaven. In line with this Catholic religious practices, the veneration of the pictures, tablets (for the Chinese) and masks of the ancestors should, as it has been the practices of Asian and African traditional religions, become valid expressions of the Christian Catholic ancestral venerations as long as they serve as symbols that represent the living ancestors who are now with Christ in heaven. Their masks, as Leo Brower suggested,³⁰⁵ can decorate churches to remind people that the saved ancestors are with Christ and, like other saints, they can still help their living kin only in and with Christ.

I am convinced that for some people in Asia and Africa they psychologically feel closer to their ancestors and feel more comfortable to pray to god through the intermediary role of their own ancestors than to Christian martyrs who, no matter how well they know the story of their heroic faith of that holy martyr. For many ethnic groups living in poor villages in Asia and Africa they own ancestors also have shown a heroic lives simply by bequeathing them life and all they need in life. They are their own saints and their relics – masks, bones and tables – are dear to them.

5.5.3. Pilgrimage to the holy sites

The third dominant exterior expression of Christian ancestral veneration is pilgrimage to sacred places such as tombs of the ancestors. Pilgrimage in fact is a common phenomenon practiced in all religions both ancient and modern. Christian Catholics usually show their love and honour to the martyrs and great saints by making a long trip to visit the toms where their remains are buried or where they spent of most of life times serving God and the Church. For Christian Catholics in Asia and Africa, it should be alright to show their love and honour to the ancestors by making pilgrimages to the sacred places where the remains of their ancestors are buried

5.6. The Core Motivations of Christian Ancestral Devotion

Christian Catholic ancestral devotions have at least three fundamental motivations why the ancestors are remembered and honoured in special devotions. They are: love of them, imitation of their exemplary life and invocation of their intercessory help for the living.

5.6.1. Love

The first core of any Christian ancestral veneration is love. The living kin honour and respect ancestors out of love, and not out of fear as some Asians and Africans hold. The Church should help the Christian

³⁰⁵ Leo Brower, "Ancestors in Christ," in *Catalyst* Vol. 3 No. 2: *Social Pastoral Magazine* ... Ibid., p. 53

Catholics to know that once the ancestors are with Christ in heaven they are loving and do not have any desire to harm their descendants. The Christian Catholics in Asia and Africa love their ancestors because the ancestors have loved them first and in various ways when they were in the world; and even after death the ancestors still continue to love and guide their living kin from heaven. We must admit that some ethnic groups in Africa and Asia still hold a belief that ancestors some times come to impose calamities for their descendants. In such a case, the Church is called to proclaim the opposite. The ancestors who are now with Christ in heaven are not that evil. They are not cruel to the living community but loving and we should respond to their love also with the same love.

5.6.2. Imitation

The second fundamental reason of devotion to the ancestors for the Christian Catholics is to imitate their exemplary lives. Remembering and loving the ancestors who are in heaven with Christ should spur the living kin to imitate their exemplary life so that they too one day may attain ancestorhood and be with Christ for eternity. It would be weird to imagine when the living kin love so much their ancestors who have gained eternal life with God in heaven, while at the same time they make no effort to take their footsteps – their heroism, their wisdom, their moral life examples, to mention only a few.

5.6.3. Mediation

The third fundamental motivation of Christian Catholic ancestral veneration is the belief that ancestors, like angels and saints, play an intermediary role between God and the living kin. Since the ancestors are now in heaven with other multitude of other saints with Christ as their head, they can transmit God's gifts and blessings to the living, and the living in their part can invoke their intermediary help.

CONCLUSION

A. Main Facts Discovered in this study:

1. The Popularity of Ancestral Veneration

Traditional religion in the form of ancestral veneration is still widely and popularly practiced by Christians of various ethnic groups in Asia and Africa as well as in other parts of the world – Latin America, Melanesia and Australia (the Aborigines). Despite the suppression and expulsion done in the past, this religious tradition is still able to survive and continue to demonstrate its vital force in the lives of many Asians and Africans, including those who have faith.

2. Positive attitude of the Catholic Church toward Ancestral Veneration

The Catholic Church, through the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), took a positive step in approaching and dealing with other religious traditions and cultures. It respects and admits some truths and good values contained in other religious traditions and cultures. One of the direct results of this positive attitude is the toleration toward a religious tradition known as ancestral veneration.

3. The Ancestors are Never Worshipped but Venerated

Many scholars – be they Christian theologians, be they anthropologists or sociologists – still mistakenly call this religious practice “worship” – *ancestor worship, worship of the dead*; and therefore, they say, it is either an idolatry or a superstition, leading to the maltreatment of the religious practice of ancestral veneration. This study has demonstrated that all these assumptions to be unfounded and untrue. The word “worship” in public parlance refers to *adoration* directed to God alone, and not to the creature beings – men, angels and things. The ancestors of various ethnic groups in Asia, Africa and in other parts of the world are never believed to become God. Instead, they are believed to remain humans; therefore, they are never worshipped. They are only venerated as human beings who are now with God in heaven for eternity.

4. Asian and African Syncretism:

Christian Faith and Ancestral Veneration Practiced Side by Side

The Protestant Churches generally view ancestral veneration as an idolatry or superstition; and therefore, it is a direct obstacle to the Gospel. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, is more tolerant toward ancestral veneration. Yet, the tolerant attitude of the Catholic Church, to some extent, has led Catholics in Asia and Africa, as well in many other parts of the world, to practice a “double religion” or “dual citizenship in faith” (Hans Küng). Catholics embrace Christian faith and their own traditional religions – ancestral veneration – and practice them both side by side – separately, one after the other – without any attempt to amalgamate them into only one faith.

B. Some New Theological Lights

5. Ancestor Veneration is not a Religion but an Aspect of a Complex Religious

System

Ancestral veneration is not a religion in itself but only an aspect of a complex religious system. In ancestral veneration, ancestors are not treated as the Ultimate Reality – God - but as human beings who are believed to have been with God and are believed to have a capacity to intercede between God and the living in the world. Because it is only an aspect of a religion, it is commonly practiced by many people in almost all religions, modern and ancient, such as Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism and Shintoism. Even ancient civilized societies such as the Egyptians, Indo-Europeans, Semites and early Christians had some sort of ancestor veneration.

6. Two Fundamental Presuppositions of Ancestral Veneration

Traditional religious piety that centres in venerating ancestors has two fundamental truths: 1) It presupposes faith in life after death and in the capacity of the living dead to pray a role as God’s emissaries to the living in the world. For a simple logic: the ancestors would not be feared or called for their help if they are not still alive in the underworld. 2) It presupposes faith in the Supreme Reality – God – in which and with whom ancestors live in heaven.

7. The Devotional Character of Ancestral Veneration

Ecclesial approach is a better theological point of departure to properly understand ancestral veneration. The religious practice of ancestral veneration – hardly found in the Hebrew Bible – is rooted in the relationship between the living in the world and the living dead in the underworld/heaven. It is precisely like the relationship between the living – the militant Church on earth – and the dead in

purgatory; the suffering Church – and the blessed in heaven; and the triumphant Church, as taught by the Church regarding the Communion of the saints. Both ancestral veneration of the traditional religions and saint veneration in the Judeo-Christian faith have a devotional character.

8. The Study of Devotions to the Saints and Ancestors Must Go Hand in Hand

In order to better understand ancestral veneration of the traditional religions, it is imperative to study and understand the nature of devotion to the saints in the Catholic religious practice under the theological reflection of ecclesiology. Both Christian saints and the saints of the traditional religions – ancestors – are with Christ in heaven for eternity and they play the same intermediary role between God and the living on earth.

C. Some Pastoral Approaches

9. The Ancestral Veneration Is to Be Incorporated into Christian Faith

Since the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has much more a positive attitude toward some good values in other cultures and religious traditions. In regard to religious traditions in the form of ancestral veneration, however, the Church should go beyond the attitude of simply showing respect and toleration. The Church is called to incorporate ancestral veneration into Christian faith and make it as an integral part of the Catholic devotion. If this is properly done, the following elements will be achieved:

a) The weird syncretism – double religion or dual citizenship in faith – unconsciously held and practiced by Christians in Asia and Africa will come to an end. Ancestral veneration will be practiced as an integral part of Christian religious piety.

b) The Catholic Church will be enriched by the ancestral veneration of the traditional religions and vice versa. For instance, the Church's understanding of the triumphant Church in heaven will be extended to including the saints of the traditional religions – the ancestors. The ancestral veneration also will be enriched by the Church in the sense that Christian faith will purify some elements of the traditional religions. For instance, since we believe that ancestors are with Christ in heaven, they are not cruel to the living; and therefore, there is no reason to fear them.

c) We believe that the incorporation of the ancestral veneration into Christian faith will help the growth of the Church in Asia and Africa. It will help the Church in Asia and Africa to have a universal as well as local Asian and African face.

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