

Ancestors: A Challenge to the Oruano Church of Namibia

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ANCESTORS: A CHALLENGE TO THE ORUUANO CHURCH OF NAMIBIA

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SUMMARY

Oruano is an Independent Church in Namibia founded in 1955 because of members of the Herero community breaking away from the Rhenish Mission Church. Oruano has the same doctrinal position as the Evangelical Lutheran Churches. In all church services it uses the standard Lutheran liturgical forms and the Otjiherero Lutheran hymnal.

Belief in the ancestors is strong among the Herero. It is centred around the holy fire that is found between the main house of the head man and the cattle's kraal. The church does not acknowledge the ancestors, but it allows its members to venerate their ancestors outside the church. The church's approach is that of tacit consent.

This dissertation discusses this approach and concludes that Oruano cannot remain silent on the ancestors any longer. Time has come to deal with it theologically, showing the supremacy of Christ, while integrating Herero traditional practices and spirituality with the worship and practice of Oruano.

Key terms: Herero in Namibia; Oruano; Protestant Unity Church; Independent Churches; Rhenish Mission; Ancestor; Ancestor veneration; Holy fire; Dualism.



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INTRODUCTION

1. Motivation

In August 1995 I arrived in Namibia to work with Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS). My main responsibility was to set up a training programme for church leaders of Oruano and other Independent Churches.

I was introduced to the spiritual leader of Oruano, Bishop A. C. Kamburona. The two of us were to work closely together in this programme. From various sides I was warned not to touch on the issue of the holy fire during workshops and tutorial meetings. This would hinder the establishment of a relationship of trust with the participants. Talking about the holy fire - even worse, talking against it - would probably lead to leaders ending their participation in the training programme. By that time I did not know much about the holy fire, but I soon learned that the holy fire was more than just that small fire place between the house of the head man and the cattle's kraal. It is the place around which the whole practice of ancestors' veneration is centred and the holy fire is the place where this veneration takes place.¹

The warning not to talk about the holy fire sounded strange to me. After all, Oruano does not formally acknowledge the ancestors' veneration. For the church it looks as if it does not exist. So why could we not freely discuss this issue? However, it is also common knowledge that church members talk to their ancestors at the holy fire. It is an accepted practice for which one does not need to fear church discipline. In my view this was a conflicting situation. It challenged me to do further research.

2. Parallelism or dualism?

My initial conclusion was that I had come across dualism observed as a general problem under African Christians. As a result they find themselves living in the two different and often conflicting worlds of church and tradition.

During a consultation that I attended, Prof. Joshua N. Kudadjie from Ghana discussed the problem of dualism in his country. Quoting the Ghanaian sociologist Busisa, he said, 'As one watches the daily lives and activities of the people, and takes account of the rites (i.e. ceremonies)

¹ The Herero venerate the ancestors and do not worship them. In chapter 4.3.4 we shall discuss this issue.

connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvest or installations to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lies outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian Churches are alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with social institutions' (in Kudadjie 1997:3). Kudadjie (1997:3) also cited an example from a survey done by the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1970s, 'Many Catholics live in a dual world and try to combine them as best as they can'.

From my own observation I can mention a complaint by a pastor of the Nairobi Baptist Church. This church is a middle and upper class church not far from Nairobi's city centre. Many members and attendants received their education at universities overseas and are now in senior positions. Even those people when facing serious difficulties, the pastor complained, would secretly go and see a traditional healer rather than coming to church.

This dualism that characterises the lives of many African Christians is often considered as the result of missionary work. For many missionaries with their closed world view, 'that had unconsciously but largely allowed itself to be restricted to the empirical world' (Boer 1973:2), the traditional spirit world was not a reality. This led to a fundamental misunderstanding of African culture by early missionaries. Missionary Church's policy, 'thus outlawed or, at least, ignored and played down significant customs and practices that give meaning to life in the context of African cosmology' (Kudadjie 1997:1).

Here we are dealing with mission churches that have rejected traditional customs and traditions, which are essential to the believers in the local communities. These customs and traditions have not been integrated into the Christian faith of the church. The situation is different with Oruano. The Church is not a mission church but a so-called Independent Church, initiated and founded by the Herero themselves. Since its beginning in 1955 the Church has always been a church on its own, without a relationship with a mission organisation. It was and still is - though not exclusively - the Herero's own church.²

In a reflection on his mission work in Nigeria, Boer (1993:1-2) observed that most church members would first go to the mission hospital for treatment and then almost immediately would

² According to Pöllitzer (1978:219) Oruano is not a Herero church in the sense that the church is only open to Herero people. Although 95% or even more of its members belong to the Herero community, the church is open to non-Herero as well. He refers to the Church Order, paragraph 3c which reads, 'The *languages* (plural!) of the church members should be taken into consideration' (1978:30; 235, translation JB). The church order apparently is thinking of others than the Herero language as well.

I myself do not know of any service, meeting or other church related activities that are not in the Herero language. Neither am I aware of any leadership position filled by a non-Herero. This was confirmed by Bishop Kamburona. In theory the church is open to people from all communities. In reality Oruano is a Herero church.

turn to some functionaries of the traditional religion to find out the real truth about their sickness. *To them there is no contradiction between the two.* The missionary doctor had done a good job treating the physical symptom, but the real cause - who had caused the sickness and how? why? - had not been uncovered. For that the help of the traditional healer was needed. What Boer describes here about Nigerian Christians is exactly what is happening in Oruano regarding the ancestors' veneration at the holy fire. Talking to the ancestors at the holy fire is not felt to be contradictory to the Christian message. The pastor of the church and the leader at the holy fire can even be the same person. Church and tradition exist next to each other in a peaceful relationship. We are not dealing here with dualism, but with what Pöllitzer (1978:221) calls, 'parallelism'.

For this study I did twelve interviews. An interviewee (Mr. A 1999:interview) told the following story that illustrates this parallelism.

'A father gave the Bible to the one son and the fire to the other. Then the one son that was having the Bible died. The son that was having the fire took the Bible. Now he was having both the fire and the Bible'.

3. Tacit consent, a valid position?

Oruano's attitude towards the ancestors' veneration can be described as 'tacit consent'. Officially Oruano does not acknowledge it, neither does Oruano allow the ancestors' veneration to be practised in the church. However, the church allows its members to be involved in the ancestors' veneration outside the church at the holy fire. This position apparently is accepted by all parties involved and one does not feel the need to speak about it. The question arises whether it is a valid position that does not violate the integrity of the church as the Body of Christ.

The study deals with this question and the conclusion is that it is not a valid position. The church cannot afford to remain silent but should deal with the issue of the ancestors' veneration. Various reasons are discussed in chapter 4. Here I would only like to mention the fact that Oruano has very recently joined the wider ecumenical body of churches. The church has lived

in isolation for a long time.³ It was only in 1998 that Bishop Kamburona started attending the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) meetings.⁴ In December 1998, accompanied by Oruuano's general secretary, he attended the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare as part of the Namibian delegation.

Leaving the isolation behind and becoming part of the larger ecumenical body has led the church into a new stage with new challenges. However, considering the accusations levelled against Oruuano from the time of its beginning, it is likely that other churches of this ecumenical body will ask the church about its position on the ancestors.⁵ Schreiter (1985:117-121) formulates a criterion for Christian identity as, 'Is a local church willing to stand under the judgment of other churches in the matter of its Christian performance or does it close itself off?'. In other words, to counteract the accusations and to prove itself as a Christian church, Oruuano should be prepared to enter a debate with other churches and be willing to discuss its position on the ancestors' veneration.

4. The missionary: expert or midwife?

'During a workshop in which I was involved I spent the first session doing a role play with the participants. I asked them to put the chairs in the shape of a boat. The boat was to cross the river and the participants were on board. Each of them played a different role. One was a rich business man on his way to open a new shop. Another one a doctor called for the chief who was seriously ill. Then there were an evangelist, a street child, a peasant, a poor woman, and a few others. The boat was in a poor condition and halfway through the journey it started to leak. It

³ There were definitely also political motives for this isolation. The Oruuano membership is to a large extent from the Maharero group, which has many members that are supportive to DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) (Pöllitzer 1978:60). The DTA was established after the breaking down of the Turnhalle Conference at the end of 1977 and was meant as an instrument for the South African government to counteract SWAPO. The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) was established in 1978 'to speak up with one voice as a church in Namibia' (Nambala 1994:165) against the dehumanizing apartheid policy of the South African government and had a strong relationship with SWAPO. Note that Pöllitzer's observation is from the 70s. Today the church is working hard to achieve a position that is above political parties.

⁴ The church has the observer status.

⁵ According to J. L. de Vries, the first Namibian president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), Oruuano is a mixture of heathen and gentile elements, thus syncretism (in Pöllitzer 1978:220). There is also strong opposition from Herero members in the Evangelical Bible Church (EBC). An interviewee (Mr. A. 1999:interview) argued that the Christian message had just stayed at the surface of the lives of the people without really changing them into committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

was obvious to all in the boat that if the boat were to reach the other side, some would need to jump out into the water and swim. That would not be a big problem if it had not been that the river was full of crocodiles. At that stage each participant was given the opportunity to explain why he or she was not to jump out but must stay in the boat. It turned out that each had good reasons to stay.

The purpose of this role play was to help participants to discover that each person is important and is a resource from which others can draw and learn'.⁶

This role play is illustrative as to what is an essential attitude for missionaries who are doing research among the people with whom they are working. Church leaders, members and others belonging to the community need to be recognized as thinking, creative people with the capacity for action (Hope & Simmel 1988:9).⁷

According to Genesis 1:27, God created man in his own image. 'Male and female He created them'. He then gave them the earth to take care of it for him. The earth continued to be God's property, yet male and female were to subdue it (vs. 28). Two conclusions can be drawn. First, with the creation of male and female and the agreement that they would manage the earth, the establishing of a community began. It was also the beginning of a culture as the development of a human response to biological and other natural factors. It means that culture is a God given gift that is essentially good. Second, by giving the earth to male and female, God declares that male and female can manage the earth and that He trusts them.

Psalm 8 is a reflection of this when it says, 'You made him (male and female, JB) a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet' (vs. 5,6).

In 1 Cor. 12:1-11, Paul discusses the spiritual gifts in the church. He explains that the church as the body of Christ has a variety of gifts. In vs. 7 he identifies these as manifestations of the Spirit and then says that to *each one* (italics JB) a gift is given. Those gifts are given with a view of serving the community, for the common good (vs. 7). Paul's explanation is in line with what happened at the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, when 'what seemed to be tongues of fire ... came to rest on *each of them*. *All of them* were filled with the Holy Spirit ...' (Acts 2:3, 4b).

⁶ 'The Sinking Boat'. Facilitator's Resource Manual for Training of Trainers Workshop Series. Kampala:Uganda Community Based Health Care Association (CBHCA), 1991

⁷ A major source for this handbook is Paulo Freire's work on critical awareness.

In 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Paul further explains that in the church everybody, like any part in a human body, has a different role to play. Each is important, even to the extent that 'those parts of the body that *seem* to be weaker are indispensable' (vs. 22). Paul also emphasizes the interdependency in the church. People need one another, even if they are from different cultures. For superiority of one culture over another is no room in the church of Christ. Once we value people as described, we also will approach their culture with a positive attitude and open mind, while looking for the signs of God's presence among them.

In this context the missionary is not the expert who tells the people the best way to express their faith. He is the facilitator, who enables the people to develop their own theology. He is like a midwife, helping at birth with lots of experience, but not really directly involved in the birthing itself (Bevans 1992:51).

5. Theology by the people

In line with what I have said above is how I understand theology. I agree with Nolan (1987:10) who describes theology as, 'trying to find answers to the questions that people ask about their faith for the purpose of nourishing that faith'. Thus, theology is a response to questions asked by believers because of their dealings - often struggles - with daily life issues. With a view to help them understand their life and live their life in the light of the gospel. An illustration of doing theology this way is the Heidelberg Catechism. The whole book is arranged as answers and questions, and these questions were of particular relevance to the Protestant believers of the 16th century in Western Europe. Consequently, 'the theological traditions of Western Christianity are culturally determined and therefore not universally formative' (Bediako 1988:183). Schleiermacher 'pioneered the view that all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it had evolved' (in Bosch 1991:241). Even more challenging is Paul Ricoeur's view regarding the interpretation of Scripture. He holds that the text 'becomes' as we engage with it; the reader 'creates' the text when she or he reads it (in Bosch 1991:423).

People at different times and in different places ask different questions. Yet all are looking for a Word from God - 'Thus says the Lord' - concerning their questions. Motives may vary. In the end, however, it comes down to - as happened with the first disciples - having heard the call of the Lord, to respond to it by getting up and following him. The point here is that theology of its very nature is contextual. It is local theology. As Nolan (1987:11) says, 'while Christian faith

remains the same at all times and in all circumstances, the theological attempt to answer questions about this faith will vary according to the different historical and social contexts that gave rise to the questions'.

Contextual or local theology is not just doing theology in a different way. It is essentially different from the way it was done traditionally. Classical theology was conducted from above, confined to the world of the academics. Its emphasis was knowing rather than doing and the main sources were Scripture and tradition. The content was unchangeable, above culture and historically conditioned expressions. Classical theology came from the outside and was taken to the people. It was a top-bottom approach, rather than a bottom-top approach. It was non-participatory and foreign to the view that theology is done by the people.

Local theology, on the other hand, allows the context to decide the nature and content of a theology for that context. In other words, local theology starts from below, from where the people are, from the questions they raise. That is where theology needs to start if it really wants to help believers 'to live Jesus'. At the wall of a huge Pentecostal church in Nairobi is written 'Jesus is the answer'. I do not want to dispute that statement as I believe it is true. However, is one still listening - with eagerness and humbleness - to the questions that people ask, if one already knows the answer? If the gospel is to be relevant - and thus, if it has to have impact on the community - it must take as its point of departure 'where people are'. However, we also need to remember that the theologising community is not isolated, yet part of the Body of Christ that is of 'all times and all places'. That is why we agree with Schreier (1985:117-121) that the judgment of other churches is a criterion for the Christian identity of a local church.

One reason for local theology is the belief that the Spirit of God works in every local Christian community and enables the believers to deal with their own questions. Another reason, which is even more fundamental, is the incarnation of Jesus. God so loved the world that He sent his Son. The Word became flesh. God was in Christ among us. Emmanuel, God with us, and this Emmanuel was Jesus, a Jew. God became a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter. The Gospel writers portray Jesus as a first century Jew who underwent the whole range of physical and emotional experiences common to man. Being a Jew He was brought up in the Jewish tradition, and was circumcised on the eighth day. At the age of twelve He went up with his parents to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. He attended the synagogue and read the prophets. He was a controversial Jew, as time and again He stepped outside the borders of the tradition. Nevertheless, He was a Jew, and not an Egyptian or a Persian

or a citizen of any other country. The Jewish culture was his, the Jewish tradition was his, the Jewish religion was his. When He preached in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, He was identified as one of them, namely as the son of Joseph (Bevans 1992:7-8).

‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14). God did not shout his message from the heavens, but descended to the lower, earthly regions and became one of us. Only then was He able to bridge the gap between himself and man, and to open the way to a life-giving relationship. According to Bevans (1992:8), ‘the means of communication would have to be such that human beings could fully grasp ... the reality of what this invitation into friendship and relationship was all about’.

If human beings are to respond to God’s invitation they should feel ‘at home’ with God. In Christ He should be one of them, and not an outsider, a stranger, one belonging to a different (even maybe an oppressing) group. ‘Incarnation is a process of becoming particular, and that way God could become visible and - to a certain extent - become graspable and intelligible’ (Bevans 1992:8). In Namibia imagining that the black community feels comfortable with a white God is hard. Bevans points out that the incarnation process needs to continue. If God has to become ‘one of us’, He must become Asian or African, black or brown, poor or sophisticated, and so forth. As he says, ‘Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and most basic insight, must continue God’s incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual’ (Bevans 1992:8). We, however, also need to acknowledge that God goes beyond the borders of our own small community. Where He is our God, He is also the God of others. He is the God of all, and people from ‘all nations will come and worship before you’ (Rev. 15:4).

6. Method

In my paper ‘Christian Hope in African Context’ I have described the importance of ancestors to many African communities.⁸ They deeply influence the day-to-day lives of both individuals and whole communities.⁹ From a contextual point of view we need to take seriously and unconditionally what is at people’s hearts. What determines the credibility of the gospel? It

⁸ I wrote this paper (1999) as the second of three for my MTh course.

⁹ An interviewee (Kaauova 1999:interview) told the story of a young man who denied his tradition and refused to marry the woman that was chosen for him by his parents. Unfortunately, his marriage did not go well. Where he first denied his tradition he then used its ideas to explain why: he had broken the social order and as a result the ancestors were against him.

depends on how relevant it is for the people to whom it is communicated (Tennekes & Vroom 1989:10-11). A gospel that just denies the ancestors will not do much harm, one can live with that. Yet, a gospel that challenges, which asks questions like 'what, why, how, if', such a gospel is a real asset to people as it helps them to find their way in life amid day-to-day difficulties and problems they are facing. This is what local theology is about, that the gospel enters deep into people's lives. When the Early Church moved out of Jerusalem preaching the gospel in unknown Gentile areas, the apostles used the concepts of the people to whom they preached, and took the risk of being misunderstood. Nevertheless, they kept on moving. By this, the gospel transformed the community from within. It is a process in which one gets engaged without knowing beforehand what the outcome is going to be. According to Donovan, it is a process of 'playing back'. After sharing the gospel the preacher asks the hearers to play it back, to say what they had heard. 'As it was played back we began to see different lights on the very passage we were trying to bring to them. I would present it as clearly as I could and they would startle me' (in Bevans 1992:59).

In my first MTh paper¹⁰ I wrote, '*Contextualisation implies that missionary work starts where the people are. It does imply an approach from below and not a top-bottom approach. Methodologically - where it is my intention to focus on ancestors' veneration - it means that I will start with listening. The purpose is to find out what the role of the ancestors' veneration has been in the Herero community throughout the years: how have people experienced the ancestors in the past, and how do they experience them today. After having carefully listened, I will listen to others in the wider ecumenical body of the Church (remember that according to Schreiter (1985:117-121), a criterion for deciding the genuineness of a particular theological expression is the strength of a theology to challenge other theologies). My responsibility will be, with the knowledge gained, to enter a debate with Oruano. However, in the end the answer on the question of integration will be my answer. Nevertheless, the guiding element will be the church's interpretation of the issue. As for missiology, this is theology by the people; for community development, this is a participatory approach, or 'the ownership is with the people'*.

This will be my approach. For practical reasons I will start with listening to others first through study of literature. I need this information to make my listening to Oruano, which will be done through interviews, more effective.

¹⁰ From Enlightenment to Contextualisation: Developments in Mission Thinking. 1998:35.

7. Set up

The title of this dissertation is 'Ancestors: A Challenge to the Oruano Church of Namibia'. To deal with this topic properly within the context of what we argued and explained above, we need to take into consideration, among others, the following,

a) Ancestors' veneration is an aspect of the total religious experience. Touching on one component affects the other components as well. One finds this confirmed when one visits a Herero village. The three important 'units' are these: the main hut of the head man, the kraal where the cattle are kept, and between the holy fire. Each is very important to the Herero community. The point, however, is the relationship between the three 'units'. For example, no ceremony takes place at the holy fire if the cattle is not in the kraal.

b) When discussing the Herero people, we must remember the genocide that took place when they fought their War of Resistance against the German colonizers. The impact of this tragedy can hardly be understood by 'outsiders'. The breakaway of most Herero people from the Rhenish Mission in 1955 was an unavoidable consequence of this genocide. That it had not happened earlier is just because people were not ready for it. They needed time to recover and regain their self-confidence (Kamburona 1998:interview).

c) About the holy fire, we will also need to look into the wider history. Living in the centre of the country, the Herero people have always played a major role in the country's politics. When the Germans arrived they mainly dealt with the Herero people. However, today the Ovambo people have taken over the majority position of the Herero, and the latter are almost sidelined, with little hope that this will change as the Ovambo by far outnumber the Herero. In response to this development the Herero are trying to strengthen the group's identity. Part of it is a stronger emphasis on the holy fire. I get the impression that this is particularly happening in Aminuis.

d) In this dissertation we talk about the Herero community. That is how people talk about it today, including the interviewees. Unless I specifically asked for it, they would not distinguish between the three main groups that make up the Herero community. These are the Zeraua, the Mbanderu and by far the biggest group, the Maharero. The latter have joined the Oruano when the church was founded in 1955. Most of the Zeraua stayed in the Rhenish Mission church and now belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). Most Mbanderu people belong to their own church, the Church of Africa (Pöllitzer 1978:60). It does not mean that Oruano is only for the Maharero. They have members from the other two groups as well. The general secretary, for

example, is a Mbanderu. While acknowledging the diversity in the Herero community (see also chapter 4.1), the ancestors' veneration is characteristic for the entire community.

The set up of this paper then is as follows,

Chapter 1. The chapter discusses the history of the Herero community, particularly the period 1840 -1955. It describes their struggle for survival. During the Herero war they were almost destroyed. Nevertheless, they managed to reestablish themselves again and to become a strong and independent community. The study of the Herero history is done to gain a better understanding as to why Oruano was founded, which happened in 1955.

Chapter 2. The chapter focuses on the founding of Oruano. In the concluding section it explains Oruano's position regarding the ancestors. This can be summarized as follows, 'The church never has formally acknowledged the practice of ancestors' veneration, but it has consented tacitly'.

Chapter 3. This chapter discusses aspects of ancestors' veneration as it occurs in the various African communities. The aim is to give a general introduction to 'The world of the ancestors'. The first two sections deal with the ceremonies and rituals, followed by three sections on concepts and how the ancestors are perceived by African communities. The last section lists the main characteristics of ancestor beliefs that need to be discussed when dealing with the role of the ancestors in the Herero community.

Chapter 4: This chapter is a concluding chapter that brings together the previous chapters. It particularly uses the information gained from interviews and ends with challenges that Oruano is facing today. Except the section on the challenges, the chapter was discussed with Bishop Kamburona and Mr. Upi before it was finalised.

8. Final remarks

Three different names for the church are used: Oruano, Protestant Unity Church, and Ongereki Yevangeli Yoruano. The last name is used on the birth certificates issued by the church. The church is registered with the Namibian government as 'Protestant Unity Church (Oruano)'. Sometimes 'in Namibia' is added. Among the people the church is known as just 'Oruano'.

As 'Oruano' is the name best known, I have preferred to use this name in this dissertation. For the sake of clarity for the reader who is not familiar with the Namibian situation, I have added 'church' and 'Namibia' to the title.

All Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV), published by the International Bible Society.

CHAPTER 1. THE HISTORY OF THE HERERO COMMUNITY

1.1 The Herero and the Orlam>Nama people (... - 1884)¹¹

1.1.1 Under the authority of Jonker Afrikaner (1840-1861)

According to the Herero legends and traditions, they were believed to have once lived in the far land of the many lakes, in the heart of Africa, at the springs of the Niles. With other people they migrated southward. Two accounts have been handed down about how they came into Namibia. The first account says that, after having resided in Kaokoland and adjacent parts of Angola for almost two centuries, forced by severe drought they migrated further south. The second account asserts that they came from the northeast through Botswana. While the Mbanderu remained behind in Botswana, the rest continued westward into the interior of present Namibia. Some remained here while others trekked to the Kaokoveld, and even crossed the Kunene river into Angola (Malan 1995:68; Nambala 1994:17-18).¹² The date for their arrival might have been before 1550. '1550, the date generally given for their arrival, may well be too late' (Gray in Nambala 1994:18).

The Herero, being pastoralists with huge herds, were always looking for grazing grounds and good water supplies. In some places their settlements could remain for long periods. Yet they were always built so that they could easily be moved. As already said, severe drought was the cause for a further migration southward, and as more settled in the central parts of the country, conflicts with other communities became inevitable. In 1830 the first clash between the Herero and Chief Jonker Afrikaner Orlams', who were moving in northerly direction from the Cape Province, occurred near present Windhoek (Malan 1995:68). Three more bloody battles followed in 1835 aimed at stopping the Herero from moving further south (Buys 1998 ch.4:4).

Jonker Afrikaner moved into Namibia in 1823 and during the next 17 years he managed to subject most of the southern Nama communities to his rule. It was his intention to unite all the

¹¹ Because of the close relationship and similarities between the local Nama and the immigrant Orlam community, a distinct Orlam identity gradually disappeared. Orlam and Nama became one group under the name Nama as a result of the Orlam integrating in the Nama people. '... the integrative power of Nama language and culture proved to be stronger' (Malan 1995:114; see also Mbumba/Noisser 1988:86). Sometimes the Orlam group of Jonker Afrikaner is also referred to as the 'Afrikaner' group. For the sake of clarity I will use 'Nama' when referring to Jonker Afrikaner and his people.

¹² Malan supports the view that the Herero people have entered Namibia from Angola into Kaokoland.

Namibians under one chief. In about 1840, Jonker established his headquarter in central Namibia at a place originally called Ai-gams, and called it Windhoek.¹³ With this he had moved into the heartland of the Herero and Damara nations (Nambala 1990:103). The Herero leader in Windhoek called on his uncle Chief Tjamuaha to send reinforcement to resist the ‘... rhinoceros ... Send me help or it will break through right to Okahandja’ (Vedder in Nambala 1990:104). However, the Herero could not stop Jonker Afrikaner because ‘a knobkerrie was useless against the gun’ (Vedder in Nambala 1990:104). As he was having the gun his military power was superior compared to the other nations. His guns and the Herero spears were incompatible. Rather than fighting him it was both necessary and advisable to resort to negotiations. This led to the Peace Treaty of 1842 between the two Herero leaders Tjamuaha and Kahitjene on the one side, and Jonker Afrikaner on the other side (Nambala 1990:162). The treaty did not mean that the two Herero leaders were deposed. In fact, the peace treaty formulated an agreement which recognized the continual leadership of both of them over their groups. However, they were required to support Afrikaner in his further raiding expeditions against still hostile Nama groups and other Herero tribes (Hellberg 1997:33). The ‘Peace of Windhoek’, unfortunately, was short lived and broke down already after four years in 1846. The following years Jonker Afrikaner continued his war campaigns with the aim to include those areas that were not yet under his authority.

It was an era of plundering and cattle raiding, reaching the areas of Ovamboland by 1860. A massacre took place in Okahandja in 1850. While concentrating on expanding his power towards the north, some Nama communities living in the south rebelled against his domination. The conflict ended with an agreement signed at Kupferberg in 1858 (Nambala 1990:165; Mbumba/Noisser 1988:59). Before his death on 18 October 1861 at Okahandja, Jonker Afrikaner made peace with Tjamuaha and warned his son Christian to live in peace with Maharero, Tjamuaha’s son (Nambala 1994:72). Tjamuaha also died in 1861.

Under the dominant authority of Jonker Afrikaner after 1842, the position of the Herero had weakened to the extent that many had become impoverished and rootless. This was the result of Afrikaner’s policy to systematically deprive the Herero of their cattle’s herds - the very foundations of their existence. Many found refuge with Europeans who gave them various forms of employment. Others herded Jonker Afrikaner’s cattle, which in fact he had stolen from them or their kinsmen. Yet other Herero groups fled with the remainder of their herds to Kaokoland.

¹³ Windhoek is from ‘Winterhoek’, the name of the place where Jonker Afrikaner’s father had lived in South Africa (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:55).

'We may therefore be justified in claiming that by the late 1850s, the Herero were weakened and hardly able to fight a war of independence against Jonker Afrikaner' (Hellberg 1997:55).¹⁴ The conclusion that Hellberg (1997:55) draws is that the fighting of the 1860s was not so much between the Nama and the Herero. It was between the Nama on the one side and European traders and the Rhenish missionaries on the other side.¹⁵ Nambala (1990:174) agrees when he states that, 'Although it appeared that the war was being fought between the Nama and the Herero, it was the whites of Otjimbingwe who really initiated this war and helped its prolongation in rendering military support to the Herero'.¹⁶

1.1.2 Maharero taking over the authority (1861-1884)

One of the most prominent figures among the Europeans was the trader Charles J. Anderson. He had set himself up as a merchant in Otjimbingwe in 1860, which then was outside the sphere of influence of Jonker Afrikaner. According to Nambala (1990:165), he was the one who by the beginning of the 1860s began selling guns in large numbers to the Herero. By this, he caused a shift in the power balance between the Herero and the Nama in favour of the first. Anderson was a real threat to Afrikaner's ambition to establish his rule over the Nama, Herero and Ovambo. In fact, Anderson was much opposed to Jonker Afrikaner because the latter wanted to keep control over all foreign trade in his territory, thus also Anderson's. His business interest made him supporting the opposition to the rule of the Nama (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:82-83). Rather than correcting him the missionaries assured him of their full support in the war waged against the Nama (Hellberg 1997:57).

Meanwhile Tjamuaha's son Maharero realised that Anderson could probably protect the Herero from the Nama people. Therefore, he moved away with his people from Okahandja to Otjimbingwe. In response to this - and for other reasons as well - Jonker Afrikaner's son Christian

¹⁴ However, '... Maharero ... was determined to rid the Herero of Jonker's tyranny' (Malan 1995:69).

¹⁵ Nambala refers to these struggles as the third out of four 'Unification wars' that was fought by the Afrikaners and lasted from 1863-1869 (1990:165-177).

¹⁶ Buys differs from Hellberg and Nambala as he talks of the 'liberation war' of the Herero against the Nama under the leadership of the two young and strong Herero chiefs, Maharero and Zeraua, who were working towards a stronger united Herero community. The Herero fought this war of their own with full support of the missionaries and the wider European community. That the Herero stood up against Jonker Afrikaner and had some successes in defending themselves brought much joy to the missionaries. They interpreted this as a sign of revival of the Herero community (1998 ch.2:11; also Buys/Kritzinger 1989:31).

Afrikaner attacked Otjimbingwe in 1863, during which battle he was killed. His brother Jan Jonker Afrikaner succeeded him. The following years Otjimbingwe became the main military base in the Nama-Herero conflict. Anderson managed to persuade the Herero to elect Maharero as their Paramount Chief, and him as the 'regent and supreme commander' (Hellberg 1997:58; see also Nambala 1990:167-168). Fighting took place at regular intervals with both parties taking the initiative. Considering this, and the deteriorating income from his business on the one hand and the high costs to maintain his army on the other hand, Anderson decided to abandon Otjimbingwe. He travelled to Ovambo land where he died in 1867. Most of the other Europeans also left, and 'the Herero with a few whites were left behind with a war which was not of their own design' (Nambala 1990:170). In spite of Anderson's death, Jan Jonker still wanted to attack Otjimbingwe and destroy this place where now Maharero had become a strong leader. Maharero was no longer afraid to take on the Nama people and even attacked Jan Jonker Afrikaner in his stronghold Windhoek and pushed him out. Over the years the war had begun to drag on, never reaching a conclusion. Finally, the 'Peace of Okahandja' was signed in August 1870. The peace lasted for ten years, from 1870-1880. For Jan Jonker Afrikaner this peace was for the sake of survival.

During this period of the 1860s Herero land was divided in three main chieftaincies by tacit agreement: the chieftaincy of Kahimemua, the leader of the eastern Herero and the Mbanderu, that of Zeraua who had left Otjimbingwe in 1868 for Omaruru, and that of Maharero (Werner 1998:41).

The peace was followed by another ten years of social and political instability. The power balance was in favour of the Herero. This being so, Jan Jonker Afrikaner found it necessary to ask Maharero to allow him to have a shopkeeper at Windhoek. In his letter to Maharero he said, 'I shall do nothing without your permission ...' (in Nambala 1988:178, from Chief Jan Jonker's letter to Chief Maharero on April 20, 1971). Nevertheless, two years after the 'Peace of Okahandja' Maharero asked the British governor of Cape Town for protection against Jan Jonker Afrikaner. The English, however, were not interested to send armed forces (Hellberg 1997:62-63). Jan Jonker's request to Maharero and Maharero's request to the British governor may also have been done for other reasons, but it shows that the power balance was a sensitive issue that had not yet been sorted out.¹⁷ Meanwhile confusion grew. Jan Jonker Afrikaner worked hard to strengthen

¹⁷ Being a political expert, Jan Jonker Afrikaner did not want to offend Maharero (Nambala 1988:177). Maharero got increasingly worried about the influx of Boer immigrants from the Cape Colony (Hellberg 1997:63).

his position. He needed allies, arms and ammunition. In search of grazing the Herero moved south again, even nearer to Windhoek, which, according to the peace treaty, was Jonker's area. A very serious incident was the slaughtering by the Nama of animals of Maharero's herd of sacred oxen, which were only to be slaughtered at the occasion of his death. In reply Maharero ordered to kill all Nama people in Herero area. Whereupon all the Nama chiefs formed a united front against the Herero people. Another period of conflicts and fighting followed which only ended with the death of Jan Jonker Afrikaner in 1889, and Maharero in 1890 (Nambala 1990:181).¹⁸

Meanwhile two important events had taken place. About 1884 Hendrik Witbooi had come on the political and military scene and became increasingly influential. Like Jonker Afrikaner his intention also was a unity of Namibian communities under his leadership (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:133). The other event was the German colonial occupation of Namibia that officially began in the same year.

1.2 The Herero under German colonial rule (1884-1915)

1.2.1 The Germans taking over authority: Protection Treaties

German colonial rule began when the bay of Angra Pequena (today Lüderitz) and the surrounding area, which in 1883 had been bought by Adolf Lüderitz, was placed under the 'protection' of the German Empire. To take control of the land, the Germans organised 'Protection Treaties' with tribal chiefs. This was done by any possible means: 'Fraud, deception, false promises and violence' (Dierks in Buys 1998 ch.5:1). Exploiting local conflicts and division between the chiefs of the various communities, colonial administrators promised individual chiefs protection against their adversaries, to recognise the chief's jurisdiction over his own people, and to respect the customs and traditions of the Africans. In return, signatories of these protection treaties promised the colonial administrators: not to make any treaty with other European nations, not to let any nation use the land without the consent of the German emperor, to protect the life and property of the Germans on their territory, to allow these Germans to carry on trade, and to leave jurisdiction over all Europeans to the German authorities (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:130). The Germans also managed to make a 'protection treaty' with Chief Samuel Maharero. It was signed in Okahandja on 21 October 1885. The treaty was formulated as an agreement made between two

¹⁸ Nambala refers to this period as the 'The Fourth War, 1880-1890' (Nambala 1990:177).

sovereigns on an equal footing. The truth, however, was that Maharero was made into a tribal leader under the official German colonial administration (Hellberg 1997:90-91). When a joint force of Hendrik Witbooi and Jan Jonker Afrikaner attacked and defeated him, Maharero realised how unreliable the German promises to provide protection against other chiefs were. Rather than providing protection to the Herero, the Germans protected the traders who 'robbed' them from their cattle. In 1888, Maharero revoked his treaty with the Germans (Hellberg 1997:90-91). However, he renewed the treaty in 1890.

Meanwhile Hendrik Witbooi continued to operate as an independent chief who was in no way prepared to give in to German pressure to sign a treaty. In response to Maharero's renewal of the treaty Witbooi wrote him a letter on 30 May 1890.¹⁹ In this letter he stated that Herero land like Namaland is an 'independent kingdom just as it is said of white countries, Germany ...'. And each country has its own leader who is 'a representative of our Almighty God, being only responsible before this great God But you have now accepted another (earthly) government and you have given yourself to it to be protected from human beings ...'. Then Witbooi warned Maharero that it was a wrong decision to renew the treaty and that one day he would regret it as it would turn against him. The years that followed proved that Witbooi was right.

Maharero died on 7 October 1890 and was succeeded by his son Samuel Maharero. Like Maharero himself, whose position as Paramount Chief had been arranged by Charles J. Anderson with the support of the Rhenish Mission, Samuel was also not the legitimate heir. That was Nikodemus, Tjamuaha's oldest great-grandson. However, he was too independent for the Germans, while Samuel was a faithful follower of the 'Rhenish Mission ... and thus naturally the colonial authorities' first choice ...' (Hellberg 1990:95). The fact that he was a Christian and thus could not fulfill all of a chief's traditional religious functions, was solved by assigning these to an elder relative (Hellberg 1990:95). Samuel's position was weak. On the one hand he was much manipulated by the Germans, and on the other hand he was not recognized as Paramount Chief by all the Herero chiefs. Particularly the eastern Herero and the Mbanderu resisted him (Hellberg 1990:100; Mbumba/Noisser 1988:146). When in 1896 their leaders Nikodemus and Kahimemua were implicated in a revolt against the Germans, Samuel saw this as an opportunity to get rid of particularly Nikodemus. He openly supported the Germans and even placed a mounted commando at their disposal to suppress the revolt. When the two men were captured and sentenced to death Samuel explicitly requested that both sentences be carried out. With the help

¹⁹ Quotes are taken from the letter as it is printed in Nambala 1990:194-195.

of the Germans, the long-continued struggle for leadership had finally been clinched in his favour (Pool 1991:142-157).²⁰

1.2.2 The loss of cattle and land

The German colonial administration was determined to turn Namibia into a settler colony and for this it needed land. According to the German colonial governor Leutwein, '... the whole future of the colony lies in the gradual transfer of the land from the hands of the workshy natives into *white hands* ...' (in Pool 1991:117). This transition had to take place gradually and peacefully. Leutwein started to define frontiers between the settlements of the different communities. Land left 'unused' after this partition was declared Crown land (Hellberg 1997:98-99). The idea was that 'after the demarcation of Native reserves, the Government will gradually declare as Crown land the remainder of the territory' (in Werner 1998:42). This so-called Crown land was then at the disposal of the German colonists. What 'helped' Leutwein to achieve his goal was the rinderpest that occurred in 1897. While between 50 and 95 percent of settler stock was saved by timely inoculations, an estimated 95 percent of Herero stock died. As cattle could not be used for trading purposes any longer, now land itself became the object of business transactions.

This was a new development as land was traditionally communal property and could not be sold by anybody, even not the chiefs. All what was done in the previous years was to give individual Europeans, including the missionaries, the right to use some land. Whenever a European moved or died, the land reverted to the Herero community (Drechsler 1986:111; Hellberg 1997:104-105). Maharero himself set the example. Having been greatly impoverished by the rinderpest he sought to improve his financial situation by selling farm land to the colonists, both farmers and traders, despite strong protest from the lesser chiefs. His increasing dependence on alcohol made him continue this practice throughout the years, while promising his leaders, 'Later we'll take it all back' (Pool 1991:172).²¹ Meanwhile settlers and traders were quick to take advantage of the situation through an unscrupulous credit system. The process of dispossession

²⁰ In his letter of 2 February 1885 to Nikodemus and Kahimemua the German colonial administrator wrote, 'The present Paramount Chief of the Herero, Samuel Maharero, is my best friend' (in Pool 1991:122).

²¹ See for the land issue, the role Maharero played in connection with this land issue, and his dependency on alcohol, Hellberg 1997:104-105; Werner 1998:109; Pool 1991:158-173.

of the Herero accelerated after the 1897 rinderpest and led to a crisis in the community, even to the extent that the survival of the Herero people was at stake.

The loss of cattle and grazing grounds had not only economic implications, but social and religious implications as well. It disrupted and even broke down life. To prevent the situation from getting worse the Rhenish mission suggested that a reserve be made for the Herero (Pool 1991:177). This would protect them from the exploitation of the colonists as they would not be allowed to sell reserve land to anyone. When the boundaries were announced the Herero were very dissatisfied: the areas were too small, the grazing land of poor quality, and surface water was insufficient. Negotiations to make adjustments did not result in any change. Unrest was growing under the Herero people. 'The idea that the moment was fast approaching when they would own no more tribal land, and would be dependent on working for Whites to survive, gained ground rapidly among the Herero' (Pool 1991:187). Other Herero leaders confronted Samuel Maharero and demanded that he as the Paramount Chief lead his people in a war of liberation. Maharero was given the choice either to lead his people in such a war of independence, or to lose his position as a chieftain. He chose war (Hellberg 1997:106).

1.2.3 The Herero War of Resistance

The order to revolt was given in a letter dated 11 January 1904. The order was clearly aimed at the German population. For strategic reasons Samuel Maharero wanted both the English and the Boers to remain neutral. He, however, tried to involve the other Namibian communities, but this was all in vain. Samuel Maharero and his Herero people had thus to fight the Germans and their allies alone (Pool 1991:200-205).²² In the following months various battles were fought with neither the Herero nor the Germans getting the upper hand. The German government in Berlin was not satisfied with Leutwein's results and replaced him with General von Trotha. After his arrival in Namibia he quickly organised the military and prepared for the battles at Waterberg, to begin at 11 August 1904. Two days of fierce fighting followed. Von Trotha failed to destroy the Herero in a single battle during those days. Their resistance though had been broken.

²² According to Mbumba/Noisser (1988:161-163) Chief Nehale from the North joined the Herero War (which they call the War of National Resistance) at the request of the Herero leaders and attacked the German fort at Namutoni. One interviewee (Kaauova 1999:interview) rejected this claim and argued that the attack of Namutoni served the northern peoples as Namutoni is located at the southern border of their area. As a matter of fact, the Herero feel they were left alone and did not receive help from the Ovambo peoples.

However, Samuel Maharero would not surrender but preferred to flee. Von Trotha then decided to pursue the fleeing Herero people. He was forced to call off the pursuit as his water and food supplies were insufficient. Many fleeing Herero died in the dry Omaheke sandveld. Early October Von Trotha issued his 'extermination order'. '... All Hereros must leave the country ... If they do not do so, I will force them with cannons to do so. Within the German borders, every Herero, with or without weapons, with or without cattle, will be shot. ... This is my message to the Herero Nation' (in Pool 1991:272). The Herero had to get out of the Schutzgebiet!

According to Pool (1991:280) giving accurate figures concerning the number of Herero that died during the war is not possible. Only an estimate can be given. Mbumba/Noisser (1988:161) estimate that by the end of 1905 about 75% to 80% of the Herero had died of war and starvation. Their number was reduced from about 70,000 to 16,000. Samuel Maharero managed to reach Bechuanaland, presently Botswana, where he died on 14 March 1923. The funeral took place in Okahandja, on Sunday 26 August 1923 (Pool 1991:214-281).

The same time that Von Trotha issued his extermination order, Hendrik Witbooi decided to take up arms against the Germans. Like the Herero the Nama suffered severely at the hands of the Germans. Between 35% and 50% of the Nama population died due to the war (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:168). On 31 March 1907, the German emperor proclaimed that the war was over (Hellberg 1997:115).²³

1.2.4 After the war: the labour issue

After the war 'South-West Africa was converted into a European-dominated country to an extent that had no parallel in Africa ...' (Iliffe in Werner 1998:47). A Police Zone was established which encompassed all those regions that were under the direct administration of the colonial authorities (Werner 1998:20). Meanwhile the colony was facing a serious labour shortage. To address this issue the colonial administration offered amnesty to the Herero people on 1 December 1905. The Rhenish missionaries were entrusted with the task of gathering the refugees from the war, who were scattered all over the area, at the two mission stations Ojihaenena and Omburo. By early 1906 they had gathered circa 12,000 Herero, while the army had captured another 8,889 (Werner 1998:49). They were all regarded as prisoners of war and

²³ The proclamation was made too quickly as Nama fighting continued even into 1908 (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:164-166).

sent to either Swakopmund or Lüderitzbucht to be employed on harbour or railway construction. However, not all Herero surrendered to the German authorities. Small communities continued to exist in areas where the Germans could not extend their control (Werner 1998:49-51).

To secure its control the colonial government introduced laws, which were designed not only to keep the indigenous population under tight control but also to force them into wage labour. Tribal land was expropriated and it was the Herero forbidden to own cattle (1905); all moveable and immovable tribal property of the Herero confiscated (1906);²⁴ all Africans over the age of eight had to carry identity cards and a service book (1907); only with the permission of the Governor could 'natives' obtain land or land-rights (which was never granted until 1912) (1907); the number of Africans residing on white-owned land was limited to no more than ten families belonging to the same tribe or group, and traditional, religious and social gatherings were declared illegal (1907) (Werner 1998:47; Hellberg 1997:120-122). It was the task of the colonial power to 'deprive the black Namibian of his national sense of belonging and indigenous particularity in order to mould him and the other blacks into a single, coloured working class' (Rohrbach in Hellberg 1997:121). According to Hellberg (1997:120) it is estimated that soon after the war 90% of all black Namibians living in the Police Zone were forced into the service of white colonizers. It also was German policy to disperse the Herero workers all over the country. In addition they sought to destroy 'all tribal connections, both political and cultural ... together with their symbols: the oxen, the insignia, and the chiefs' (Werner 1998:53). Doing it this way, they tried to prevent the reorganisation of the Herero. Despite all what is mentioned here, the Herero gradually left the labour camps and moved back to their ancestral lands where they resumed their traditional way of living (Werner 1998:53).

1.3 The Herero under South African rule up to 1955 (1915-1955)

1.3.1 Restoration of the Herero community?

During World War I Namibia was administered by the military administration of the Union of South Africa. Its army had invaded the country at the end of 1914 and already a few months later the German governor decided to capitulate. The capitulation was signed at Khorab on 9 July 1915. The black community had high expectations of the new administration who had

²⁴ All moveable and immovable tribal property of most of the Nama communities was also confiscated.

defeated their former masters. Samuel Maharero firmly believed that this defeat heralded the dawn of Herero liberation from colonial rule (Werner 1998:55). He even urged his people to go into South African military service. This led Katjavivi to draw the conclusion that, 'Namibians were not therefore naively entertaining hopes of freedom; they worked through physical participation in the Allied effort to contribute to regaining control of their country' (in Hellberg 1997:168). Initially the new administration was a relief to them. New legislation was introduced, which brought greater freedom and a more human treatment. The prohibition to own stock by the black community was abolished. Under certain conditions black cattle's owners were granted the right to their own land for grazing. Thus, people were able to escape from lowly-paid farm labour and to establish a life of their own. This was particularly welcomed by the Herero who worked very hard to get large and small stock (Hellberg 1997:146-159). Werner (1998:58) refers to this period of military rule as the period of 'repeasantization'.

1.3.2 The labour issue again

Because of the 'Peace Treaty of Versailles' in 1919, Namibia became a League of Nations mandate, category C, administered by the Union of South Africa. A 'C' mandate meant the total freedom for the mandatory power in its administration of the territory. It even allowed the Union of South Africa to apply its own laws in Namibia (Mbumba/Noisser 1988:189). The mandate said that South Africa should 'promote the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants' (in Mbumba/Noisser 1988:190). The interpretation of the mandate by South Africa was quite different from what the black community had hoped. Smuts, South Africa's prime minister, intended to treat the blacks in Namibia with severity, and rule over them with a heavy hand. They were needed as *labour*, and 'should therefore be encouraged to be diligent and obedient' (Hellberg 1997:165). The black population was to be subordinated to the interests of the white population in everything. The time of liberalisation had ended.²⁵ The following years

²⁵ There are various reasons for this change in attitude. South Africa chose to be lenient during the military administration to appease the black community. They just could not afford black rebellion during the war years of World War I. Moreover, they did not have enough trained manpower for running a sufficient administration. On a positive note we should also mention that the more liberal attitude of the officers assigned to administer the country, who mainly were of English origin, was another reason (Hellberg 1997:142-143; 167-168). However, as a matter of fact, despite the reforms, there had hardly been a fundamental change towards the black community since post-1907 German colonial rule. Werner (1998:72-73) refers to a 1915 circular (Circulars S. W. A. Administrasie 1915) lying down that 'Every able-bodied Native to be self-supporting and in employment somewhere, or else be treated as a vagrant ...'.

are best understood in the light of the much quoted statement of Administrator Hofmeyer that 'the labour question ... is synonymous with the native question' (in Hellberg 1997:193; in Werner 1998:101). Farming, mining and other industries heavily depended on the black labourers. Poor labour conditions like ill-treatment, nonpayment of wages, and insufficient earnings for daily living, resulted in workers deserting from their employment. The labour situation was so serious that one settler said, 'This country is hell for the white man' (in Werner 1998:70). 'In countless petitions and reports to the Administrator by farmers' organizations, the 'native question' was represented as a very serious one' (Werner 1998:70).

1.3.3 The reserves

To deal with the issue the Union administration introduced a system that was the same as that operative in South Africa. It included, 'removal of blacks away from white territories, the disappearance of so-called 'black islands' (temporary reserves) from within white settlement areas, and legislation forbidding the leasing of land to blacks in a 'white territory' (Hellberg 1997:193). This way the government thought they would undermine the self-sufficiency of the black communities and thus force them to seek work as labourers on the farms and in the industries. The areas for reserves that the colonial administration had selected were rejected by the Herero leaders because of their inferior quality. Hosea Kutako, who was elected as head man by his people in 1915 with the approval of Samuel Maharero in 1919 (Hellberg 1997:168), argued that, 'We are a big nation, and as such we shall not develop in a country like this where there is only deep borehole water ... it is not healthy for the people or the cattle ... I told him only one farm can depend on borehole water but it is no use for a whole nation We are the original inhabitants of S. W. A. and we know the best and the worst parts of the whole country You should rather bring the Europeans here and let us stay where we are ... (in Werner 1998:105).²⁶

Nevertheless, the Herero had to give up their temporary reserves, some of which were well-watered land, to be resettled in the sandy and dry areas on the eastern border of Namibia. Where they refused the government used violence in forcing people to move. Kutako now took measures to improve the living conditions in the reserves, so that his people could earn a living

²⁶ It is interesting to hear Kutako using the term 'nation'. It shows the desire for a Herero nation of its own. When in 1946 the Namibia case was brought before the United Nations, it was particularly the Herero case that was presented (see chapter 2). The present Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako also spoke of the Herero nation during the Herero day that took place in Okahandja on 22 August, 1999 (The Namibian, 24 August, 1999).

without having to seek employment at the settler farms. However, new restrictions were introduced which limited both autonomous production and the number of cattle people could keep (Hellberg 1997:194). Furthermore, due to lack of water and the poor quality of grazing land, Herero stock owners lost many animals. With insufficient income for daily living the Herero people were forced to enter into labour contracts with these settler farmers.

Another important reason for the establishment of reserves was the issue of controlling the black community. The colonial administration did not want the restoration of the once powerful Herero community. Therefore they refused the Herero's request to recognise Frederick Maharero, Samuel Maharero's son, who was still living in Botswana, as Paramount Chief (Hellberg 1997:107).

The administration was done through the structures of traditional leadership. The government would make sure that the leadership was willing to cooperate with them before making use of 'tribal rule'. In 1928 the administrator of Namibia was appointed as the 'Paramount Chief of the Namibians' (Hellberg 1997:195).

Further to ease the control of the black population the Union administration issued a series of laws between 1920 and 1924. The Vagrancy Proclamation Act No. 25/1920 contributed to the solution of the labour problem by forcing the unemployed, and those without a legally registered home abode, to work for whites. The Masters and Servants Proclamation No. 11/1920 made it a crime for a worker to change employers, or leave a job, without his employer's permission while under contract. The Curfew Regulations Proclamation No. 34/1922 limited very much the access of so-called 'nonwhites' into white areas. The Pass Law Proclamation No. 11/1922 made it a crime for the black people to be in the Police Zone without the relevant pass (Werner 1998:106; Hellberg 1997:170). All these attempts to control the Herero community resulted into what the South African administration had wanted to avoid, namely the development of an ethnic consciousness. Awareness of the Herero community as a nation was increasing (Werner 1998:109).

The Great Depression that coincided with a severe drought in the early 1930s led to a further impoverishment of the people in the reserves (Werner 1998:139-168). After 1934 the situation improved considerably. Cheap labour was very much in demand. According to Werner (1998:178) 7,002 labourers were employed on farms in 1934 and 30,202 in 1938. During these years Labour Tenancy was common practice. The most common form obliged the labourer and his family to provide labour all year round in turn for stock grazing rights on the farm lands. The

right to graze stock was then part of the remuneration (Werner 1998:177-180).

Regarding the reserves, the government was in a dilemma. It believed the costs of developing the reserves had to be borne by the people themselves. This was only possible if the revenues generated from the reserves would increase, which required the improvement of the agricultural production in the reserves. For this labour was needed, but labour was also needed at the white settler farmers. These farmers were putting pressure on the government to draw as much labour from the reserves as possible. The only way to solve the dilemma was a very tight control of the economic development in the reserves. This was met by resistance and 'this resistance culminated in the mid 1940s in a total rejection of the Union's attempts to incorporate S. W. A.' (Werner 1998:185). Nevertheless, many Herero stock owners continued to build up their stock throughout the years (Werner 1998:185-187).

1.3.4 Call for independence

With the constitution of the United Nations, replacing the League of Nations, the Union of South Africa renewed its attempt to incorporate Namibia into the Union and to make it its fifth province. The South African authorities organised a referendum for the 'nonwhite' population. The people were so manipulated that the majority voted for South Africa continuing to have the mandate over Namibia (Hellberg 1997:222-223).²⁷ In 1946 Hosea Kutako wrote a letter to the United Nations protesting against the referendum. It was an important step as the black community made its voice heard before an international platform. In a telegram to the UN in the same year Kutako requested 'in the name of the Herero people and 'other nations' in Namibia that the country be declared independent ...' (in Hellberg 1997:225). These first attempts yielded little result, not at least because of the isolated position of the Namibian black leaders. They could not present their case before the United Nations themselves, simply because the South African administration refused to give them travel documents. Next, Kutako sought the help of Frederick Maharero in Botswana and wrote him a letter saying, 'You, who enjoy freedom, are the people who should come here to us' (in Hellberg 1997:226, letter of 17 June 1946 from N. Houcke to S. Bingane, Sehitwa, Botswana). The result of this letter was the introduction of the Anglican

²⁷ First, the referendum was prepared in consultation with chieftains, most of which had been appointed by the South African administration. Second, the referendum carefully avoided the issue of incorporating Namibia into South Africa. It just asked the question whether one wanted to join the Chinese, the Russians, or the British (Hellberg 1997:223).

pastor Michael Scott who was staying in Johannesburg.²⁸ He took it upon himself to represent the Namibia case before the United Nations. The petition that he was to present, asked for 'the return of the lands belonging to the Herero people. It also asked for the return of their Paramount Chief living in exile with 15,000 of his tribesmen, for the reestablishment of their tribal organisation and the reunion of the Herero people within one tribal area. They claimed that the subdivision of their tribe into eight separate reserves with no freedom of movement between one and another was destroying the integrity of their people' (Scott 1988:111-114). South Africa tried to silence him, but failed. In 1957 the first Namibian represented his country's case to the United Nations. It should be noted that up to 1958 it was primarily Hosea Kutako and the Herero people's council assembly who had taken the initiative for the liberation movement. Consultations with leaders of other groups, however, became increasingly common.

Meanwhile the National Party had come to power in 1948 and South Africa had gone ahead with the incorporation of Namibia. The white community was given the right to elect their own representatives in the South African parliament. The governor-general was to appoint two senators to represent the interests of the black Namibians. The black community in Namibia, like the black community in South Africa, was now under the rule of South Africa's Minister of Bantu Affairs. Its policy was one of 'apartheid' or 'separate development', with special 'homelands' (reserves) for the indigenous tribes and groups of people of Namibia.

A direct consequence of this incorporation was the harshening of the apartheid policy, which again in turn strengthened the opposition among the black community (Hellberg 1997:219-237; see also Scott 1988:111-114).

²⁸ It is very sad that this case was not taken by the Rhenish Mission who by then had been working among the Herero and other communities for over a hundred years. At the same time it is an indication of the mistrust between the Mission and the indigenous groups.

CHAPTER 2. THE FOUNDING OF ORUANO

2.1 The Rhenish Mission: conflicting interests

2.1.1 Serving the people

The first contact between the Rhenish Mission and the Herero dates from 1844 when Jonker Afrikaner forced the missionaries Hugo Hahn and Heinrich Kleinschmidt to leave Windhoek, but he allowed them to move further into Herero area. At that time Afrikaner preferred the Wesleyan mission over the Rhenish mission and he wanted their missionaries to work among his people in Windhoek (Buys/Kritzinger 1989:11-12). In this chapter we will not discuss the relationship between the Rhenish Mission and the Herero community during the period 1844 - 1907, as that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we want to find out how the Rhenish Mission has contributed to the founding of Oruano. For this 1907 as the starting point will be sufficient.

After the war the remaining Herero community was totally uprooted and without any cohesion. The policy of the colonial authorities was to see to it that it would stay that way. They forbade the Herero people to own neither cattle nor land. Furthermore, travel regulations very much limited free movement of the people. Living conditions under colonial oppression was harsh and the authorities were not much in favour of the Mission bringing a change to this situation. Nevertheless, the missionaries worked hard to carry out the priorities that had been set by its Mission Inspector Haussleiter. According to him, 'the Mission must, after the end of the war, show respect for the human value of the defeated people, as well as restore in them a faith in their future' (in Hellberg 1997:132). He also emphasized the need for education 'so that they could have a greater share in shaping the future of the colony' (in Hellberg 1997:132). The missionaries were committed to serve the people and often pleaded with the colonial authorities for them. The Herero people themselves found replacement for what they had lost, namely the fellowship with their ancestors and with one another, in the Mission church. What the ancestors had given them before, spiritual and material well being, they were now expecting from the missionaries. The latter were even often addressed as 'ovakuru' (Kuhlmann in Sundermeier 1973:87). Small wonder that the Herero started to turn away from the missionaries when at a later stage they did not fulfil their expectations. However, at this time a relationship of trust existed

between the people and the missionaries. 'At least here was some hope in an otherwise hopeless situation' (Hellberg 1997:132).

Due to various regulations and restrictions it had become difficult for the Mission closely to supervise the parishes. As a result the everyday running of these parishes was done by the people themselves. By this, the parishes became 'shelters, protecting the people from the total disintegration of their traditional social life' (Hellberg 1997:133). It also offered an opportunity for the leadership to train themselves to manage their own matters of concern. It is thus not surprising that during these years the membership of the Rhenish Mission congregations increased considerably. Before the war the church counted approximately 9,000 members, while the membership was an estimated 25,000 members by 1914, which was almost the entire Herero people (Hellberg 1997:133).

2.1.2 'You cannot serve two masters'

In 1914 World War I broke out. The German colonial power was defeated by the South African Army and in 1915 South African military rule replaced German colonial administration. In the following years the Rhenish missionaries undertook a reorientating on their position, which is best understood if we consider that they wanted to maintain good relationships with three opposing parties: the South African administration, the German settlers, and the Herero and other black communities.²⁹ In the end, however, it was their attitude towards the black people that was the decisive factor. This attitude was 'in the true 'colonial spirit' characterized by a paternalistic benevolence for 'the natives' (Hellberg 1997:204).

2.1.2.1 The relationship with the South African administration

Regarding the South African administration it was the missionaries' concern that they might be expelled which would mean the end of the Rhenish Mission in Namibia. To ensure the future of the mission work the Rhenish Missionaries had to resign themselves to working under 'foreign rule'. The head of the mission called on the missionaries '... to show willing obedience

²⁹ Initially, South African authorities and German settlers were opposing each other. After 1920 this changed because the South African administration needed German farmers. Later on, after 1933 when Hitler had come to power in Germany, the relationship became difficult again (Hellberg 1997:196-207).

to the new government which is now your authority. This is a duty before Christ!' (in Hellberg 1997:156, from Minutes of the Missionary Conferences 1844-1925: I.1.1-7). By this, the Rhenish Mission promised its loyalty to the new administration. It is this questionable loyalty that independent groups, who left the Mission during the 1940s and 1950s, gave as the main reason (Hellberg 1997:197). This loyalty has definitely damaged the mission work as Hellberg (1997:199) concludes, 'Thus the Rhenish Mission's efforts to remain loyal to South African racial ideology proved detrimental to the furtherance of its activities in Namibia from 1920 onwards'. After World War II, that had seen the defeat of Nazism, they even promised the South African government to fight any tendency towards nationalism and politicization among the black congregations (Hellberg 1997:247).

2.1.2.2 The relationship with the German community

The other party briefly to be discussed is the German settler community. Many settlers were much opposed to the introduction of relief measures for the black community after the 1904-1907 war. It undermined 'the black's respect for the white man' (Hellberg 1997:196). Now they would become 'indolent, lazy, inefficient, unreliable and negligent' (Emmet in Hellberg 1997:196). They protested because it resulted in a shortage of cheap labour. There was, however, a deeper motive, namely fear for a repeat of the Herero rebellion that had led to widespread murder of German settlers (Hellberg 1997:196). A strong government was needed to suppress 'dreams of freedom' among the black people. The missionaries shared this opinion, though for different reasons, as we will discuss in the next section.

As the new South African administration needed the knowledge and experience of the German settlers, the latter were given many privileges, especially considering the fact that they were the defeated party. Many of those who had been expelled after the capitulation, were allowed to return. Soon the German community became strong and influential again. During the second half of the 1920s a revival of so-called 'high German sentiments' can be observed. The 'Peace Treaty of Versailles' was seen as injustice. 'They have seized our colonies by force, but have as yet been unable to tear them out of our hearts' (in Hellberg 1997:201, from the 'Die Evangelische Kolonialhilfe', Heft 30, 1925, 590). The Germans were called to remember that

they have 'Germanic blood in their veins'.³⁰ It is not surprising that the Nazi party had easy access to this community. They already started their activities as early as 1929 (Hellberg 1997:202).

The missionaries, who ministered as pastors in the German congregations, found themselves in the midst of this. Like the German settlers they also were open to Nazi ideology. 'Most of the missionaries of the Rhenish Mission sympathized with the Nazi cause' (Hellberg 1997:205). Having said this we must also say that some missionaries distanced themselves from Nazism.

Being part of and ministering to a white and dominant community that considered itself superior, while also serving a black and dominated community, could only but hinder the missionary work. The Herero complained, 'You missionaries work among the indigenous people, but your heart is with the congregation of the whites that you also serve' (in Sundermeier 1973:103, translation JB). The position the missionaries took during these years damaged seriously the reputation of the mission among the indigenous congregations.

2.1.2.3 The relationship with the Herero community

The Herero community was the third party the missionaries had to maintain good relations with. An awareness of 'national' consciousness among the Herero was growing, which probably was the result of the reforms introduced during the period 1915-1920. According to missionary Vedder, it led to a deterioration of the relationship with the Rhenish Mission (Werner 1998:80). Many Herero withdrew their children from the schools that were all run by the Mission. They also stopped attending church services, and refused to pay their dues to the parish. In 1916 the Rhenish Mission was even forced to close the Augustineum in Okahandja. A new anti-German spirit had taken root, particularly among teenagers, leading to rebellious activities of the students (Werner 1998:80). The Herero also revived old customs and traditions like the holy fire, circumcision, and the filing of teeth. These and other actions culminated in 1920 in a request by the Herero to the South African administration to have the German missionaries replaced by others (Werner 1998:79-81).

For the Herero, possession of land, cattle, and independent tribal authority, were always

³⁰ A leaflet sent out by the synod that met in Windhoek in 1926 to all the young German immigrants upon their arrival in Namibia read, 'Beware of the racial dishonour. You have Germanic blood in your veins. ... Remember that you are Christian! Remember that you are white! Remember that you are German!' (in Hellberg 197:202, from 'Die Evangelische Kolonialhilfe', Heft 30, 1925, 590).

connected to the ancestors' veneration at the holy fire (Buys 1998 ch.14:7). Also the missionaries were very much aware of the importance of land and cattle for the Herero, but they saw it as a stumbling block to development. They reasoned that raising cattle would generate income and thus made the Herero less dependent on the Mission. It would also lead to the Herero people withdrawing into the reserves, away from Christian influence and the civilised world, where they would revert to their pagan customs. A missionary expressed this view saying that 'the ownership of stock is a big misfortune for our natives' (in Werner 1998:112). Rural production became equated with 'idleness and lazy dreaming' (in Werner 1998:112). Rather than by raising their own cattle, people would need to make a living through wage labour. Mission education was tailored towards this goal. Black people were to be turned useful labourers, rather than successful pastoralists or peasants (Werner 1998:114). According to Vedder, the head of Augustineum, 'the youth had to be educated for work. Only through labour could our natives build a future in which they can assert themselves as worthy members among other working peoples' (in Werner 1998:114). Herero leaders opposed the school curriculum that did not honour the pastoral ambitions of the Herero and repeated their calls for children to stay away from the mission schools, which they regarded as inferior.

The relationship of the Mission with the Herero people was during these and the following years, as mentioned above, of a paternalistic nature. An almost total absence of any ability to be critical about their own culture or to appreciate foreign cultures, characterized the missionaries' approach. Local peoples were to be developed according to Western standards, as that was their only hope - 'reshaping the entire world into the image of the West' (Bosch 1991:294). The Herero could not accept this attitude. It is therefore not surprising that a revival of the awareness of their own identity led to moving away from the mission. The Herero community was not, and has never been, at peace with the Rhenish Mission. Reason for this was their negative attitude towards Herero culture. A Herero man told a missionary, 'It was a year of peace when the missionaries came into our land, because they brought the gospel. But as they taught us, they took away our customs, our culture. They took away the right of men to marry more than one wife, and the right of a father to circumcise his child. If we look at our nation now, then we have to say that we are a dying people' (in Werner 1998:111, from 'Berichte der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1932). Also, 'The gospel was a misfortune for us. In the past we were the owners (of the land and the cattle, JB), today it's the whites (i.e. those who came with the gospel). Things would have been better today, had our fathers never converted to Christianity' (Meyer in

Sundermeier 1973:92). It may not have been everybody's opinion, but it clearly shows the deep feelings of frustration among the Herero regarding the work of the Mission. It should also be noted that in the perception of the Herero they received little support from the Mission against racial oppression. In fact, to black Namibians the Rhenish Mission was clearly in support of the South African administration (Hellberg 1997:208). 'You are not servants of God any longer, but servants of the English government (*meant is the South African administration, JB*)' (in Werner 1998:112). The mission was also held responsible for the deliberate destruction of Herero social and political structures, which was regarded as the root cause of Herero impoverishment (Werner 1998:111).

The Mission tried to accommodate some complaints of the Herero. In 1938 they opened Paulinum for the training of church leaders, and they also did not apply church discipline any longer for circumcision and filing of teeth (Sundermeier 1973:94). However, the missionaries failed to realise the motives behind the Herero's actions of resistance. Rather than recognising their desire to be independent and determine their own lives, the missionaries blamed the Herero. The spirit of defiance had to be sought in the hearts of the people themselves. According to the missionaries it was the result of having never experienced a conscious conversion (Sundermeier 1973:110). The people had formally accepted Christianity, but it had not really transformed their lives. It was only after 1950, under the influence of worldwide 'paradigm shifts in theology of mission', that a change towards an attempt to understanding the indigenous Christian communities took place (Hellberg 1997:238-263).

2.2 Growing self-awareness

2.2.1 The influence of Garvey

The arrival of Garveyism and the funeral of Samuel Maharero also contributed to the Herero's attempts to establish their own identity on the one hand, and resistance towards the Mission on the other hand.

The Garvey movement arrived in Namibia at a time that all hopes for better conditions had faded away with the establishment of South African dominion (Hellberg 1997:172-173). They preached the liberation of the Africans, promised the improvement of the school education, care for the widows and the poor, and the building of hospitals, aiming at Africa becoming a bright

star among the constellations of nations (Sundermeier 1973:89). The movement spread rapidly throughout the country in both urban and rural areas and among all black communities. Among the Herero Hosea Kutako became one of the movement's leaders (Werner 1998:124; Hellberg 1997:173). The movement was established by Marcus Aurelius Garvey, born in Jamaica, but from 1916 onwards operating from the United States. Soon after his arrival in the USA he established the 'Universal Negro Improvement Association'. He also founded a Black National Church with a black Patriarch as leader, and a black Christ and black Madonna as symbols. His aim was to free the black peoples from the oppression of the whites and to establish a 'Black Imperium' in Africa under his leadership. In 1922 the movement arrived in Namibia. It generated a mood of great expectancy when it was announced that Marcus Garvey would arrive with battle ships in Walvisbay to drive the whites from the land, after which he would rule in Africa. Farm labourers flocked to towns to hear more about the liberation that was to come. Funds were collected to make it all happen. The Herero community held a collection producing an amount of £ 4,000 (Buys 1998 ch.14:4). The administration received reports about plans for an uprising from all corners of the country. 'White women and children would not be spared this time as has happened in the Herero rising' (in Werner 1998:128). Acts of defiance were also widely reported from farms.

In the end Garvey's ideal was not realised. Due to financial problems in his organisation, he was convicted and sentenced to prison, and was eventually deported to London where he died in poverty in 1940. His influence, however, was considerable. His emphasis on Black Nationalism provided support for attempts to establish a Herero nation. The movement had succeeded to kindle renewed hope for black Namibians in their opposition to South African racial oppression (Werner 1998:123-133; Buys 1998 ch.14:3-4; Hellberg 1997:171-177). The attitude of obedience was beginning to be replaced by a spirit of resistance towards the colonial authorities.

2.2.2 The funeral of Samuel Maharero³¹

The Herero were filled with bitterness towards the colonial administration because it had not kept its promises. They were also deeply influenced by the ideas of Garvey. His movement had contributed substantially to the awakening of national consciousness, to the awareness of the

³¹ For details on Maharero's funeral see Buys 1998 ch.14:4-5; Hellberg 1997:185-188; Werner 1998:115-123.

community's own identity, and to resistance against the Whites, including the missionaries. The people had taken a definite stand on freedom. 'If the gospel required that a government must be accepted, which denies the free existence of the indigenous Namibians (as the situation was before 1884) forcing them into an economy of manual labour, they would not accept it!' (Buys 1998 ch.14:5).

Against this background we need to see the funeral of Chief Samuel Maharero that took place on 26 August 1923. Maharero died in Serowe, Botswana, on 14 March 1923 (Hellberg 1997:185). His wish had been to die in his native country, but he was never given permission to return from exile. The South African administration, however, allowed the funeral to take place in Okahandja.

Now Samuel Maharero was buried in Okahandja side by side with his father Maharero and his grandfather Tjamuaha, the Herero again hoped for a new and better future. 'Now the great ancestor had returned home, who initiated resistance against the Germans, ... the land of South West was again consecrated' (Sundermeier 1973:90, translation JB). In the past the struggle for liberation had followed upon the death of a great leader. The Herero expected that the same would happen again, that Maharero with his fathers would be dedicated to his people's case and act accordingly (Sundermeier 1973:90). In the light of all this it was just a necessary consequence that pre-colonial customs and traditions were revived. Holy fire, ancestors' veneration, circumcision, and other traditional customs were brought back to life. The people turned away, not only from the missionaries but also from Christianity (Sundermeier 1973:91). Buys (1998 ch.14:4) calls the funeral 'the revival point for Herero tradition and the national movement of the Herero'. Hellberg (1997:188) concludes, 'They represented a form of a rebirth for the Herero's tribal identity'. The Rhenish Mission criticised that the funeral had taken place according to tribal tradition. To them it was a 'reversion to paganism, the direct result of Herero criticism of the divinely ordained political structure and of the white man's power' (Engel in Hellberg 1997:187). As a result many Herero left the Rhenish Mission church, including Chief Hosea Kutako (Buys 1998 ch.14:4).³²

³² Particularly the Maharero and Mbanderu groups left the church. The Zeraua group in Omaruru stayed with the Rhenish Mission (Sundermeier 1973:94). In 1929 there was again an increase in the church membership. Particularly women joined the church. They did so because the church gave them a better opportunity to play an active role than the Herero religion. For example, they were not allowed to participate in the so important practice of the holy fire (Sundermeier 1973:93; Werner 1998:120). Today it is the complaint of Oruano church leaders that mainly women attend church services, but men stay away. At the same time the leadership is firmly established in the hand of men. The issue of women preaching is still rejected by a large majority of the church leadership (I gathered this information from informal discussions that I had with church leaders during various workshops).

2.3 Events leading to the founding of Oruano

The founding of Oruano took a long period of about nine years. It started in 1946 with the occurrence of the prophetic movement that proclaimed that independence would be gained soon. The Herero would soon have their country returned to them. First, however, they had to free themselves from the white man's dominion (Hellberg 1997:244). According to the prophet Amon, the slaves (namely the Herero, JB) would become masters (namely the whites, JB) and the masters would become slaves (in Sundermeier 1973:302).³³

The prophetic movement was not the direct cause of the establishment of Oruano, but it prepared the way (Sundermeier 1973:297). It was another move in a process of awareness making that had already started with the Garvey movement and the funeral of Samuel Maharero and that eventually would lead to the formation of Oruano (Buys 1998 ch.14:7). Another stimulating factor was the Nama secession from the Rhenish Mission Church. In 1946 they joined the American-based AMEC (American Methodist Episcopal Church). The Herero did not want to join them because of Nama leadership (Buys ch.14:8; Hellberg 1997:244). They also refused because they did not wish to belong to an 'American Church' (Hellberg 1997:244). However, it reinforced the idea of forming a church of their own.

In 1947 a gathering of Herero Chieftains took place and the founding of a Herero church was given a kind of official approval. The new church was not to be different from the Rhenish Mission Church. It would be a Lutheran church, but under Herero leadership (Sundermeier 1973:98).

It should be noted that it was particularly the Chiefs who wanted a Herero church. Throughout the years there was little support for a Herero church from the evangelists, and later from the pastors as well (Sundermeier 1973:98; see also Sundermeier 1973:107).³⁴ Pöllitzer (1978:36) is even of the opinion that secession would not have taken place if the Chiefs had not taken the lead.

A Missions conference took place on 21 and 22 January 1948, which was not only attended by the Rhenish missionaries but also by the evangelists. In an attempt to prevent further

³³ "Ich bin Amon ... Ich bin der Heilige Geist und sage: 'Was durch den Sklaven gegessen wird, solst du auch essen. Die weißen werden die Feldkost essen, die die Schwarzen heute essen. Amen.' (in Sundermeier 1973:302).

³⁴ Only in 1948 the ordination of the first five Herero pastors took place.

unrest among the congregations of the Mission, the Herero evangelists were given permission to choose four of their own people to form a council (Hellberg 1997:246). Another outcome was the ordination of the first five Herero pastors.³⁵ This was such a joyful event for the Herero people that this year is remembered as '*Ombura jovahonge*' (the year of the pastors) (Buys 1998 ch.14:8). The joy, however, was quickly overshadowed when the evangelist Gottfried Murangi died. He had been a faithful leader and helper to the Herero people amid all crises and in times of difficulties. The Herero people expected the Mission to provide a coffin for this committed worker. They felt it was their 'honourable duty', but the Mission failed. This 'neglect' widened the gap between the Herero and the Mission so much that Buys (1998 ch.14:8; also Sundermeier 1973:99) even concludes, 'The process of secession started at this funeral'.

The Rhenish Mission Board in Germany, inspired by the developments in mission thinking that were taking place in the world wide mission movement, urged the missionaries to yield to the outcome of the IMC (International Missionary Conference) held in Whitby, Canada in 1947. The message of the conference was, 'Partnership in Obedience'. All churches were to be treated as equal and were thus to work on a basis of equality in fulfilling the purpose of mission in the whole world (Hellberg 1997:247-248). It not only meant the denial of apartheid, but also the denial of a patriarchal attitude in mission work. At their following missionary conference held from 27 - 30 September 1948 the missionaries decided that, as for Namibia, one could not follow 'Whitby' unconditionally. Because of the weakness of the Black Christians, which made them an easy prey to many temptations, the missionaries recommended their board not to make any rash decisions (Hellberg 1997:248-250). However, not concern for the Black Christians but lack of trust in the capability and creativity of the indigenous Christian leadership, was the main motive.

Vedder's decision to accept the position of Senator in the South African senate, in charge of Native Affairs in Namibia, came as a shock to the Herero and widened the gap even further between them and the Rhenish Mission. Though it was not a motive for secession, as that decision was already taken, it strengthened the Herero's belief that it was the right decision (Hellberg 1997:251; Sundermeier 1973:101).

In 1950 a mission conference took place, followed by a meeting on 25 November between

³⁵ Buys (1998 ch.14:8) considers this decision to be 'a conciliatory attitude ... acknowledging the Herero desire for independence' in a positive way. I would not say that the missionaries were showing here a change of attitude. If we consider their attitude during the 1946 -1955 period, I would rather say that the ordination of the pastors was an attempt to neutralize the Herero's desire for a church of their own.

representatives of the Mission and Hosea Kutako and other Herero leaders. Also Herero pastors and evangelists were present. The immediate cause for this meeting was the increase of church contributions that was rejected by the Herero leaders. They argued that the Mission should have consulted with them before making such a decision. Because the Herero chiefs wanted more influence in the church, they felt that a closer cooperation was needed with the missionaries. The much more important issue, however, was the 'lost life potential of the Herero' (Buys 1998 ch.14:8; also Hellberg 1997:253-254; Sundermeier 1973:102).

The meetings were revealing as it clearly showed the underlying world view of the missionaries. Theirs was a dualistic world view where Christian faith belonged to the area of religion and liberation to the area of politics. The two areas had nothing to do with each other. Following this line of thinking the missionaries did not wish to have responsibility for political issues. Those were for the politicians to deal with (Frostin 1989:65-69). For the missionaries the Herero's resistance against apartheid was a political issue. This was also true for the presentation of their case to the League of Nations through Michael Scott, and Kutako's request for more influence in the Herero congregations. All of this was politics for which the Mission had no responsibility (Hellberg 1997:253-254).

After the meetings the Chiefs clearly wanted a national independent Herero Church (Buys 1998 ch.14:8), but the Rhenish Mission was not ready for it (Hellberg 1997:253-254). The missionaries did not listen to the grievances submitted by the Chiefs. Instead, they stressed the importance of 'deepening the spiritual life of the congregational members, and thereby strengthening the faith of each Christian to lead each and every one of them away from the present politicization among the group' (in Hellberg 1979:255). The gap between the Herero and the Rhenish mission kept on widening. However, it did not yet lead to the founding of a Herero church. The process had almost stopped as there was no charismatic leader who could establish and lead such a church (see Sundermeier 1973:108). Also the needed support, as already noted above, from the evangelists and missionaries was lacking (Buys 1998 ch.14:8; Pöllitzer 1978:28). Eventually in 1954 Pastor Reinhard Ruzo was prepared to take the lead. Referring to Acts 4:32 he called the new church 'Oruano', which means 'Communion'. The English name was 'Protestant Unity Church' (Sundermeier 1973:110). He circulated a notice and announced that on 1 January 1955 secession from the Rhenish Mission would take place. Few congregations responded to his call. Finally on 25 August 1955 Ruzo was appointed as leader of the Herero community church by Hosea Kutako. The secession was a fact!

2.4 Motives for the founding of Oruano

The process that would finally lead to the founding of Oruano in 1955 started already in 1922-1923 with the Garvey movement and the funeral of Samuel Maharero. To identify motives that have developed over such a long period is not easy. Some initial motives may have faded away, while others developed only at a much later time. The present leader of Oruano, Bishop Kamburona, refers to Vedder's acceptance of a seat in the South African senate as an important motive. Particularly the fact that he had said, according to Kamburona, while discussing the development of the Herero community, 'one should not wake up a sleeping dog'.³⁶ According to Hosea Kutako, apartheid was the main reason for the Oruano breach with the Mission (in Hellberg 1997:257). Apartheid had separated the missionaries from the people and had hindered them to practise the love of Christ. The secession was only a logical consequence.

Pöllitzer (1978:30-35) mentions the language issue. It was not the language as such that was the point of discussion - the missionaries talked with the people in Otjiherero as much as possible - but it was the person of the missionary. The Herero found it very unsatisfactory that a German missionary, a foreigner, a non-Herero, functioned as an intermediate between them and God. Another motive was the belief that Herero money was sent to support the widows and orphans in Germany, all victims of World War II.³⁷ The third reason given was the apartheid policy, and particularly the implications for the day-to-day life: no transport for the evangelists and pastors, while the missionaries had cars, no promotion in the church despite years of committed involvement, underpayment of black church leaders, the master-servant relationship between the missionaries and the pastors and evangelists, etc. A fourth motive was the rejection of the holy fire by the missionaries, but 'how can you pray properly if you despise the ancestors?' (A. Kandirikirira in Pöllitzer 1978:35, translation JB).

The various motives show a deep level of mistrust in the missionaries, which was an expression of the already mentioned 'lost life potential of the Herero' (Buys 1998 ch.14:8). The Mission was perceived as life threatening. They had taken 'life' away, without replacing it with 'new life'. Sundermeier (1973:102-106) explains this by analysing the various complaints and accusations submitted over the years by the Herero Chiefs to the Rhenish Mission. The Chiefs

³⁶ He made this remark once when we travelled to a workshop.

³⁷ According to Pöllitzer (1978:30-35), this money was never sent. It was just a story that went around among the people. The assumed incident, however, hurt the people so much that it became a motive for secession.

had complained that land given on loan by the Herero to the Mission was sold by the latter, church buildings built with Herero funds were deteriorating or had been given to whites for storage, the black mother who had received a child from a white father was put under church discipline, but not the father, the evangelists were maltreated, and school education for the young people was insufficient. In all these complaints and accusations the Herero expressed that they were experiencing the Mission breaking down their community. It was their concept of life that explains the negative experience. Herero thinking is concerned with the increase of life. Everything that contributes to their power, wealth and prestige is appreciated. However, everything that damages the community, like hunger, illness, bad luck, is considered as evil and bad. Some people call it 'sins'. It causes the decrease of life, even 'dying'. Selling the Herero land, selling church buildings constructed with Herero funds, neglecting the evangelist, these were all signs of taking life, and no compensation was given. This being the case the Herero felt they had only one option left, namely to withdraw from the Rhenish Mission and to establish a church of their own.

2.5 Oruano and the Herero tradition

How should we describe Oruano? According to Buys (1998 ch.14:8), the Herero chiefs aimed at a church that would maintain the Rhenish liturgical tradition, but also was firmly rooted in the Herero cultural tradition. This implies that with the founding of Oruano the door to ancestors' veneration and other traditional customs and ceremonies was open. When discussing the reintroduction of pre-colonial customs in the Herero community during the early 1920s, Werner refers to Wienecke who speaks of 'Hereroization' of Christianity (in Werner 1998:116). Werner explains this as 'a synthesis of Christian and traditional elements'. Is the Hereroization of Christianity the aim of Oruano? On the other hand, Sundermeier thinks Oruano is a Lutheran church. Oruano was founded not for doctrinal differences with the Rhenish Mission church, but only because of the chiefs' desire to have a say in the church. With apparent approval he quotes Hosea Kutako who said, 'I want with the people to adhere to the faith that we have received. We do not want other teachings. We only want more responsibility in the church, that is why we want to be independent' (in Sundermeier 1973:98; translation JB). Hosea Kutako aimed at a Lutheran church, but under Herero leadership. The question rises whether the new church was going to condemn the traditional practices, particularly the ancestors' veneration and the holy fire. This

is what the Rhenish Mission church did. Those who had the holy fire were put under church discipline. It is, however, not likely that the new church was going to follow the Rhenish Mission in these aspects of church life. Pöllitzer (1978:35) points to the fact that the holy fire was a motive for founding Oruano. We also need to remember that Kutako himself belonged to the apostates who had left the mission church already in 1923 (Buys 1998 ch.14:4), and they were the people who reintroduced many old customs and ceremonies. Kutako himself also had a holy fire at his place (Werner 1998:121).

After the first secession in 1923, the general feeling of the Herero was that the problems they faced were caused by their negligence of the ancestors. 'When we became Christian we deserted them (namely our ancestors, JB) and we abandoned our customs and traditions. The punishment for this is the departure of all blessings from us' (in Sundermeier 1973:92). It is very doubtful whether this belief had disappeared in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. We need to realize that the relationship between the Herero and the missionaries had often been full of mistrust, thus putting up a barrier for the gospel to be a transforming power in the lives of the people.

We have already mentioned that the funeral of Samuel Maharero was a factor that prepared the ground for the founding of Oruano. What then did it mean? When South Africa did not follow up the reforms that it had introduced during the 1915-1920 period, the people were disappointed and lost hope. The Garvey movement, however, managed to restore hope by promising that it would end white domination and replace it with a 'Black Imperium' under Garvey's leadership. By this, the movement contributed substantially to the process of building self confidence and regaining the Herero's identity. This also led to the restoration of pre-colonial customs and traditions, like holy fire, filing of teeth, and polygamy. In this regard Maharero's funeral acted as a catalyst to regain the Herero's identity and by that speeded up the restoration of the old customs and traditions (Werner 1998:118).

Further, seeing the Herero as a people that was always involved in a struggle for survival is also important. As pastoralists they had to fight other tribes to get grazing grounds. Those fights were not always beneficial. Jonker Afrikaner, for example, was a real threat to their existence. After the Herero War they were almost nonexistent. Only a few thousand individuals were left without any cohesion, but the fire of wanting to be a free and independent nation kept burning. Particularly in the early 1920s the fire flamed again. As a result the people went for what they wanted themselves, rather than just accepting what others, namely the dominant whites, told them

to do. They went back to what they felt was the foundation of their existence: the holy fire and its related practices. To the Herero this meant what we discussed above, the increase of life.

For the mission this going back to the old customs and traditions was unacceptable. To them it was a return to a heathen lifestyle that would prevent the Herero from developing their community. Because of this attitude the Herero were not to expect any support from the mission to regain their own identity. *Thus, we conclude that it was of necessity that the Herero replaced the Rhenish Mission church with a church of their own that would allow for the rebuilding of their own culture.*

Sundermeier (1973:106) points out that the pre-colonial customs and traditions were not an issue when Oruano was founded, while it was so much an issue in the 1920s. This confirms what we argued above. The Herero did not feel the need for a church that would integrate Christianity and tradition, thus working towards Hereroization of the Christian faith. After having been in a close relationship with the Rhenish Mission for a hundred years, 'The religious tradition of the Rhenish Mission and its liturgy had found such a high level of acceptance, that people felt as if it were something of their own' (Mühlmann in Sundermeier 1973:106, translation JB). However, a church was needed that would allow the Herero tradition, including the ancestors' veneration that is centred around the holy fire. This church could well be a Lutheran church. Pöllitzer (1978:225), when describing Oruano, concludes that in essence doctrine, leadership, worship and ethics are the same as what is found in the Rhenish Mission church.

If we look at Oruano today we can say that in a sense they achieved what they had been working for: a church of their own, a Lutheran church, under Herero leadership. The church never has formally acknowledged the practice of ancestors' veneration, but it has this practice tacitly consented. Because of this it now happens that the same person preaching the Christian message in the Sunday morning service sits in the afternoon at the holy fire where he talks to his ancestors. This is an accepted practice and Oruano does not put the person involved in this practice under church discipline. The Christian message and Tradition are not integrated but exist peacefully next to each other. I found this confirmed when I attended a Herero funeral in March 1999. While the Christian message was preached at the grave side and Christian hymns were sung, other Herero people walked along the graves honouring their ancestors by throwing green leaves on the graves.

Considering what has been written in this section we need to ask ourselves whether Oruano's position is tenable. Particularly when it comes to the ancestors, is it not a conflicting

situation? We will discuss this question in another chapter, but first we will discuss the general African perception of the ancestors.

CHAPTER 3. THE WORLD OF THE ANCESTORS

3.1 The ancestors are alive!

A woman from the Caprivi region in Namibia recounted this story: *'The baby of one of my relatives was crying almost each night. In the end the mother became desperate and decided to consult the elders. After some discussions they suggested that she would change the baby's name and give it the grandmother's name. The grandmother had passed away some time ago. The elders explained that the grandmother was visiting the baby during the night and told the baby that it had the wrong name as it was not her name. The baby, still too young to talk, communicated this message to the mother through endless crying. The mother followed the advice of the elders and changed the baby's name to that of the grandmother. The following nights the baby was quiet and slept peacefully'*.

During that same meeting the woman also shared an experience of her own. 'Occasionally', she said, 'during the night my mother, who passed away some years back, would come and visit me. We then sit, talk, drink coffee, and go outside to look at the cattle'. It struck me that she shared these two experiences without showing any restraint. Why would she? To her this is reality, no doubt about that. The grandmother was visiting the baby and she herself is having meetings with her mother!

These two stories clearly show that the dead are alive. Mbiti (1971:10) calls those who have died the 'living-dead'. They are dead because their bodies were buried, and they are living because their spirits continue to live on in the spirit world. It is also clear from the two stories that there is a strong relationship between the living and the living-dead, as well that the latter have a great influence among the living in their daily lives. African Traditional Religion is very much occupied with death and the hereafter. Shorter (1983a:24) observes that most of the myths concern the vital communion between the living and the dead, while myths about the end of the world and the end of history are rare.

3.2 When a person dies ...³⁸

3.2.1 Concept of death

African communities everywhere have believed that the Supreme Being created the first man and woman. Among the Akamba in Kenya, for example, the creation myth tells that God created the first man and woman and brought them out of a hole in the ground somewhere in the land where the Akamba live (Mbiti 1971:9). They also believe that a human being is more than a physical body. One can distinguish between the physical part, which at death is put into the grave, and the non-physical part, which survives and bears the personality traits of the individual in the hereafter. Death may separate these two and destroy the first part but not the second. Gehman (1999:4) refers to the Mandari people in Sudan who say that a human being has two parts, the physical body and the life principle. A person dies when this vital force leaves the body. This vital force, however, continues to live on in the spirit world, 'the life released from the flesh returns to the Creator who gave it' (Buxton in Gehman 1999:4).

In the light of this it is understandable that for the African the perception of death is not the end of existence but a transition into another form of life. This fact is shown by the many expressions used for death: 'going home', 'being called', 'following the company of one's grandfather', and others. An expression like 'going home' seems to mean that life is like a pilgrimage, 'the real 'home' is in the hereafter, since one does not depart from there' (Mbiti 1990:153).

Death is more than a transition. It is also feared and resented as the most disrupting phenomenon of all. It brings loss and sorrows to every family and community. The Akamba people, though they believed that men and women continued to live in the spirit world after death and though they continued to have relationships with the living, considered death as man's great enemy (Gehman 1999:6).³⁹

Various African communities have stories about the origin of death. It all goes back to the break down and loss of the happy relationship between God and man. Man has accepted this

³⁸ This paragraph is a compilation of what I found in Mbiti, 1970:253-271; Mbiti, 1971:125-156; Shorter, 1983a:1-24; Gehman, 1999:3-28.

³⁹ However, according to Mosothoane (1973:89), 'To Africans, therefore, death is no dark misery ... What a man does fear is dying childless as that is one of the greatest curses that can happen to an African. In such a case there will be nobody to remember him.'

separation. Mbiti (1990:96) observed that 'there is not a single myth, to my knowledge, which even attempts to suggest a solution or reversal of this great loss'. He concludes that man has since accepted death as a natural phenomenon that eventually everyone personally faces (Mbiti 1990:151).

Most Africans see the hand of God in it when a person dies. Even if another agent is involved, God causes a person to die. The Herero believe that God calls away old people. The Nuer accept death as God's will. A Mandari senior elder spoke at a funeral: 'Now my son - (addressing the dead man), Creator has come and taken you from among us. This is Creator's affair who made men' (Buxton in Gehman 1999:9). Many African communities, however, perceive God as far away, almost unreachable. They only explain him as the ultimate reason for death. 'In effect he (God, JB) means little to the Lodaga except as a final cause by which to explain the otherwise inexplicable ...' (Goody in Gehman 1999:10). First, other reasons for death are sought. Witchcraft and angry ancestors are the more common explanation for sickness and death. When somebody has died, for example, as the result of the bite of a snake, the question is always, 'WHY did that snake bite?', 'Who is behind it?' It is the common opinion that somebody is responsible for the person's death. Death is both natural and unnatural (Mbiti 1990:151).

3.2.2 Rituals and ceremonies

When someone is on their sickbed and approaching death, special steps must be taken to prepare for death. In some communities 'a dying father uses this occasion to give admonitions, to rebuke or to thank, and to decide about the inheritance' (Van Pelt in Gehman 1999:11). In other communities a last meal is arranged with the family and a goat or bull killed for the last meal. This is the last opportunity for the dying person to offer his own sacrifice on earth to his ancestors. To neglect this last meal means punishment of the living by the living-dead who want honour from the living.

Death is a public event and must be announced widely. The first announcement is usually made by loud wailing of women. Messengers are also sent to distant relatives. These days many people use the radio to make the death announcement. Mourning is often 'exaggerated'. This is motivated 'by a desire to avoid any suspicion of having been concerned in the death of the person lamented, either by poison or some form of witchcraft' (Lawrence in Gehman 1999:12). It should be noted, however, that the amount of mourning depends on the status or position - age,

economic, social and political status - of the dead person. The more powerful a person is in this life, the longer and the more extensive are the ceremonies when he dies. The common opinion is that persons who are powerful in this life, will also be powerful in the life hereafter and can cause harm to the living. Therefore, keeping on good terms with them with elaborate funeral rites is important. Women, children, and unmarried persons are usually considered as unimportant, and so their funeral rites are minimal. Sometimes no funeral rites are done at all.

It is obvious from what we have said here that not everybody qualifies to become an ancestor. Only those qualify who will be of benefit to the community.

While mourning takes place the body is prepared for burial, which usually takes place on the day of the death or the following day. Sometimes a burial is delayed to enable those coming from far also to be present and participate in the ceremonies.

The body must be washed carefully. In many places the women who wash a man's body must be so old that they can no longer bear children. Before the body becomes stiff it must be placed in a certain position. The Lodaga people of West Africa place the body in a sitting position outside the hut. The mourners look into the face of the dead person. By this, the dead person can know who attend the funeral.

Proper burial is most important for any people who believe that the dead continue to have interaction with the living. Most African communities take great care 'to see that all the little details of the burial are attended to, for neglect may cause the spirit of the departed to become angry' (P'Bitek in Gehman 1999:15). Furthermore 'these rites are the last of a series of ceremonies marking an individual's progress in the social scale on which all hopes, aspirations and fears are based' (Masilo Lamla 1981:17).

The funeral that follows is immediately related to the journey to the next world. The Herero bury their dead facing north where they believe the land of the departed to be situated.⁴⁰ During Chagga funeral ceremonies, the body of the departed is made to face Mount Kilimanjaro, which is the abode of God and is told to 'find God at home'. Other communities bury their chiefs on the hills and their ancestral spirits are venerated there - as the hill is an important symbol of the Creator. In other words, the ancestors are associated with the places of God.

To some communities this journey to the next world is long, dangerous, and terrifying.

⁴⁰ According to Herero sources this should be 'east'. This way the departed will see the sun where life is coming from when he wakes up. It also symbolizes the Herero perception of life. Like the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, similarly life is a process of coming up and going down. 'You go through life like the sunrise' (Usurua 1999:interview).

The spirit of the departed may need to travel through a desert region where the sun is very hot. Or the spirit must cross a river which can be very difficult. Whatever the view, many African communities bury food, drink, weapons, tools, and other objects with the body. This is to equip the dead for the journey and give him some means to help him to establish a new life in the next world. According to the Chagga of Tanzania, the way to the spirit world takes eight days. On the ninth day the spirit reaches the place of the dead where the grandfather greets him and asks why he died. Before being allowed to enter the place of the spirits a bull must be slaughtered. Therefore, the living Chagga help the departed by slaughtering a bull on the day after the funeral.

Death is not only a transition for the dead as they enter the world of the living-dead. It is also a transition of the living as they adjust to life without the departed person. The purpose of the rites taking place after the funeral is to help the living to return to normal life. A common ritual is the purification of the living from ceremonial uncleanness. The body of the departed is regarded as a source of pollution, and all those attending the funeral are said to be contaminated from contact with it, no matter how indirectly (Masilo Lamla 1981:15). Cleansing rituals like splashing with water, whitewashing (that is applying white paint to the body), sweeping the house (Goody referring to the Lodaga People of West Africa in Gehman 1999:19) are performed. The Southern Nguni of South Africa have a feast called 'the celebration of the spades'. At this feast the spades and shovels that were used to dig the grave are cleaned and purified. It takes place two or three weeks after the funeral and is seen as the completion of it (Masilo Lamla 1981:16).

Another ritual is that of 'bringing back home'. Of this Fortes says, 'But death and mortuary rites, though they must precede, do not confer ancestorhood. Specific rites are needed for that. The dead has first to be 'brought back home again', reestablished in the family and lineage ...' (in Bediako 1995:218). The Zulu call this ritual '*ukubuyisa*'. In their tradition this ritual consists of two parts: inviting the departed person to come back home and the purification of the family members and of the animal to be slaughtered, which is usually a goat, and the second part of the designation of this animal. Since this is a family concern only family members are allowed to be present. The family head presides at this function. While holding the goat by the horns he invites the dead to come back home, 'calling him to be present in the midst of the family, stating that it is the day for him and that the celebration is in his honour' (Nxumalo 1981:71). Among the Northern Nguni this was the first time that the name of the departed was included in the praise of the ancestors (Callaway in Masilo Lamla 1981:17). He should come home 'so that he would guard the home and bring fortunes'. During the purification that follows

the family members take a medicine to purify themselves from the pollution through death.⁴¹ This purification marks the end of the mourning period.

The ritual of 'bringing back home' is a 'celebration of man's conquest over death: for death has only disrupted and not destroyed the rhythm of life' (Mbiti 1990:147).⁴²

The Herero also have a ritual that marks the end of the mourning period.⁴³ It is most extensive where it concerns the head of the kraal. After the funeral the close relatives stay behind at his house for about two months - the exact time is determined by the position of the moon. During this time they limit themselves to do only the basic things of life, for example, no marriage will take place. At the last day, early in the morning, the women leave the house and sit at the left side where they mourn quietly. Then the extoller, a relative of the grand, grandfather, goes into the house and cleanses it by spitting water over everything that is there. A cow is slaughtered and a little bit of mist of this cow is put on the forehead of each person present to cleanse him or her from death. Sometimes people receive fat instead, which they rub over their face. During the day the meat of the slaughtered cow is cooked and first tasted by those who are present before being eaten. At the end of this mourning period the signs of mourning are also taken off, like the black ribbon around the arm, and the women can again put their jewellery on. For the Herero the rituals and ceremonies on this day are to cleanse the people from the darkness of death, they are not meant to bring the deceased back home. The first time that the deceased is called upon as an ancestor is not related to this day.

During the funeral ceremonies animals are slaughtered at various stages. For many African peoples the ideal animal is a bull or a cow. Goats and sheep are also allowed. However, for some communities sheep are unacceptable. The reason for this is that a sheep is dumb, it does not bleat nor make noise when it is slaughtered. Thus, the ancestors will not be 'called'. In contrast a goat cries out when it is killed, and when it cries 'it communicates with the ancestors. They (the ancestors, JB) also know that when they hear its cry wherever they are there is a ceremony in the family so they need to be part of us' (Hammond-Tooke 1981:24; Nxumalo 1981:71; Oral History Project, Pamphlet 2).

⁴¹ It is my understanding that taking this medicine causes the people to vomit and so they remove the pollution.

⁴² Similar in Christianity, 'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' (1 Cor. 15:54f.). Death itself has become a mere sleep, incapable of destroying our fellowship with God and Christ (Mosothoane 1973:87).

⁴³ Kamburona during a discussion that took place at NETS on 23 August 1999.

3.2.3 The land of the departed

Many views, some of which vary considerably, are held regarding the location of the land of the departed. For the Herero it is in the lower world, which they consider to be situated 'near the graves and the grazing grounds' (Kuhlmann in Pöllitzer 1978:166, translation JB). The Southern Nguni, a community that glorifies its cattle, believe that the ancestral spirits live under the cattle byre.

For other people the land of the departed is in the woods, bush, forest or wilderness. Others locate it around the homes of the living. Again others locate it on special mountains. Some communities associate it with rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and pools. For some it is in this world but separated from that of human beings by a river. Among a few communities the land of the departed is situated on the moon, sun, or stars.⁴⁴ Finally, in some communities it is thought that the dead go where God is, and his place may or may not be found.

Wherever they live, the living dead are closely associated with the place of burial and with their former home, but their place of living is in a spiritualised world. Yet, their world is much like this world, a carbon copy of the community where they lived in this life. It has mountains and valleys, rivers and lakes, forests and plains. In other words, the 'next world' is to a certain extent an extension of the present world and usually different from the place where God lives. For the Akamba people the next world is even a complete copy of the physical world. It is a land of rivers, hills, animals, etc. The activities of its people resemble those of the people in this life, like working in the field and keeping cattle. Children who die young continue to grow and become adults, get married and raise families.⁴⁵ It is also widely held that relatives, families, and friends meet in the hereafter. The Igbo say, 'we die to meet again'.

It is commonly accepted that African communities do not know of separate places for the 'good' and the 'evil'.⁴⁶ Most of them do not expect any form of judgement in the hereafter. The

⁴⁴ Some see the moon as the place for the good ones because it is cool, and the sun for the evil ones, because it is hot.

⁴⁵ Gehman (1999:24) states about the life in the other world, 'One major difference, however, is that people do not marry'.

⁴⁶ Various authors point out that African Tradition Religion is strictly monotheistic. Suffering, of whatever nature, in the end comes from God. Even the witch operates under the protection and with the help of God (Bosch 1974:47). Satan is not present in ATR, it was introduced by Christianity (Kirwen 1987; see also Bosch who says that 'strictly spoken Satan does not have its equal in Africa' 1974:47, translation JB).

feeling is widespread that trial and judgement take place throughout life itself. The Bachwa people think that God punishes in a form of illness and death through lightning or falling trees. There are, however, a few examples of punishment in the hereafter, 'because you sinned on earth'.

3.3. Who are the ancestors?

3.3.1 Terminology

Several terms are used to refer to the dead, among which ancestor, spirit, spirit of the dead, ancestral spirit, living-dead are the most common. Less regular is the term 'shade'. From literature one gets the impression that there is no consistency in the use of the various words. One can easily find articles in which the author uses different words while still referring to the dead.

'Ancestor' is the word most used.⁴⁷ Its meaning is '*any of those from whom one's father or mother is descended*'.⁴⁸ The word refers to the lineage of the generations. Some difficulties with this term need to be discussed.

First, the word ancestor is an attempt to translate African words like *ovakuru*, *muzimu*, *umulungu*, etc., which are not quite similar in meaning. Dzobo (1985:333-334) points out that the word ancestor as such does not express a community's understanding of their ancestors. As for the Akan and Ewe (Ghana) words for ancestors, *nana saman* and *togbui*, he explains that these are moral titles earned by people because of the excellent way they conduct their lives. These titles are thus received in this life, 'and once you earn it in this life you take it with you into the other world' (Dzobo 1985:334). It is not death that turns a person into a *nana saman* or *togbui*, but the life that a person lives as a member of the community. Thus the English word 'ancestor' is inadequate to express the real meaning of *nana* and *togbui* with their moral connotation.

Another difficulty is that the first ancestor in line, according to the dictionary's description, can only be the grandfather or grandmother, not the father or mother. This is not correct. In fact, a husband who has passed away will in due course become an ancestor to his wife who is still alive (Oral History Project, Pamphlet 2). Furthermore, 'ancestor' is a male word, the

⁴⁷ Gehman is an exception with his book titled 'Who are the Living-DEAD'. Note the use of capitals in DEAD. This apparently is to express his position of rejecting the ancestors.

⁴⁸ Oxford Illustrated Dictionary 1975, second edition.

female word is 'ancestress'. The use of 'ancestor' may lead to the conclusion that only male ancestors exist. Most of the ancestors are indeed the male members of the family, yet female ancestors are known as well. (See the story in the first section where the mother visits her daughter; also Oral History Project, Pamphlet 1 that reports on one informant who had chosen her grandmother as a special ancestor).⁴⁹

Mbiti (1971:10) has introduced the term 'living-dead', which Shorter (1983b:199) qualifies as a better translation than 'ancestor'. In Mbiti's view the living dead are the spirits of the people who died recently, up to three or four generations ago. The living still recognize them when they appear to them, for example in dreams, and they remember them by name. 'The living-dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits' (Mbiti 1990:25). The living-dead is still part of the extended family and as such has a close relationship with the living. Mbiti distinguishes the living-dead from the other spirits, namely the spirits of those who have disappeared in the world of the unknown. The living do not know them anymore, they have ceased to be members of the family. 'Such spirits have no personal communication with human families' (Mbiti 1990:26). Mbiti thus reserves the term 'living-dead' for those, both men and women, who have recently died. The living still consider them as part of the family, and they live in a close relationship with the living. The status of being a 'living-dead' is limited to a few generations only.

From literature it seems that most authors would agree with Mbiti's explanation, even though they use the term 'ancestor'. One wonders why Mbiti's term the 'living-dead' has not received more acceptance? Nevertheless, in my dissertation I will use the term 'ancestor' as that is the most commonly used term. My understanding, however, is that being explained by Mbiti.

3.3.2 Ancestors as part of the spirit world

The ancestors are not the only spirits living. Other spirits exist as well and together they make up a hierarchical structure (Mbiti 1990:74-97).⁵⁰ Mbiti (1990:75) distinguishes between

⁴⁹ Note that we have two examples here of woman having an ancestress. Further study would be needed to see whether this is co-incidence or whether here is a pattern to discover.

⁵⁰ However, according to Hammond Tooke, 'the oft-repeated statement that the ancestors stand in a hierarchical relationship to the Supreme Being and mediate between him and man, is not part of any indigenous world view. Where such an idea has been recorded it is almost certainly due to missionary influence. There is

Divinities, Spirits, and the Living-Dead, who we call 'ancestors' in this paper. The divinities are created by God and are associated with him, 'and often stand for his activities or manifestations either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of these major objects or phenomena of nature' (Mbiti 1990:75). Most African communities relate the weather and other natural phenomena like the sun, mountains, seas, lakes, and rivers to the divinities. They are 'attributed to have or to be ... divinities' (Mbiti 1990:76). In the hierarchical structure they are the closest to God. On the other hand they are closer to men than is God, as men experience them constantly in the phenomena of thunder, lightning and the like. As a result some of them are being regarded by men as intermediaries.

The spirits are the next in line. In the hierarchical structure they are between the divinities and men. This group can be subdivided in the ancestors and the other spirits. Here we will discuss the latter. Their origin is not clear. 'Most people, however, seem to believe that the spirits are what remains of human beings when they die physically' (Mbiti 1990:77). They are 'the depersonalized residues of individual human beings' (Mbiti 1990:79). They used to be the ancestors before. They then had a relationship with the living, who knew their name and remembered them. That is all over now, they are not known by the living any longer, they are the 'forgotten ones' who have moved into the endlessness of the spirit world. Their personality has evaporated and they have become a 'thing' and are often referred to as 'IT' (Mbiti 1990:78). Nevertheless, they continue to appear to the living, though not as often as the living-dead. Being invisible, they make themselves visible and may assume different shapes like human, animal, plant forms or inanimate objects. They may appear in ponds, caves, groves, mountains, and outside villages (Mbiti 1990:80). To the living the spirits are strangers, and that is why people fear them more than because of what they are or do (Mbiti 1990:80). The safest thing to do is to keep away from the spirits. Because if they appear too frequently, they may possess the living, resulting in illnesses like madness and epilepsy. On the other hand, however, the spirits are nearer to God than the living. The first can talk to God directly, while the living require intermediaries. Thus, 'in many African societies the spirits ... act as intermediaries who convey human sacrifices or prayers to God, and may relay His reply to men' (Mbiti 1990:79). Striking the balance in the relationship with the spirits, therefore, is important: they should not be too near, neither too far away. If the balance is upset, then the living make sacrifices, offerings and prayers to restore it (Mbiti 1990:79).

nothing in indigenous concepts to indicate such a relationship' (in Wanamaker 1997:290).

The third group of spirits is that of the ancestors. They are also spirits, but they are the spirits of those, seen from the perspective of the living, who are still dying. They are still alive as is clear from their appearances in dreams.⁵¹ While the spirits of the second group are the spirits of those who have completed that process. This is the case when the last person who knew a particular ancestor also dies. The remaining living do not know this ancestor and as for them he or she is dead. The relationship is over, and the ancestor holds no meaning to them any longer as a member of the family.

As said earlier, being an ancestor is not a human being's final stage, but it is a transition to a shadowy existence in the spirit world. The living are particularly concerned with the ancestors, rather than with the spirits and divinities. This will be discussed further in chapter 3.4.

3.3.3 The ancestor as a 'Person'

Earlier, it was said that Africans understand human beings as composed of both a physical and a nonphysical part. Mbiti (1971:131-131) when discussing the Akamba people of Kenya, further subdivides the nonphysical part in spirit or breath, heart, life, and mind or intellect. The spirit is the 'life-principle', and its existence is manifested through breathing. It needs the body to exist. The heart is the seat of the emotions. Life resides in one's body as long as the spirit is there. The mind understands the world around a person. When a person dies, it is only the physical part, the body that dies. All other elements continue to live, bearing the personal traits of the individual. His whole being, except the physical body, moves into the spirit world. In Akamba belief this person even receives another body that is identical to the body left in the physical world.⁵² In the light of this we can easily understand the term 'living-dead'. We can even say that the ancestor is more alive than dead - at least not yet!⁵³ Those who were caring people while alive, will continue to be caring, even now that they are ancestors. Those who were fearful will still be fearful. We can now also understand why in the African view the ancestor is still a

⁵¹ And as the deceased is still alive some communities forbid the widow to marry (Kirwen 1974 ch.5)

⁵² The informant who told me about her mother visiting her during the night, also told me that her mother looked very old when she died, but now she looks young and beautiful (see 3.1).

⁵³ A similar thought we find in John 8:25, 'He who believes in me will live, even though he dies'. The body is in the grave, the believer yet continue to live. As death will never triumph over him there will be no final death for the believer. This is a major difference with the ancestors who are alive, yet in the process of dying.

member of the family, and even an active member.

3.3.4 Who qualifies to be an ancestor?

Hammond Tooke (1981:23) makes the point that ancestors' religion must not be confused with the cult of the dead. By way of illustration he refers to the Dahoenas of West Africa who distinguish clearly between the dead and the ancestors, and who do have complex ceremonies to transform some dead into ancestors. This already shows that not everybody who died automatically becomes an ancestor. Women, children, unimportant men, unmarried men, he who died without children, young adults less than eighteen years of age, are not likely to become ancestors (Gehman 1999:12-13). During their life time they were not people of any influence, so the community can expect little, neither do they need to fear them now they have passed away. 'Only those who lived exemplary lives and from whom the community derived some benefit' become ancestors (Bediako 1990:38). Particular married and older people, especially men, have power and prestige while alive. They are people to reckon with not only before their death, but after their death as well. If this is not done, their power may turn against the living.

As already mentioned earlier, for the Akan and Ewe the essential condition to become a nana or togbui is an exemplary life. The criteria of such a life are marriage ('But if you are unmarried you are nothing ...' (p'Bitek in Dzobo 1985:337)); having children (Man's chief end ... is to multiply and increase ...' (Williamson in Dzobo 1985:337)); good health; natural death in old age (Dzobo 1985:336-337).

Shorter (1983a:15) also mentions the need of having children. To be invoked a person must have descendants to invoke him. This implies the need for having children. He refers to pastoralists and mixed farmers who possess herds of cattle and small livestock, and who ask for the increase of their herds. Food is one reason. But even more important is that the bigger the herd, the more likely it is to get more wives, and thus more children.

The departed should also have a name if he is to be invoked. Mbiti (1971:133) points out that names are extremely important in Akamba life, as they describe the personality of an individual. To lose one's name, is to lose one's personality and 'human' existence. The living do not know him any longer and he gets forgotten. On the other hand, to have many children is to extend one's name and, at least for the time being, a way to overcome death and to become

'immortal'.⁵⁴ A person is said to be completely dead, only if his or her name is totally forgotten.

3.3.5 Different categories of ancestors

Shorter (1983a:8-9; 1983b:199-200) mentions four basic categories of ancestors. The first category is that of the *ancestor-companion*. The ancestor acts as the companion and guardian of the living in their everyday activities. He also accompanies the living in their invocation of the Supreme Being. They transform the prayers of the living and make it acceptable to God. As such, they are an expression of God's favour towards the living. Although the names of the ancestors are mentioned in the prayers, it does not mean that the living address their prayer to the ancestors themselves. Rather, care is taken to pray in harmony with them as the ancestors are held to stand in a close relationship to God.

The second category is that of the *ancestor-intercessor* with God. Here the prayers are addressed to the ancestor who in turn takes the messages to the Supreme Being. Shorter mentions the Bemba people of Zambia as an example. They whisper messages into the ears of recently deceased relatives at the time of burial. It has been asked whether the intercessory role of African ancestors is not a Christian invention, since tracing it in traditional practices and prayer texts is very difficult.

The third category, which is common in Africa, is that of the *ancestor-plenipotentiary* ('the concept of the deceased as plenary or partial surrogates for the Creator', Shorter 1983b:200). In this concept the ancestor is not so much interceding for the people, but acts on behalf of God as a permanent plenipotentiary. By this, he mediates God's providence. He also receives praise in his name. Here, the people rarely, if ever, address God directly. In all regular prayers they invoke the ancestors and then call upon God to witness their prayer.

The fourth and final category is that of *ancestor-divinities*. These are the ancestors who are treated as divinities, autonomous spirits. Among them are the people who have become the focus for a religious cult after their death, for example, certain kings and religious leaders. In this category they are associated with divine providence, prayer and sacrifice.

⁵⁴ See also the story in the introduction where the grandmother feared that she would be forgotten if her name is not being remembered any longer. Therefore, she insisted that the newborn baby would carry her name.

3.3.6 Are the ancestors alive?

'Can the shades (ancestors, JB) require a person to do something that is not acceptable to his conscience?' A summary of the answers states, 'one's conscience can never be at loggerheads with the will of the shades'. It was one of the questions that interviewees were asked as part of a research on the above issue (Gijana 1981:48). With the help of Freud's 'Super-Ego' and Jung's 'collective unconscious' Gijana (1981:46) concludes that 'the life, which we attribute to the ancestral shades is symbolic'. The ancestors are alive, they exist, but they only exist in our consciences. When the living say that they observe and respect their ancestor's teachings, they actually follow the voice of their conscience. 'The attitude of the living toward departed members of the family ... is one of continuous remembrance and affection' (Overmyer in Gijana 1981:46). This attitude is the result of man's unwillingness to accept 'the horrifying idea that death is an extinction' (Gijana 1981:46). More specific, it is a refusal to accept the possibility that one who was so powerful and strong during his live, could be destroyed and ceased to exist due to death. Thus, a concept of life after death with a major role for the ancestors developed. Along with it ceremonies and rituals also developed. 'The sacrificial rites originate in the emotions of remembrance and longing for the dead' (Le Fleur in Gijana 1981:46).

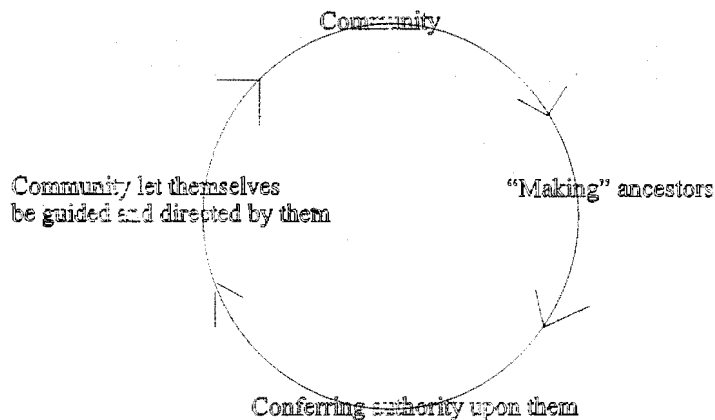
Also Bediako (1990:38-39) believes that the ancestors are 'made' by the community.⁵⁵ They belong to the category of myth, 'ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community' (Bediako 1990:39).⁵⁶ The influence and power of the ancestors are not from the ancestors themselves, but it is the influence and power of myth. After having observed that only those who have lived an exemplary life will become ancestors, Bediako (1990:38) asks the question: 'are not ancestors in effect a projection into the transcendent realm of the social values and spiritual expectations of the living community?'. If this is the case then ancestors have no independent existence from the community that produces them. However, they give the community the possibility to locate in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community. This is important for the social harmony on which life and continuity

⁵⁵ At this point there is agreement between Bediako and Gijana. But whereas Gijana seems to reject life after death altogether, Bediako only rejects the possibility of ancestors as an independent living reality.

⁵⁶ In his view 'myth' is pure imagination. Mbiti (1971:25) agrees that this is true for some myths, while others are based on historical events. And so, he concludes that in African thinking myth and history belong together. Shorter (1983a:3) states that 'it is no longer possible or desirable to treat history and mythology as mutually exclusive genres in African thinking'.

of the community are believed to depend. Bediako (1990:39) then concludes to the *functional value* (italics JB) of the veneration of the ancestors. On each important occasion like birth, death, or harvest celebrations, the ancestors' veneration forms an essential part of the ritual ceremonies.

We can summarize Bediako as follows,



When discussing the divinities Mbiti (1990:76) also says, 'Most, if not all, of these attributive divinities are the creation of man's imagination'. However, what from a scientific point of view is not real, is nevertheless real to the people concerned. To the people in the community the ancestors are spiritual beings that are alive, they are reality! This is what we have to reckon with first.

Handwritten note: Act-1 of the... is...

3.4 The ancestors and the living

3.4.1 Ancestors: senior family members

The deep sense of kinship has been one of the strongest forces in traditional African life. It is the binding factor that controls social relationships between people in a given community. It determines how people behave towards one another, and deeply influences the behaviour, thinking and whole life of individuals in the community. The kinship system is like a vast network stretching horizontally in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local group. It also extends vertically to include the departed and those yet to be born. The result of this system is that everybody is related to everybody else. Everybody is a 'relative'. When two strangers meet, they first find out how they relate to each other. Having discovered this, they behave towards each other according to the accepted behaviour set by the community. If they are 'brothers' they will treat each other as equals, if they are 'uncle' and 'nephew', the nephew may pay much respect to

the uncle. Relatives are also expected to help one another, particularly in times of need.

The biggest 'kinship-group' is the tribe, and the clan is its major subdivision. The clan is subdivided in families and the family in households, which is the smallest unit of the tribe, consisting of the children, parents and sometimes the grandparents. Besides the household the family also includes uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives. In many areas there are 'extended families', by which generally is meant that two or more brothers or sisters establish families in one compound or close to one another. The joint families are like one large family (Mbiti 1990:102-106).

As already mentioned the departed are considered as still belonging to the family. It means that the ancestor is not a stranger. He is a relative, more particularly, he is a senior elder (Gehman 1999:33). The living have responsibilities towards him. 'They (the ancestors, JB) are our fathers and we are their children whom they have begotten. ... Does not a man help his father when he is old?' (Middleton in Shorter 1969:30). The ancestors are seen as 'essentially loving relatives, good and exemplary people, who are irrevocably committed to the well-being of their lineage and its continuance' (Shorter 1969:29). Also Hammond-Tooke (1981:24-25) points to the fact that ancestors in fact are lineage members. The ancestors and the living together make up a group of kinsmen. He refers to the Nguni people with their strong patrilineal structure. The head of the homestead is the genealogical senior. He is the link between the ancestors and the living. When he dies, he will join the community of lineage members, now ancestors, who have already died, while the then genealogical elder takes over his task. Consequently ancestor veneration is not something that happens between an ancestor and just an individual. '... wherever ancestor religion becomes observable, it does so as a congregation of kinsmen who are the living relatives of those ancestors' (Kuckertz 1981:5).

Meanwhile we need to come back to the question whether ancestor veneration is a social affair, based on a specific understanding of the family (Ela, referred to by Kuckertz 1981:11) religious, or both.

3.4.2 The role of the ancestors among the living

Gehman (1999:33-35) mentions three different roles for the ancestors: Senior Elder, Benefactor, and Mediator.

First, the ancestor as a Senior Elder. 'The principle of seniority makes the ancestors the

head of the lineage' (Uchendu in Gehman 1999:33). The ancestors have now become the senior elders of the living elders. Therefore, attention and honour must be paid to them. The elders are also responsible for the well-being of the community, in that they must see to it that the customs, rituals, and ceremonies, as they were handed over from generation to generation, are properly done. Being the senior elders the ancestors 'are always watching to see that the living preserve what their forefathers established' (Field in Gehman 1999:34). When the living fail, the ancestors will punish them. Thus, 'the welfare of the living is felt to be bound up with the faithful performance of ancient custom (Field in Gehman 1999:34). Looking at the ancestors from this perspective, we can say that the ancestors are a stable factor in the community. However, they can also easily be a source of conservatism and a hindrance to change.

Another role is that of Benefactor. The ancestors not only cause all kinds of trouble to the living, but they also send every kind of blessing. They protect the living from the danger of the enemies, provide a good harvest, increase cattle, and birth of children. Interviewees (Oral History Project, Pamphlet 1) explain why they venerate the ancestors, 'The main reason is for security, especially in difficulties'; 'I am going to Durban now, but before I go I will tell my ancestors ... to protect me'; 'The power they (the ancestors, JB) receive through death is used to the benefit of the living by bestowing blessings on them and protecting them from evildoers and misfortunes'.

Thirdly, the role of the ancestor as a Mediator. The ancestors may serve as mediators between the living and the Supreme Being. When praying the living recite the names of all those ancestors who have gone before and so, through a chain of ancestors, their prayer reaches God. As we have already noted above - see the paragraph on the ancestor-intercessor - many Africans are not familiar with this idea. They do not really experience the ancestors as mediators. To them their religious experience ends with the ancestors. Only in exceptional cases, when they or their community is in serious trouble they may want to call upon God directly, 'in desperation, after all other efforts have failed' (Parsons in Bosch 1974:46).

3.4.3 Communication between the ancestors and the living

The ancestors speak with the living through dreams, in the fire and during times of trouble. Sometimes they can be seen, particularly when they appear in dreams. Other times they cannot be seen, but their presence is felt, for example, when the wind blows in trees and grass,

or the grain rustles (Gehman 1990:35).

The diviner, witchdoctor, priest, or owner of the holy fire serves as the intermediary between ancestors and the living. In the traditional Akamba community, and many others as well, he is the most powerful man. The living consult the ancestors through him (Gehman 1990:35).

Sacrifices are important tools of communication, at many occasions an animal is slaughtered. Mbiti (1971:93) distinguishes sacrifices from offerings. Sacrifices are acts that involve the shedding of blood or the killing of an animal, while offerings are acts that do not involve blood. Here food, drink and other items are 'offered'. Acts of offerings and sacrifices can be performed at many different places, including temples, homesteads, rocks, caves, waterfalls, hills and mountains. As a rule it goes with prayers and invocations. 'There is, in short, no place and occasion when African peoples may not perform acts of worship or reaching into the spiritual realm, through offerings, sacrifices, prayers or invocations' (Mbiti 1971:93). As I will explain in the next paragraph, only in rare and difficult occasions are these sacrifices and offerings addressed to God. Normally the recipient is one of the ancestors. While doing these acts, words are uttered like 'May you (the name of the ancestor is recited, JB) receive this beer or piece of meat!'. The Herero will say, 'Oh my father ...'. The leader during a Shona funeral will say, 'Now let us inform our ancestors, so that they will convey our intentions to Christ, who will tell the Father that ...' (Gundani 1995:32).

3.4.4 The nature of the relationship between the ancestors and the living

Shorter (1969:29) writes 'it would be quite wrong to conclude that the ancestors' veneration was based on fear alone and on the selfish desire to escape suffering and harm'. On the other hand the dead are experienced as a 'heavy load' carried by the living from generation to generation. The spirit world presses hard upon that of human beings. It pervades their whole life, their vocabulary, social relations, folklore, etc. The spirit world forms an integral part of the whole existence of African communities. It is an intense relationship between the living and the dead, a mutual relationship where both are dependent on each other. In the traditional Shona view, 'community' refers to both the living and the dead of all ages (Gundani 1995:35).

After death the departed person continues to show keen interest in the welfare of those he has left behind, and occasionally he may come to see his former place of abode and see his relatives. Those who see him do not get frightened because they know him as he is still one of

them. There is, however, also a sense of separation, a vague but real sense of a barrier because death has come in between. Communion occurs between the departed and the living relatives, yet it is not full communion. When discussing the Akamba people, Mbiti (1971:134) points out that the spirit world must not be allowed to get either too close to or too far from the human world. They are wanted and not wanted. In Akamba everyday life the two signs of hospitality are greetings and food. Yet no one ever passes on greetings to the ancestors when they are on a visit. Neither are they welcomed and invited to wait until food is prepared. A balance should be kept. If it gets lost a sense of insecurity and uncertainty comes upon the people. So on the one hand people fear the spirit world, on the other hand they want it to exist.

Kirwen (1987:29, 82) points out that violation of the social order provokes the anger of the ancestors resulting in them sending suffering, and even death, until the immorality is corrected. However, the good graces of the ancestors are needed to achieve and sustain something good in life. Things such as fertility, good crops, rain, health and prosperity are all under the protection of the ancestors. Again in the Akamba community it is believed that if the spirits are too far away, the contact with the human world becomes too weak. As a result the spirits will bring misfortune upon the people. If, however, they get too near to human beings, they interfere with people's lives by causing madness, possessing them, frightening them with frequent appearances. The whole of life is under the pressure of maintaining the balance with the spirit world. Life is characterised by unfreedom. As the living do have the instruments, namely offerings and sacrifices, to maintain the balance, we can also put it differently. The living control the spirit world by bringing it closer or driving it further, whatever the case may be, with a view that in the end the living will benefit from this balanced relationship.

On the other hand, Shorter (1969:29-30) talks of the one community of the ancestors and the living and 'the dead are the real rulers ... and owners of its wealth'. The living, acting for the ancestors, are the temporary caretakers of the community's prestige and prosperity. In this type of relationship 'piety' is the keyword. Referring to the Lugbara and the Kimbu, it appears that they 'interpret their relationship with their ancestors as one of piety and not of selfish fear and favour'.

My conclusion is that the livings' feelings towards the ancestors are ambivalent. They are loved and feared, respected and dreaded. As a Mukamba summarised, 'I loved them because of their provision, and I also feared them because they might take their things' (in Gehman 1999:37). It is a 'strangely mingled sentiment of awe, anxiety and affection which the living feel towards

the ancestors' (Taylor in Gehman 1990:38).

3.5 The ancestors and their relationship with God

At first glance God does not seem important to African communities. All the Bantu-speaking people have an idea of a sky-God, the creator of the world and man. However, it is very vague, and rituals or myths about him are almost nonexistent. God is a 'retired God' (Hammond-Tooke 1981:23). The Lango of Uganda say they do not know anything about their God Gabipiny. So they do not pray to him any longer. Most African communities do not have a cult of the Supreme Being (Bosch 1974:45). It, however, does not reflect the reality. According to Sidhom, 'God is; hence man is - that is the core of African belief' (in Bosch 1974:40). Excluding God from African Traditional Religion is unthinkable. God's presence is indeed not very prominent, yet he is the one who is holding everything in place. Bosch (1974:40) suggests representing ATR as a circle. Its centre is the community where a good order is to be maintained for the sake of peace and continuity. In a circle around this centre are the elements organized that are important for the maintenance of this good order. Bosch (1974:40) lists as the elements: the Gods, the ancestors, the people, the plants and animals and the lifeless objects. God's work is to carry this circle with all its elements in his hands. He keeps these elements in place, and without him the community would collapse. This model explains that God is necessary for the well being of the community, even though he is stays at the back ground.

For the African understanding God is in the first place the Creator-God. In the beginning he lived in harmony with humanity. He taught the people how to make fire, to build houses, to develop the land, and how to organize the community. At one stage, however, he withdrew, he separated himself from humanity. Not so much because of sin, but because something happened that annoyed him. One story tells about two men who got into an argument. In anger the first one shot an arrow from his bow. The arrow hit the heavens that were then visible as a cloud. Immediately blood and water came forth from the cloud, and the heavens receded to where they are now. The rains began to fail, starvation entered, and death became the lot of human kind. Although God had withdrawn, he had not broken the relationship with the people living on earth. He created the lesser deities, the sun and the moon to watch over and care for them. They are the reminders of God's caring presence (Kirwen 1974:4,5).

God's withdrawal, however, does mean that he is no longer present in the day-to-day life

of the community. He is not the God of history, acting in history like Jahveh in the Old Testament. James O'Connell wrote about God, 'His immense power could not be utilized ... because no one could read his intentions and so utilize his power' (in Bosch 1974:43).

Today man cannot understand God. He is too great, too awesome, too fearful. To say that one understands God is almost an expression of disrespect. The living cannot live with God. The ancestors therefore are needed to serve as intermediaries between the living and God. Bosch (1974:44) even states that the more vague the idea of God is, the more prominent the role of the ancestors. Thus, it is understandable that there are many references to the relationship between God and the dead. The Herero call him 'the father of all the Ovakuru (ancestors)'. Nevertheless, for many African communities their religious experience ends with the veneration of the ancestors.

3.6 A summary of the main aspects of ancestor belief

Traditional religion in Africa is disappearing or being greatly changed. Many traditional rituals are no longer practised. This is not true for the belief of which the rituals are an expression. The ancestors are still very much alive. From what we have discussed we can summarize the main aspects of this belief in the ancestors as follows,

a) The ancestors need to be understood in the light of the African concept of death. Death is the transition into the next world where the deceased continue to live a life quite similar to the one they lived in this world. There is, however, one important difference: the ancestors are closer to God than the living. They are between God and the living and thus able to mediate. Due to their 'new status' they also have supranatural qualities that the living lack. They can appear whenever and wherever they wish. They can send sickness, misfortune, but also every kind of blessing.

b) The ancestors can be described as 'the living individuals who lost their bodies'. It is a person's whole being, except the physical body, that moves into the next world. When the living talk to them, they are not just dealing with unknown spirits, but they know exactly to whom they are talking. They have known them for long.

c) The ancestors are senior family members. Even now that they are in the next world, they are still part of that whole network of relatives. Being senior family members, the ancestors have the responsibility to care for the well being of the living family. They have a functional value in that they are important for the social harmony of the family and the community at large. The

living relatives on the other hand are to respect and honour the ancestors with the respect and honour given to senior family members. Note that Shorter (1969:29-30) calls the living the temporary caretakers of the community's prestige and property on behalf of the ancestors. If the living fail, they should expect punishment from the ancestors. The ceremony of 'bringing back home' is an expression of this family relationship between the ancestors and the living.

d) That the ancestors are family members, does not mean that things are still the same as they were before. Death is experienced as 'the most disrupting phenomenon of all', which has made things different. The relationship between the ancestors and the living is a mixture of fear, selfishness and piety. It is an intense relationship where both are dependent on each other. It depends on which African community it is whether the balance is more on the side of fear, or on the side of piety. Mbiti believes that in the end the ancestors are controlled by the living, as they do have the tools to manipulate the ancestors, namely offerings and sacrifices.

e) How the Africans perceive the ancestors, is very much linked to how they perceive God. The more far away God is, the closer are the ancestors. Actually the religious experience of many African communities does not go beyond the ancestors.

f) The funeral rituals and ceremonies serve various purposes, but finally come down to appeasing the ancestors so that they will send all kinds of blessing to the living.

CHAPTER 4. THE CHALLENGE OF THE ANCESTORS

4.1 Unity in diversity

A tendency to generalise always exists when dealing with another community. De Wet (1983:44) points to the fact that Westerners often look at African communities 'as being small scale, subsistence-agriculture, kinship-based, chieftain-governed, ancestor-worshipping societies ...'. However, we should remember that Africa has always known a tremendous diversity. Even the communities that belong to the Bantu speaking group, of which the Herero is one, are different. This diversity is also true for just one community.

Due to rapid processes of social change, secularisation, acculturation and urbanisation the Herero community today is different from the Herero community of 15-20 years ago. This is also true for the Oruano church as is reflected in the differences between the 1978 and 1992 Oruano Church Orders (Buys 1993:451). We also need to be aware of the influence of 150 years of Christianity among the Herero. Wanamaker (1997:285) points out that 'evidence exists that Christianity has helped overcome much of the fear that people have had of their ancestors in the past, though it does not lead to reject them'. Nxumalo (1981:67), who has done research among the Zulu, comes to the same conclusion when he says, 'that conversion to and faith in Christ do help to wipe away fear of the ancestors, but do not encourage rejection'.

We also need to distinguish between the urban Herero and the rural Herero. An example is the young people in the urban areas who grow up without the holy fire and cattle in the kraal, which are core elements of Herero life. It also makes a difference whether the rural area is close to the urban area, or whether it is like the Kaokoland (Kunene Region) 700 km away from the capital. Particularly the Himba people, who live in that area, have mostly been left untouched by modern developments and have managed to maintain much of their tradition (Malan 1995:85-101).

The Herero communities are spread over a vast area, from Kaokoland in the northwest to Aminuis in the east, a distance of more than a 1000 km, and from Windhoek in the south to Tsumeb in the north, another 500 km. Due to limited means of transport and communication the villages in the various areas have developed as quite independent units. In the light of this we can understand some diversity in the way things are done. According to one interviewee (Undari 1999:interview) there are differences from home to home in the Herero community, 'each home

has its own rules'. Another interviewee (Mr. A. 1999:interview) warned not to generalise, as 'customs and traditions vary from clan to clan'. But then again another interviewee (Usurua 1999:interview) was quick to say that those differences are just small, and that a general agreement exists on Herero norms, values and beliefs. There is diversity, but the unity goes beyond it. For most Herero the binding element is the ancestors' veneration, which finds its expression particularly in the holy fire. Among the people I have interviewed I observed a strong awareness of the Herero's own identity, and being proud of it. Nevertheless, the warning not to overlook the diversity should be taken seriously.

4.2 The God of the Herero

4.2.1 Ndjambi cares for his people

When talking about God, the Herero refer to Ndjambi. He is the God of the Universe, the Creator God, the Supreme Being, but He is also the one from whom a person receives gifts for life. He is the God of love and all blessings. He helps and one can rely on him. He is not wrathful and he does not punish anybody. Therefore, there is no reason why one should fear him. He is the God of benevolence and the Father of life. When a sick person receives healing, it is attributed to Ndjambi. He is also a spirit (Pöllitzer 1978:80-85).

In chapter 3.5 I have referred to James O'Connell who summarizes as the core of African belief, 'God is; hence man is' (in Bosch 1974:43). This is definitely true for the Herero. God's presence may indeed not be very prominent, but he is there as the one holding everything in place. Unlike many African communities, whose religious experience does not go beyond the veneration (or worship) of their ancestors, the Herero have quite a strong awareness of God and his concern for their well being. This awareness does not mean that God is also accessible or easily accessible. In the Herero tradition are no rituals and ceremonies for the worship of God. All existing rituals and ceremonies are directed to the ancestors. The living, however, turn to Ndjambi directly if they do not receive response from their ancestors after they have talked to them. They then may speak as follows,

'... What has happened to the ancestors? Are they now away from you (Ndjambi, JB), or are they still with you? And if they (the

ancestors, JB) are still with you, why have you not sent them to give healing to this kind of sickness ... But if they are away from you, call them back to you so that you can send the message through them to us ...' (Kamburona 1999b:interview).⁵⁷

Although rain, food, health and other blessings come from Ndjambi, people sometimes also contribute these blessings to the ancestors. Muniazo (1999:interview) mentioned that the people do not really know God, 'God does not play a major role in the life of the Herero people, but the ancestors, they do ...'. Like most African communities the Herero's life is much more determined by their relationship with the ancestors than with God. It is, however, also true that in Herero thinking people eventually are all dependent on Ndjambi. One, however, approaches Ndjambi through the ancestors.⁵⁸

Meanwhile the question raises whether this quite strong awareness of Ndjambi was always there, or was it because of the influence of Christianity? The same can be asked for the perception of Ndjambi, particularly the personal traits of his being like, as mentioned above, love, help, and gifts sending. Van Rooy (1994:263) mentions the Basotho and Batswana whose God Modimo, before the arrival of the missionaries, used to be 'the all-pervading, impersonal energy of life'.⁵⁹ Today this is disputed by those who 'found their objections mainly on their own observations from contemporary beliefs ... which one can expect to be strongly influenced by the biblical concept of God' (Van Rooy 1994:263). Wanamaker (1997:286) goes even further when he concludes that the concept of God as creator and supreme power 'remained extremely vague and underdeveloped until the influence of Christianity began to be experienced'. Dwane (1982:19) does not agree. According to him the supreme being who is the Giver of Life is behind all forms of life in the universe. 'He preserves and sustains life. He upholds and defends those values which have to do with human dignity, and which create and sustain the community' (Dwane 1982:19). He may be so transcendent that he is unapproachable, but he is believed to be at work in and

⁵⁷ This example was collected during an interview. The text is as it was recorded. Only minimal editing was done where it was needed for the sake of readability. The same is done with all quotes that are taken from the interviews.

⁵⁸ One would expect that the awareness of God is stronger among members of Oruano and other Christian churches who have been exposed to the gospel for about 150 years. This, however, does not seem to be the case. Both Christian and Traditional Herero expressed themselves along the same lines with regard to Ndjambi.

⁵⁹ This is the conclusion of research done by Setiloane. Van Rooy refers to this research.

behind all that happens. Here the ancestors are not the final address but mediators between the living and God. Dwane receives support from Dzobo (1985:335) who says, 'This African conception of the relationship between God and man is similar to the Johannine and Pauline conception of the relationship between Christ and the believer'.

Dwane expresses best the Herero concept of Ndjambi. Though the use of words as 'merciful' and 'graceful' (Upi 1999:interview) are clear indications of the influence of Christianity.

4.2.2 Ndjambi or Mukuru or Musisi or Jehovah?

All interviewees, when talking about God, used the name of 'Ndjambi'. This leads me to conclude that today Ndjambi is the common name for God, particularly among the Christians.⁶⁰ This has not always been the case. During the 1970s prayers in church services were mainly directed to 'Mukuru' or, to be more polite, 'Muhona Mukuru' (Pöllitzer 1978:82).

Mukuru was introduced by the missionaries. People today differ on the motives. One view holds that the missionaries, when they started their ministry, did not want to use the name of what they thought was the name of the heathen God of the Herero. Instead they introduced the name of Mukuru (Pöllitzer 1999:interview, see also Pöllitzer 1978:80, 167). Another view holds that the missionaries were not aware that the name of God was Ndjambi, because the people, out of respect, did not mention his name. Even when the missionaries introduced Mukuru, which was wrong in the eyes of the people, the latter did not correct nor did they convey the real name of God (Usurua 1999:interview).

Whatever the historical facts may be, the missionaries introduced a name that confirmed rather than rejected the ancestors' veneration. When they arrived, Mukuru had a wider meaning than today. Today Mukuru refers to God. Then Mukuru was also the head of the family, the owner of the holy fire, the chief priest. Mukuru was the ancestor who takes prayers to God. He also was the ancestor of the ancestors, meaning that the Herero believed that they derived their existence from him. At the basis of the Himba religion thinking lies the belief in a Supreme Being called Ndjambi-Karunga or Mukuru. It is Mukuru who endows the ancestors with supernatural attributes (Malan 1995:90). Mukuru thus has strong ancestral connotations. Today Mukuru is 'not

⁶⁰ This seems to be the result of the revision of the Herero translation of the Bible in the late 1970s. The Bible Society followed Pöllitzer's recommendation to use Ndjambi as the name of God (Pöllitzer 1999:interview).

so much used, outside the church. But in the church we use Ndjambi' (Kambarona 1999c: interview). As the ancestors' veneration takes place outside the church, this statement also confirms the ancestral setting of the term Mukuru.

When the missionaries after thirty years or so realised the mistake they had made by naming the God of the Bible Mukuru, they did not want to change it as they feared that it was going to cause confusion among the Herero Christians (Pöllitzer 1978:81-82).⁶¹

Another name is 'Musisi'. This name is not used frequently. 'Today the old people use it, not the youngsters' (Kambarona 1999c:interview). Pöllitzer (1978:85) already observed that Musisi had almost been forgotten.

An apparent attempt to solve the problem of 'Mukuru' while also avoiding the use of 'Ndjambi', was the introduction by missionaries of 'Jehovah'.⁶² This name for God is not widely accepted. 'It is close to the western way' (Muniazo 1999:interview), which is another way of saying that it is a foreign, western idea. I observed, however, that one interviewee used Jehovah as frequently as Ndjambi. The two names were used interchangeably, with apparently almost no difference in meaning. This interviewee grew up in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church (C. 1999:interview).⁶³ Further research may show whether it is indeed the Roman Catholic influence that made this person use the name of Jehovah.

My conclusion is that Ndjambi has survived all attempts to replace him. It is interesting to notice that, for example, in the Nama community the traditional name of God is now used to refer to the devil (Pöllitzer 1978:82). But Ndjambi was, and still is 'the God we confess'.

4.2.3 Are Ndjambi and the God of the Bible the same God?⁶⁴

Before elaborating on this issue we first need to clarify which Ndjambi we are talking

⁶¹ The general secretary of Oruano, Mr. Upi, who I had asked to read this chapter and to comment on it, strongly denied that Mukuru had ever referred to more than God alone.

⁶² Prof. W. A. Saayman drew my attention to the fact that 'the old missionaries had decided to use the term Jehovah in order to avoid using Ndjambi or other names' (E-mail, 17 April 1999).

⁶³ Recently I met a second person who mentioned Jehovah as one of the names of God. This person also was brought up in the Roman Catholic tradition.

⁶⁴ Van Rooy (1994:261-274) is of the opinion that there is an essential difference between the Old Testament revelation about God and the views of the African peoples. He distinguishes between five concepts of God, 1) the all-pervading, impersonal energy of life; 2) the far-away, uninvolved God; 3) the indulgent cosmic grandfather; 4) the first ancestor-chief; 5) a personal, creator God.

about, Ndjambi of the Christians or Ndjambi of the holy fire? Ndjambi whom we approach through his Son Jesus Christ, or Ndjambi whom we approach through the ancestors? The Herero Bible uses Ndjambi as the name of God. Consequently, Christians refer to the God of the Bible when speaking of Ndjambi. Those, however, who are committed to the Herero religion centred around the holy fire, refer to the God who has been known to them for generations. He is the traditional God of the Herero (see chapter 4.2.1). It is this God we are referring to when we ask the question whether Ndjambi and the God of the Bible are the same God.

Missionaries, explaining God to African communities, assured the African people that the God of the Bible actually was the same as the traditional God of Africa (Bosch 1974:48). As noted above this was not the approach of the missionaries working among the Herero. They avoided identifying the God of the Bible with the God of the Herero, with Ndjambi. Nevertheless, it is the general opinion of the Herero that Ndjambi and the God of the Bible are the same. 'Ndjambi is the same God as the God of the Bible' (Tjiuma 1999:interview). According to them, it is the same God that one approaches both in the church and at the holy fire. The only difference is, 'we go through the fathers and you go through Christ' (in Muniazo 1999:interview).

I did a workshop for Herero church leaders and members during which time I discussed the concept of God in the Old Testament.⁶⁵ With the concept of the African God in mind who is often seen as the faraway God with little meaning for the people today, I emphasised God as the God of history who was directly and very much involved with his people of Israel. Then I asked participants for the name of this God. They unanimously agreed that it was Ndjambi.

The Herero did not learn about God for the first time when the missionaries came. They knew about God, 'that there is somebody above, who is powerful, merciful, graceful' (Upi 1999:-interview). How did they find out? Because God had revealed himself to the people before the arrival of the missionaries. The new message that the missionaries brought was that of the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Upi 1999:interview).

One reason for this identification of the God of the Bible with the traditional Herero God

⁶⁵ The workshop took place as part of a TEE programma in Opuwo, Kunene Region, in March 1999.

is the strict monotheistic character of African religions (Bosch 1974:46). There is only one God, the Creator God, the God of the Universe, Ndjambi. Also the ancestors are not Gods. They never were. They are the deceased members of the family who now function as intermediaries between the living and God.

When Bishop Kamburona (1999c:interview) was asked about the differences between the God of the Bible and Ndjambi - Ndjambi as the faraway and passive God, and the God of the Bible as the nearby and active God, who in Jesus Christ (Immanuel) is among us - he referred to God's progressing revelation. Like a flower closed in the morning but opening up during day time, people now have a better understanding of God. The people he referred to are those who are converted, the Christians. Because of the ministry of Oruano they have discovered new aspects of God, which are still hidden for those who are outside the church.

Bosch has observed that this is a common explanation among African communities. 'Evangelism ... must stress that he is the same God as the God of the Kikuyu but that he has now revealed himself in a better and clearer way ...' (Kibicho in Bosch 1974:49). Meanwhile John Taylor made a valuable remark when he said, 'The Christian's God is called Father, but to the majority this signifies only that he is creator and supreme head' (in Bosch 1974:49). In other words, calling God 'Father' does not mean that one experiences him as 'Father'. In an ancestor environment 'Father' is associated with 'your father' who watches over his children and cares for them, although he has died.

Kibicho's statement is also Oruano's position regarding God. It would therefore be wrong and fruitless as well to urge the Herero to turn away from their traditional God Ndjambi and to turn to the God of the Bible. Such an urge would not make sense to them anyway. It would, however, be equally wrong to deny the differences and just to identify Ndjambi with the God of the Bible. A way out may be found in Bosch's idea of 'continuity and discontinuity' (1974:36-61).

The continuity refers to Yahweh who incorporated El and took over his names and functions. When Yahweh revealed himself to Abraham and called him to be the father of a new community, He entered the Semitic world dominated by El. In this process He assimilated and integrated El into himself. Yahweh became also El Eljon, God Most High (Gen. 14:18-22), and El Sjaddai, the Almighty (Gen. 49:25). But 'Eljon' and 'Sjaddai' already showed that He was more, greater than El.

An example of continuity in the New Testament was Paul's sermon on the Areopagus

(Acts 17:16-31). The point of departure was the Athenians' concept of God. Paul elaborated on what they were familiar with. But there was also discontinuity when Paul started talking about the resurrection of the dead. For the Athenians the immortality of the soul was acceptable, but not the resurrection of a dead body. At this point the God of the Bible and the God of the Athenians separated and each went his own way. The God of the Athenians was no longer incorporated into the God of the Bible. Having a life of his own, this God now stood against the God of the Bible. The conflict arose when Paul proclaimed 'the uncompromising message of one God who lays exclusive claim to people's loyalty (Bosch 1991:134).

When God revealed himself to the Herero community He did so in and through Ndjambi. Ndjambi thus is a manifestation of the God of the Bible. Attributes of Ndjambi are seen in the God of the Bible, even to the extent that one interviewee (Muniazo 1999:interview) said, 'If you look at Ndjambi and the God of the Bible, they do have the same character'.

As far as the continuity concerns I agree with Bediako (1995:225) that 'the God of African pre-Christian tradition has turned out to be the God of the Christians'. Thus, the missionaries did not go before God went, but He was already at work among the Herero before they arrived. He just called his messengers in, so that by proclamation He might be made more manifest. 'And thus it is to be expected that He has not left himself without testimony in the past. ... Local ancestors who prepared the way for the coming of the gospel ...' (Bediako 1995:225, 226).⁶⁶ But where we maintain continuity, we also need to say that this God of the Christians goes beyond Ndjambi. He is the Greater One. That is where the discontinuity surfaces.

Both the God of the Bible and Ndjambi are God Creator. Among the Herero is also awareness of Ndjambi's concern for people's well being. However, what can be said of Yahweh, namely 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery' (Ex. 20:2), cannot be said of Ndjambi. Ndjambi does not operate at that level. He is not the God of history like the God of the Bible. This is not just an 'addendum', it makes the God of the Bible the Unique One. At one stage the God of Africa withdrew from humanity, he separated himself from the affairs of men (see also chapter 3.5). According to Scripture, however, it were the living who withdrew from God, while God, searched for the living to restore the relationship with them. The climax came when God spoke through the Son, 'through whom He reconciled to himself all things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (Col.

⁶⁶ The two ancestors Tjamuaha and Maharero played an important role in connection with the introduction of the gospel to the Herero community.

1:20, see also Heb. 1:1). At the centre thus of God's dealings with the living is his Son Jesus Christ. The discontinuity of the God of the Bible with Ndjambi culminates in him. Where the God of the Bible points exclusively to Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and the living, while Ndjambi points to the ancestors, there Ndjambi is no longer incorporated in the God of the Bible. Then, like the God of the Athenians, Ndjambi leads a life of his own, against the God of the Bible. That Jesus Christ is the breaking point indeed, was confirmed in the interviews where this issue was discussed.

'If I tell the Herero (meant are those who are committed to the ancestors, JB), 'Ndjambi is the father of Jesus Christ, they will not understand because they deny Jesus Christ. That is why they use their ancestors. If they would not deny Jesus, it would mean to stop the ancestors' (Muniazo 1999:interview).

'According to the Bible they (meant are those who are committed to the ancestors, JB) should leave the ancestors out and only pray to God through Jesus Christ. He is the only way. But they still refuse' (Undari 1999:interview).

'The Herero religion is God - ancestors - the living. There is not really a place for Christ' (Kaauova 1999:interview).

Question, 'Are Christ and the ancestors in conflict with one another?' Answer, 'For a real Christian it may be a conflict. Not for the Herero, because they practised it (ancestors' veneration, JB) before the missionaries. What is new, is that there is another meeting place, the church. So there are now two meeting places. But the final address is the same God' (Upi 1999:interview). (In the church one prays to God through Christ, and at the fire through the ancestors. And one does not mix the two, JB).

The God of the Bible, as argued, is essentially different from Ndjambi. That is why they

cannot just be identified as the same God. Neither is 'progressive revelation' a sufficient explanation. What is needed is to search for, and reveal the attributes of Ndjambi. What is characteristic for him and distinguishes him from, for example, Gabipiny, the God of the Lango people of Uganda (see chapter 3.5). Next we will need to confront Ndjambi with the God of the Bible. The approach will help to see the aspects of continuity and discontinuity between Ndjambi and the God of the Bible (Bosch 1974:58). It was Paul's approach in Lystra. Due to the cultural and religious background of his audience, his sermon was not about 'Jesus Christ and him crucified', but about the living God 'who has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons' (Acts 14:17). This was the God they knew, and so Paul could open the door to the God who is greater.⁶⁷

4.3 The ancestors in the Herero community⁶⁸

4.3.1 The holy fire⁶⁹

In the Herero community the holy fire (*okuruwo*) is the place where the head of the family talks to the ancestors. It is found between the main hut and the kraal where the cattle are kept. Around the holy fire is a circle of stones, and mopane wood is piled up next to it for use in the holy fire. The holy fire is not very impressive. An outsider who does not know the tradition of the holy fire may think it is just a small fire used for cooking food. The same is true for the fire itself. It consists of a single smouldering stump lying in the ashes, and it is only stirred into flame when important rituals are performed. For the Herero, however, it is the visible expression of their belief in the ancestors. 'It is regarded as the religious foundation of the village ...' (Malan 1995:93). Because, 'where the fire is there are ancestors' (Pöllitzer 1978:169).

The fire is rekindled twice a day before sunrise and at sunset, 'when the sun comes at the

⁶⁷ To evaluate the Bible Society's decision to use Ndjambi for the name of God would require a study of the translation of all the names of God. At this stage one wonders the wisdom of this decision as it has apparently led to the full identification of the God of the Bible with Ndjambi. Would analogous Old Testament names like 'El-ohim', which includes the name of the God El, not have been a better choice?

⁶⁸ The ancestors are extensively discussed in chapter 3. Much of what has been said in that chapter applies to the Herero community as well. In this section we will not repeat what was said there, but we will only highlight some aspects of the ancestors as far as they are specifically related to the Herero community.

⁶⁹ This section is based on Pöllitzer (1978:169-170) and Malan (1995:90-101) who both give a concise description of the holy fire. Useful information was also gained from the interviews with Undari and Mrs. C.

top of the mountain, is when the fire is lit' (Undari 1999:interview). The burning fire symbolises sustained contact between the living and their ancestors. Therefore, care must be taken that it does not extinguishes. The ancestors would feel insulted at such a situation and inflict punishment on their living family members. Therefore, at night a smaller burning stump is taken from the holy fire into the main hut, 'the Big House', from which the outside fire may be relit in the morning (Malan 1995:92). The cattle must be in the kraal when the fire is rekindled. Once the fire is on, the milking can start. Why? 'Well it is their belief that it must go like this. You do it, so that bad things will not happen' (Undari 1999:interview).⁷⁰

The holy fire plays an important role at the occasion of major rites of passage in the life of an individual. It is at the holy fire where the ceremony of the *name-giving* takes places. The new born child is introduced to the ancestors and they are asked for protection 'to secure a prosperous future for the new member of the family' (Malan 1995:94).

Although the *circumcision* of boys and young men itself does not take place at the fire, the ceremony does not happen before the family head has asked for the blessing of the ancestors at the holy fire.

A few days after the first menstruation *puberty rites for girls* take place. A girl is taken to the holy fire, where the ancestors are informed that she has now reached the marriageable status. They are asked to give her protection.

The holy fire also plays an important role during *marriage* ceremonies. A special act is performed to introduce the bride to the patrilineal group of her husband.

The holy fire features most strongly in the *funeral* rites, particularly when the village head dies. Life thus, from birth to death, is connected with the ancestors and the holy fire is its main expression.

The holy fire also plays a major role in day-to-day issues. When a child is sick, it is taken to the holy fire for healing. 'When you travel from Opuwo to Windhoek, the old man will pray at the fire' (Undari 1999:interview). When one has a serious problem in his or her life, one will see the family head who will consult the ancestors. When one wants to dig a well, or one has bought a new car, one needs the blessings of the ancestors, without which one may not find water, one may have an accident, one's marriage may break up, etc. - without which misfortune will

⁷⁰ In an attempt to find the essences of the Outdooing and Naming Ceremony of a baby among the Ada of Ghana Kudadjie (1997:11) observes that, 'As is often the case in traditional societies, the presuppositions, beliefs and meanings of most of the ritual acts are usually not recorded or passed on in detail. Some are even lost.'

come upon a person.

Not everybody, however, can sit at the fire. A woman that is menstruating is not supposed to be there as she is unclean. When she is allowed, she will only sit at the second or third row as a passive participant. The holy fire is a strongly male dominated praxis.⁷¹ Also a man of mixed blood cannot participate in the holy fire because he is not a real Herero (Mrs. C. 1999:interview).

After the Herero war of 1904-1907 a political aspect was attached to the holy fire. As Bishop Kamburona (1999b:interview) said, 'It became an expression of victory'. The Herero were almost destroyed but managed to regroup and reestablish themselves around the binding element of the holy fire, which was even more emphasized after the funeral of Samuel Maharero. This confirms what I had observed earlier, that the holy fire is an important aspect of the Herero identity (Introduction 7, Set up).

4.3.2 The perception of the ancestors

Over the past years the number of households that have a holy fire has decreased. This does not mean that the ancestors have become less important. Upi (1999:interview) predicted that the belief in the ancestors will die out. However, that is definitely not so today. 'It is still very strong' (Mrs. C. 1999:interview). The ancestors are still very much alive. It is true that people experience the controlling influence of the ancestors differently. In particular the elderly people live with the ancestors much more than the younger generation. '... the younger generation does not have the belief that the ancestors do something to them' (Mrs. C. 1999:interview). Nevertheless, many Herero feel that their life in both small and big things is interwoven with their ancestors.

A strong awareness of family relationships characterizes the Herero community. What was said in chapter 3.4.1 'that everybody is related to everybody else' applies to the Herero as well. This is also true for the relationship with the ancestors. The first ancestor in line is one's father. He continues to care for his child like he did before he died, and his child continues to respect him (Usurua 1999:interview; Upi 1999:interview). The fourth command to honour your father and

⁷¹ In the late 1920 this was probably the reason for the increase of membership of the Rhenish Mission Church when particularly women joined the church. The explanation would be 'that Christianity enabled women to achieve limited power in a community which excluded them from all religious and political activity' (Werner 1998:120; see also chapter 2.2.2).

your mother (Ex. 20:12) goes beyond the grave, at least as far as the father concerns.⁷² The relationship with the father varies in intensity. The intensity is of the highest level when one sits at the holy fire, like Christians may experience the nearness of the Lord Jesus Christ particularly in the Holy Communion (Usurua 1999:interview).

A keyword in the relationship is 'respect'.⁷³ Out of respect for one's father one fulfills his or her obligations.⁷⁴ One has that respect because the father is the older one. 'In Herero tradition you always put the older one first - the first to drink the milk, the first to eat the meat, the first to enter the house' (Undari 1999:interview).⁷⁵ One knows that if one does not do it, the father may turn against him or her because he does not compromise (Usurua 1999:interview). This is clear from examples given in the interviews. The ancestors were not acknowledged in a marriage and the woman got sick and died (Usurua 1999:interview). Another person's marriage broke up because he had married a woman other than the one who was selected for him by the parents (Kaaouova 1999:interview). After the funeral one makes sure that one participates in the cleansing ceremony because one's car may overturn if one does not do it (Mrs. C. 1999:interview). This is how people experience the relationship with the ancestors.

The respect for the ancestors has quite a strong element of fear, which Mr. A. (1999:interview) said is a negative fear.⁷⁶ It is a burden to people and captures their freedom. This was denied by Upi (1999:interview) who described the fear as 'the fear of the child who knows that if he does something against the father's will, the father will punish him'.

This respect also explains the strong position of the holy fire. Muniazo (1999:interview) one day had asked a pastor how he could preach the gospel in the morning and sit at the fire in the afternoon. The pastor had answered that he had received the holy fire from his father, and what was received from the father could not be given up easily. That would be an act of disrespect. Moreover, the pastor had also experienced the power of the ancestors, for example,

⁷² At the holy fire they only talk to the fathers. The grandmother who died is also an ancestor, but they do not talk to her (Mrs. C. 1999:interview).

⁷³ An interviewee (Usurua 1999:interview) even mentioned 'love'. I think this is the opinion of an individual which is not shared by the community at large.

⁷⁴ And what if your father had a criminal record before he died. He is still your father, your ancestor and the bad things get easily forgotten (Usurua 1999:interview).

⁷⁵ 'Older' is not always older in age. It depends on one's place in the patrilineal structure. So a person younger in age may still be 'older' because of that position and the older person always comes first.

⁷⁶ We have already noted how Christianity has helped to wipe away fear of ancestors.

that time when a sick child was brought to the fire and the child was healed. Kamburona (1999c:interview), who commented on this issue, expressed the feeling of many Herero as follows, 'You cannot just do away with it, you have received it from your father. You may know Jesus Christ, but ...'. The message is clear. One may think that Christ and the ancestors cannot go together and thus a decision has to be made in favour of Christ. The fact, however, that the holy fire has been given by one's father is enough reason to shy away from this decision and to allow Christ and the ancestors to coexist next to each other. It is obvious from these examples that the ancestors are deeply rooted in the life of the Herero community.

Chapter 3.5.5 discusses Shorter's four basic categories of ancestors. Where do the Herero ancestors fit in? The ancestors do not only have a functional value in the sense that they are important for the social harmony and stability of the community (chapter 3.3.6). They are also needed to help individuals coping with problems and difficulties they are facing. 'When we have a problem we will talk to them (the ancestors, JB). They will tell Ndjambi about the problem and then Ndjambi will take that problem away' (in Undari 1999:interview). A fourth year university student (Mr. B. 1999:interview), when asked whether he would first go to the holy fire before writing exams, did not say yes, but neither did he deny it. When the discussion continued, however, he gave the impression that he will be going.

The living talk to the ancestors because they know them. Moreover, through their death the ancestors have moved into the other world, and they are now near to Ndjambi. Therefore, the ancestors are the most qualified people to take one's requests to him: the ancestors and not Jesus Christ. He was not always there like the ancestors. People only got to know about him when the missionaries arrived. Therefore, one cannot expect people to give priority to Jesus Christ at the expense of the ancestors. The general feeling about Christ and the ancestors is best expressed in this question, 'How can you love the one you do not know, and you do not love the one you know?'. .

As noted above, the Herero are quite aware of Ndjambi's presence. The blessings come from him. Sometimes people say the blessings are from the ancestors. However, also in those cases these are somehow linked to Ndjambi. This leads to the conclusion that the ancestors are intermediaries between Ndjambi and the living. The living need them because 'the great, great man (i.e. Ndjambi, JB) how can we reach him? It is not so good to speak to him. So the living send somebody they know, whom they have seen' (in Kamburona 1999c:interview).

As for Shorter's categories the Herero ancestors fit best, although not exclusively, in the

category of the ancestor-companion. It is because Ndjambi has a concern for the living and the ancestors are 'an expression of his favour towards the living' (chapter 3.3.5). This being the case, we may already want to conclude that the Herero ancestor praxis is not 'worship', but 'veneration'. We will elaborate on this in another paragraph.

4.3.3 Ancestors: religion or social-cultural?

How strong is the belief in the ancestors among the Herero? It is still very strong, though not to all. 'Personally the ancestors do not have much meaning to me' (Mrs. C. 1999:interview). However, under the condition that it will not harm her the interviewee participates in the holy fire. Her motive is that she does not want to be rejected by her family for refusing to participate. She wants to belong to her family because 'the family gives fellowship that the church (in her case the Roman Catholic Church) does not offer' (Mrs. C. 1999: interview). Not the religious experience but the social-cultural aspect of the unity of the family is the motive for the participation in the ancestors' veneration.

Pöllitzer (1978, particularly 162-200) is strong on the social-cultural aspect of the ancestors' veneration. When the missionaries described the ancestors' veneration they did it from the perspective that they were dealing with another religion. Accordingly, Christian terminology was used leading to the conclusion that the missionaries had come across a religion that was conflicting with their Christian faith. Pöllitzer, however, argues that we are dealing with two different entities, which cannot just be compared with each other. The one is religious, the other social-cultural, or as he calls it social-profane. Of course, because of the African holistic world view the religious cannot be separated from the social-cultural. Ancestors' veneration thus has religious elements. The emphasis, however, is on the social-cultural aspects. His argument is based on word research of which a few examples are given below (Pöllitzer 1999:interview; Pöllitzer 1978:173),

Christian terminology used by the missionaries.	Profane (secular) terminology used by the Herero according to Pöllitzer.
Holy fire	Fire ⁷⁷
Sacrifice	Slaughtering
Worship	Loud crying in order to be heard
Priest	The owner of the fire

As we are dealing with two different entities, one religious and the other social-cultural, and not with two opposing religions, inculturation is the logical next step. In his thesis he gives examples of how to incorporate some traditional rituals and ceremonies in the Roman Catholic Liturgy (1978:201-214 particularly for what we briefly have discussed here).

Kaputu (1999:interview), who suggested that I would call him the Ceremonial Chief Priest of the Holy Fire, strongly rejected Pöllitzer's approach. According to him 'everything is sacred', and thus the terminology is religious accordingly as shown in the table below.

Profane (secular) terminology used by the Herero according to Pöllitzer.	Religious terminology used by the Herero according to Kaputu (1999:interview)
Fire	Holy fire
Slaughtering	Sacrifice of the sacred cow
Loud crying in order to be heard	Worship
The owner of the fire	Priest Chief

According to Kaputu (1999:interview), Christianity and Herero belief are two different religions that relate to each other like, for example, Christianity and Islam. He then concludes that they should accept and respect each other, and they should not be mixed. For example, a pastor leading a funeral service should only preach the gospel and not also praise the cattle. According to Kaputu (1999:interview), it is very well possible not to mix Christianity and Herero belief is (as practised in the Oruano church), as 'we are both praying to the one and same God. That is why a Herero ancestor believer can allow his wife and children to go to church'. After all Maharero did the same when he allowed his son Samuel to stay away from the fire because he

⁷⁷ Very few people talk about the fire these days. Almost everybody refers to the holy fire.

was a Christian.

We agree with Pöllitzer that the ancestors' veneration has social cultural elements. We also agree with Kaputu that it has religious elements. Particularly the role of the family points to the social aspects. We have also noted the political dimension of the holy fire. In our view, however, the question whether the ancestors' veneration is religious or social-cultural is quite irrelevant as the holistic African world view denies such a contradistinction. Hastings remarks, 'You can analyse ancestors' veneration in almost entirely secular terms, and many good social scientists have done so, or you can analyse it in almost entirely religious terms. *But you certainly cannot separate it into two*' (in Wanamaker 1997:286, italics JB). In the perception of most traditional African world views no real distinction exists between religious experiences and social-cultural experiences. The religion embraces all areas of life from social existence to material production (cf. Mogoba and Thorpe in Wanamaker 1997:286).

Religion can be defined as 'the belief in God together with the practical results of such belief ... a particular view of the world and of the nature and destiny of man, and the way someone ought to live his daily life' (Howkins 1988:575). This is what ancestors' veneration is about: Ndjambi, who is God, the ancestors, who are near Ndjambi because of their status of living-dead, and near the living because they are their senior elders, and the living, who recognise Ndjambi and they expect blessings from him through the ancestors. Thus, we should conclude that the ancestors' veneration is a religious praxis. It has, however, also social dimensions.

4.3.4 Veneration or worship?

The issue of whether Africans 'worship' their ancestors or 'venerate' them is a complex one and has raised much discussion (Gehman 1999:47). Bediako (1995:218) points out that a possible reason for this 'is a failure to realise that African ancestors, strictly speaking, do not become after death what they were not before death'. In other words, death does not turn the living into gods.

Worship has two elements (Manson 1988:730-732). First, revelation through which God shows himself to man. This revelation has such a deep impact on man that the result is 'man's sense of awe in the presence of the magnificent, the frightening or miraculous' (Manson 1988:730). The second element is the response, through which this awestricken man responds to God. At the heart of worship thus is God himself and not human beings, even not the ancestors.

According to Carmichael, the essence of the ancestor cult is 'the belief that the deep personal communion between the parents and their families established on earth is not broken by death, but spans the chasm of death' (in Mosothoane 1973:92). Sacrifices offered to the ancestors are an expression of this belief. However, it does not mean that the living worship their ancestors (Mosothoane 1973:93). Mbiti (1990:59) states, 'When these acts (i.e. sacrifices, JB) are directed towards the living-dead, they are symbols of fellowship, a recognition that the departed are still members of their human families, and tokens of respect and remembrance for the living-dead'.⁷⁸

During the interviews the question was asked, 'Do you talk to, venerate, or worship your ancestors?'. All but one answered, 'We venerate them'. Also throughout the interviews the common term was 'talk to': one talks to the father and one does it respectfully. The ancestors being 'a person like us' (Mrs. C. 1999:interview) are venerated and not worshipped.

This confirms what Sundermeier (1973:145, translation JB) had already observed that 'God alone is worshipped, but one cries loudly to the ancestors. At the okuruuo one does not worship, but one only cries loudly'. 'Crying loudly' is the translation of the Herero word 'okuravaera'. This word is also used in daily life when one calls somebody to tell something very important. The word implies a direct and personal contact between the caller and the addressee. This word is used for the ancestors (Pöllitzer 1978:183).

If God alone is worshipped, where then and how is he worshipped? As said earlier, all ceremonies and rituals are directed to the ancestors. The only conclusion we can draw is that Ndjambi is worshipped in and through these ceremonies and rituals. Is the Herero believer, however, always aware of the difference between worship and veneration?

4.4 Oruano and the Herero religion

4.4.1 Two examples of parallelism

Sundermeier (1973:133-142) reports extensively on the 1967 Maharero day in Okahandja. At the grave sides of the Mahareros a Christian service took place. Psalm 90 was read, hymns from the Lutheran hymn book were sung, and prayers addressed to Christ to intercede for the people by God, his Father. From there the people moved to the grave of Kahimemua where Herero religion was practised. The priest, the owner of the holy fire, was the first to go the grave,

⁷⁸ As said earlier 'living-dead' is Mbiti's term for the ancestors.

before anybody else. He knelt down and asked the father for reconciliation so that the others could also approach the grave. 'Father Kahimemua, we have come from there and there ... Give us your blessings ...'. After Kahimemua had answered through the mouth of the priest, 'Iiii, I have heard' (Sundermeier 1973:137), the others also approached the grave.

This day is a clear example of how the Christian faith of Oruano and the Herero religion coexist next to each other in peace. Each has its own domain and no border crossing takes place.

I myself attended a funeral where I observed a similar situation as described by Sundermeier.⁷⁹ A Christian funeral service took place next to the house of the deceased. The gospel was preached, prayers offered and hymns sung. Simultaneously the sacred cow was slaughtered as a sin offer. This took place near the entrance of the kraal that was opposite the house of the deceased. It takes away the sin of the people of the kraal, and reconciles them with God and the ancestors so that they are prepared for the funeral ceremony.

A while after the service two church leaders went into the house to pray. Then the coffin was closed and carried outside. Halfway between the house and the kraal the coffin was put down on the ground in front of an old man, the chief priest.⁸⁰ He prayed to inform the ancestors that so and so was coming. Next he spat soil mixed with water over the coffin to purify the deceased so that she could join the community of the ancestors.

At the graveyard the same person functioned both as pastor and priest. As pastor he preached the gospel and as priest he praised the cattle. After the funeral the people returned to the village where the vast majority, if not all, participated in the cleansing ceremony of the splashing of water. 'You shed the darkness of dead off - then you can take up life' (Kaputu 1999:interview).

The Maharero day took place in Okahandja in 1967. The funeral near Opuwo, Kunene region, in 1999. Both cases show the two religions going together and people are at peace with this practice. At the funeral I did not notice any tension. All parties involved had room to do their own things. This person participated in the slaughtering of the sacred cow, while another person

⁷⁹ A full report on this funeral is attached as Appendix B. Explanation on the various rituals was collected during the interviews, particularly from Mr. B, Kaputu and Undari.

⁸⁰ I did not notice anything of a holy fire. The reason, I was told, is that the house opposite the kraal belongs to a woman (the woman who had passed away and whose funeral I attended), and women do not have a holy fire. But Undari (1999:interview) who is from that area insisted that there must have been a holy fire, or at least a circle of stones.

had joined the church service. There was no sign of integration of the two religions. Except the pastor who 'preached' and 'praised'. This seemed to have been an exception. Usually the pastor would do his part, the liturgy of the church, and then would hand over to a relative of the deceased for the praising or condolence message.

4.4.2 The official position of Oruuano on the ancestors

Finding out what the official position of Oruuano is, is not easy. How do they justify this situation of parallelism? How do they explain the same pastor participating in both Christianity and ancestors' veneration? The problem we are facing is that the church has not published any official document on this issue. No publication from the church is available. We will need to rely on information given by the leaders. Valuable information was collected particularly from the two interviews with Bishop A. C. Kamburona, the spiritual leader of Oruuano, and Mr. Willy V. Upi, the church's general secretary. Because of their leading role in the church we do consider their views, where they agree, as the official position of the church, until something more official is in place.

4.4.3 Double standards or a pastoral approach?

4.4.3.1 The context

Oruuano is a 'Holy Church' like any other, for example, the Lutheran Church (Upi 1999:- interview). It has the same doctrinal position as the Evangelical Lutheran Churches and most historical Protestant churches, as it emphasises that its 'foundation' is the 'Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments' and that its confessional stand is formulated in the ancient Christian creeds (Apostolicum, Niceanum and Athanasianum), supported by the confessions of the Reformation, in particular the Augsburg Confession, and the Smaller Catechism of Martin Luther. It uses only the standard Lutheran liturgical forms in all church services and continues to use only the Otjiherero Lutheran hymnal (Buys 1993:450; Oruuano Church Order par. 2 in Pöllitzer 1978:234). Evaluated on this confessional basis alone, Oruuano can be recognised by any historical church as a Protestant church. However, due to its apparent acceptance of ancestors' veneration the church has received much criticism. It was accused of syncretism because it would

have mixed Christianity and Heathenism (de Vries in Pöllitzer 1978:220). Others refuse to acknowledge the church as the Body of Christ. Said an interviewee (Mr. A. 1999:interview), 'it is a group of deep religious people'. Again others feel the church lives a life of double standards. 'In the church they do the things of the church, at home they do the things of the fire' (Usurua 1999:interview).

When discussing Oruano's stand towards the ancestors' veneration we need to consider the historical background. We did this in chapter 2 where we concluded that it was of necessity that the Herero would get a church of their own that would allow for the rebuilding of the Herero's own culture without restrictions (see chapter 2.5). In other words, inherent to the founding of Oruano is an attitude of tacit consent towards the veneration of ancestors. Thus, speaking against the holy fire would somehow mean rejecting the very reasons for its own existence.

We also need to remember the strong conviction among the Herero that both in the church and at the fire one prays to the same God. This conviction could grow stronger when the Herero Bible translation started to use Ndjambi as the name for the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ.

The reasoning of Oruano church members (not all!) and others is simple and straight forward. It can be summarized as follows (compiled from the interviews),

'Of old our Herero religion was determined by Ndjambi and the ancestors. In times of need one would approach Ndjambi through them. We have experienced how Ndjambi through the ancestors (or with the ancestors, this is not always clear) came to our aid in response to our requests. Then the missionaries came and introduced Christ, the Son of Ndjambi. 'So there is another one near Ndjambi, his Son ...' (in Kamburona 1999:interview). But at least the fathers we know and they know us. What about this Jesus?'⁸¹ Those who told us about him cheated us when they called us for a church meeting in the church of Ombakaha.⁸² We were told not to take our arms and kerries into the

⁸¹ Referring to the Akan people a similar view is expressed in John Pobee's (in Bediako 1990:12) question, 'Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and tradition?'

⁸² 'This notorious event is well known in the oral tradition of all sections of the Herero people' (Buys 1993:453). In his article Buys gives a detailed report of the event. An interviewee (Muniazio 1999:interview), referring to this event, said that the Herero perception is that they were cheated by the missionaries, which to them is a reason thus also to reject Jesus Christ.

church and we agreed. When the service began, the missionaries quickly took off and German soldiers, who had just arrived with machine guns opened fire on the people inside the church. Do you now expect us to accept something from those who have cheated us, even at the expense of our own fathers? Furthermore, 'if you have a problem you will take it to your father, not to a son!' (in Kamburona 1999a: interview).

The fathers have proven themselves. One can rely on them, but this Jesus is still new. Moreover, are we not all praying to Ndjambi, whether through Christ or the ancestors? So why should we replace our fathers with Jesus Christ? We do not deny Jesus Christ. Let us say that we now know of two ways leading to Ndjambi: in the Church through Christ, at the fire through the fathers. In the church we do as we learned (from the missionaries, JB), and at home we follow the tradition (in Undari 1999: interview)'.

Clearly, in the perception of many Herero, Jesus Christ, the corner stone of the Christian faith, is just another one who is near Ndjambi. It is also clear, as we had already concluded, that the discontinuity of the God of the Bible with Ndjambi culminates in Jesus Christ. He is the breaking point, the stumbling block. According to Wanamaker (1997:281), 'The difficulty comes in fitting Christ into the African world view since his roles as judge, mentor, and intermediary for Christians come into immediate conflict with the traditional functions of African ancestors.'

4.4.3.2 A pastoral approach

If we accept the views and opinions of the spiritual leader and the general secretary of Oruano as the official position of the church, we should conclude that Oruano is very clear on the role of Christ. This is shown in the following statements.

'Jesus died for my sin. He is first and then there is no room for the ancestors. When people get to know him, the ancestors will die. It may be a long process ... You cannot just do away with the holy fire, you have received it from your father' (Kamburona 1999: interview).

'I see Jesus Christ as my Lord. You must try to encourage, bring

others that have a weak faith, to know and accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. How? Not harsh, then you will lose them' (Kamburona 1999:interview).

'We need to do away with the ancestors because Jesus is the only way and that is what Oruuano is preaching' (Upi 1999:interview).

Question, 'Can Christ be the ancestor of the ancestors?' Answer, 'There is no need to have Christ between the ancestors and God. Christ alone is enough. That is what we preach in Oruuano. But it does not mean that you deny your fathers' (Upi 1999:interview).

For the church it is Christ and only Him who is the way to God. With Christ there is no need for the ancestors any longer. Christ also should not be put in the line of the ancestors as the ancestor of the ancestors. In Oruuano Christ has replaced the ancestors. This, however, does not mean that the ancestors are being rejected. They are still respected, but in a different (new) way. It is, however, unclear how this different (new) way looks like.

The reason for the continuing respect for the ancestors is that they are, in their capacity of senior family members, an integral part of the Herero culture and tradition. They are needed for a person to determine his or her identity as a Herero. 'You need to know your roots, who you are, where you are from ... that is why you need to know your father and your forefather' (Upi 1999:interview). As it was from its inception, the preservation of the Herero culture and tradition is still a high priority to Oruuano.

Although Oruuano confesses Christ as the only mediator between God and the living, they do not put under church discipline those church members who compromise Christ by talking to the fathers at the holy fire. On the one hand the church preaches that 'only the way of Jesus Christ as the Saviour is acceptable' (Kamburona 1999c:interview), while on the other hand the church allows its members to continue talking to the fathers at the holy fire. In fact, Oruuano is remarkably silent on the issue of the ancestors. At least four reasons should be mentioned.

a) The church has not yet gone into the question of what the consequences are for the role and the position of the ancestors now that Christ has replaced them. Some thoughts are developing as we have just noted, but they are still quite vague. Attempts are also made to deal

with the issue theologically. However, these attempts focus more on a pastoral attitude towards those who are still committed to their ancestors, rather than dealing with the ancestors as such. Bishop Kamburona (1999c:interview) referred to Rom. 14:1-4, 'Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ... Who are you to judge ...'. 'Let us tell the people your way is not acceptable to God, only the way of Jesus Christ is acceptable, but let's leave the judgment to God' (Kamburona 1999:interview).

b) Many church members do not experience a conflict between Christ and the ancestors, although they may acknowledge that combining the two is difficult. This simultaneous adherence to opposing ideas is puzzling. Pauw (1962:209), however, reminds us 'that traditional African systems of belief and ritual could function without forming completely integrated wholes at the intellectual level'. He also states that, 'the tendency to act alternately in terms of apparently conflicting sets of values - situational selection, as it is called - is a recurring feature among Africans involved in a 'plural society' (Pauw 1962:209).

c) Church leaders, though not all, believe that eventually the ancestor belief will die.⁸³ 'Should the church not put under church discipline those who practise ancestors' veneration?' To which the answer was given, 'No, because this ancestor belief is dying' (Upi 1999:interview). At the same time, however, the church acknowledges that it may take a long time. However, with young leaders coming up the ancestors' veneration will disappear. Therefore, the church does not consider it wise to touch on such a sensitive issue that very likely will cause tension among its members. There is definitely an element of fear that dealing with this issue will provoke unrest and eventually will lead to members leaving the church. Fear also exists that Oruano will lose its position as the 'Church for the Herero' (Volkskirche).⁸⁴

d) The vision to be a church for the entire Herero community is another reason for the church's silence on the issue of the ancestors. Here we can only but appreciate Oruano. Oruano wants to reach out to all people in the Herero community with a view to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and bring them under his Lordship. Oruano wants to be a church for the Herero. The

⁸³ In chapter 4.3.2 we have already concluded that the ancestors are deeply rooted in the Herero community. Therefore, I think this is a false hope. It could be very well that this is a case where holy fire and ancestor belief is confused. The number of families having a holy fire is indeed decreasing.

⁸⁴ Oruano is the result of, as we noted in chapter 2.5, the desire to have a national independent Herero Church under Herero leadership. According to Oruano's general secretary, the present membership is 20.000+ (exact data are not available). This makes Oruano the biggest church in the Herero community. We also should take note of the fact that Oruano is not limited to only one or so geographical location, but has congregations in almost all areas where Herero live.

church therefore is careful not to alienate itself from the community, even if it means adopting an attitude of tacit concern regarding the ancestors.

Meanwhile the attitude of tacit concern has led to an approach, which is expressed in this statement, 'In the church we preach a clear gospel, showing Christ, but the people need to take their own decision' (Upi 1999:interview). According to the general secretary Mr. Upi (1999:interview), the church aims at creating awareness among the people. However, it is up to them how to respond. Some will follow the Bible message, but others may ignore it and continue with the ancestors' veneration. 'But somehow, some day ... they will know it' (Upi 1999:interview). The question though can be asked whether the church, despite its good intentions, does not compromise the gospel with this approach of tacit concern?

Double standards or pastoral approach? In my view Oruano deals in a pastoral way with the holy fire. For the sake of reaching out to their fellow Herero they do not want to be harsh, because they know that such an approach will close doors. 'Once the church starts speaking against the fire, the people will leave' (Kaputu 1999:interview). As noted above, there is also an element of fear. The question can be asked whether the pastoral approach the best is Oruano has to offer. Can the church afford to keep silent (or almost silent) on the issue of the ancestors' veneration? For the sake of the gospel members need clarity. The young people need guidance. The wider ecumenical body that Oruano has joined, asks for an explanation. Time has come for Oruano to deal with the holy fire theologically and come up with a point of view that reflects the supremacy of Christ, while also making room for the fathers. Oruano is facing challenges that it needs to address.

4.5 Challenges to Oruano

Oruano is facing challenges in three different yet closely related fields. These are,

a) Theological reflection on the role and position of the ancestors from the perspective of the supremacy of Christ. I suggest that this reflection starts with God who has revealed himself in history to the people of Israel as the 'I AM WHO I AM' (Ex. 3:14).

b) Integration of Herero traditional practices and spirituality with the Christian worship and practice of Oruano.

c) Adaptation of the Sunday worship service. The integration (b) will require changes in the liturgy of Oruuano. We can think of hymns, prayers, music, music instruments, special services and liturgies to be used for rites of passage. This all should be 'in keeping with the African (Herero, JB) psychology and concepts, and which meet the aspirations and touch the soul of the African (Herero, JB)' (Kudadjie 1997:6). Water, for example, important in cleansing rituals, could be used in the church as an expression of ablution or absolution and God's blessing.

As b) and c) go beyond the scope of this dissertation I have limited myself to only one short section for both in chapter 4.5.5.

In summary, we can say that the challenge to Oruuano is not to become a Christian church, because that is what the church already is. The challenge is to become a Christian Herero Church.

4.5.1 Speak out on the ancestors

We have noted that Oruuano is very careful on the issue of the ancestors. The church chooses to remain silent rather than to speak about them, and certainly not against them. In fact the church has adopted an attitude of tacit consent and it has reasons for this: the desire to make Christ known in the Herero community on the one hand, and fear on the other hand. We have also noted in chapter 4.4.3.1 that dealing with the issue of the ancestors would be difficult for Oruuano as it means 'rejecting the very reasons for its own existence'.

Is Oruuano's position of tacit concern tenably? Are the church members really helped by this approach? In the end will this approach not turn against the church? There are at least two reasons why the church cannot keep silent on the ancestors, but should deal with them.

First, a serious warning was given by Kaputu.⁸⁵ According to Kaputu (1999:interview), Oruuano is in a process of 'Christianizing'. Older pastors and evangelists function both as pastor of Oruuano and as priest of the Herero religion. With the younger generation coming up this will disappear. The young generation will only be pastors. 'Then Oruuano is going to be a real evangelical church' (Kaputu 1999:interview). However, ancestors' veneration will also continue. As a result Oruuano will lose its position as the 'Church for the Herero' as people will turn away from the church.

Second, it is questionable whether the ancestors are dying out. People definitely do not

⁸⁵ We do consider Kaputu to be a representative of the Herero religion.

agree as is obvious from remarks made during the interviews. They even hold contradicting views with some saying they are dying out and others denying. Fact is that the number of holy fires is decreasing (Upi 1999:interview). The question, however, is whether this is also true for the ancestors. Evidence from the wider Southern African region shows that this is not so.

During the first half of this century it was commonly believed that the ancestor cult would disappear due to the following reasons,

a) Process of urbanization.

b) Realization that city and town people who could not exercise the necessary rituals related to the ancestor cult, were not punished by the ancestors.

c) Replacement of the 'primal' world view by a scientific world view that leaves no room for the myths and beliefs upon which the ancestor cult is based.

d) Breakdown of the lineage system including the disruption of the traditional patterns of authority (cf. Hunter and Staples in Wanamaker 1997:285).

Various publications, however, point out that the anticipated end of the ancestors has not happened. 'Beliefs and practices associated with the ancestors have proved far more resilient but also far more adaptable than had initially been thought' (Wanamaker 1997:285; see also Mosothoane 1973:86; Paauw 1962:10). Further, according to Pauw (1962:10), 'traditional ancestor beliefs may take on new significance as political leaders see in them a symbol of 'Africanness'. As noted, this is already the case among the Herero regarding the holy fire.

4.5.2 Start with the concept of God

In chapter 4.2.3. we discussed the idea of continuity and discontinuity in connection with the relationship between the God of the Bible and Ndjambi. This is also relevant for the discussion on the role and position of the ancestors, because how people perceive them depends on how they perceive God. Ancestors, for example, are prominent where God is far away and inaccessible (Bosch 1974:44; also chapter 3.5). Ancestors therefore should not be discussed as an independent and non related issue, but within the framework of the concept of God.

It is here suggested that Oruano study the God of the Bible. This study should lead to an evaluation of the ancestors based on new insights gained. The study should focus at God as the God of Revelation, by which the heart of revelation can be described as 'God's self-offering for *fellowship*' (Oepke 1977:573; italics JB). Other aspects to be considered: the God of the Bible

has revealed himself in the Old Testament as the Creator and Sustainer of the world. He is not the faraway, uninvolved God as Jacob says, 'Two closely connected themes have come to our notice more forcibly than others, the themes of the *presence* and the *action* of God' (in Van Rooy 1994:267). He is a personal God, with a personal, moral will - a God who loves his people (Deut. 7:8), feels compassion for them (Ex. 3:7), can be grieved by their conduct (Is. 63:10), and hates his enemies (Mal. 1:3). He concludes a covenant of grace with his people with the purpose of having fellowship with them, as a Person to persons. He is faithful to his covenant as expressed in his name 'I AM WHO I AM' (Ex. 3:14). He also judges where his love and commitment towards people are ignored or even rejected by them. (Van Rooy 1994:261-274). This God has become man among us in his Son Jesus Christ, who says of himself, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me' (John 14:6).

4.5.3 Confront the ancestors with Christ

Oruano church members disagree on the relationship between Christ and the ancestors. We can distinguish four different views.

a) Christ and the ancestors are both intermediaries between the living and God or Ndjambi. Each has its own domain and is restricted to that. Christ belongs to Oruano and the ancestors to the holy fire. In the church one would never pray through the ancestors, and at the holy fire not through Christ.⁸⁶ Further Christ is a 'newcomer', while the ancestors have a long established tradition. They can even be traced back to the founder of the Herero community, Mukuru.

b) Christ and the ancestors are both present, but Christ goes beyond the ancestors. He is more than the ancestors. He is Lord and He is Saviour and the only way to God. However, there is also room for the ancestors, not in the church but outside. How much room and what the position of the ancestors is, is not clear. Some of those who are holding this view do it for pastoral reasons. As far as themselves concern, they have a good understanding of the essence of the gospel. They, though, allow the ancestors' veneration as they do not want to lose those church members for whom the ancestors are still important for their religious life.

c) Christ alone, without any room for the ancestors. This view does not mean rejection of

⁸⁶ It seems that some pastors have Christianized the concept of the ancestors and apply it to church services when they pray, 'God of Abraham, God of Jacob, you see we are suffering, please help us' (Undari 1999:interview).

all traditional practices, but one would make sure not to participate in rituals and ceremonies that are somehow linked with the ancestors. I have not come across this view in Oruano, but it is held by members of, for example, Evangelical Bible Church.

d) Uncertainty about Christ and the ancestors. One cannot really call this a view, but I mention it here because it shows another position. Some Oruano church members are confused. They want to give up the holy fire for the sake of the gospel but then they experience sickness and bad luck. This, they interpret as the fathers having turned against them. Next, they are back at the holy fire. Several church members experience this confusion, though they are still an exception (Muniazo 1999:interview).

Oruano's position, as we have already concluded in chapter 4.4.3.2, is the view expressed in b): Christ first and room for the ancestors as well, though not in the church but outside. The church is clear on the position of Christ. The problem, however, is that the church is not clear on the position of the ancestors. When Christ is preached, the church prefers to keep Christ and the ancestors strictly separated than relating Christ to the ancestors. The issue of how Christ has changed the position of the ancestors has never been dealt with, thus leaving a vacuum among the church members.

A basic principle of a contextual theology is that it must take as its point of departure where the people are, which is here the ancestor belief. The question why people should give up this ancestor belief for the sake of the gospel must be answered. Why is Christ of more value than the ancestors? What can He do that they cannot do? Jesus Christ must be made relevant, which can only be done by confronting the ancestors with him. If this is not done, the gospel will not be of much meaning to church members. Christ will be in their head, but the ancestors in their heart!

As an illustration may serve Boer's experience in a mission hospital in Nigeria (1993:2). The preaching by the missionaries emphasizing the Lordship of Christ over this life, but failing to relate it to the world of spirits, powers and ancestors, resulted in a distorted perception of Christ in the understanding of Nigerian Christians. They had learned that Jesus can heal certain physical symptoms. However, once it came to find the real cause of the sickness, they felt that Jesus was powerless. Thus, they turned to the traditional healers for help. The consequence was that they experienced Jesus as 'a rather weak and limited Saviour' (Boer 1993:2).

How do we relate Christ and the ancestors? I suggest that this can be done by looking at the continuity and discontinuity between them. The question we ask is what the specific roles are that the ancestors play among the living? And which of those roles are taken over by Christ?

First, however, the issue to be dealt with is whether Christ was a 'newcomer'? To which we must answer that He was not. When the God of the Bible revealed himself to the Herero in and through Ndjambi, it was the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We would be wrong to assume that the missionaries brought Jesus to the Herero. He was already there. They were just instruments to uncover him so that people would know him.⁸⁷

Turning then to the specific roles of the ancestors, Wanamaker (1997:287-295) mentions three areas.

a) Ancestors as guardians of the social and moral order. It means that the ancestors require 'an unquestioning respect for tribal law and custom' (Eiselen and Schapera in Wanamaker 1997:288). When the living fail in this regard the ancestors will deal with this misbehaviour and bring judgment over the living.

Judgment is also known from Jesus. Paul, for example, was blinded by Jesus when on the way to Damascus to persecute the Christian community. The experience had a healing effect on him as it changed his whole behaviour for good. This is what the ancestors also seek to do by their punishment.

b) The ancestors as the givers and sustainers of life. The ancestors are respected and honoured as the source of life of the lineage group. They are also looked to for the sustenance of life among the living. Blessings received from them include, 'offspring ... fertility in both field and livestock, rain, good health, protection from physical and mystical danger, and the curing of illness' (Staples in Wanamaker 1997:298).

Jesus also is a source of blessing. He does this task continuously for his living family, the church. John tells of Jesus, 'In him was life, and that life was the light of men' (John 1:4). Thus, Jesus is the source of all life for all peoples of the world. However, He has a special role towards the family of God that Christians form, 'I have come that they (the family of God) may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10). He also sustains life as is clear from, for example, John 14:19b, 'Because I live, you will also live', and from John 14:13, 'And I will do whatever you ask in my name ...'.

In the Book of Acts we see the practical implications of Jesus life-giving and life-

⁸⁷ See also the Prologue of John's Gospel, John 1:1-8; also Col. 1:15-20.

sustaining activities (3:1-10; 8:4-9; 12:6-19; 18:9-10, and others).

c) The ancestors as mediators. The ancestors are the mediators between the living and God. They can do so because, 'They have experienced death. They are no longer in this world and have been elevated to a new status. They have a particular power to pray to God and be heard. They are closer to God than those who are living, [sic] therefore they become our intermediaries. There is a relationship between God and those who are dead and from him they derive the power of doing good' (Nxumalo 1981:67).

The Christian faith centres on the person and work of Christ as mediator. The New Testament presents his mediatorship directly and indirectly. He is directly declared to be 'the one mediator between God and men' (1 Tim. 2:5), and 'the mediator of a new and better covenant' (Heb. 9:15). He is indirectly portrayed as the unique intermediary who fulfills a priestly ministry of reconciliation of sinful man to God by sacrifice, perpetual intercession and heavenly blessing (Col. 1:16-20; 2 Cor. 5:9; Heb. 2:17; 7:25; 9:14) (Hancock 1988:418).

Christ's mediatorship, however, is unique. It goes beyond that of the ancestors because Christ goes beyond the ancestors. Christ and the ancestors do not belong to the same league. While the ancestors are considered spiritual beings, they are nevertheless deceased human beings. Christ on the other hand is not only a human being, He is God as well. 'The difference between the two is incomparably profound' (Tlhagale 1996:12). Both his divine and human nature ensure that Jesus Christ is able truly to reconcile God with human beings. Being God-man 'Jesus bridges the gulf between the Holy God and human beings and so achieves for humanity the harmonious fellowship with God' (Bediako 1990:36-37). He is the better mediator, the mediator par excellence. He has superseded the ancestors. With Christ the old order has gone, the new one has come (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). In the end the ancestors are not the ultimate solution for the African communities.

4.5.4 Make room for the ancestors

After the realization that the ancestors are still significant for many African believers, we can now observe a move towards the appreciation of the ancestors. Attempts are made to integrate the ancestors into the Christian faith.⁸⁸ Particularly Roman Catholics for this purpose use the

⁸⁸ 'The debate on the role of ancestor veneration in the Christian church is heating up everywhere' (Numberger 1995:11).

concept of the *Communio Sanctorum*. This appreciation is the result of having become aware that 'to take the ancestors from an African is robbing him of his personality' (Setiloane in Bediako 1995:216).⁸⁹ In chapter 4.3.2 we have concluded that the ancestors are also deeply rooted in the life of the Herero community.

The basic question, however, is whether the ancestors can still be considered as bringing judgement over the living, as givers and sustainers of life, as mediators now that Christ is being preached among the Herero? To this I would say no, because Christ has taken over all the functions of the ancestors. The ancestors have served the people. The latter have experienced their care and protection, but things have changed. Wherever Christ appears as the final revelation of God, the old order loses its validity. A new order replaces it. The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to that of the ancestors, as is the new order of which He is a mediator is superior to the old one (cf Heb. 8:6). Jesus himself is the guarantee of this new and better order (Heb. 7:22) because of his death and resurrection.

The new order of Christ does not mean that the ancestors are to be rejected. When the author of Hebrews 12 (vs. 1-3) talks about the great cloud of witnesses that surround us, he reminds his readers of an athletic stadium. The living are running, and the living-dead are sitting in the stands. Their presence does make a difference. One performs better in a stadium filled with supporting people than in an empty stadium. The message of the text is not to say that all the ancestors are now sitting in the stands. The 'witnesses' in Heb. 12:1 refer to those who 'were all commended for their faith' (Heb. 11:39), for their trust in and commitment to God. The point is that the presence of ancestors has an impact on the life of the lineage members (cf. Grosheide 1955:283). They are valuable resources that the living can draw from to help them to accomplish their journey through life. The question is how shape can be given to this impact through ceremonies and rituals. Meanwhile the author calls upon the living not to be directed by the ancestors, but by Jesus as he says, 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus' (Heb. 12:3).

The challenge to Oruano is to help people looking at the ancestors from the perspective of the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. Under his Lordship they will receive the position they deserve. True, this position is less prominent than the position they used to have. Nevertheless, they can still be important to the community as inspiring examples. An African

⁸⁹ An interviewee would not agree. He clearly stated that 'I do not need the ancestors to be a Herero' (Mr. A. 1999:interview). When pleading for the integration of the ancestors into the Christian faith, we need to be careful not to make it a norm for true African Christianity.

proverb says, 'the past has something to say, the past has something to teach' (in Oduyoye 1998:8). Was that not also a reason for Israel to build signs to remind the present of the past and to learn from it? This way, 'the exemplary way they (the ancestors, JB) lived can be used to help others grow and realize the ideal life' (Dzobo 1985:336). The ancestors can even continue to be guardians of the social and moral order in the sense that one does certain things and refrain from others out of respect for the father. This way the ancestors contribute 'to achieve peace and harmony between God and human beings ... and among the people in the society' (Dzobo 1985:336).

4.5.5 Integrate Herero traditional practices and spirituality

How can the church through ceremonies and rituals acknowledge the presence of the ancestors as discussed above? According to Pauw (1962:8), the church can do this through,

a) Undoing the ancestors' veneration of its 'unchristian' aspects, and retain, for example, forms of commemoration of the dead which are not deemed incompatible with Scripture.

b) Developing of substitute rituals, retaining certain traditional forms, but filling them with a new, Christian content and meaning. In my view this approach holds out possibilities. Kudadjie's (1997:1-23) renewal of the 'Outdooring and Naming Ceremony of a Baby' is an illustration of this approach. He mentions the following helpful principles and guidelines,

a) The apostles established the principle that people need not reject every aspect of their culture to become Christian (see Acts 15:23-39).

b) Christian's are not to be restricted unnecessarily with '*do's*' and *don'ts*'. However, freedom is to be exercised responsibly (Rom. 14:13-23); 1 Cor. 10:23-30; Col. 2:16-23).

c) Whatever is done should glorify God and be helpful to others (1 Cor. 10:31-33; Col. 3:17).

d) It is important to be alert and not compromise on certain crucial issues of the Christian faith: one cannot worship both Christ and demons (cf. Ex. 20:1-7; 1 Cor. 10:1-22; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Col. 2:11-3:4).

e) Identify and sift the essence from the incidental in the traditional custom or practice. Test them,

i) By the standard of the primitive creed: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour and Lord. If any practice compromises the saviourhood and lordship of Christ, then it

is not acceptable. If it does not contradict these doctrines, then it is acceptable.

ii) Whether a practice is compatible with biblical revelation and teaching: if it goes counter to explicit biblical teaching/injunction, then it is not acceptable. If it does not, it may be integrated.

f) Retain what does not conflict with biblical teaching. In this regard, practices that have no (overt) religious connotations - especially those that highlight typically African values and presuppositions - should be retained.

g) Replace, adapt or transform what conflicts with biblical teaching. Traditional practices, which have deep philosophical or religious significance but conflict with biblical teaching, should be adapted or transformed and integrated.

h) A practice may be modernized and innovations made, provided these do not undermine the traditional essences or Christian belief and practice.

i) Ensure that any imported practice is meaningful and not repugnant in the receptor culture. As far as possible remove, or at least reduce to the barest minimum, any incompatibilities.

To which I would like to add,

j) Any replacement, adaptation or transformation can only be done by the community itself. It is a process from below. 'For when people do not develop step by step from their point of departure by a series of choices but jump over into an apparently Christian new pattern without growth by decision then, sooner or later, old pagan patterns reassert themselves' (Taylor and Lehman in Pauw 1962:9).

4.5.6 The need for study

As mentioned earlier, time has come for Oruano to deal with the ancestors theologically. The difficulty, however, is that at this stage the church does not have members who are sufficiently trained to assist in doing theology. It is a bit sad that some younger Herero theologians are not in Oruano. They are much needed there.

For the time being Oruano will need assistance from outside, first from other Namibian churches. This assistance should not be seen as a missionary outreach, but as an expression of the one body of Christ where the members take responsibility for one another. Does God's preferential option for the poor *mutatis mutandis* not apply to Oruano? Rather than criticising,

the mainline churches in particular, have the responsibility to assist Oruuano and many other small churches as well, with the theological training of the leadership.

Meanwhile, Bishop Kamburona has introduced a Theological by Education by Extension (TEE) programme to his church, which is quite well received. Approximately sixty church leaders are involved. A further step forward would be to make the TEE programme compulsory for all pastors and evangelists.

It is also suggested here that Oruuano identify qualified persons from among its membership who can be sent for full-time theological training. The church should try to raise the necessary funds. Some donor organisations might also be interested to share in the expenses.

To take on the challenge of the ancestors is not going to be an easy task for Oruuano. It is a sensitive issue. As the ancestors are still very much alive in the Herero community, many do not want the church to challenge them on this issue. They prefer that the church remain silent.

Opposition should also be expected from the family heads who intermediate between the living and the ancestors. A change in the position of the ancestors will affect their position as well. For the Spirit of God, however, no barrier is too big that it cannot be taken.

APPENDICES

A. A questionnaire used for the interviews (Working document).

Objective: *to find out what role the ancestors do play in the life of the Herero community.*

Is it a cultural praxis (here I suggest the **emphasis** be on the ancestor as **family member**), religious practise or is it both? Does it compromise the gospel? Or can it exist next to the gospel? If it is a religious praxis there is definitely a conflict with Scripture and thus a solution must be found. If it is cultural than there is no problem with the present praxis. What, however, is then the meaning of the ancestors' veneration? From our study in chapter 3 the ancestors' veneration obviously has religious meaning. For many Africans their religious experience does not go beyond the ancestors!

I suspect that there is a conflict in Oruano, but people do not want to acknowledge it.

An important indicator is people's experience of the ancestors, *'I do not need to spend a whole day at the holy fire, but if I could just be there for a few minutes ...'*, (a statement made by a church leader).

The Herero community is a diverse community. The different villages are quite independent units. We need to distinguish between rural and city people. The city people can be divided in: members of EBC (Evangelical Bible Church), members of Oruano, and 'secularized' Herero. I also would need to interview Oruano church leaders. All along we need to take into account the age of those to be interviewed and their level of education.

Questions that can be asked,

1. Personal Information

- a. Home area?
- b. How long in Windhoek?
- c. Schooling where? Level of education?
- d. Present employment?
- e. Church: if not Oruano, were they a member before?

f. Level of Church involvement?

2. Concept of God

- a. Is Ndjambi the same God as the God of the Bible?
- b. What is the relationship between the ancestors and Ndjambi? (In ATR God is the faraway God who is to be feared, 'vreze des Heren'. So, the ancestors are needed as intermediates).
- c. Other names for God? Meaning?
- d. How do you experience him? Who is he to you? Describe your relationship with him?

3. Meaning and Practice of Ancestors' Veneration

- a. Who is an ancestor? What are the criteria? What does it mean to you that your ancestor is your relative (a senior family member)? Should I talk about your ancestor (**singular**) or ancestors (**plural**)?
- b. Do you **talk**, **venerate**, or **worship** your ancestors?
- c. Why do you do this? What do you expect from your ancestor? For the city: with hospitals and other 'security' facilities so nearby, is there still a need for the ancestors?
- d. What do the ancestors expect from you?
- e. How would you describe your relationship with your ancestors: fear, selfishness, piety?
- f. What are the practices that you exercise in connection with your ancestors? How and where? Can you recite a prayer? How do you practice the ancestors' veneration while living in the city?

4. The position of Jesus Christ

- a. The position of Jesus Christ in relation to the ancestors (He is the Son, and one does not call upon a son for help when having problems, one calls upon his father).
- b. What does it mean to you that Jesus is **Saviour**? **Lord**? **Son**?
- c. How do you explain John 14:6 - 'I am the way ... No one comes to the Father except through me'. Where do the ancestors fit in?

5. Oruano and the Ancestors

- a. What do you think of Oruano's position of 'tacit consent'?
- b. Would it be possible for Oruano to acknowledge the ancestors' veneration? Can it be part of the worship in the church?
- c. What should be adjusted or changed for this to be possible?

6. Ceremonies and rituals (a funeral report)

- a. Strangling the cows?
- b. Coffin in front of the old man who spits on it.
- c. Cow head: smearing with dung; burying it with the body
- d. Throwing leaves of the graves
- e. Burying people facing north, east or both?
- f. Traditional preaching: praising the cattle
- g. Why not entering the house of the deceased after the funeral?
- h. Splashing of water, and receiving fat: cleansing ceremony
- i. Ceremony of 'bringing back home' - known in Herero community?
- j. The role of donations: your name is mentioned and what you have donated.

B. An example of Parallelism: Report on a Herero funeral

On Saturday 13 March 1999 I travelled with Bishop Kamburona from Opuwo in the Kunene region to Oshakati. On our way we attended a funeral on which I report below. Comments were collected from the interviews.

A small village, just outside Opuwo on the way to Windhoek. Small, poor huts are spread all over a rocky area. Many people have already arrived when we arrive at 8.00 am. Several tents have been put up all over the place. They belong to guests who arrived on Friday or even earlier. It just looks like a camping site.

There are two kraals, showing that two families are living in the village. One kraal belongs to the brother, the other to the sister. The kraals are located in the middle with the huts/houses around it. Around the one kraal are about 10 small houses/huts. That kraal has still cattle. Around the other kraal are only few houses/huts. This one has no cattle. This one is opposite the house of the sister who has passed away. It is because of her funeral that we are here. Her house is approximately 10 m². There is no holy fire between her house and the kraal, because only men can have the holy fire and not women.

Small groups of people are sitting under the few trees, men and women separated. The men are sitting on chairs, stools, etc., but the women are all sitting on the ground. A bigger group of about 60 people is meeting outside the house of the deceased. It is a church service, which is led by a participant in our TEE programme. About forty women are sitting on one side and twenty men on the other side. Hymns are sung and a message is given. The message is about Peter who realizes that the gospel is not only for the Jews but for the gentiles as well. God is for everybody. The message has a strong evangelistic character.

During the service some men, who are not attending the service, bring a cow from the brother's kraal and slaughter it at the entrance of the kraal opposite the sister's house. The cow is killed by strangling it. It is forced to lie down. A wooden beam is put on its neck, with one or two men sitting on each side of the beam, till the cow has suffocated. The skin is removed, and the meat put on a heap of fresh branches that still have green leaves. This is for hygienic reasons so that the meat does not get dirty because of laying on the ground. Fire is made under the big cooking pots for the meat to be cooked. Fire wood is delivered by a few pick ups. A second and a third cow are slaughtered. The remaining cows are then released for grazing. The work is all

done by the men, and the women are not at all involved. They are just sitting near the hut of the deceased.

The strangling of cows with a beam is a later development. Originally a man would take the cow at the horns and put his knee on the throat till the cow had suffocated. The reason for strangling is that no blood should flow. Because the spirit is in the blood and if the blood flows, the spirit will disappear and the ritual will lose its meaning.

The cow is the sacred cow that was already selected by the deceased during her life to be slaughtered at the funeral. Being the sacred cow, it was well cared for. The sacred beast serves to take away the sin of the people, to reconcile them with God and the ancestors and so to prepare them for the funeral. The other two cows also served the purpose of reconciliation.

Note that one interviewee talked about the 'sacred' cow, and another about the 'beloved' cow. It is not clear to me whether this was done purposely.

When one walks around one observes a service taking place, cows being slaughtered, and those, who are not participating in either one, are just socialising. It is a relaxed atmosphere where everybody is fulfilling his or her duties and responsibilities in peace. Otherwise, it is a minority of the guests that attend the church service.

During the morning more guests arrive. The women go into the house of the deceased where her body lies in state. The body is laying in an open coffin. The body had only been brought from Opuwo on Friday evening, where it was kept in a cool room. The wailing of the women in the house is intensive and loud. Two church leaders also enter the house for prayer. Shortly afterwards the women come out. Then other men go in to close the coffin. They use nails and as a hammer they use a piece of rock that they have just picked up from outside the house.

Meanwhile, two other men have taken the head of the first cow slaughtered to the side. They clean it by removing all the soft parts, eyes, etc. An older man carries his chair to the place and sits there, watching the work. When the head is clean, it is returned to the place where the cow was slaughtered. One of the men then smears the whole cow's head with fresh dung from this slaughtered cow that is just lying there.

This practice has no religious meaning. The head is to be used as tombstone. The dung is just a protection layer to keep away flies and other insects from the head that is still very fresh.

Meanwhile, the coffin is carried out of the house. It is put down in front of an elderly man who is squatting on the ground. He spits out water mixed with soil over the coffin.

The old man is a chief priest (owner of a holy fire). He takes some soil on his tongue, mixes it with water and then spits it out over the coffin. He also talks to the ancestors.

The purpose is to inform the ancestors that so and so is coming, 'you take the woman to the graveyard, you cannot do that unannounced. You must inform them'. Another purpose is to purify the deceased so that this person can now join the community of the ancestors.

Then the coffin is carried to the bakkie that will take it to the grave yard. The relatives walk from the house of the deceased to the kraal and then turn to the bakkie. The head of the cow is also loaded on the bakkie.

The graveyard is a few km. away. There are about 25 graves, all facing the same direction. The guests again gather in small groups in the shade of the trees. Some men take green leaves, walk along the graves and throw few of them on each grave.

The Herero belief they are all coming from two people (Mukuru and his wife Kamungarunga, JB). Thus, they are all related to one another, except the new people, for example., those who are from mixed marriages. Being relatives, one greets one another, not only the living but the ancestors as well. The purpose thus of throwing the green leaves is greeting the ancestors, telling that one still remembers them. The men who throw the leaves do have a holy fire in their place.

One interviewee insisted that not one grave should be missed out. Otherwise 'that one will ask 'why'? Why are you not honouring me?' Another interviewee was less strict. I observed that at this place all graves were honoured.

The grave is already dug when we arrive. Some strong branches are pulled from the trees and used to lower the coffin into the grave. The preacher first delivers a traditional message, praising the cattle. He then preaches the gospel: 'if you do not obey God you will be cursed, you will have no rain, your cattle will be sick, you will not be able to bury your relatives'. To me it was not really a message of hope, but it certainly was contextual. Throughout the ceremony many Christian hymns are sung.

In fact this praising is addressed to the ancestors rather than the cattle. 'This (the deceased, JB) is the son/daughter of ... who is ...'. The speaker refers to both the patrilineal and matrilineal line and reminds the guests how the ancestors took care of the deceased during her life. This is done through praise songs. At the same time this praising is also to teach the young generation.

It is not usual that both the preaching and praising are done by the pastor. The pastor would only do the liturgy of the church, and then hand over to one of the relatives of the deceased to do the praises. The fact that the pastor also did the praises means that he is an owner of a holy fire, thus the two functions of both pastor and priest are combined in one person.

The grave is filled with sand. When almost done the cow's head is also buried.

'This is how to rape culture and tradition' (Kaputu 1999: interview). People here are confused of how things are to be done. The cow's head should not be buried, but used as a tombstone.

Meanwhile other men have gone out with a bakkie to collect big stones that are put on top of the grave. Ten men are working together to finish the grave by putting the stones on top. A big stone serves as tombstone. With a sharp knife a man carves in it the name of the woman. Meanwhile, the singing continues. They are particularly women, but also a few men have joined in the singing.

Most men do not participate in this Christian part of the funeral. I estimate that about 90% stay at a distance from the service that takes place at the grave.

After the funeral we all return to the village. I hear that nobody is allowed to go into the house of the deceased, yet I see women entering.

Before the guests start eating the meat, a cleansing ceremony takes place. The owner of the holy fire gives water to everyone present, who takes it in his/her mouth and spit it out. Also, a bit of water is splashed over this person.

Coming back from the graveyard one has to purify him/herself. 'You shed the darkness of dead off and can take up life again'. If one does not do it, bad luck may occur to that person. Also the bakkie that carried the body must be purified before it is being used to take people home.

After the funeral the relatives stay behind for a few days, and when they go home they receive fat on their hands and face, another cleansing ceremony showing that nothing is between

them and the deceased.

We arrived at 8.00 o'clock in the morning and left around 1.30 in the afternoon. People take time to bury their dead. A funeral is also a social event where people have time to interact with one another.

After having observed and experienced this funeral, I realised that the holy fire is part of the entire community's life. Therefore, it should not be discussed in isolation. There is the risk of overemphasizing the holy fire by outsiders, because they are not aware of all other rituals and ceremonies. For the local community, however, the holy fire is such an obvious religious tradition, that one just does it. Why, is not always an issue.

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LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED

The interviews done before 9 June 1999 were not recorded, but notes were taken either during or after the interview. All interviews after 9 June 1999 were recorded. After the interview the tape was listened to and written notes were prepared. These notes are available as resource material. For privacy reasons the names of some interviewees have been omitted. They are referred to as MR. A., B., etc. The names though are available from me under specific conditions, with approval. The interviewees are from the three different Herero groups: the Zeraua, Maharero and Mbanderu.

MR. A. Church leader in the Evangelical Bible Church, Windhoek. Holder of a M-degree .	Windhoek	8 June, 1999
MR. B. 4 th year student at UNAM.	Windhoek	8 June, 1999
MRS. C. She works with the Ministry of Health, Training section. I interviewed her to find out whether women do have a different view than men on the male dominated ancestor veneration. Member of the Roman Catholic Church. She considers to move over to Oruuano.	Windhoek	27 July, 1999
KAAUOVA, W. Rev. Part time pastor of the Evangelical Bible Church. Former lecture at NETS. At present working on a DTh on marriage in the African culture.	Windhoek	7 June, 1999
KAMBURONA, A. C. Bishop of Oruuano.	Windhoek	25 August, 1998; 11 February, 1999a; 13 June, 1999b; 21 July, 1999c
KAPUTU, A. Mr. Representative of the Herero religion. Ceremonial Chief Priest of the Holy Fire. Works with the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in the Herero section.	Windhoek	29 July, 1999

MUNIAZO, E. Mr. Student at NETS. Member of the Unit- ing Reformed Church in Namibia (URCN). Until recently Field Coordinator for the TEE Programme with Oruuano church leaders.	Windhoek	15 July, 1999
PÖLLITZER, Ph. Dr. The only not Herero interviewed. Author of a thesis on Oruuano.	Windhoek	22 July, 1999
TJIUMA, A. Mr. Teacher of profession. Active member of Oruuano in Opuwo, Kunene Region. Field Coordinator of the NETS TEE programme with Oruuano and other church leaders in the Kunene region.	Opuwo	12 March, 1999
UNDARI, J. Mr. Evangelist in the Oruuano church of Windhoek. Originates from around Opuwo in the Kunene region. Active student in the NETS TEE Programme.	Windhoek	28 July, 1999
UPI, W. V. Mr. General Secretary of Oruuano.	Windhoek	22 July, 1999
USURUA, C. Mr. Director Human Resource Development in a non-profit organisation for community development. Committed to the Herero religion and tradition.	Windhoek	13 July, 1999