

JESUS AS OUR ANCESTOR IN THE AFRICAN TRADITION

It is not everybody who qualifies to be an Ancestor. To be an ancestor you must be **unique, special, and invocable** because you lived an exemplary life. We must also state that there can be levels of ancestral-ship- some are higher up on the ladder while other are below.

We recognise in our tradition that Jesus is our ancestor par excellence because of life he lived even before he died because it was unique, special and exceptional and he fulfilled it through death and resurrection.

- As we talk about Jesus as our Ancestor, the aspect that has come to my mind is that of **sacrificial life or self gift to others**. This is what I admire about ancestors.
- Our ancestors were not people who were self- centred or cared for themselves only. When we look in our families or society, we can remember some people who stand out clearly more than others because of their exemplary –sacrificial life. I remember my grand mother’s story as a widow, caring for her children and the children of her daughter. She worked hard like a man, digging cutting tree in order to bring up her children and orphaned children of her daughter. She could let the children eat first and herself later.
- This **sacrificial life is the self transcendence of human existence**. The more one forgets about himself or herself, the more one gives up himself for others, for a cause or for love, for service, the more human he or she becomes. And the more he fulfilled he or she becomes.
- This is symbolic of Jesus Christ our ancestor par excellence who gave up his life on the cross for us so that we may have life. **The cross is the symbol of love and ancestral-ship. It is the project of the love of God in which many of our ancestors have participated or shared. Love is the only way in which we can grasp the innermost core of another person.** With love you can begin to live in another person that is why because of love and self gift our ancestors still live with us, that is why we remember them because of this love they shared with us.
- And Jesus our ancestor par excellence reminds that; ‘there is no greater love than to lay one’s life for his friends’ (Jn 15:12-17). This is the sacrificial love which many people we can now call ancestors have practised.

The moral Aspect of ancestral-ship

To be an ancestor has also **moral/ spiritual** implications; Our ancestors also demand that we live an exemplary life, that we maintain social order, avoid sin and discord. Our ancestors demand that we become hospitable, welcoming, loving and compassionate. Jesus our proto ancestor admonishes us that we remain in his love and he in us (Jn 15:9-11).

When we maltreat others, we don't love and care for the widow and orphans, evil consequences may ensue or we can be reprimanded by our ancestors. There are with us and they see all that we do.

I would like here to make an allusion with St Paul who was persecuting Christians he was reprimanded Jesus told him stop persecuting me. Acts 9:1-20.

Ancestors -the living dead.

Our ancestors are not dead and because of their sacrificial love they have acquired spiritual unending life and are with us always. **There is a Timeless bond of relationship.** They guard us and protect us from all evil, sicknesses and from evil people. When we are sick, or have a problem we should not fear to invoke them. Surely they will listen to our invocation because they have become spiritually strong. This also reminds us of Jesus our ancestor par-excellence as the source of life eternal. Through his death on the cross he has become our ancestor par-excellence. He is a '**Living Dead**' as we call our ancestors and he promises to be with us until the end of time.

Ancestor Veneration

In our African spirituality or religion ancestors were worshipped, people consulted them, asked for help whenever there is a problem. Because they inhabit our world we should consult them at all times.

People who are affected by AIDS need to access their deepest religious and spiritual resources in order to find healing, consolation and resolution.

But there has been problem in that the issue of syncretism always surfaces. Theologically and spiritually reflective Christians should help others to find and employ these resources, even if they do not originate in a traditional Christian source. (p. 168)

NB Now for me **the cross is the symbol of love and ancestral-ship** because many of our ancestors participated in that cross because of their **sacrificial life** while they lived. And the '**cross** in which many of our ancestors have shared is the **project of God** from time immemorial. This is what God through prophets and saints, our fore fathers and ancestors wanted to demonstrate (love) to humanity but now fulfilled in Jesus our ancestor par -excellence. **Love is the only way we can enter and touch people's lives and it is the only way to ancestral- ship.**

Peter Knox SJ. (2008).Aids, Ancestors and Salvation: Local Beliefs in Christian Ministry to the Sick.

Schreiter Robert. (1998). Faces of Jesus in Africa, Orbis books.