THE QUEST FOR APPROPRIATE GOD-IMAGES

WITHIN AN AFRICAN PARADIGM FOR

PASTORAL MINISTRY

Amon Eddie Kasambala

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By

Amon Eddie Kasambala

An Assignment presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch.

Study Leader: Professor DJ Louw

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby do declare that the work contained in this Research proposal is my own original work, and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any University for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

This Research work is dedicated to my wife Tibalenge

and

To great friends; Chris and Verité Stoffberg

ABSTRACT

This proposal focuses on the quest for appropriate God-images which can be used to *represent* God in a given pastoral situation within an African context. It identifies the challenge that confronts the African people as they try to find what can be accepted within the African culture to express their experience of God.

The study argues that pastoral care and cross-cultural communication are faced with a twofold problem: the problem of *accommodation* (continuity) and *rejection* (discontinuity). It has been observed that the problem of accommodation and rejection is an integral feature of a theological problem of *continuity* and *discontinuity* in cross-cultural communication. The problem of accommodation and rejection has been described in this study as: *the challenge African people confront in trying to express their experience of God in a given pastoral situation, while at the same time being aware of what is not acceptable and appropriate to the content of the Christian faith.*

The basic working assumption undertaken by this research, states that appropriate God-images are those which represent God and create an experience of meaning and significance in any kind of circumstance faced by His people. We will presuppose further that appropriate God-images are those which are not going to conflict with a theological interpretation of the God-human encounter in a given pastoral care situation. In order to clarify these basic assumptions, the study has undertaken to work with a *Hermeneutical model*. A *hermeneutical model* will help us to identify the underlying factors of an African cosmology and anthropology which, according to this study, influences the way African people formulate their God-images. It will be argued further that unless we understand what influences the way African people formulate God-images, we will not comprehend the depth of the problem of accommodation and rejection in an African context.

The research proposal wishes to emphasize that the African quest for appropriate God-images is a pastoral problem. Pastoral ministry has a challenge of providing a pastoral diagnosis of God-images which people can identify with. Pastoral ministry should make use of metaphors and symbols common to African people in order to facilitate their quest for appropriate God-images.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie voorlegging fokus op die soeke na gepaste voorstellings van God wat gebruik kan word in 'n gegewe pasorale situasie binne 'n Afrika-konteks met die oog op die effektiewe kommunikasie van die evangelie en die vorming van lidmate se geloofsvolwassenheid. Die kernvraagstuk is die probleem van inkulturasie met in agneming van die invloed van 'n Afrika-spiritualiteit en kosmologie op Godsvoorstellinge.

Die studie voer aan dat pastorale sorg en interkulturele kommunikasie voor 'n tweeledige probleem te staan kom: die probleem van *akkommodasie* (kontinuïteit) en *verwerping* (diskontinuïteit). Daar is vasgestel dat die probleem van akkommodasie en verwerping 'n wesenlike kenmerk is van die teologiese vraagstuk van *kontinuïteit* en *diskontinuïteit*. Die probleem van akkommodasie en verwerping is in hierdie studie beskryf as: *die uitdaging waarvoor die mense van Afrika te staan kom wanneer hulle probeer uitdrukking gee aan hul belewing van God in 'n gegewe pastorale situasie, terwyl hulle tegelyk ook bewus is van wat, volgens die inhoud van die Christelike geloof, nie aanvaarbaar en gepas is nie.*

Die grondliggende hipotese waaruit hierdie navorsing voortvloei is dat gepaste voorstellings van God dié is wat God op so 'n wyse weergee dat dit sin verskaf aan mense se daaglikse belewing en ervaring. 'n Verdere veronderstelling is dat gepaste voorstellings van God dié is wat nie bots met 'n teologiese interpretasie van die ontmoeting tussen God en mens binne 'n konkrete situasie wat kultureel geprofileer is nie. Om hierdie grondliggende aanname te beredeneer, is daar in hierdie studie besluit om met 'n *Hermeneutiese model* te werk. Die veronderstelling is dat *'n hermeneutiese model* ons kan help om die onderliggende faktore van 'n Afrika-kosmologie en antropologie te identifiseer wat 'n invloed het op daardie Godsvoorstellinge wat iets reflekteer van die eiesoortigheid van 'n Afrika-spiritualiteit. 'n Dergelike pastorale hermeneutiek is nodig met die oog op lydingspastoraat binne 'n Afrikakonteks. Die navorsingsvoorstel wil beklemtoon dat die Afrika-soeke na gepaste voorstellings van God 'n pastorale probleem is. Vandaar die noodsaak om met die oog op 'n pastorale diagnose in pastorale terapie, aandag te gee aan kriteria wat die vraagstuk van inkulturasie in die pastorale bediening kan aanspreek. Die navorsing voorsien om op hierdie wyse uitdrukking te gee aan die vraagstuk van metaforiese teologie binne 'n Afrikakonteks.

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Above all and everything else, I give thanks to God for enabling me to think clearly in my time of study, and for the assurance of his "Empowered Presence" which has always been there for me and my family.

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

1.1 Motivation

Pastoral ministry faces more challenges in our days than ever. We will not be making an over statement to underscore the fact that pastoral ministry has become one of the most challenging professional ministries of the Church in the Christian era. Having been in the pastoral ministry for a number of years, and having faced a number of challenges, I am inclined to conclude that one of the most contributing factors to many pastoral problems has to do with how people view God. It is the way they conceptualize God within their time of pain, crisis, disappointments and struggle that either leads them to a further quest for God or an abandonment of their faith in God altogether.

The questions we usually hear from those in the Church environment and those lying on hospital beds, have mainly to do with their search for appropriate God-images which they can use to express their experience of God in times of pain and suffering. The challenge which most of us face, in pastoral ministry, is to try and explain the significance of God in situations of suffering. It is quite obvious that many of us realize how limited our language expression about God can be. The option we are left with, in such situations of pain and suffering, is to devise metaphors and symbols which are familiar to the African people so as to make the significance of God relevant to them. However, this option should be coupled with a fair understanding of what confronts the African people in their search for appropriate God-images.

We should, seriously, note that the quest among the African people is not a quest for metaphors and symbols, but a search for appropriate God-images which they can use to describe their experience of God in times of suffering. A number of questions could be raised at this point; Why has it been difficult for the African people to find appropriate God-images which can be used to express their experience of God in times of suffering? Could it be appropriate to conclude that the African people are confronted with a problem of *accommodation* and *rejection* in their search for appropriate God-images? Is this problem, a

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kind of *tension* between culture and faith? Is the problem of accommodation and rejection in the quest for appropriate God-images among the African people linked to a theological problem of *continuity* and *discontinuity* in cross-cultural communication? Is the problem of accommodation and rejection both a pastoral and hermeneutical problem altogether?

While we shall try to explore some of the questions raised above, this study shall mainly focus on the problem of accommodation and rejection in the quest for appropriate God-images among the African people. We shall also take note that the problem of accommodation and rejection forms an integral part of the theological problem of *continuity* and *discontinuity* in 'cross-cultural communication' (see Kraft 1979:150-155 and Bosch 1991:447-457).

1.2 Identification of the problem

This research proposal focuses on the quest for appropriate God-images which can be used to "represent" (Howe 1995:112) God in a given pastoral situation within the African context. The problem we find in this particular quest is that the African people are confronted with a challenge in trying to find what can be accommodated and accepted in their culture to express their experience of God without conflicting with the content of the Christian faith. It is a challenge because, on one hand, the African people have their own way of expressing their experience of God, and on the other hand they have to identify what is not acceptable and appropriate to the content of the Christian faith. We shall term this problem as a problem of *accommodation and rejection* in the African quest for appropriate God-images.

The problem of accommodation and rejection is about *the challenge the African people confront in trying to express their experience of God within their cultural context while at the same time being aware of what is not acceptable and appropriate to the content of the Christian faith.*

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"Accommodation", in this study, will refer to what can be accepted and accommodated in the African culture to express the way the African people understand and experience God. Whereas "Rejection" will refer to what is unacceptable to the Christian faith due to the difference that exist between the content of the Christian faith and the nature of an African spirituality.

While we shall focus on the problem of accommodation and rejection, it will help us, from a theological perspective, to note that this problem is an integral feature of the theological problem of continuity and discontinuity in cross-cultural communication. Bosch (1991:453) in his book, "Transforming Mission" states that the problem of continuity and discontinuity in cross-cultural communication surfaces within "the encounter between the Christian faith and the local cultures". The problem of continuity and discontinuity as a theological problem results from the inevitable tension that exists between revelation and human experience (see Louw 1999:9). It will be appropriate for us to observe that the problem of continuity and discontinuity exists due to the fact that the message of the Christian faith will always maintain its uniqueness in any given cultural context. In terms of this study, the problem of accommodation and rejection in the quest for appropriate God-images among African people is as a result of an encounter between an African culture and the meaning of the Christian message. Hence our proposal that the problem of accommodation and rejection is an integral feature of the theological problem of continuity and discontinuity in cross-cultural communication. We shall observe further that the problem of accommodation and rejection is not only a communicational/ interpretational problem, but also a pastoral problem.

1.3 Hypothesis

The problem of *accommodation* and *rejection* becomes an acute problem when it involves people's understanding of God and their quest for appropriate God-images to express their experience of God. This problem affects the way people interpret the message of the Christian faith in their particular cultural situation. In other words, the problem of *accommodation* and *rejection* is a 'communication' (Kraft 1979:147) and 'interpretation' (Louw 1999:5) problem within the following dynamics: the interchange between culture and faith. This is a problem centered in what Louw describes as"an expression of both *ubuntu* (link to Africa) and *koinonia* (the link to Christian tradition)" (Louw 1999:13)[1].

It will be argued that Pastoral ministry in Africa is being confronted with a cross-cultural communication problem (see Bosch 1991:447). This problem arises due to the difference that exists between the content of the Christian faith and the nature of an African spirituality. We shall argue that there are certain aspects of the African culture that will always conflict with the interpretation of the content of the Christian faith. In order to prove that the quest for appropriate God-images among the African people is not only a cross-cultural communication problem but also a pastoral problem, this study will identify some of the challenges pastoral ministry faces in helping people formulate appropriate God-images.

The basic working assumption taken by this study states that appropriate God-images are those which are not going to conflict with a theological interpretation of the God-human encounter within a given pastoral care situation. In order to address the problem of accommodation and rejection, this study will argue that pastoral care should make use of *a hermeneutical model*. A *hermeneutical model* will deal with the question of a pastoral diagnosis of God-images within the cultural context of an African spirituality. A hermeneutical approach will help us to identify the factors of an African cosmology and anthropology which influence the way the African people formulate their God concepts. The study will argue further that the problem of accommodation and rejection centers on how the African people interpret, by the use of "anthropomorphic language" (Mbiti 1970:91), the significance of God in their life situation. A probe into the way the African people make use of metaphorical and

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[1] See Louw's paper on "A Pastoral Paradigm for God-images in an African Context" (1999:13).

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symbolic languages to express their experience of God will create a proper platform for us to discover how they also try to formulate God-images.

This study presupposes that the formulation of God-images within a given cultural context is a pastoral and theological problem that will always be confronted with the inevitable "tension" of continuity and discontinuity. On one hand, there is a search for what can be acceptable and accommodated from culture in the formulation of God-images, and on the other hand what is unique to the Christian faith (differentiation). In order to address this "tension" the study will call for an intercultural communication within the field of Pastoral care (see Kraft 1979:151). We shall presuppose that an intercultural communication within the field of Pastoral care will help in creating dialogue between people's experience of God and their understanding of the Christian faith (see Augsburger 1986:71-78).

However, the thesis will also take into consideration the fact that "revelation and human experience are not identical" (Louw 1999:9). It will be argued that though there is consideration for some cultural aspects in the Christian faith there will always be differentiation.

1.4 Terminology

Several terminologies have been used in this study. They will be defined in the way they relate to the understanding of this research proposal.

1.4.1 God-Images

God-images refer to how people experience and interpret God in their life situations. God-images relate to the way God comes across and is presented in people's lives. Louw defines God-images as follows:

"God-images refer to our understanding and experience of God in terms of our human ideas, needs and expectations. It refers to the many different ways in which humans portray God through metaphors. It is also connected to symbols and is often expressed in rituals and liturgical events" (Louw 1999:1).

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In pastoral ministry, God-images refer to the way people understand and experience the presence of God in times of suffering in order to discover meaning. God-images are representations of God by the using metaphorical and symbolic language to show how God is experienced in people's lives. Howe (1995:112)[3] refers to God-images as "symbols" which make God present to us. God-images may also point to the way people intend to express their experience of the "faithfulness of God" (Louw 1999:12) in their daily lives.

1.4.2 Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral ministry, as a terminology in this study, will refer to the whole realm of the diaconate (*diakonia*) as the service for the kingdom of God. It will be used to cover the whole field of ministry in the Church and the world. The study will put a lot of stress on Pastoral care as a field of pastoral ministry because of the way it relates to the subject in discussion. Needless to state that all other fields of pastoral ministry are equally important.

1.4.3 Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics comes from a Greek terminology *hermeneuo,* which means "to interpret". The word points to the science of interpreting (especially) ancient literature. Hermeneutics covers the text in its context as well as the presuppositions of the interpreter who lives in a different context from the original author (see Douglas & Toon 1989:182). Pastoral hermeneutics must be seen as " a theological reflection on how to live and to practice faith within the context of the congregation and the contemporary social and cultural situation" (Louw 1998:4)[4].

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[3]   For more detailed information see Howe (1995:106-117) "The Image of God".

[4]   On the subject of Pastoral Hermeneutics, see Louw (1998: 4, 81).

1.5   METHOD

1.5.1 Research Outline

(a)   Chapter 2 works with a basic assumption which states that appropriate God-images are those which are not going to conflict with a theological interpretation of the God-human encounter within a given pastoral care situation. The chapter identifies a hermeneutical problem in the quest for appropriate God-images within an African context. The hermeneutical problem arises due to the difference between the content of the Christian faith and an African spirituality. It is contended in this chapter that metaphorical and symbolic language plays a great role in the way African people express their experience of God.

(b)   Chapter 3 discusses the influence of anthropology and cosmology on the formation of God-images in an African context. It is discovered that at the center of an African spirituality lies the core-issue of relationship. In an African spirituality, God should be presented in concepts of communality rather than in a personal concept. The problem of accommodation and rejection in the quest for appropriate God-images in an African context calls for self-understanding in order to reflect on the interchange between God-images and culture. The chapter also discusses the fears and concerns which surround an African cosmology.

(c)   Chapter 4 is an evaluation of the God-images which have been commonly used in Africa. God-images depicting God as Father, Friend, Shepherd, and Companion have been identified as the most common God-images among the African people. It has been discovered that some of the commonly used God-images are inadequate in expressing how the African people experience and understand the significance of God in times of fear and suffering. Hence the proposal of another dynamic God-image, the "Empowering Presence" of God. The notion of God's "Empowering Presence" serves as a Pneumatological interpretation of God's protection from "cosmic powers" in an African cosmology.

(d)   Chapter 5 discusses some of the implications that this study has raised for Pastoral ministry within an African context. The following implications have been identified:

        (1)   Diagnosing God-images in pastoral care

        (2)   Engaging the context

        (3)   The Reformulation of negative associations

        (4)   Providing a "*koinonia*" for God-image reconstruction

Chapter 5 deals with the finding and outcome of the research.

CHAPTER 2

2. UNDERSTANDING GOD – A HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM:

2.1 The Hermeneutical dimension in suffering

In this chapter we shall argue that in the quest for the significance of God in human suffering and in the process of God-image formation, a process of interpretation is involved. We shall term this process of interpretation as a *hermeneutical problem* in the African quest for appropriate God-images. The *hermeneutical problem* arises due to the challenge African people face in interpreting their encounter with God in moments of suffering. In Pastoral care, the *hermeneutical problem* can be acute especially when it involves people's experience and interpretation of God in suffering. Their search for the significance of God and the meaning of his presence becomes quite evident in those moments of pain. We shall therefore contend in this chapter that a hermeneutical model needs to be provided for the problem of accommodation and rejection in the African quest for appropriate God-images. This model will include a reflection on the role of language in God-image formation among the African people. In the first place, we should take an evaluation on the importance of the process of interpretation in God-image formation.

The process of interpretation is critical because it challenges the way people understand and interpret God's significance in their cultural context and the way they interpret the message of Christian faith. A search for appropriate God-images to express people's experience of God in times of suffering will always be met with a problem of interpretation (a *hermeneutical problem*). Hodgson (1994:10) commenting on the theological science of interpretation writes, "Theology, as a practice of the Christian Community, is a constructive activity that requires critical interpretations and practical appropriations of faith's language about God in the context of contemporary cultural challenges and their theological implications."

Interpretation holds such an important place not only in our understanding of the Christian tradition but also the encounter between God and human beings as Fowler (1995:5)[5] writes "in Scripture and tradition the Church lives in relation to ongoing interpretations of

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[5]   See Fowler (1995:4-7) "The Hermeneutical and correlational dynamics of Practical Theology."

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"remembered patterns of God's praxis" in the past." He explains further that these patterns of God's praxis and his encounter with human beings in the past and present have given "shape to present interpretation and discernment" (1995:5-6). For Mudge (1987:104), "the search for a hermeneutic of primary thinking in the faith community is a response, not merely to the Church's practical problems, but to a series of crises in the Christian theological enterprise."

In our quest for appropriate God-images, the process of interpretation plays a very important role because it helps in providing a critique to our understanding and experience of God in a cultural context. The dynamics of accommodation and rejection operates within the polarity of culture and faith, transcendence and immanence, theology and reality. These should always be taken into account whenever we engage in the search for appropriate God-images for pastoral ministry in a situation of suffering. Poling & Miller (1985:22)[6] emphasize this point as they write;

"Research on the relation of biblical texts to the communities that produced and interpreted them is changing the assumptions about Bible Study. Rather than search for a single true interpretation of the Bible for all times, scholars are asking what a particular text meant in a particular community and how that meaning changes as the community context changes."

Mcfague's point is also worthy noting as she writes in her book *Metaphorical Theology:* "It is the context that recognizes that we who attempt to speak about God are social, cultural and historical beings with particular perspectives influenced by a wide range of factors. With the introduction of historical criticism of religious texts, we become aware of the relativity of the words and images in Sacred Scriptures, that these texts were written by limited people who expressed their experiences of divine reality in the manners and moves of their historical times (Mcfague 1982:3).

In the context of Pastoral care, people's quest for the significance of God in suffering will need what Louw in his book, *A Pastoral hermeneutics of care and encounter,* calls *a Pastoral hermeneutics.* To emphasize this point Louw writes: "Care should be taken that any understanding or interpretation of God-images are controlled by careful hermeneutics and thorough exegesis. The purpose of pastoral hermeneutics is to regard faith development as a dynamic and imaginative process of continual interpretation of God-

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[6.] See Poling & Miller's book (1985:22). "Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry".

images. The main function of such pastoral hermeneutics is to assess the significance of God-images within the context of faith development and real life issues"(1998:244).

We will argue that the hermeneutical approach to the problem of accommodation and rejection becomes an essential key to our understanding of the significance and representation of God in human suffering. The reason being that a hermeneutical approach helps people to evaluate their cultural and traditional context as they engage in the process of interpreting the message of the Christian faith. The process of formulating appropriate God-images to use in people's experience of God calls for a critical interpretation of culture in the light of the message of the Gospel. The consequence of not applying a critical interpretation to the process of God-image formation and people's experience of God leads to the lack of distinction between "adequate and inadequate conceptions of God" (Sarot 1995:186)[7] It is this critical approach to the interpretation of people's experience of God within a given cultural context which Louw(1995:5) terms a *"hermeneutical schema"*, and defines it as "the art of interpreting and clarifying concepts, God-images, in terms of current contextual issues and vice versa". Our experience of God will always need clarity because of the influences we get from our cultural inheritance and the surrounding environment. This is why a hermeneutical approach to God-image formation is extremely important because it also helps us in discerning what we can use in our culture to express our experience of God and to know what is not acceptable to the Christian faith.

We can summarize our evaluation on the importance of interpretation in God-image formation with a piece of advice from Hodgson (1994:16) as he writes; "Any attempt to retreat from interpretation is a retreat into fundamentalism". The role of interpretation in the problem of accommodation and rejection is of utmost importance to our understanding of the significance of God in human suffering.

2.2 The role of Language

Language becomes an extremely important media in our expression for the meaning of God-images. At the same time, it can also limit our definition of something that is divine in character and nature. In most cases we tend to resort to defining the unfamiliar with

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[7] Sarot (1995:185-189) discusses one of God concepts as the compassionate God. See also Cavanagh (1992:79).

something familiar, the transcendent with our objective immanent; that is, we make use of metaphorical language.

Mcfague (1982:1) argues a point by stating that "religious language is a problem for us, a problem of a somewhat different kind than the classical one. For most of us, it is not a question of being sure of God while being unsure of our language about God. Rather, we are unsure both at the experimental and the expressive levels."

Language is considered to be a limiting factor in our interpretation of God-images. It is part of the hermeneutical problem in a cross-cultural communication within the dynamics of accommodation and rejection. The African people have often found it difficult to express themselves in a language that will explicitly define their experience of God without opting for the use of metaphors and symbols. As Hesselgrave (1989:175) notes, "The effective use of any language depends on a latitude of correctness that is the correct or generally accepted use of speech". The search for a correct way of expressing people's experience of God is part of the whole process of God-image formation. It is always a problem to know what in culture can be accommodated and accepted in our understanding of God unless we discover the meaning of the words and expressions used in that particular culture, in this case the African culture. It is equally true that when we want to know what is not accommodated in the content of the Christian faith, we should look at the meaning of the expressions used to describe people's experiences of God in the Bible.

The use of language expression in form of metaphors and symbols among the African people is the only way they have found it convenient to express their experience of God and their understanding of his significance in their life situations. Metaphors and symbols are used as expressions to attempt to "explain the mystery and tragedy of life" (Louw 1999:1) among the African people. This is why Mcfague (1982:4)[8] says that if we want to understand the way people experience God we need just to look at how they "express the meaning of God with the use of metaphors, symbols and analogies".

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[8]   See Mcfague (1982:1-4)

2.2.1 Metaphorical Language

Metaphorical language as an expression for understanding the experience of God in the lives of people is a very important part of the biblical narrative and the African tradition. Metaphors point to something transcendent but at the same time immanent. Metaphorical language consists of using metaphors to describe people's understanding of God's involvement in their life experiences. The African people have always used metaphors to describe the nearness of God and his involvement in their lives (Mbiti:1970:2). Metaphorical language is used to describe the unfamiliar with something familiar, the transcendent with the African objective immanent.

For Hodgson (1994:5) the "metaphorical and symbolic character of language is not something to be avoided, not only because its richness and concreteness are irreplaceable but also because the broken character of the bond between the human and the Sacred can best be expressed by the indirect language of faith." The discovery of the use of the "metaphorical nature of language helps us to see the value and the limitations of various linguistic expressions, and it may free us from a correspondence view that can function in authoritarian ways that undermine full participation in community process" (Poling & Miller 1985:25). In terms of Mcfague (1982:20) "metaphorical theology will insist that many metaphors and models are necessary, that a piling up of images is essential, both to avoid idolatry and to attempt to express the richness and variety of the divine-human relationship".

Blumenthal; (1993:6), a Jewish Scholar, in his *"Theology of Protest"* writes: "In many of the classical sacred texts of the tradition, God walks and talks. God feels anger, despair, and joy. God exercises moral judgement. God even laughs." Metaphorical language forms an integral part of the way the African people wishes to express themselves about the significance of God's nature and his character.

Louw (1999:5-6) writing on *"A hermeneutic schema"* for the interpretation of the biblical text and the cultural context, argues:
"In interpathic caring, the process of "feeling with" and "thinking with" another, requires more than one entering the other's world of assumptions, beliefs and values – one needs to probe deeper. One needs to understand the different metaphors which try to express

our human endeavour to come to terms with the meaning, question and our spiritual yearning for the divine. In Africa, metaphors are deeply embedded in a culture determined by a spiritual world and a communal awareness of co-humanity (*ubuntu*)."

In the African tradition, metaphorical language is extremely useful because it is by this that the African people formulate God concepts that are used in their quest for the significance of God. Through metaphorical language, the African people are able to express themselves on how they understand and experience God in their daily lives. Metaphors, among the African people, describe the way they interpret their encounter with God and the cosmos. Metaphors are expressions of the mystery of what the African people believe to be in existence and guiding the course of human life. Metaphorical language is important in our understanding of the problem of accommodation and rejection among the African people because it does not only describe for us the way the African people interpret their encounter with God, but also their formation of God-images.

2.2.2 Symbolic Language

Like metaphorical language, symbolic language has an important function in the way the African people express their experience of God. Through symbolic language the African people are able to enliven their experience of God. Whereas metaphorical language has been used to describe God's involvement in human life, the African people have used symbolic language to make God 'present' in their situations of suffering. Symbols have been used by the African people to offer them "a closeness to things divine that signs cannot" (Louw 1999:1).

For Berinyuu (1988:90)[9] symbols are part of a cultural set-up. "Any one individual is a product of a culture. In other words, each of us perceives and interprets meaning with symbols and signs from a certain cultural perspective" (see also Augsburger 1986:61-62). Symbols are what give meaning to life among the African people. This is why we cannot understand the way the African people experience God without analyzing their use of a symbolic language. Symbols are embedded within the dynamics of life and the African cosmos.

9.
      Berinyuu's (1988): *"Pastoral care to the sick in Africa"* is a helpful resource on the understanding of transcultural approach to Pastoral situations in Africa.

To sum up this point, in Farley's words; "Any theology of God inevitably takes place in connection with the history and symbolics of an actual religious community." The symbolics of God "arises from the way God comes forth as God, for instance, as redemptive" (1996:5-6). Symbolic language and the use of symbols are inevitable in the process of interpretation of God-images, and in helping us resolve the quest for appropriate God-images among the African people.

2.3 Conclusion

Adequate God-images will be those which will manage to fulfill the function of re-presenting God in the context of pastoral ministry. Adequate God-images, will be those which are not going to conflict with a theological interpretation of the God-human encounter within a given pastoral care situation. These factors should be borne in mind so as to develop a proper hermeneutics for the problem of accommodation and rejection in people's experience of God. A proper analysis of the use of metaphorical and symbolic language among the African people will help us in understanding the way they express their experience of God.

This chapter has helped to highlight the problem of accommodation and rejection in the quest for appropriate God-images among the African people by making the following observations;

(a)   A hermeneutical dimension in the formation of appropriate God-images is of utmost importance because it helps in identifying some cultural influence on the way African people interpret and understand their encounter with God.

(b)   The use of metaphorical and symbolic language among the African people shows how they have always expressed an understanding of God's involvement in their lives. Hence providing us with metaphors and symbols that can be used to determine 'what' in the African culture is appropriate for the formation of appropriate God-images.

CHAPTER 3

3. THE INFLUENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY ON THE FORMATION OF GOD-IMAGES IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT.

3.1 Presuppositions on God-Image formation in Africa

In this particular Chapter, we shall take an overview on how the African people have been influenced by an African anthropology and cosmology in their formation of God-images. Our presupposition is that in the formation and understanding of God-images, cultural anthropology and cosmology has a role to play among the African people. Their world-view is different from the westernized world. Their approach to issues of spirituality is quite different when compared to the western approach (see Bosch 1991:448). We can further presuppose that our understanding of African Spirituality and all factors of influence on African's understanding of God will help us to discern some of the inadequate God-images which have been used in expressing their experience of God. We shall argue that pastoral ministry will become effective among the African people once appropriate God-images have been identified, and this can be possible when their cultural anthropology and cosmology have been analysed.

3.2 African Spirituality

When referring to African spirituality, we mean the way the African people view the world around them. The African people are always aware of how they are influenced by cultural values and traditional norms in their understanding of God. Their spirituality (their world view) is so deep that they believe that behind every person is a spiritual guardian who caused the beginning of his or her life and has been actively protecting and guiding him or her (see Berinyuu 1988:18-19).

An African spirituality is basically based on the way Africans view relationships. These relationships are an indication of how each person relates to the other (communality) and to life as a whole. Their spirituality lies in an awareness of the invisible reality of the cosmos and the visible harmony of life. In African spirituality humanity is only interpreted

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within the understanding of the whole community. Once a person separates himself from his extended family, he is no longer considered to be a "normal" human being. This is what Mbiti means when he wrote: "To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinship's and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture" (Mbiti 1990:2).

The main goal and purpose of African Spirituality centers on the fact that relationships have to be developed and sustained. Effective pastoral ministry among the African people is when broken relationships are healed and restored. Sickness is not only a physical ailment, but also a broken relationship in the eyes of other people and God. Pastoral ministry should take this into consideration that, sometimes, the healing certain people need in the African context has nothing to do with a physical sickness, but the guilt caused by their unfaithfulness to either a nuclear family relationship or the extended family altogether. It is for this reason, that, God should be presented in concepts of communality rather than in a personal concept.

In Africa, spirituality can be expressed in various activities of the African people. We can see it expressed either in the religious beliefs of African people, on their way to the farm, at a wedding or beside the bed of a dying member of the family. African spirituality can also be expressed by the way African people dress on a special occasion such as; a festival at the end of each farming season or through a Liturgy at the worship. In his book, *In living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral care and Counseling,* Lartey (1997:113)[10] outlines five dimensions of understanding spirituality in Africa:

1)   relationship with *transcendence*
2)   Intra-personal (relationship with *self*)
3)   Interpersonal (relationship with *another*)
4)   Corporate (relationships among *people*)
5)   Spatial (relationships with place and things)

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[10]   see Lartey (1997:112-12) "Spirituality in Pastoral Care"

These dimensions summarize the way Africans approach their spirituality. At the center of their spirituality lies the core-issue of relationship. God-images, which do not challenge an African to relate, are considered alien and foreign to the African Spirituality. It is for this very reason that some of the traditional Christian understanding of spirituality as based on the principles of the community of faith is welcomed within the African Spirituality. Any "private" approach to spirituality is alien to Africans. For the African, spirituality has to be communal and incorporative. "A Spirituality that does not incorporate all people, their events, their richness, their hopes and concerns, cannot speak to Africans who are fundamentally communal and relational" (Bellagamba 1987:107).

In sum, African Spirituality becomes an integral part in the formation, interpretation and understanding of God-images. The quest for God in the lives of Africans has always been influenced by their spirituality within the community of the African context. In any given pastoral ministry situation, the underlying God-images have to be discussed before offering new ones. This will help both the pastor (helper) and the person receiving help to begin interpreting God-images within a given term of reference.

3.2.1 Cultural Anthropology in an African context

We have noted above that African Spirituality is shaped by culture. We need to take a step further to try and understand the meaning of culture and how it contributes to the understanding of God-images in the African context. Malina (1993:11) in his book, "The New Testament World", defines culture as "a system of symbols relating to and embracing people, things, and events that are socially symbolized". He points further that this symbolizing means "filling people, things, and events with meaning and value (feeling), making them meaningful in a way that all the members of a given group mutually share, appreciate, and live out of that meaning and value in some way". When we are talking about the African culture, we are referring to the values of African people that give meaning to life as a whole within the African context. We are referring to the symbols, customs and traditions that constitute the way Africans live and relate.

In this case, a cultural anthropology of the African people refers to the way the African people have modeled themselves in terms of their cultural values. It also refers to the

language Africans use to describe persons and things in order to give meaning to life. An understanding of an African cultural anthropology will help in getting us to know some of the influences behind certain God-images. Hence Mbiti's emphasis: "African people do not consider God to be a man, but in order to express certain concepts, they employ anthropomorphic language and images about him as an aid to their conceptualization of him whom they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing" (Mbiti: 1970:91).

It is from a cultural anthropology that we are able to gather the data for understanding God-images in the African context. The whole issue of an African contextualization do surface in their cultural anthropology. This is why Hesselgrave & Rommen (1989:101) wrote: "The anthropological data can be reinterpreted theologically so as to build upon the truth already present in the African religious experience." The kind of cultural anthropology we find among Africans is the one that describes the importance of a human being within a relationship. You are protected and shielded from the forces of life (cosmic powers) as long as you stay within the boundaries of the family (communality) unit. Outside this, a person is exposed to the infliction and oppressiveness of the "powers" and "forces".

A common saying among the African people; *"somebody is considered to be a human being only in relationship with other people"* refers to the fact that cultural values are to be taken seriously among the African people. For it is only in relationships that these cultural values are being upheld. According to the African people, "Abnormality" or mental illness is seen as caused by certain behavioural activities that are not acceptable within the norms of the African community. One other interesting thing is that a person might be considered "dead", even if he is alive, when he cannot relate to the culture of his family. In other words, a cultural anthropology, in an African context, defines the way Africans live and relate to each other.

3.2.2 Cosmology – An African ethos of the divine

An African cosmology refers to the way the African people have incorporated in human life "the mystery of the unseen and the beyondness of human life"(Louw1999:1). An African cosmology also refers to the way the African people relate to "cosmic powers" and "forces" of life. Hence the point that Louw (1998:78) makes: "for the African, life is a continuum of

cosmic, social and personal events. When one breaks society's moral codes, the universal ties between oneself and the community are also broken."

Ancestors play a greater role in an African cosmology. They are part of the process of God-image formation as Pobee (1979:48) writes: "Apart from God, the ancestors and the gods, nature is believed to have power and even spirits". Ancestors form an integral part of African cosmology. They have "such a tremendous influence on the daily life of most Africans that some western anthropologists and theologians wrongly supposed that they are worshipped" (Berinyuu 1988:8). The African people believe strongly in the presence and influence of ancestors in daily life, so much so that they do things, often unconsciously, to reflect such a belief but they do not worship them as gods. There is a belief among the African people that "behind the visible substance of things lies essences or powers that constitute their true nature" (Pobee 1979:48). They believe that nature has power, which may be reversed as well as harnessed to man's benefit.

Human beings have also a respectable role to play in an African Cosmology. They are an integral part of the world-view (cosmos). "They are not principal partners, but minor partners" (See Berinyuu 1988:10).

Any God-image suggested for an African Christian who is struggling to come to terms with the "cosmic powers" and forces, should be a God-image that shall bring an assurance of a "conquering power" and "victorious presence." This becomes a great challenge to pastoral ministry done among the traditional African people. They are aware and more sensitive to the presence of these cosmic powers than they are to God. This is what Berinyuu explains about:
"Most Africans generally believe that everything (human being included) is in constant relationship with one another and with the invisible world, and that people are in a state of complete dependence upon those invisible powers and beings" (Berinyuu 1988:5).

For most of their life, many African people have placed God in the transcendental plane, making him seem remote from their daily affairs. Yet they also know and believe that he is immanent, being manifested in natural objects and phenomena (cosmic), and they can turn to him in acts of worship at any place and any time (see Mbiti 1970:12). Such factors

may lead us to knowing how the African people formulate God-images and understand the God-human encounter.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has identified some features of an African anthropology and cosmology in the quest for appropriate God-images within the African context. The following observations have been made in this chapter within the context of our study;

(a)   When we understand the influence a cultural anthropology and cosmology has on the African quest for the significance of God in times of suffering, then it will be possible to understand the tension which confronts African people in their search for appropriate God-images.

(b)   The African people build their spirituality (world-view) around relationships. God should always be represented in concepts of communality rather than in a personal concept. Therefore appropriate God-images will be those that portray a sense of communality and belonging among the African people.

(c)   The quest for the significance of God in times of suffering among the African people is also a quest for an assurance of a "conquering power" and a "victorious presence", especially in those moments when their cultural values and lives are threatened by "cosmic powers" and forces. Hence the need for God-images which will make God 'present' in moments of suffering.

CHAPTER 4

4. A RE-EVALUATION OF GOD-IMAGES IN PASTORAL MINISTRY WITHIN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

This Chapter wishes to concentrate on an investigation of God-images commonly used in the pastoral ministry within an African paradigm. A number of questions could be raised at this point; what can we refer to as the most commonly known God-images among African people? How have they been used in the African context for pastoral ministry? What has made certain God-images inadequate in pastoral ministry? What does one need to know before using some of these God-images in pastoral ministry? These and many other thought provoking questions could help us to discover the underlying factors of each God-image which has been commonly used in pastoral ministry to the African people.

4.1 An Analysis of God-Images

In the preceding chapters we have come to learn that the problem between what can be Accommodated and what can be rejected in the search for appropriate God-images has one basic argument. This argument is that the African people find it difficult to know what they can accommodate within their culture to express their experience of God. This dilemma comes as a result of the difference between the content of the Christian faith and the nature of an African spirituality (see chapter 3 of this study). An analysis of some of the commonly used God-images will help us to understand the kind of dilemma the African people find themselves in as they search for appropriate God-images. We should note that the search for appropriate God-images is a very serious quest among the African people because they want to express the way they experience God in every life.

Most of the God-images, commonly used among the African people have been described by the use of anthropomorphic descriptions of God's character and nature. "Anthropomorphic" descriptions refer to the attribution or characterization of a human form or personality to God. One needs to understand that the Bible is full of these anthropomorphic attributes of God. Whereas some of these descriptions of God have served their purpose in the history of human beings, others could no longer be used

without raising reactions among people who feel discriminated by their bias interpretation. An analysis of the commonly used God-images will help us determine which of these descriptions are raising theological reaction in our time.

4.1.1 God as Father

The father-image of God has been used quite often in the scriptures, and stands out to be one of the most common God-image among the Jewish people. Being a father, God is also seen as the creator of all things including human beings (Deut.32: 6; Isa.63:16; 64:8). As father, God is taken as the King of all people (Ps.2:7). "In the ancient Near East the relationship between a great King and one of his subject Kings, who ruled by his authority and owed him allegiance, was expressed not only by the words "Lord" and "Servant" but also by "father" and "son"[11]. This kind of addressing God as father extended to all the subjects of the King in his Kingdom.

Jesus' continuous use of the father-image of God is also part of the patriarchal tradition of the Jewish people (Mt 5: 16; 11:27; Jn 5:17). The only trouble Jesus caused himself in the use of the father-image of God was when he referred to God as "my father." To Jesus, this referred to a special relationship he has with God. The Jews, however did not object to the idea that God is the father of all, "but they strongly objected to Jesus' claim that he stood in a special relationship to the father – a relationship so close as to make himself equal with God"[12]

The father-image of God has great acceptance and influence in the patriarchal system of societies. In certain African traditional communities the father-image of God has been used from one generation to the other. In addition, "God is father in terms of his position as creator and provider" (Mbiti 1970:8).

Whereas the father-image of God has had influence on the traditional patriarchal communities of the African people, reactions to this one-sided image of God could be traced in post-modern Africa. The call to gender sensitiveness puts into question the whole integrity of ascribing God with a male metaphor. "Both Christian and post-Christian

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[11]   See New International Version (NIV) Bible footnotes on Psalm 2:7
[12]   NIV Footnotes on John 5:17-18.

feminists are in agreement that exclusive male God-images and patriarchal religious beliefs hamper the esteem and well-being of women" (Abbott 1993:240). A conclusion, which Mcfague makes on the masculine imagery of God is worthy noting:

"The patriarchal model should be seen as a perversion both of the relationship between God and Israel implied in the covenant as well as of the relationship between God and human beings implied in the Kingdom, with its radical reliance on the unmerited love of God. Hierarchy, subordinationism, and patriarchal authoritarianism do not model this relationship; parental images, both maternal and paternal, with their notes of compassion, acceptance, discipline, forgiveness, nurture, and guidance do so more appropriately" (Mcfague 1982:177).

The father-image of God is one of the God-images that stands in the center of the problem between accommodation and rejection. The Christian dogmatics with its interpretation of the fatherhood of God still operates as a hermeneutical key to understanding the nature and character of God. However, in the pastoral ministry one has to face the fact that sometimes this image of God can be oppressive to certain people who have fallen victim of childhood abuse[13]. How then do we present God to such people? Do we ignore the fact that their interpretation of God-images tends to be based on a bias kind of understanding the whole spiritual phenomena? Despite our Christian traditional understanding of God as our father, this image, sometimes, offers an inadequate way of representing God in certain situations of pastoral ministry.

4.1.2 God as Friend

The metaphor of a friend as a God-image has its base in the Scriptures. God comes to the level of a human being and relates as a good friend. He calls Abraham as a friend with whom he could confide the plans of "visiting" Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18; Isa 41:8). The Lord God would "speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend"(Ex.33:11). Jesus Christ calls all those who follow him and obey his words as friends in Jn 15:13-14 "Greater love has no one than this they he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command." And in practical ministry, Jesus

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[13]   See Poling (1991:170) "The Abuse of Power."

extended his friendship to sinners hence him being accused as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt 11:19).

Although, the friend metaphor was not commonly used for God among the Jewish people in the Bible, "it depicts God in terms of his faithfulness and identification with the history of Israel[14]. The friend metaphor for God takes a special significance in Mcfague's (1982:180) description because "Jesus, in his identification with the sufferings of others throughout his life and especially at his death, is a parable of God's friendship with us at the most profound level."

In pastoral ministry this image of God as a friend takes another meaning of great importance as Louw describes it; "Through the death of Christ, God indeed is our soul friend. God as soul friend represents the dimensions of partnership and companionship, which are both ingredients of the pastoral encounter. It creates a familiarity and intimacy, which indicate the love and grace of God. Friendship becomes a signal that the word of God assumes the hearer to belong to a subset distinguished by a bond of intimacy. It gives meaning to a post-modern people who are in great need of intimacy (Louw 1998:85,86).

In the African context, friendship is used in relative terms. It signifies a covenant that has been made between one type of a family and another family in a different location. It is some thing that is done in the presence of family representatives. Great friends will never fight against each other. Great friends will always protect themselves from an invasion of an enemy. If an outside force attacks one member of the covenant friendship, the other member of the covenant friendship will join the counterpart as part of the defensive warfare. The African people have always viewed God to be above a level of a friend hence this God-image is not very common among them. However, it should be pointed out that there are some African people who have taken God to be a covenant friend, who could be called upon in times of trouble and suffering. Mbiti affirms this when he writes:

"Although friendship is something highly valued in African societies, it is surprising that we do not have many examples where God is spoken of as "friend", (and) as a sign of an

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[14]   See Louw (1998:85-86)

intimate feeling towards God, the *Nuer people* (an African tribe) address him as friend (emphasis mine)"[15].

4.1.3 God as a Shepherd

The Hebrew term for shepherd is the participial "*roeh*". The Greek term is *poimen*[16]. The shepherd metaphor comes from the literal shepherd who pursued and still pursues a calling like the Abel the first shepherd of the Old Testament. The Old Testament delineates God as the shepherd of Israel on a number of occasions (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1; 80:1). It points to the fact that God is tender and caring. It also communicates in a very special sense the way in which God proves himself as a faithful God to his covenantal promise.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ takes the shepherd metaphor to depict his mission to the world. He is a great shepherd (Jn.10) and the chief shepherd (Heb.13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25, c.f. 1 Pet. 5:4). He contrasts his understanding of the role of a shepherd to the understanding of Palestinian shepherds. While a Palestinian shepherd might risk danger for his sheep, he expected to come through alive. But Jesus said that the good shepherd will die for his sheep.

In certain parts of Africa, the shepherd image of God might help people in a pastoral care situation to understand the love and care of God towards them. However, in many other parts of Africa the shepherd metaphor has been used in connection with the way African Christians have translated the message of the Psalms. The famous Psalm 23 can be heard sung or read in different parts of Africa. Unfortunately, this God-image has been associated with death in the African context. They can not read Psalm 23 at weddings or births because it is believed that the Lord's care (like a good shepherd) only happens as one moves from the visible world to the world beyond. And so, this God-image is found to be inadequate for pastoral ministry in the African context. The announcement of the singing of Psalm 23 at a wedding festival could alarm, if not upset, certain people who have been brought up with an interpretation of "the Lord is my shepherd" as depicting

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[15]   See Mbiti (1970:94).

[16]   See Douglas (1987[2]:1103) "New Bible Dictionary."

God's care in death. Hence our use of the shepherd metaphor in pastoral care within the African context will always call us to take these views seriously.

In many parts of Africa, the shepherd metaphor has always been interpreted on the same level with the pastor image.

God is seen as a Great Pastor who takes care of his people. Pastors have been viewed as God's representatives. In traditional Africa, pastors have been accorded place of honour because "in them" people see God. Faithful pastors have re-presented God very well while those pastors who did not take their call seriously have "painted" a bad image of God. God has been praised for sending a good pastor to the people and at times God has been blamed for sending a bad pastor. Welcoming a pastor in one's house has been just like welcoming the Creator-God himself into that house. Pastoral visitation is taken seriously among the African people because they see in it as God taking time to visit them through his servant the pastor. The pastor in this case takes the role of an ambassador for God, and through the prayers offered in each house (home) God "comes down" to take care of the needs of the people in that particular house.

A pastor as a representative of Jesus, the great shepherd, should never make the mistake of promising a pastoral visitation and not fulfilling his promise. The injury caused to the people expecting that pastor will never heal, it will be told from one generation to another of how God never wanted to visit the family through his representative. The people who have been disappointed (due to the pastor's failure to visit them) will always feel that they have done something terribly wrong against God, therefore God has change his mind about the intended visitation.

The above illustrations are an indication of how we can make certain God-images appropriate or inadequate within the pastoral ministry paradigm. The shepherd metaphor is a very serious God-image in some parts of Africa.

4.1.4 God as a Companion

A companion is a person who accompanies, associates with, or shares with, another. Life is seen as a journey or pilgrimage in which we all need companions to accompany us on our way to the destination.

The Bible has always portrayed the spiritual life as a journey of faith. And in this particular journey God becomes a companion of life. In the Old Testament God is seen as a companion to the Jewish people as they make a transition from Egypt to the promised land (Ex.12:31-42) "Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honour the Lord for the generations to come". As a companion, God made the Israelites feel safe when their lives were under threat from the army of Pharaoh. God's companionship served as a comfort, and gave the Israelites assurance that they were not alone in their journey to the Promised Land.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ promises to accompany his disciples as they went about doing the mission of preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. Companionship from Jesus, in this case, becomes an assurance of strength, boldness and victory in a divine mission (Mt.28:20) "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The promise of the *paraklétos* (helper/comforter) is another indication of companionship on the journey of faith. "And I will ask the father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever in the Spirit of Truth" (Jn 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit will always stand by Christ's people. He will become a companion as a representative of God the father and the son on the journey of faith in a Christian's life. The work of the *paraklétos* is to comfort, counsel or help as a companion on this life journey.

Most Africans understand the need for a companion on a long journey. In most rural areas of African countries, it is rare to find buses transporting people from one village to the other. Most African people walk long distances to go to Church functions, wedding parties, funerals, family meetings or traditional political functions. The need for a companion(s) on such journeys is great. A companion on an African journey is to be a trusted person, someone who will be able to defend another person in case of an attack from a wild animal or a total stranger. A companion becomes someone who can share in the folk tales and traditional updates on the way. He/She becomes a person who can walk at the same pace without leaving the other person lost in the jungle or strange places.

It is apparent then that the metaphor of a companion could be used as a God-image in pastoral ministry. God is a companion for life in one's life journey. He suffers with us in

those times when the journey of faith becomes difficult. He is always there in times of joy and sorrow. We can turn to him to guide us in the thick circumstances of life. We can talk to him on the way, and share with him our life stories. God can advise us and guide us whenever we are confronted with hardships on our life pilgrimage. Presenting the companion metaphor in this way makes God 'present' in people's situations of either joy or suffering.

However, the limitation of this God-image (companion) is experienced in those moments when the African people are overwhelmingly aware of cosmic (forces of darkness) powers threatening their lives and families. In a pastoral care encounter, we are most of the times confronted with a situation where the invisible forces of darkness seem to have overpowered the trust of a family in God. Reports of deaths in that particular family seems to be frequent. The search for an adequate God-image in such situations becomes even more apparent. In this case, it is not a problem to believe that God is a companion when there is joy and happiness, however it becomes very difficult to comfort a family or an individual whose belief in the cosmological powers shatters even the very faith he/she might have in God. At this point then, there is a need for a God-image that is able to present God, as a living, caring, yet, powerful God.

4.2 The Notion Of The "Empowering Presence" of God

The Old Testament is full of symbols depicting God's being represented among the Jewish people. The making of a Tabernacle in Ex.25: 8-9 points to the fact that God wanted to dwell amidst his people in a symbolic way. "Then have them make a Sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this 'tabernacle'[17] and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." Symbolically the tabernacle represented God's royal tent. God-images were built around these symbols among the Jewish people. Everytime the Ark of the Covenant (Num.10:33) was in their midst, they believed that God was present.

The New Testament symbolism for God's dwelling among his people comes to us through a pneumatological hermeneutics of the indwelling spirit of the resurrected Christ. "And I will ask the father, and he will give you another counselor (*Paraklétos*) to be with you

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[17] Tabernacle, literally means "dwelling place". The word is rarely used of human dwellings; it almost always signifies the place where God dwells among his people (See also Ex.29:45-46: Lev.26:11; c.f. Jn 1:14: Rev. 21:3) NIV (footnotes).

forever – the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans" (Jn 14:16-18).

The Spirit of the Lord *(Pneuma)* becomes the symbol of the presence of God in all who believe in Jesus Christ. In essence, the spirit of God becomes a new dynamic and meaningful objective for human existence. His dwelling in people's lives becomes an "empowering presence" of God. People are energized and dynamically empowered to live for God, and are given assurance of God's protection, love and care.

In developing an additional God-image for pastoral ministry in the African context, we need to be drawn back to the prevailing circumstances of many African people.

The cosmology of the African spirituality has brought with it a lot of fear among the African people. The sensitivity towards the presence of forces, spirits in the cosmology of the African spirituality makes other God-images inadequate. It is not that all African people are superstitious, but they have been brought up to be aware of the presence of the *living dead* who play big roles in family set-up and their activities. Mostly, African spirituality is surrounded by the fear of breaking down the coherence of the cosmos. Sickness and suffering in many instances is interpreted as punishment for breaking down the cosmic system of coherence. Hence the need for a God-image which will out do the phenomenon of fear in the African people.

During pastoral ministry, many pastors encounter a dilemma in people's lives. This dilemma is caused by the fear that if one did not yield to the controlling force of the cosmic powers in the African spirituality, that person will one day lose his life. This kind of dilemma leads to a syncretistic type of faith, where there is still a hold back on the traditional beliefs and on the other hand there is a need to adopt the Christian faith. A pastor finds himself "battling with words" to try and find an appropriate God-image for the given situation.

The African people are in need of God-images, which point to the fact that God is caring but at the same time powerful to overcome the fears about the "Cosmic presence" in African Cosmology. They need a God-image which shall give them courage in those moments when not even a *pastor* (shepherd), *friend, father* or *companion* metaphors could

help overcome that fear in them. Hence the proposed God-image of the *"Empowering Presence"* of God.

The *"Empowering Presence"* of God is embedded within the life metaphors (shepherd, friend, father, and companion) of an African spirituality. This God-image creates a kind of sensitivity to a presence beyond our human comprehension. It points to a God-human encounter in a pastoral situation where an assurance for the significance of God's care and love has been sought after. The "Empowering Presence" of God is a pneumatological interpretation of the presence of God in human suffering and struggle. Further more, the "Empowering Presence" of God refers to God's intervention in bringing the "cosmic" powers under his control in the African context. We can also refer to the "Empowering Presence" of God as a God-image of the resurrected Christ who abides by and through his Holy Spirit in all those who trust him.

The "Empowering Presence" of God could also be referred to as a *"life force"* of the presence of God in people's lives and the world. This "life force" entails of the transformation and sustenance of human life and the cosmos within an African spirituality. Oates (1986:59) in his book: *The presence of God in pastoral counseling* writes: "The life force of the presence of God in the history of families and individuals reminds the reverent scientist of human relations of the randomness in human life – as opposed to the positivistic predictability of human behaviour". The "empowering presence" of God, as a life, force will then become a transforming power in an African renaissance because it will challenge our way of doing things, our philosophical principles in the African spirituality and our exposure to globalization.

In the context of the problem of accommodation and rejection, the "Empowering Presence" of God is a uniting force in our quest for appropriate God-images in Africa. The "Empowering Presence" of God incorporates the familiar God-images (shepherd, companion, friend and father) in the pastoral encounter. As Mcfague (1982:2) has stated: "unless one has a sense of nearness of God (*"Empowering Presence" of God)*, the overwhelming sense of the way God pervades and permeates our very being, one will not find religious images significant: the power of the images for God of father, mother, lover, friend will not be appreciated" (emphasis mine).

In the African approach to a communal life of relationships, the "Empowering Presence" of God represents the communal God. He is present in a family struggling to sponsor children for school. He is present in a family that has been threatened by witchcraft and other superstition acts. The "Empowering Presence" of God takes the role of a "ministry of reconciliation and redirection of life as centered in the realization of the presence of the living Christ" (Oates 1986:20).

The "Empowering Presence" of God (from a Pneumatological point of view) penetrates through the mystery of *life in* a Christian and gives meaning to the cosmological panorama of the African spirituality. It is an image of the *otherness* and points to the *beyond* of an African cosmology. The "Empowering Presence" of God is a "coming forth" (representation) of God to us in the power of his spirit. It is given meaning in the words of Farley (1996:xi) when he writes: "Only if God in some way comes forth (actively, redemptively) can we proceed to assess and reinterpret our textual legacy and only from that coming forth do we have grounds for appraising the ways we speak to God and God's activity.

The "Empowering Presence" of God is a pneumatological symbol and metaphor for God's involvement in human life. It is a symbol a pastor can use without offending any particular group of people for it accommodates other metaphors and symbols for God-images. It is a symbol, which is inclusive of all genders, class, and nationality within the African context. It points away from us to someone beyond and near. The "Empowering Presence" of God also points to both the transcendence and immanence of God within an African context. There is a sense of awesomeness (presence) and companionship in this God-image. It shows that God is our "partner for life" who has come to dwell amidst his own people despite our sinfulness[18].

4.3   The Interplay between the Christian faith and the reality of Africa(contextuality)

We should seriously note that there is an interplay between faith and context in the problem of accommodation and rejection. Faith cannot operate in a vacuum, it will always take the context into consideration. Yet there are instances when faith will not give in to misinterpretation when the context demands so. As faith interacts with the context, there

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[18]   "Partner for life" See Louw (1999:15)

will always be considerations to take. The consideration that takes place as faith interacts with the context will always create a dynamic and tentative tension between them. As already pointed out in the study, the tension between faith and context is as a result of the difference between the content of the Christian faith and the nature of an African spirituality. Faith is as a result of the revelation of God in his encounter with human beings whereas the nature of an African spirituality is based on her experience with the anthropological and cosmological phenomenon that is embedded in his world view.

In a pastoral ministry, it is always important to note that people have their own God-images before they come to seek help from the pastor. An effective pastoral ministry is the one that acknowledges people's experience of God within their context, but also helps them to understand the challenge of the gospel on their lives. To effect this process, on one hand the pastor should always be aware of the concepts of God people have, and on the other hand his/her own concept of God[19].

In our God-image formation, one thing that we should bear in mind is that at the end of it all, it is the faithfulness of God in the whole pastoral ministry encounter which matters most. Our God-images should point people to someone and something beyond their contexts. Faith points to a revelation of the God who has come in the history of mankind as the God of promise (hope). We should also take note that the more we face challenges within the African context, the more diverse will be the experience in the formation of God-images. Every situation in pastoral ministry will call for specific God-images. However, we should not hesitate to point out that adequate God-images are those which represent God and create an experience of meaning and significance in any kind of circumstances faced by his people. The African quest is a search for adequate God-images which will express the people's experience of God, and at the same time not to conflict with the content of the Christian faith.

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[19]   See Louw (1999:85).

that sometimes it is people's views of God and the God-images they have ascribed to him which worsens their crisis situations. An example of such a situation is when people's concept of God has been depraved or distorted by a bad experience in their search for the meaning of God. In this kind of a situation most people tend to visualize God as one who is after getting at them. The God-image they ascribe to God is that of a "policeman" who is always on the lookout for any kind of mistake. This way of viewing God not only distorts our understanding of God, but also affects experience of God in times of suffering.

It is evident that there is a great need for a pastoral diagnosis of the way people view God so as to help them in their quest for meaning and understanding of God. In this case pastoral ministry should make use of a hermeneutical approach in every situation of suffering in order to provide proper pastoral diagnosis. We have noted in the beginning of this study that appropriate God-images call for a right interpretation of the revelation of God in scripture, and a correct understanding of people's experience of God.

5.1.2 Engaging the context

Since pastoral ministry takes place within a particular context, the challenge which it faces is to understand how people view God and what kind of God-images they use when they are in need of care, love and help. The African context needs to be taken into consideration when providing pastoral care and any other ministry. It then becomes a challenge to pastoral ministry to evaluate the anthropological and cosmological factors underlying the African Spirituality. Without this, pastoral ministry will always find it difficult to meet the quest for meaning and understanding of God in an African context.

Understanding people in their context helps in reaching out to them and in providing them with quality service. If pastoral ministry is to have a qualitative impact on the lives of the African people then it has no choice but to take time in evaluating those principles guiding the African way of life. The rich symbols and metaphors for God within the African spirituality need not be thrown away, but reviewed so as to reach the people at their level. This, then becomes another implication for a pastoral ministry in Africa.

5.1.3 The Reformulation of negative associations

People formulate negative associations for God when they do not know how to handle the tension between accommodation and rejection in their quest for the meaning and understanding of God. It becomes a challenge to pastoral ministry to reformulate certain "theological assumptions about the relation of God and humankind" (Poling 1991:185). It is a reformulation of the images of God that sometimes give latent sanction to abusive patterns in families and interpersonal relationships. Pastoral ministry has to always engage itself in re-evaluation of how it presents God in preaching, counseling, worship, education, Bible study and pastoral care. Our reformulation of negative associations for God will also require a reformulation of how we understand faith and the doctrine of God in the paradigm of pastoral ministry in Africa.

An even greater challenge lies in identifying these negative associations for God, and tracing their source. Negative associations are a hindrance in people's quest for meaning and the significance of God. They make pastoral care and counselling extremely difficult because people's minds are made up on how they view God even before they request for pastoral help. A thorough research in this particular area will be of great help to the work of pastoral care in Africa.

It will also be appropriate for us to begin reformulating any God-images, which have a connotation of oppressiveness and negative view of God in Africa. Pastoral ministry should take upon itself a task of redefining our traditional dogmatical terminologies that represent a negative image of God. This is another area where thorough research will help us in collecting all those terminologies that the Church is used to and redefine them. If we are going to achieve the goal of analyzing the tension between accommodation and rejection in the understanding of God-images for use in pastoral ministry, then the challenge of reformulation has to be taken up.

5.1.4 Providing a "Koinonia" for God-Image reconstruction

The inadequacy of the object relations theory is in its reduction of the quest for the significance of God to a human experience. The theory persists in addressing "the question of God in human experience only at the level of concepts or representations we

form as we grow towards maturity" (Howe 1995:107). The object relations theory states that when our image of God has been distorted due to negative experience during the time of childhood, it is impossible for someone to turn to God in his/her adulthood. On the contrary, from a pastoral care point of view, we believe that the distorted God-images can be reconstructed. Hence the need for a place where the distorted God-images can be reconstructed.

Pastoral ministry faces a challenge of providing an environment where those people who have been affected by bad experiences of childhood and adolescence could come and share their stories and have their God-images reconstructed. The most appropriate place for such a reconstruction which pastoral ministry could provide would be within the koinonia[20] of the Church. The koinonia of the Church becomes a place where inference and reconstruction could take place. It is a place of faith and hope for those who have developed negative associations of God due to painful experiences in their childhood and adolescent. It is a place where they can provide narratives of their childhood and adolescent experiences that have led to a distortion of their God-images. The koinonia of the Body of Christ takes a clinical role to diagnose the distorted God-images, and in turn reconstruct them into adequate concepts of hope and faith. This task is possible when pastoral ministry undertakes it.

It should be pointed out again, here, that there is need for more research on the role the Church can play in facilitating the whole process of diagnosis of damaged God-images and what resources could be offered to reconstruct such images. This would provide an alternative answer to the object relations theory. Pastoral ministry is about *hope therapy* that can help people to formulate adequate God-images and also to reconstruct those concepts of God which have been "damaged" due to painful experiences during childhood.

In an African situation, Pastoral ministry is confronted with pastoral cases that have presented themselves as a result of distorted God-images. The problem is that these cases can not be dealt with in isolation, they need a supportive group into which the people involved can be at ease to continue being sustained as they receive counselling

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[20]   'koinonia' refers to " fellowship or a close mutual relationship" offered by the Church. See Norman (1971:101).

and care. Pastoral ministry will be of great help to the African people when the *koinonia* of the Church is incorporated in the ministry of reconstructing "damaged" God-images.

5.2 Option for further research

Apart from several options for further research which have been raised in this research proposal, an investigation on the role of the Church in facilitating the process of diagnosing distorted God-images and the resources to use in reconstructing them is very fascinating to me. In addition to this, an investigation on the task of redefining traditional dogmatical terminologies which represent a negative image in people's experience of God will also be a promising field for further research. The above mentioned options, will be a step forward in the research on God-images within an African paradigm for Pastoral ministry.

5.3 Conclusion

This research proposal has tried to raise awareness on the prevailing problem in the pastoral ministry. It is the problem of *accommodation and rejection* in people's experience of God in African context. The problem of accommodation and rejection arise because of the difference between the content of the Christian faith and the nature of an African spirituality. The African people find themselves in a "tension" between what can be accepted in their culture to express their experience of God and what is rejected in as far as the content of the Christian faith is concerned.

The study has proposed that adequate God-images are those which will represent people's experience of God in times of suffering. According to our research, appropriate God-images are those which are not going to conflict with a 'Theological interpretation' of the God-human encounter within a given pastoral care situation. This entails that our experience of God must be interpreted in relation to the revelation of God as revealed to us in scripture. Hence a proposal for a hermeneutical approach in people's experience of God. The hermeneutical approach will need to consider the symbolic and metaphorical expressions commonly used among African people in their experience of God.

The quest for adequate God-images among the African people is highly influenced by an African anthropology and cosmology. The problem of accommodation and rejection in the

African context is a problem between culture and the content of the Christian faith. Our comprehension of the influence that a cultural anthropology and cosmology play on an African quest for adequate God-images will help us to give a fair analysis of the problem. The study has shown that God-images among the African people portray a sense of communality. Their world view is based on a deep sense of relationships.

God-images like father, friend, shepherd and companion have been evaluated and found to have their own limits especially in those moments when the African people are threatened by "cosmic powers". Hence the proposal of another dynamic notion of God which will point to the presence of God in suffering and in times of insecurity. A notion of "The Empowering presence" of God depicts the presence of God in different life situations faced by people. An African anthropology and cosmology has brought with it a lot of fear for evil spirits and a sensitivity towards the presence of "forces" in the cosmos. We have stressed that the notion of "The Empowering presence" of God can be used effectively, in a pastoral situation, where people's lives are being threatened by 'powers' and 'forces' of darkness in the cosmos of an African spirituality.

From the outcome of this study, a number of challenges facing pastoral ministry in Africa have been identified. These challenges come as a result of people's quest for the meaning and significance of God in times of suffering. In summary, the following are the identified challenges;

a) Pastoral ministry is challenged to provide a proper diagnosis of God-images by using metaphors and symbols which people can identify with.

b) Pastoral ministry is challenged to engage the African context in its ministry by taking the underlying factors of an African world view into consideration.

c) Pastoral ministry is challenged to begin a process of reformulating the negative associations which have distorted the meaning and significance of God in people's lives.

d) Pastoral ministry is challenged to provide a place of hope and care for the reconstruction of God-images. A place where people who have had their God-images damaged by painful experiences in their childhood and adolescence could come and give their narratives.

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