
An apologetic approach to ATR's influence on Christian churches in Southern Africa

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Abstract

African Traditional Religion (ATR) poses a significant challenge for the Christian church in Southern Africa. Members of Christian churches coming from an ATR background often grapple with a transition from their upbringing, which involved practicing rituals in ATR, to embracing Christianity in a non-compromising way. This struggle is apparent in the syncretic practices that have emerged within Christian churches in Southern Africa, where elements of ATR have been incorporated into their Christian worship. This syncretism is a result of the religious beliefs and cultural practices of congregation members. Despite their efforts to adhere to Biblical teachings, they still find themselves drawn to traditional African religious practices and the associated worldviews. Major aspects

of the ATR's influence on Bible believing Christian churches should be understood and apologetically addressed.

Opsomming

Afrika Tradisionele Religie (ATR) stel 'n beduidende uitdaging vir die Christelike kerk in Suider-Afrika. Lidmate van Christen kerke wat uit 'n ATR-agtergrond kom, worstel dikwels met 'n oorgang van hoe hulle opgegroeï het deur die beoefening van ATR rituele, na die uitleef van Christenskap op 'n nie-kompromitterende manier. Hierdie stryd kom duidelik na vore in die sinkretiese praktyke wat binne Christenkerke in Suidelike Afrika ontstaan het, waar elemente van ATR in Christelike aanbidding geïnkorporeer is. Hierdie sinkretisme is 'n gevolg van die godsdienstige oortuigings en kulturele praktyke van gemeentelede. Ten spyte van hul pogings om by Bybelse leerstellings te hou, vind hulle hulself steeds aangetrokke tot tradisionele Afrika-godsdienstige praktyke en die gepaardgaande wêreldbeskouings. Belangrike aspekte van die ATR se invloed op Christen kerke wat in die Bybel as Woord van God glo, moet verstaan en apologeties aangespreek word.

Key terms:

Apologetics, African Independent Churches, African Traditional Religion (ATR), Syncretism, Africa Christian Churches, Contextualization

Introduction

African Traditional Religion (ATR) holds the position of being the third-largest religious group in Africa, following Christianity and Islam, as noted by De Vries (s.a.:55). As a nature religion it was practiced across the African continent from very early – long before the arrival of Christian missionaries (Maleke, s.a.:10; Mhlophe, 2013:302). According to Ofuafo (2019:149), the central aim of African Traditional Religion (ATR) is to safeguard African culture by preserving its core elements through the devoted veneration of the ancestors and the accompanying rituals that signify its proponents' loyalty.

Some Christian adherents of ATR advocate for an admixture of Christianity and ATR, as they perceive these two religions as not inherently incompatible.

Instead, they hold the belief that these religions can co-exist and even complement each other. Lugira (2009:14) supports this notion by stating that for many individuals, the amalgamation of ATR and Christianity has become a way of life. This has led to the indiscriminate adoption of the ATR worldview to the extent that it becomes syncretistic, as discussed by Chiatoh (2017:3; Lugira 2009:14; Gehman 2005:6).

Moreover, because they view ATR and Christianity as complementary, adherents often incorporate ATR rituals into their church practices and maintain strong convictions regarding ancestral spirits, known as *Izinyanya*, as outlined by Taringa (2006:191). They utilize various symbolic elements such as water, oil, the veneration of ancestors, church uniforms, crosses, salt, and candles to seek protection and draw closer to God (Chiatoh, 2017:3; Da Silva, 1993:395).

These practices are particularly widespread within African independent churches, which assert that they are contextualizing Christianity and, therefore, represent the largest contemporary blend of ATR and Christianity (Lugira, 2009:14). However, it's important to note that syncretism between these two religions is not confined solely to these church groups, as individuals who attend mainstream churches also engage in these practices.

The use of the aforementioned objects holds appeal for those who exclusively practice ATR without being Christian, as these elements resonate with the core beliefs and practices of ATR (Chiatoh, 2017:3). As a result, African independent churches are experiencing rapid growth, largely due to non-Christian adherents of ATR choosing to join them.

The motivations for embracing Christianity from the context of ATR

The phenomenon of individuals transitioning from ATR to Christianity is multifaceted and often influenced by diverse factors. To gain a nuanced understanding, we can turn to the teachings of Jesus, particularly his Parable of the Sower found in Matthew 13. In this parable, Jesus uses the metaphor of different types of soil to illustrate the various responses people have to the message of the Gospel.

In Matthew 13:5-6 (ESV), Jesus states, "Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched.

And since they had no root, they withered away.” Here, the rocky ground represents individuals who initially receive the Word of God with joy, signifying a positive reception of the Gospel message. However, the lack of depth in soil symbolizes a shallow commitment. These individuals, although enthusiastic initially, fail to establish a robust foundation for their faith (Platt, 2013:178-179).

This biblical analogy finds resonance in the experiences of some adherents of ATR who encounter Christianity. Similar to the seed on rocky ground, these individuals may embrace the Gospel with joy. Yet, their roots remain shallow due to the formidable challenge of familial expectations within the context of ATR. The fear of repercussions from abandoning ancestral practices and traditions can hinder the development of a deep, enduring faith.

The specific challenge arises when these converts are faced with the potential persecution and rejection from their families and communities for deviating from the established norms of ATR or even speaking ill of the dead (Mhlophe, 2013:301). Matthew 13:20-21 (ESV) describes this situation, “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

In this context, the parallel is evident. Some individuals, despite their initial joy in receiving the Gospel, lack the rootedness to withstand external pressures. The fear of familial consequences becomes a stumbling block, leading to a wavering faith and, in some cases, a subsequent return to syncretism—attempting to blend elements of both ATR and Christianity.

Motivation for syncretism

The motivations behind individuals embracing Christianity from the context of ATR are intricate and varied. One compelling reason is the pursuit of a sense of belonging. Some individuals perceive certain similarities between Christian beliefs and those of ATR, leading them to feel a connection between the two.

For example, the shared belief in a creator God responsible for the universe is a point of resonance between Christianity and ATR. Additionally, both traditions acknowledge the existence of mediators. While ATR recognizes multiple mediators, particularly the role of ancestors, Christianity emphasizes one central Mediator—Jesus Christ. This convergence of beliefs becomes

a magnet for adherents of ATR who find comfort in the familiarity of these shared aspects.

However, a potential pitfall arises when individuals assume that these shared beliefs automatically imply a complementary relationship between the two religions. The recognition of similarities does not necessarily negate fundamental differences, and the blending of diverse religious practices can lead to syncretism rather than a harmonious coexistence.

The desire for acceptance within a community plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. Individuals transitioning from ATR to Christianity may be motivated by a reluctance to be perceived as heathens or outsiders. By affiliating themselves with the church, they seek acceptance and integration into a community that aligns with the dominant religious narrative.

Moreover, a distinct aspect influencing the choice of Christianity, particularly in the context of independent churches, is the cultural significance attached to burial rituals. Some individuals opt for Christian affiliation to ensure that their funeral is officiated by a minister of the Word. Within their society, this act is viewed as sacred and carries a sense of honour. The belief in the sacredness of a Christian burial adds a cultural dimension to the decision to join Christianity.

The primary reason for multitudes of Africans' preference for African independent churches over mainstream, Pentecostal, or Charismatic churches is their desire to simultaneously practice both ATR and Christianity. They are not willing to be compelled to forsake their rituals and demonstrate exclusive allegiance to God, which is why they opt for syncretism. Individuals would self-identify as "Africans who are Christians", delineating a distinction from the label "Christians who are Africans". The fallacy embedded in this perception lies in the presupposition that African identity inherently implies affiliation with ATR. The consequence manifests when individuals, who may not outwardly demonstrate a reverential relationship with their ancestors, turn to them in moments of dire necessity. While ostensibly engrossed in their recently embraced Christian faith, they establish a contingency plan, resorting to communing with the departed when faced with adversity (Mhlophe, 2013:306).

The syncretism of African Traditional Religion (ATR) with Christianity has profound implications for two fundamental doctrines of Christianity: the nature of God and the nature of man. Within this syncretic context, there is a prevailing belief that God is remote and inaccessible without the mediation of ancestors, as noted by Lugira (2009:9). It is also held that direct contact with God would

result in a transformation that a person cannot endure. Consequently, in ATR, people turn to their ancestors as intermediaries between humanity and God. From a Bible-based Christian apologetic perspective where God's intimate relationship with man is a basic presupposition, these views are regarded as significant distortions of what the Bible teaches.

Moreover, this syncretism significantly impacts another crucial Christian doctrine that influences both the perspectives on God and man: salvation. This influence is evident in the way of worship, where ancestors, influenced by ATR, assume the role of mediators instead of the sole Mediator(?) in Christianity, Jesus Christ. In this context, adherents communicate with their deceased ancestors to intercede with God on their behalf and seek blessings from Him (Maleke, s.a.:20). Instead of living before God solely by grace in Jesus Christ, they do rituals to obtain the goodwill of the ancestors. In cases of disobedience, it is believed that both the ancestors and God may bring curses upon them.

This syncretic blending of ATR and Christianity raises theological challenges and departures from mainstream Christian teachings, prompting concerns about the core doctrines of God, man, and salvation. In many regions across sub-Saharan Africa, ATR exerts a significant influence on the daily lives of its adherents. This influence is particularly pronounced due to the coexistence of ancestor veneration and adherence to Christian beliefs within households, as noted by Lugari (2009:18), who argues that proponents of ATR often do not differentiate between religion and other aspects of their lives.

Considering the aforementioned circumstances, this article aims to undertake an apologetic examination of these phenomena in the Sub-Saharan Africa. It operates under the assumption that the findings may be applicable to other Christian communities across Africa. The primary focus of this study will revolve around ATR's proponents' perceptions of God and their beliefs concerning man, with a specific emphasis on the understanding of life after death. The assumption is that these core doctrines of ATR and Christianity are mutually exclusive.

This endeavour acknowledges the complex interplay between ATR and Christianity, recognizing that it presents unique theological challenges and syncretic beliefs that warrant careful consideration and apologetic engagement. The aim is to provide insights and responses that can contribute to a deeper understanding of these faith dynamics in the context of Christian communities in Africa. This paper will, as an example, explore how the influence of ATR on mainstream Christians in Reformed South African congregations should be apologetically addressed. This is particularly

significant due to the traditional emphasis of Reformed Churches on the principles of “God alone” and “Scripture alone”, as well as the doctrine of atonement through “Christ alone”. To address these issues effectively, the paper will delve into four fundamental questions:

- 1. What aspects are major in the ATR Influence on the mainline congregations in Southern Africa?**
- 2. What Is ATR’s view of God and man’s life after death?**
- 3. What do the Reformed Churches confess about God and man’s life after death?**
- 4. In what manner should the major aspects of ATR’s influence on a Bible-believing Church be apologetically addressed?**

By addressing these four critical questions, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the influence of ATR on mainstream Christianity in a manner consistent with Reformed theological principles and biblical teachings.

1. What aspects are major in the ATR influence on Christian churches in Southern Africa?

When examining the practices of ATR, there are numerous aspects to consider. However, this article will narrow its focus to just a few key aspects that significantly influence the mainline churches in Southern Africa.

1.1 Syncretism

Manganyi and Buitendag (2013:1) asserts that when missionaries arrived in South Africa, there was already a pre-existing religious belief system followed by African people. Rather than acknowledging the presence of this indigenous religion, the missionaries disregarded it and proceeded to propagate the Christian Gospel. As a result, many Africans perceived the missionaries as using Christianity to promote the superiority of Western values. They saw the missionaries as using the Gospel to legitimize European conquest and the exploitation of Africa.

The perception among some Africans wasn’t just that missionaries were leading them away from their cultural heritage, but also that they were undermining African culture by displaying arrogance (Bonsu, 2016:113). This arrogance was evident in the tendency of some of the missionaries to compare African culture unfavourably to what they considered their superior culture (Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013:13). Today, many people regard

missionaries (also those who worked hard to evangelize and through mercy ministries) as proponents of African colonization.

Maimela (1991:7) explains that a response to this domination and cultural resistance led to the emergence of indigenous counter movements. In the 19th century, African Independent churches were established as a breakaway from mainstream churches due to resistance against Western culture and what they saw as religious imperialism. The founders of these African Independent churches aimed to both preserve their African culture and embrace Christianity (Mhlophe, 2013:304). It is important to note that not all African people joined the Independent churches; some continued to worship in mainstream churches.

Syncretism in this context originated from African believers, both in mainstream and African independent churches, who desired to practice both their cultural traditions and Christianity concurrently. This blending of the two religions has persisted in churches to this day, resulting in a fusion of elements from Christianity and ATR (Mhlophe, 2013:301-302).

Examples of this overlap include the use of prayer by traditional healers before performing rituals and the lighting of candles in Christian services to commemorate deceased loved ones (Da Silva, 1993:395). During these services, individuals not only light candles but also engage in communication with their deceased relatives, often praising their clan names (*ukuzithutha*) by reciting their family lineage from the eldest member to the youngest. It is believed that when ancestors hear their names called in this manner, they become appeased and respond to the people. Some individuals may exhibit unusual behaviours such as making strange sounds or burping, which are attributed to being overwhelmed by the spirit (*basemoyeni*).

In some African Independent churches, the use of African drums is incorporated to help connect people with both God and their ancestors, leading to dancing and prophesying among congregants. These prophecies can encompass various messages from God or the ancestors at that specific moment (Da Silva, 1993:395).

Another manifestation of syncretism's influence on the Christian churches in Southern Africa is the practice of church leaders and members sending letters to report their upcoming absence from a church service because they have a family ritual (*umcimbi*) to attend.¹ This has become an accepted norm

¹ This type of behaviour is well known in the community where the churches are situated. Members of the congregations may attest to this if they may be interviewed. Further, even those who are proponents of ATR or some of them who are even traditional healers in the

in some of the churches I attended. In some cases, other elders may choose to skip church to support their fellow elder in this ritual.

To have a Biblical link to these practises, adherents hereof use 1 Corinthians 15:46 out of context and in support of ATR because it says, "But it is not the Spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual." Their understanding of this verse is that they must begin with rituals and ancestral worship so that the ancestors may preserve their bodies from illnesses. After this they worship God who takes care of the Spirit.²

Christianity and ATR are in a direct contradiction as far as basic doctrines or beliefs are concerned. Attempting to blend these two religions does not align with their fundamental principles, as they stand in opposition to each other. Comparing these practices to the teachings of biblical Christianity underscores the stark contrast between the two worldviews. Biblical Christianity is firmly monotheistic, with the God of the Bible commanding believers to worship Him alone and have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). This command implies exclusive devotion to God, without any competing deities or (ancestral) spirits. The worship of false gods, but also, including ancestors, directly conflicts with the worship of the one true God, Yahweh – as stated in the first commandment (Ex. 20). Creating 'mediators' or 'substitutes' in the forms of images or so-called ancestral spirits, in the place of a very far-off and uninvolved God, conflicts also with the second commandment in the law of God (Ex. 20). Therefore, attempting to merge these two conflicting worldviews is not logical or coherent, as well as directly contrary to what God's Word teaches Christians. They pull in opposite directions and are fundamentally incompatible.³

Eastern Cape churches, will not hide their position. They will boldly stand that they believe in both God and the ancestors, but that they will not forsake their forefathers.

- 2 They are not doing justice to this verse as they are twisting its meaning completely. In this verse, Paul was pointing out that through the 1st Adam we received our natural bodies, but through the last/second Adam we will receive our spiritual bodies. Therefore, Paul was talking of the fact that the first Adam was natural and the second was spiritual in the sense that Christ Jesus, though he was 100% human, he was 100% God.
- 3 A similar example is recorded in Acts 16 where the woman who was led by a spirit cries out that Paul and Silas are servants of the most high God and preaches how people can be saved. Although the sentence as such does not have to be false, the intention is clear that the pagan natural religion in Greece can cooperate with the Christian faith and is even willing to describe the God that Paul preaches as the highest of the gods. Yet Paul commands the spirit to leave the woman.

1.2 Language and theological vocabulary having different meanings

The ATR influence on Christian churches in Southern Africa extends to the language and theological terminology they employ, often with distinct interpretations. This leads to situations where they discuss their service to ancestors, but when questioned, they deny equating it to worship. For instance, the English word 'worship' is translated as 'unqulo' or 'ukukhonza' in IsiXhosa. Proponents of ATR argue that they don't claim to worship ancestors, considering it a misrepresentation. They assert that Christians wrongly attribute the worship concept to them.

In IsiXhosa, the word 'veneration' is translated as 'ukuhlonela', akin to 'respect' in English. Naden, in his article on "Ancestor non-worship in Mampruli" (1996), stresses the importance of careful language use. He differentiates between the English term 'worship' and what he terms the "cult of respect" in the Mampruli language, emphasizing the latter's meaning as respect for ancestors. Naden's argument suggests that 'veneration' is a more fitting term than 'worship'. Bonsu (2016:114) agrees with this view, asserting that supporters of ATR do not actually worship their ancestors. He argues that those who claim otherwise have been influenced by Western racial bias. He contends that the perception of ancestor worship in ATR is rooted in racial discrimination, rather than a genuine and thorough study.

In Setswana, the word for worshipping God is 'Kgumamelo', while ATR proponents use "go direla badimo", meaning serving the ancestors. This pattern is also observed in the Xitsonga language, where worshipping God is "ku gandzela", while ATR members use "ku tirhela vakokwa wa vona", signifying service to their ancestors. In Zulu, 'worship' is expressed as 'ukukhonza', distinct from phrases like "ukuhlabela amadlozi" or 'ukuphahla', which ATR proponents use to denote actions like sacrificing to ancestors or communicating with them.

Even if different words are being used in these languages, it's important to remain cautious, as the words used often still bear strong resemblances to the concept of worship. In order to fully understand the meaning of the words used in relation to ancestor veneration, attention must be paid to the way the veneration took place. We should move beyond mere linguistic analysis and examine the actions associated with these terms. Additionally, it's worth exploring whether there are any parallels between these words and the biblical concept of worship, which serves as our authoritative source of truth. Let us start with the latter.

1.3 *The use of the word worship in the Old Testament*

Having explored the intricacies of some sub-Saharan languages, it becomes imperative to turn our attention to the Bible, which serves as our ultimate source of truth. In order to ascertain potential similarities or differences, we need to examine the definition and application of the term 'worship' in both the Old and New Testaments. To accomplish this, we must delve into the original languages, specifically Hebrew for the Old Testament and Greek for the New Testament. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review will be conducted. The investigation will encompass the meanings ascribed to 'worship' and how it is employed within the biblical context. By scrutinizing the original languages, we can gain a deeper understanding of the nuances and connotations associated with this term. This rigorous examination will enable us to discern whether the biblical concept aligns with or diverges from the interpretations found in sub-Saharan languages, shedding light on any potential distinctions.

In Exodus 20:5, the author employs the Hebrew word הִתְחַשֵּׁת, coupled with the negative particle לֹא, which is translated as "you shall not bow down". The root of הִתְחַשֵּׁת is חוּהוּ, signifying to bow down or depress, often referring to prostration, especially in homage to royalty or God. This word encompasses various meanings, including bowing oneself down, crouching, humbly beseeching, doing obeisance, showing reverence, making oneself stoop, or engaging in worship. In the context of Exodus 20:5, הִתְחַשֵּׁת, when combined with the negative לֹא, conveys the instruction "You shall not bow down". Exodus 20:5 follows on from the preceding verse, Exodus 20:4, which prohibits the crafting of carved images or likenesses of anything in the heavens, on the earth, or beneath the waters. These directives were imperative for the Israelites due to the covenant established with God. They were to offer obeisance exclusively to God, acknowledging Him as the people of the covenant. Continuing in verse 5, it admonishes against bowing down to the aforementioned entities, as indicated by פָּהֳלָה, implying that worship should not be directed towards them.

In the verse under consideration, we encounter the Hebrew word עָבַד, which is coupled with the negative particle לֹא. This word's root is עָבַד, encompassing a range of meanings, including serving, working, engaging in bond-service, or acting as a worshipper. It signifies various forms of service, whether it be servitude, labour, or worship.

The context in which עָבַד is used determines its specific meaning. For instance, it can denote 'work' or 'service' in passages like Exodus 5:18 and Numbers 8:25. However, when employed in the context of rendering service

to false gods (Jeremiah 16:13) or the God of Israel (Exodus 3:12; Isaiah 19:21, 23), it takes on the connotation of 'worship'.

In the context of worship, דָּבַע implies obedience to a set of divine commands, encompassing religious rites and behavioural regulations. It signifies compliance with the deity's rules and submission to the deity's will (Deut. 10:12, 20; Jos. 22:5). Therefore, within the scope of worship, דָּבַע involves devotion, adherence to religious practices, and submission to divine ordinances.

According to Hill (1996:2-3) another Hebrew word is שָׁדַח and it may be rendered 'worship' in English (Ezra 4:2; 6:21). This word is more often translated 'seek' or 'inquire' (Pss. 24:6; 69:32; Isa. 11:10). Hill (1996:2) calls this "worship as spiritual inquiry" and what he means by this is the people who worship God seeking His face to know Him. The prophet Hosea uses this seeking after God and compares it to a hunter pursuing the prey as he inspired Israel to "press on" to know the Lord (Hos. 6:3). In Phil. 3:12-14 we hear the apostle Paul in his prayer echoing the same thought. Hill (1996:3) articulates that there are a number of reasons that may instigate the desire to seek, know, and worship the Lord. It may be prompted by distress and trouble, as in the laments of the psalmist (Ps. 9:9-10). It may also be actuated by love and adoration in thanksgiving for God's goodness to the righteous (Ps. 119:2, 10, 68).

In the Old Testament we also find the word יָרָא which means fear, revere, or to venerate expressing awe and respect (Hill, 2006:3). This word in the Old Testament is employed to depict the form of fear and awe for the Lord of Israel by His people (Ex. 14:31; Deut. 31:12-13). This reverence and fear of the Lord are mixed together, almost to the point of terror and dread. For he has the power to both deliver the just and judge the wicked, the Lord God should be feared more than all other gods. The righteous were motivated to worship and serve out of a fearful reverence for God Almighty. The people of God were charged to "fear God" and "serve him" (Eccles. 12:13).

As Hill (2006:6) explains, the commonly used Hebrew word in the Old Testament for worship is שָׁחָה. This term can be translated in various ways in English versions, including "bow down" (deeply or with reverence, as seen in passages like Gen. 18:2 and 47:31), "prostrate oneself" or "show homage" (as found in Isa. 49:7), or simply 'worship' (for instance, in Gen. 24:26 and Ex. 12:37). The root meaning of this verb implies the "act of falling down, grovelling, or even lying on the ground in reverence, whether before royalty" (as seen in 2 Sam. 14:22 and 1 Kings 1:16) or before a deity (as exemplified in passages like Ex. 34:8, 2 Sam. 12:20, and 2 Kings 19:37).

In the Old Testament, we also come across an Aramaic word specifically used for worship, primarily in the account of King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image and the fiery furnace, which is found in the book of Daniel, chapter three. This Aramaic term is 'ܐܘܬ', signifying "to pay homage" or "to prostrate oneself in reverence" (as seen in Dan. 3: 5-7, 10-12, 14-18, 28). This phrase is used in conjunction with the verb 'ܦܠ', which means "to fall on one's face" or simply "to fall down". In this context, worship is closely associated with the act of prostrating oneself before a deity, much like the Hebrew term 'שָׁרַף'.

1.4 The use of the word worship in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the term 'worship' is utilized and appears a total of forty-four times. However, it's noteworthy that despite the consistent use of the English word 'worship', the New Testament employs five distinct Greek words to convey this concept. The primary Greek term frequently used for worship, which also appears first in the New Testament in Matthew 2:2, is 'προσκυνέω'. This specific word recurs thirty-two times throughout the New Testament. By consulting a few Greek dictionaries an understanding of the meaning of 'προσκυνέω' can be found.

Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:

- Fall down, worship, do obeisance.

Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains:

- To prostrate oneself in worship, to bow.

A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (NT):

- Worship, prostrate oneself before as an act of reverence.

Implication:

This word, 'προσκυνέω', conveys the meaning of worship in the sense of bowing down to a deity, indicating an act of prostrating oneself in worship. It is employed to signify an attitude or gesture that represents complete dependence on or submission to a higher authority figure.

The second word to examine in the New Testament is 'σέβω', which is translated as 'worship' four times.

Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:

- I worship, I show reverence, I respect.

Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains:

- I worship, I venerate.

A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (NT):

- I worship, I devout, I fear God

Implication:

The word 'σέβω' conveys a sense of reverence coupled with fear. It suggests that an individual holds another person or entity in such high regard that they also experience a sense of fear or awe. In the context of worship, it refers to performing the actions and rituals associated with the veneration of a deity. This term is often used to describe the worship practices of Gentiles who are not part of the nation of Israel, particularly those who are uncircumcised.

The third word to consider in the New Testament is the word λατρεύω and is used 21 times.

Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:

- Serve, work for pay, be in servitude

Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains:

- To perform religious rites, to worship, to venerate

A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (NT):

- Worship, minister, serve in religious duties

Implications:

The term λατρεύω carries the connotation of worshipping a deity through acts of service. In other words, it implies engaging in labour or ministry on behalf of a deity as a form of worship.

1.5 Not what they say, but what they do

Our investigation began by some South African languages' use of words for worship and veneration and how these words compare to the concept of worship in the Bible. Although different words are used in these languages, they bear a strong resemblance to the idea of worship found in the Old and New Testaments.

In both the Old and New Testaments, words used for honouring God or gods signify bowing down and worshipping, with the sense of prostration, obeisance, and paying homage to a deity. This act involves devotion through honouring and placing oneself at the mercy of the deity and acknowledging vulnerability before God. For instance, Exodus 20:5 commands not to “bow down” to entities other than God, emphasizing the importance of vulnerability and submission to God alone. Similarly, when Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples bowed down and worshipped him, signifying their vulnerability and submission to him.

This gesture of bowing down and worshipping is precisely what proponents of ATR employ when they consult their ancestors, as well as their traditional healers when they seek guidance from their ancestors. By doing so, they express their vulnerability before their ancestors, paying homage to them and acknowledging their authority and control over their lives.

Moreover, we explored words such as ‘seeking’ or ‘inquiring’, which are used in the context of seeking the face of the Lord or false deities. We observed that fear can be a motivating factor for seeking the Lord or idols. This aligns with ATR’s practice of constantly seeking and consulting their ancestors out of fear of potential repercussions.

Finally, we delved into the word translated as ‘service’ or “being in servitude”, which involves dedicating oneself to the service of a deity. This service is often voluntary, but fear of the deity can also be a motivator. This fear is evident in the ritualism and frequent offerings in ATR to appease their ancestors (Mhlophe, 2013:306). Adherents of ATR commit themselves to the service of their ancestors for life, driven by a fear that prevents them from leaving their religion, thus serving the ancestors regardless of the circumstances.

1.6 A dependence on ancestral veneration and consultation

ATR functions as a comprehensive worldview, offering its adherents a framework for understanding existence and providing guidance in their interactions with both the natural world and fellow humans. This belief system plays a central role in regulating the African’s relationship with nature and society. Consequently, certain animals may be deemed sacred in honour of specific deities, and natural elements like trees, hills, mountains, or rivers can take on divine significance (Mhlophe, 2013:305-306; Dennis, 2004:179). Additionally, ancestral heroes may be revered within this context.

Proponents of ATR do not consider their religious awareness as an abstract concept; instead, it is an integral aspect of their daily lives (Maleke, s.a.:20). This worldview is evident in various religious and cultural practices observed

today. It becomes apparent during the celebration of diverse festivals and indirectly when individuals turn to traditionalist diviners or priests for guidance during challenging times (Maleke, s.a.:20). At the core of the African Traditional Religion worldview is the concept of a community that encompasses both the living and the deceased. This perspective emphasizes that everything exists for the betterment of humanity within the community. Consequently, individuals willingly submit to unseen supernatural forces beyond their control (as to gods in other nature religions), sometimes employing magic or muti to influence these forces to their advantage.

In ATR adherents heavily rely on the veneration and consultation of their ancestors to navigate various aspects of life. Ancestor veneration and consultation serve as essential tools for interpreting encounters with sacred animals, understanding societal norms, and determining when to perform rituals in honour of ancestral heroes. Additionally, these practices are crucial for establishing communication with the unseen spirits encountered in daily life.

The veneration of and consultation with ancestors become imperative because adherents fear the potential consequences of not being in tune with their ancestors' wishes. They are concerned about unknowingly displeasing the ancestors and the severe repercussions this might entail. Consequently, maintaining a harmonious relationship with their ancestors through reverence and consultation is a fundamental aspect of their religious and cultural beliefs (Maleke, s.a.:20).

1.7 Cultural superiority over Biblical teachings

The profound fear deeply ingrained within adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) often leads them to regard their cultural beliefs as superior to biblical teachings. This fear of their ancestors plays a central role in their resistance to embracing biblical principles. ATR grapples with persistent challenges, namely a pervasive sense of fear, a feeling of powerlessness, and a prevailing sense of hopelessness.

Proponents of ATR frequently live in a state of fear, primarily stemming from the constant threat posed by spiritual forces and powers in the world, which must be appeased or balanced for one's survival (De Vries, s.a.:65; Mhlophe, 2013:306). This fear extends to practical concerns like illness and death, resulting in an emphasis on seeking protection through rituals, charms, and anti-witchcraft measures, among others (Maleke, s.a.:19). The fear of death, in particular, can lead adherents to be "subjected to lifelong slavery" (Hebrews 2:15; De Vries, s.a.:65).

Additionally, adherents of ATR often experience a sense of powerlessness due to the unpredictable nature of human existence. Despite all efforts to protect themselves through the service of spirits of so-called ancestors, they may still face unforeseen hardships. In contrast, the Bible teaches that God, as our Father in Christ, is in control of all things in the world for our benefit and His ultimate glory. This assurance counters the feeling of powerlessness, as believers are not helpless in the face of unpredictable fate. Our Almighty and Sovereign Father reigns even over spiritual forces, with Jesus Christ interceding on our behalf.

While the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers solutions to the challenges faced by proponents of ATR (De Vries, s.a.:65-66), resistance to change is a common response. Many individuals may profess to be Christians but continue to engage in idolatry by leading syncretic lives. Due to their belief in the superiority of their religious based culture driven by fear, they often harden their hearts and resist anything that contradicts their syncretism. Consequently, biblical teachings are disregarded in favour of cultural idolatry practices, resulting in a superficial form of Christianity. This is in essence not Christianity but a radical deviation, as it lacks depth and contradicts the fundamental monotheistic nature of Christianity.

1.8 Fear of cosmological events

ATR is often characterized by a pervasive sense of fear, as its adherents believe that disobedience to the ancestors can lead to punishment. These punishments can take various forms, ranging from illnesses and financial misfortunes to moral transgressions, such as promiscuity, as well as cosmological events and even death. These various afflictions and challenges are believed to serve as means to capture the attention of adherents of ATR and steer them back onto the right path, encouraging them to obey the ancestors and perform the necessary rituals.

As a result, they harbour a deep fear of cosmological events, including disasters, illnesses, death, and misfortunes, to the extent that they don't perceive these occurrences as mere natural events but instead attribute them to supernatural intervention. They regard these events as punishments meted out by their ancestors in response to disobedience, violations of moral codes, or neglect in demonstrating the requisite veneration, as noted by Dennis (1978:53).

In this context, ATR differs significantly from Christianity. Christianity teaches that our sins are atoned for through Jesus Christ, offering the concept of forgiveness. In contrast, ATR instils fear in its followers, lacking the concept

of forgiveness. Consequently, disobedience is met with punishment from the ancestors, while obedience is believed to garner their favour.

As a result, in ATR, nobody wishes to incur the displeasure of the ancestors. Everyone strives to maintain a harmonious relationship with them to avoid the potential disasters they believe can befall them. When a community or family faces illness or misfortune, their initial recourse is often to consult sangomas (traditional healers) to ascertain whether they have maintained the ancestors' favour or offended them. If they discover that they have offended their ancestors, they will perform a devotion ritual to appease them, with the hope that the misfortune will be alleviated (Mhlophe, 2013:306).

Driven by the fear of cosmological events, those who adhere to these beliefs are continually engaged in rituals to ensure they remain in good standing with their ancestors at all times.

1.9 Ritualism

The apprehension surrounding the ancestors and their potential consequences drives an exaggerated emphasis on the significance of rites and ritualistic forms of worship. In simpler terms, the belief is that as long as everything goes smoothly, there's no need for concern; however, if something adverse does occur, it necessitates the performance of a ritual (Maleke, s.a.:19).

Mhlophe (2013:259) describes that it is fear that motivates adherents of ATR to keep channels of communication with the deceased active. Consequently, natural causes are attributed to the wrath of ancestors. For instance, when a child falls ill, parents often become concerned because their initial thought is that it could be a retribution from their ancestors (Maleke, s.a.:19).

Even though the community might encounter severe and unfavourable weather conditions as a natural occurrence, such occurrences are often attributed to the ancestors, and as a result, a ritual must be conducted (Mhlophe, 2013:259). The ancestors are thought to have the power to bring about drought or afflict the entire community with disasters. This is typical of nature religions and the many gods/spirits that is involved in disasters. It is also believed that these supernatural spirits supposedly of the ancestors can influence occurrences like car accidents, infertility, and numerous other phenomena (Mhlophe, 2013:259; Maleke, s.a.:20).

However, it's essential to recognize that rituals in ATR are not exclusively reserved for adverse situations. As in other nature religions, within ATR, people also perform sacrificial rituals during times of prosperity and when

everything is going well. Nevertheless, there is mainly the fear inherent in ATR, which compels its adherents to maintain a ritualistic approach.

The dangers that relate to ritualism are especially vivid when someone gets sick, however not only limited to that. For instance, a person will get sick and be kept home for a long time and not be taken to the doctor or hospital because it is believed that a sacrificial ritual must be performed to heal the person. Unfortunately, in some cases this leads to the death of the person who needed treatment for a certain chronic illness, but died because everybody was blinded by ritualism.

2. What is the ATR's view of God and of man's life after death?

In ATR, there exists a belief in a powerful God who is the creator of the universe and everything within it. However, this Creator God is perceived as distant and unapproachable (Maleke, s.a.:11-12). It is believed that this God initiated the creation of the universe but has since abandoned it, showing little interest in its daily operations. The suggestion here is that our everyday experiences are largely influenced by the presence and actions of the spirits of departed ancestors in our midst (De Vries, s.a.:67; Maleke, s.a.:11; Mhlophe, 2013:302).

Another perspective within ATR is that this Creator God is so awe-inspiring that adherents feel unworthy to approach Him directly. Consequently, followers of ATR must present their needs and engage in worship through intermediaries or mediators (De Vries, s.a.:67; Maleke, s.a.:11; Mhlophe, 2013:306).

This single Creator God is known by various names across different African tribes and regions. For instance, the Xhosa people refer to Him as *uThixo* or *uQamatha kaTayi*, while the Zulu people call Him *uNkulunkulu* or *uMvelinqangi*. The Tsonga people use the name *Xikwembu*, the baVenda people call Him *Mudzimu*, and the amaNdebele people refer to Him as *uZimu*. Importantly, these names are also used by Christians to address God. These names are employed to translate the term 'God' from the original languages of the Old and New Testaments, as the New Testament uses Greek words for God and Lord, Theos and Kurios, when it refer to God as revealed in the Old Testament. This can also be seen in Paul's reference to the altar for the unknown God in Acts 17:23 whom he proclaimed. Therefore, these names should not be associated with false deities per se.

Regarding the concept of life after death, adherents of ATR hold the belief that existence continues beyond physical death (Maleke, s.a.:12; 19). According to this belief, the body may perish, but the individual who passes away transitions into the spiritual realm and assumes the role of an ancestor (Maleke, s.a.:12; 19).

Mhlophe (2013:151) concurs with this perspective in his characterization of an ancestor. He asserts that an ancestor is, according to ATR, an individual who existed within a particular family in the past. Furthermore, he emphasizes that an ancestor is a forebearer or someone who has preceded the present generation. It is noteworthy to highlight specific terms within Mhlophe's definitions, such as "lived a long time ago" and "has gone before". These expressions aptly convey that an ancestor is an individual who has deceased and remains in that state.

In this spiritual state, they are considered to possess great power, with the capacity to both protect and cause harm to the living (Maleke, s.a.:13). It is widely held that these ancestors provide protection when their descendants adhere to their guidance and fulfil the necessary rituals and sacrifices. In such cases, they are seen as benevolent forces that watch over and safeguard the living.

Conversely, when individuals disobey the guidance of their ancestors and neglect the essential rituals and sacrifices, it is believed that these ancestors can become malevolent – similar to the (mostly smaller) gods of other nature religions. In this context, they are seen as capable of causing harm or misfortune to those who have failed to uphold their responsibilities and show proper reverence. It is believed that they maintain a closer connection to the divine, effectively serving as intermediaries between the living and God. Consequently, those who adhere to ATR and Christianity often try to communicate with the uninvolved God through these ancestors, seeking their intercession.

During this spiritual phase, these ancestors may make requests for various types of offerings or sacrifices, depending on the specific purpose. In this context, they are often referred to as the "living dead" because, despite their physical demise, they are believed to remain spiritually alive. It is thought that they continue to be present in the daily lives of their descendants, accompanying them wherever they go.

This is why, when fortunate events like surviving an accident occur, it is commonly expressed that "your ancestors were with you", signifying their protective influence.

Nonetheless, within ATR, when unfortunate incidents like a fatal car accident transpire, they are often ascribed to the absence of protection from one's ancestors. In such circumstances, individuals may convey the sentiment of "amawenu akufulathele", conveying the notion that the ancestors have essentially forsaken or disregarded the individual confronting the calamity (Maleke, s.a.:20). This underscores the perceived function of ancestors in bestowing safeguarding and underscores the implications when they are thought to be absent or dissatisfied. Following such unfortunate occurrences, it is customary to engage in specific practices. This may involve the performance of a sacrificial ritual, seeking guidance from the ancestors through a traditional healer, or appointing a representative, typically an elder male within the family, to communicate on behalf of the affected individual or family (Maleke, s.a.:20).

3. What do mainline Protestant Churches confess about God and of man's life after death?

Protestant churches believe in one, indivisible, spiritual, eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchanging, boundless, all-powerful Creator who possesses perfect wisdom as stated in several Protestant confessions such as the Belgic Confession, Article 1, and the Second Helvetic Confession. This belief is further emphasized in the Heidelberg Catechism (Question and Answer 94), where all forms of idolatry are absolutely rejected and the unwavering devotion and exclusive worship of God are maintained (De Bruyn, 1997:175). Both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism make it clear that there is only one God deserving of worship.

This perspective is reinforced in the subsequent question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, namely 95, where it is confessed that idolatry involves the act of imagining or placing trust in something other than the one true God, who has revealed Himself through His Word. This principle is derived from the first and second commandment of the law (Ex. 20:3-6), where all forms of idolatry are prohibited. As De Bruyn (1997:176) notes, some individuals in the past might have argued that God should not pay attention to idols since they are all false gods. However, the actual truth is that there are no other gods besides the one true God. God issues these warnings not out of fear of other gods but for our own benefit. We are the ones in danger of elevating something to godlike status that is not truly God, only to realize our folly too late (De Bruyn, 1997:175-176).

Despite this clear commandment, Israel repeatedly fell into idolatry, particularly in their worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. Similarly, during the Reformation era, various forms of idolatry were prevalent in Roman Catholic practices, including the invocation of saints and medieval pagan traditions. Consequently, the Catechism addresses issues such as idolatry, magic, divination, and the invocation of saints and other beings.

Even in our time, we are not immune to idolatry, which persists in various forms. One specific form of idol worship is found in ATR, where adherents worship ancestors and other spirits in a similar way as adherents of idol-worship did in Biblical times. According to both the Bible and the Protestant confessions, this constitutes idolatry because they are worshipping the deceased instead of the one true, living God. They place their trust in these spirits instead of placing their trust in the only true God who created the heavens and the earth.

Additionally, it is important to note that mainline Christians believe in one true and eternal God, who has revealed Himself as three distinct persons, as detailed in the Protestant confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 8 Q&A 25. This doctrine of the Trinity is rooted in Scripture, notably in Matthew 28:19, and further evidenced in Matthew 3:16-17 during Jesus' baptism. At this event, Jesus emerged from the river, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and the voice of the Father spoke from heaven, clearly revealing the distinctiveness of each person within the Godhead. In essence, orthodox Christianity confesses that while God is one, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Father is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son (cf. Athanasian Creed). Additionally, in Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 6 Q&A 18, Christians declare that our Lord Jesus Christ serves as our Mediator, a belief derived from 1 Timothy 2:5, which states that there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus.

Therefore, it becomes evident that Christianity and ATR are fundamentally at odds. ATR followers consider their ancestors as intermediaries between them and God, whereas Christians firmly believe that Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator. This dichotomy represents two divergent worldviews that cannot both be simultaneously valid, in accordance with the law of non-contradiction, which asserts that something cannot be both itself and its opposite at the same time and in the same context.

Furthermore, in Heidelberg Catechism Lord's day 1 Q&A 1, it is affirmed that Christ, through His Holy Spirit, assures us of eternal life. This underscores

the Reformed church's belief that life does not cease at death; in other words, we hold that there is life after death. However, it's crucial to highlight a significant distinction between Christianity and ATR in this regard. While both share a belief in life beyond death, traditional African religions generally teach that when a person dies, their soul initially roams their homestead or neighbourhood, and after funeral ceremonies, it joins their forefathers (Maleke, s.a.:19). According to adherents of ATR, this individual becomes an ancestor, gaining the ability to communicate with the living and influence their lives through blessings or curses (De Vries, s.a.:71; Maleke, s.a.:20; Mhlophe, 2013:305). In contrast, Christians believe that when a person dies, their physical body returns to the earth, while their spirit returns to God. The apostle Paul articulates this in 2 Corinthians 5:8, emphasizing that when Christians die, their souls immediately enter the presence of Christ and are with the Lord, while their bodies remain on earth and are buried, still connected to Christ (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23). Christians do not subscribe to the idea that the deceased become ancestors capable of communicating with or influencing the living. In fact, believers are directly forbidden to have anything to do with the so-called spirits of the dead (see Deut.18:11-12 & Lev. 19:31).

The author of Ecclesiastes also conveys this concept clearly in 9:5-6, stating that the living are aware of their mortality, but the dead have no longer any part in the world of the living. This sharply contrasts with ATR where the dead influence the living in cardinal ways, and which lacks a concept of resurrection, signifying that those who have passed away in this belief system are essentially considered living spirits that persist in the community but do not physically rise from the dead. Conversely, Christians believe in life after death with God looking forward to the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return, with Jesus Christ having paved the way by rising from the dead Himself (Romans 8:38-39). Believers receive eternal life the moment they place their faith in Jesus Christ, transitioning from spiritual death to spiritual life (Rom. 6:11). Additionally, Christians do not fear physical death or hell because their new life in Christ guarantees their eventual resurrection when they will be made incorruptible and free from sin. The belief is that when Jesus Christ returns, their physical bodies will be raised from the dead, glorified, and eternally reunited with their spirits (1 Cor. 15:22, 23; 1 Thess. 4:14, 16; see also De Vries, sa:73).

4. In what manner should the major aspects of the ATR's influence on a Bible believing church be apologetically addressed?

To delve into the profound impact of ATR on the Bible-believing church, it's crucial to acknowledge the existence of both similarities and disparities between ATR and Christianity. While certain parallels may exist, it is imperative to recognize that the distinctions between the two are more substantial (Mhlophe, 2013:302; 305).

Understanding these disparities is essential in navigating the complexities that arise when ATR encounters the tenets of Christianity. The differences, often overshadowing the similarities, become pivotal points of consideration. This recognition lays the groundwork for a nuanced examination of how ATR's influence permeates and interacts with the fabric of the Bible-believing church (Mhlophe, 2013:302).

In comparing ATR and Christianity, one can discern fundamental differences in their worldviews, encapsulating their perspectives on God, humanity, and life before and after death. ATR leans towards an anthropocentric worldview, placing humans at the centre, while Christianity is inherently God-centered (Mhlophe, 2013:303).

The anthropocentric nature of ATR is evident in its emphasis on the significance of ancestral spirits and the interplay between the living and the dead (Mhlophe, 2013:305). The fear of consequences from ancestors and the constant rituals to maintain their favour underscore the human-centric focus in ATR. In addition, followers of ATR acknowledge the existence of a creator God, yet their belief differs significantly from that of Christianity (Mhlophe, 2013:302). While they affirm a God who initiated creation, their conception involves a distant deity, one removed from active involvement in the daily affairs of the created world. Thus, ATR adherents need their ancestors to speak to God because they believe that the ancestors are closer to Him (Mhlophe, 2013:305; 307). This perception contrasts sharply with the Christian understanding of a God who is intimately engaged with His creation, sustaining and guiding it with ongoing care and interest. This worldview is deeply ingrained in the adherents, shaping their beliefs, practices, and responses to various life events.

Contrastingly, Christianity places God at the centre of its worldview. The Bible, a foundational text for Christianity, emphasizes the sovereignty and centrality of God. In passages like Isaiah 40:22, where it states, "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers". This

highlights the supremacy of God over creation, a perspective divergent from the anthropocentric focus of ATR. Moreover, in Christianity, God is perceived as imminent, signifying His closeness and presence—Emmanuel, God with us. Unlike the distant God of ATR, the Christian understanding emphasizes God’s intimate involvement with His people. This closeness eliminates the need for intermediary spirits, as believers have Jesus Christ as their sole Mediator. In Christianity, individuals approach God directly through Christ Jesus without the mediation of ancestral spirits (Heb. 4:16).

Furthermore, Christianity diverges from ATR in its views on life before and after death. ATR often sees life after death as a continuation of existence in the spiritual realm, where ancestors hold significant power. This contrasts with Christianity’s belief in an afterlife shaped by one’s relationship with God. As stated in Philippians 1:21-23 “²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

The Bible verses, such as Romans 8:28 (“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him”) and John 14:6 (“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”), underscore the God-centered nature of Christian beliefs and the reliance on faith in Christ for salvation.

The contrasting worldviews of ATR and Christianity become apparent through their emphasis on either humans or God at the core (Mhlophe, 2013:303). The Bible serves as a primary source, providing guidance and quotations that articulate the distinct perspectives of these two religions.

The application of logical principles, specifically the laws of non-contradiction, assumes a central role in shaping a coherent and unwavering worldview (see Nash, 2023). A notable illustration of this is the discernment required when concurrently adhering to divergent worldviews, particularly those related to the worship of God and ancestors (Mhlophe, 2013:303).

A foundational Christian principle, grounded in biblical injunctions, emphasizes exclusive devotion to God as described in the Bible. This is articulated in a biblical commandment prohibiting the veneration of any other gods. This principle aligns seamlessly with the laws of non-contradiction, underscoring the logical impossibility of simultaneously following two opposing and conflicting belief systems. Consequently, the decision to worship either God or ancestors becomes a matter of logical consistency and religious fidelity (Mhlophe, 2013:303).

Expanding this principle to contemplations of the afterlife further underscores the commitment to a singular belief system. The dichotomy presented—either becoming an ancestor or returning to God—resonates with the logical assertion that two divergent destinations after death cannot coexist simultaneously. This conviction finds support in the biblical reference stating that “to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord”, reinforcing a singular path and destination in the hereafter (2 Cor. 5:8).

In adopting such a consistent approach, individuals ground their faith in a logical framework, where adherence to Scripture becomes a guiding principle for maintaining the coherence and integrity of their religious convictions. The laws of non-contradiction function as a beacon, illuminating the path towards a steadfast and logically sound understanding of one's faith.

Recognizing the logical contradictions between ATR and Christianity, the subsequent imperative is to disseminate the Gospel. Our task involves articulating the accurate biblical perspectives on God, humanity, and life—both preceding and following death—drawn directly from Scripture. This endeavour necessitates a prayerful approach, placing trust in the Holy Spirit to influence the hearts of ATR adherents, prompting repentance, and fostering trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and exclusive mediator. Transformation within the ATR community can only occur through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, facilitated by the proclamation of the Gospel.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration of the intricate relationship between ATR and Christianity in Christian churches in Southern Africa reveals a tapestry woven with diverse beliefs, fears, and practices. The foundational differences in worldview, the centrality of God, and the contrasting perspectives on life after death underscore the complexity of this intersection.

As we grapple with the influence of ATR on Christian churches, it becomes evident that the call for an apologetic approach is not merely a scholarly exercise but a profound engagement with the hearts and minds of individuals navigating these dual belief systems. The pervasive fear within ATR, stemming from its emphasis on appeasing ancestors and cosmic forces, contrasts sharply with the hope and assurance offered by Christianity.

Logical consistency and adherence to Scripture emerge as guiding principles in this apologetic endeavour. The laws of non-contradiction illuminate the path towards a steadfast and logically sound understanding of faith, emphasizing the exclusive devotion to the God of Christianity.

In addressing the influence of ATR on Christian churches, empathy and respect must characterize our approach. Engaging in dialogue that acknowledges the cultural context, while highlighting the distinctive elements of Christianity, can foster understanding and bridge the gaps between these two worldviews.

As we navigate this complex terrain, our ultimate aim is to disseminate the transformative message of the Gospel. Grounded in the truth of Scripture, we extend an invitation to all, acknowledging the fears and uncertainties within ATR, yet pointing to the unwavering hope, grace, and love found in Jesus Christ. May our apologetic efforts be guided by prayer, humility, and a genuine desire to lead hearts towards the eternal truth that transcends cultural boundaries and brings the light of Christ to every mainstream Bible believing church influence by ATR.

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