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Aids and the Ancestral Cult:  
Toward a Contextual Theological Conversation in the “New” South Africa

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AIDS and the Ancestor Cult:  
Toward a Contextual Theological Conversation  
in the "New" South Africa

by

Peter Knox

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## RESUMÉ

### **Purpose of the Thesis**

This thesis investigates the meanings of Christian salvation within the context of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa. The pandemic poses enormous social, economic, developmental, as well as theological, problems for the fledgling democracy of South Africa. The pandemic has stricken the whole continent of Africa particularly forcefully, but in South Africa, where there had been expectations of a new order since the peaceful overthrow of the apartheid government in 1994, the expectations of "salvation" for the nation have been cruelly dashed by the force of the pandemic.

With the aid of a lemma, I show that salvation is neither equivalent to and co-extensive with political liberation, nor reducible to a unassignable spiritual state of being in relationship with Christ. Rather, as in Old Testament writings, salvation should be understood as having direct bearing on the immediate context of the person or nation in question - which understanding is frequently overlooked. In the context of AIDS, then, an understanding of salvation should have a bearing on social death due to the stigma of the condition; on the healing of the illness itself; on the reconciliation of people whose lives are immediately affected by the pandemic; on addressing those social factors which allow the spread of HIV, and on the tardiness in the provision of effective medical care for people with various AIDS-related illnesses.

In the thesis I demonstrate that another unavoidable dimension of the "New" South Africa is the traditional Bantu cult of the ancestors. I cite numerous reports showing that the cult is widely practiced, even by Christians. The ancestors are therefore an unavoidable dimension of the common religious understanding of life. If the meanings of salvation in the pandemic are being sought, then it would be a grave oversight not to consider how they relate to the cult of the ancestors.

## Synthetic Contextual Theology

Following the Synthetic method of contextual theology described in Stephen Bevans's *Models of Contextual Theology*,<sup>1</sup> the thesis may at first appear to have a somewhat eclectic approach. However, the motivating idea behind this method is to devise a response that speaks to a particular lived present situation, while remaining as faithful as possible to the past. Thus it is important to understand well the context under consideration, and to relate to it relevant elements from other contexts of the Christian tradition. The synthetic approach takes cognisance of the fact that societies and cultures are always changing, so that no single formulation can be the final word on any given subject.

### Sources Used

As no word is final, no single source provides all that is necessary for a synthetic contextual theology. Thus, for example, I use some elements from my Jesuit tradition, which I deem to be relevant to the present context, as well as relying somewhat heavily on the systematic historical soteriology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. I use the work of Antoine Vergote, a Belgian theologian-anthropologist, as well as the work of many anthropologists familiar with the cult of the ancestors. I rally data from the medical field, in order to describe the AIDS disaster, and have also trawled archives in Lesotho and South Africa to gain a historical perspective of the relation of the cult of the ancestors to the Christian churches in Southern Africa. Drawing on these disparate sources, I conduct a conversation between the past and the present, with the hope of being faithful to both.

But this thesis is most heavily indebted to the *Kairos Document*<sup>2</sup> which supplies both the notion of AIDS as a *kairos* and the skeleton to which I attach my analysis of the meanings of salvation. It is clear that the AIDS context presents a challenge to the

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1. Revised and Expanded Edition, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002) Chapter 7

2. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985).

country as well as to the very identity and relevance of the churches in South Africa. It is an issue on which the churches have to “stand up and be counted” and is thus a *kairos*. The *Kairos Document* offers a method of analysing some of the theologies that were current at the time of apartheid, when it was written. It compares critically three different theologies, showing what interests are being served by each. In this thesis I borrow this tripartite juxtaposition of theological trends, and compare soteriologies implicit in the cult of the ancestors, in a classical Christian approach, and in a prophetic stance vis-a-vis the AIDS crisis.

### Findings

This research has shown that the cult of the ancestors makes a definite contribution to an understanding of salvation in the context of the pandemic in South Africa. Apart from any benefit that people with AIDS may derive from traditional medicinal remedies (revealed by the ancestors), the cult also places them at the centre of rituals of reconciliation and social healing. The eschatological horizon represented by the cult offers people who die of AIDS both a hopeful prospect (being reunited with one’s deceased forebears) and a potential source of disturbance (having no direct descendants to remember one.)

I believe I have also shown that some of the traditional soteriological formulations of classical Christianity do not do much to offer comfort or reassurance to people suffering with AIDS. Likewise, the cult challenges Christian ministers to a more culture- and person-sensitive celebration of the sacraments of reconciliation and of the sick. These have to treat the person within his or her social circle and should encompass more than only the wellbeing of an individual soul in relation to God. People in other contexts have written that their diagnosis of “HIV-positive” has been an impetus for them to become more engaged in a community, and to embark on a new spiritual life. It would be surprising if the same did not hold for people in a similar situation in South Africa.

I have also shown how the AIDS *kairos* challenges Christians to bear a more prophetic witness. They are to announce the Good News, to denounce anything that exacerbates the suffering of people who already have AIDS, or that contributes to the spread of HIV, and they are to engage in prophetic action that witnesses to the love of God for all people, particularly the most stigmatised and marginalised.

### **Conclusion**

The most obvious conclusion of the thesis is that the cult of the ancestors has a significant contribution to make, both to the wellbeing of Christians afflicted with AIDS, and to a better understanding of salvation in the context. Any attempt to understand the meanings of salvation in this context would be incomplete without a consideration of the cult.

I make bold to extend this conclusion to other parts of the developing world which are in the grip of the AIDS pandemic. Christians involved in the crisis would do well to take account of the traditional wisdom and religious background of the people concerned. The Christian ministries of evangelisation and healing will be immeasurably enriched thereby.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
(1) Statement of the Problem .....	1
(2) State of the Question .....	1
(a) New Political Dispensation .....	1
(b) The AIDS Pandemic .....	3
(c) The Ancestors Reclaimed .....	5
(d) Choosing Soteriology as an Appropriate Theological Category. ....	10
(3) Hypothesis. ....	11
(4) Methodology. ....	12
(a) Bevans's Presuppositions. ....	12
(b) The Synthetic Model of Contextual Theology. ....	16
CHAPTER 1: AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA. ....	20
(1) Introduction. ....	20
(2) AIDS in South Africa .....	21
(a) Early days of the Pandemic. ....	21
(b) Sexual Orientation Not the Issue. ....	22
(3) Modes of Transmission in South Africa. ....	24
(a) Sexual Transmission. ....	24
(b) Perinatal Transmission. ....	24
(c) Parenteral Transmission. ....	26
(4) AIDS and Gender. ....	33
(5) Ages Affected. ....	36
(a) Young adults. ....	36
(b) Children. ....	37

(i) Perinatal Infection. . . . .	37
(ii) Child Rape . . . . .	37
(c) The Elderly. . . . .	41
(6) Other Social Factors in the Transmission of AIDS. . . . .	42
(a) Daniel Hrdy's Contribution. . . . .	43
(i) Female Circumcision and Infibulation . . . . .	43
(ii) Promiscuity. . . . .	44
(iii) Homosexuality and Anal Intercourse. . . . .	45
(iv) Practices Resulting in Exposure to Blood. . . . .	47
(v) Practices Involving the Use of Shared Instruments. . . . .	47
(vi) Contact with Nonhuman Primates. . . . .	48
(b) Other Cultural Factors. . . . .	48
(i) 'Dry' Sex. . . . .	48
(ii) Circumcision. . . . .	49
(iii) Traditional Healers. . . . .	51
(7) AIDS and Tuberculosis. . . . .	51
(8) AIDS and Death, AIDS and Life. . . . .	53
Actuarial Projections of Mortality. . . . .	55
(9) Conclusion. . . . .	58
(10) AIDS Raises Context-Specific Questions for Theologies - A Brief Survey. . . . .	59
(a) "Systematic" Questions. . . . .	59
(b) "Ethical" Questions. . . . .	63
(c) "Pastoral" Questions. . . . .	67
(11) Afterword. . . . .	70
CHAPTER 2: THE ANCESTOR CULT IN SOUTH AFRICA. . . . .	74
(1) Introduction. . . . .	74
(2) Extent of the Cult of the Ancestors. . . . .	75

(a) Manona. ....	76
(b) Kitshoff. ....	76
(c) Anderson. ....	77
(d) Kriel. ....	78
(e) Dreyer and Mjwabe. ....	79
(f) Tihagale. ....	79
(g) Denis. ....	80
(h) Conclusion. ....	80
(3) Who Are the Ancestors? .....	81
Toward a Definition. ....	82
(4) Who Becomes an Ancestor? .....	86
(a) Obengo. ....	86
(b) IMBISA. ....	86
(c) Michalek. ....	87
(5) Worldview of the Ancestors. ....	92
(a) God. ....	93
(b) Other spirits. ....	97
(6) Conclusion: Causation and Location. ....	99
(a) Causation. ....	100
(i) Impersonal. ....	100
(ii) Personal. ....	100
(b) Location. ....	102
<b>CHAPTER 3: CHRISTIAN MISSION AND THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS</b> .....	<b>104</b>
(1) Introduction. ....	104
(2) Preliminary Notes. ....	106
(a) The Basotho as Case Study. ....	107

(b)	The Impossibility of Describing a 'Pure' or 'Original' Cult. . . . .	109
(3)	History of the Cult of the Ancestors and Christianity. . . . .	111
	Stage One: The Missionary Movement and the Ancestor Cult. . . . .	111
(a)	Forbidden Practices. . . . .	113
(i)	Beer Consumption. . . . .	115
(ii)	Dancing. . . . .	119
(iii)	Rites of Passage. . . . .	120
(iv)	Marriage. . . . .	122
(v)	Healing. . . . .	124
(vi)	Conclusion. . . . .	124
(b)	The Ancestors and the Commandments. . . . .	125
(i)	Ancestors and Sins. . . . .	125
(ii)	Ancestors and Saints. . . . .	130
(iii)	Conclusion. . . . .	133
(c)	The Missionary Motivation. . . . .	133
(d)	Conclusion. . . . .	136
	Stage Two: The Resurgence of the Ancestor Cult. . . . .	138
(a)	Documents Indicating a Changing Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors. . . . .	138
(i)	Ancestor Cults Permitted in China, Japan and Congo. . . . .	139
(ii)	Papal Documents and the Cult of the Ancestors. . . . .	141
	Paul VI's <i>Africae Terrarum</i> . . . . .	141
	The "African Synod" and John Paul II's <i>Ecclesia in Africa</i> . . . . .	142
(b)	A Context of Social and Ecclesial Changes. . . . .	146
(i)	Decolonisation. . . . .	147
(ii)	Recognition of and Adaptation to Foreign Cultures. . . . .	148
(iii)	Growth of the Church Outside the Western World. . . . .	151

(c) Major Theological Changes at the Second Vatican Council. . . . .	151
(i) <i>Lumen Gentium</i> . . . . .	153
(ii) <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> . . . . .	154
(iii) <i>Ad Gentes</i> . . . . .	155
(iv) Conclusion. . . . .	156
(d) Inculturation. . . . .	157
(i) Transitional Text: <i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> . . . . .	157
(ii) A Description of Inculturation. . . . .	158
(iii) John Paul II and Inculturation. . . . .	159
(e) Local Changes in Christians' Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors. . . . .	161
(4) Conclusion to Chapter. . . . .	165
CHAPTER 4: AIDS AND KAIROS. . . . .	167
(1) Introduction. . . . .	167
(2) AIDS as <i>Kairos</i> . . . . .	168
(3) Introduction to the <i>Kairos Document</i> . . . . .	171
(4) Contents of the <i>Kairos Document</i> . . . . .	171
(5) Disadvantages of Using the <i>Kairos Document</i> . . . . .	175
(6) Justification for Using the <i>Kairos Document</i> as a Structure. . . . .	177
(7) Conclusion. . . . .	181
CHAPTER 5: AIDS AND SALVATION. . . . .	185
(1) Introduction. . . . .	185
(2) The Meanings of Salvation in the Context of AIDS. . . . .	186
(3) Responses to the Questions of Salvation. . . . .	189
Section One: Perspective of the Ancestor Cult. . . . .	189
(1) Medical Contribution. . . . .	190
(2) More Holistic View of Salvation. . . . .	193

(3) The Cult as a Source of Desolation. . . . .	197
(4) The Cult as a Source of Consolation. . . . .	200
 Section Two: Classical Christian Response. . . . .	202
(1) History of Christian Soteriology. . . . .	203
(a) Five Aspects of the New Testament Witness. . . . .	205
(b) The Patristic Model. . . . .	207
(c) Medieval Models. . . . .	208
(i) Anselm. . . . .	208
(ii) Thomas. . . . .	210
(d) Contemporary Models. . . . .	211
(i) Solidarity. . . . .	212
(ii) Substitution. . . . .	213
Vicarious Punishment. . . . .	214
An Anthropological Theory: The Scapegoat. . . . .	215
(e) Two Further Anthropological Models of Salvation. . . . .	217
(i) Substitutionary Expiatory Sacrifice. . . . .	218
Expiation. . . . .	218
Substitution. . . . .	219
Sacrifice as Metaphor. . . . .	220
Communion Sacrifice. . . . .	220
Holocaust. . . . .	222
(ii) Initiation. . . . .	224
Mysteries of Initiation. . . . .	225
Life and Death in Psychoanalysis. . . . .	225
The Cross as a Liberating Paradigm. . . . .	227
Death to Sin. . . . .	228
(f) Conclusion of History of Soteriology. . . . .	230

(2) Lemma: Salvation is Not a Single-dimensional Spiritual State. . . . .	231
(3) Examples of Salvation from AIDS. . . . .	234
(a) Healing Illness. . . . .	234
(b) Raising the Dead. . . . .	235
(c) Engagement in Community. . . . .	236
(d) A New Spiritual Life. . . . .	237
 Section Three: The Prophetic Response. . . . .	 239
(1) Prophecy. . . . .	239
(2) Announcing the Good News. . . . .	241
(a) The Value of Ritual and the Sacrament of Healing. . . . .	241
(b) Naming the Affliction. . . . .	244
(3) Denunciation where Necessary. . . . .	246
(a) Means of Infection. . . . .	246
(i) Issues of Gender. . . . .	247
(ii) Distribution of Condoms. . . . .	249
(b) Exacerbation of Suffering. . . . .	250
(i) Government Inefficiency. . . . .	251
(ii) Stigma. . . . .	251
(4) Prophetic Action. . . . .	254
(a) TAC: The Treatment Action Campaign. . . . .	254
(b) Christian Prophetic Action. . . . .	255
 (4) Conclusion to Chapter. . . . .	 257
 CONCLUSION. . . . .	 260
(1) Contents of the Thesis. . . . .	260
(2) Future Challenges. . . . .	267
 APPENDIX: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TEXTS. . . . .	 269

1. A. Gaughran, <i>Katekisisa ea lekhotla le leng</i> . . . . .	269
2. Ferdinand Krüger, "Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana-Gruppe der Bantu in Südafrika".	269
3. Bernard Mohlalisi, <i>Tseleng ea leholimo</i> . . . . .	270
4. Bernard Mohlalisi, <i>Katekisisa ea bakatekumena le ea bana</i> . . . . .	271
5. Pius XII, "Allocutio ac officialibus Pontificiarum Operum Missionalium". . . . .	271
<b>ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS.</b> . . . . .	<b>272</b>
<b>SOURCES CITED.</b> . . . . .	<b>274</b>
<b>(1) Magisterial Documents.</b> . . . . .	<b>274</b>
(a) Roman Catholic. . . . .	274
(i) Papal Documents. . . . .	274
(ii) Episcopal Conferences and Synods. . . . .	275
(iii) Congregations and Commissions. . . . .	275
(iv) Catechisms. . . . .	276
(b) Protestant Churches. . . . .	276
Constitutions, Synods and Catechisms. . . . .	276
<b>(2) AIDS.</b> . . . . .	<b>277</b>
(a) Medical. . . . .	277
(b) Social. . . . .	279
(c) Theological. . . . .	283
<b>(3) The Cult of the Ancestors.</b> . . . . .	<b>285</b>
(a) Anthropological. . . . .	285
(b) Historical Perspectives. . . . .	289
(c) Ancestors and Christian Theology. . . . .	289
<b>(4) History.</b> . . . . .	<b>292</b>
<b>(5) Theology.</b> . . . . .	<b>294</b>
(a) Collections of Documents. . . . .	294
(b) General. . . . .	294

## INTRODUCTION

### **(1) Statement of the Problem**

In the "new" South Africa millions<sup>1</sup> of people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and leads inevitably to premature death. The theology that has been written in the context of this pandemic has been of a largely pastoral nature and has not concentrated on traditional Western systematic theological categories of soteriology, theodicy, eschatology, etc.

At the same time as the AIDS pandemic has been building up steam, an innovation has occurred in theological writing. Many theologians have reappropriated the traditional Bantu cult of the ancestors in Southern Africa. They write about the cult as the traditional source of African spirituality, and about the ancestors as guardians of African morality. This is a re-assertion of black identity which has co-incided with the latter years of the struggle for democracy and the early period of the new political dispensation in South Africa.

Two observations can be made about the renewed prominence of the ancestral cult on the theological scene:

(i) In the Christian literature up to August 2001, the cult is only once related to the AIDS pandemic. Either this is a gross oversight, or there is the perception that perhaps the cult has not the resources to address the pandemic.

(ii) The cult raises the questions of salvation in Christ and of Christian eschatology, neither of which has been adequately addressed in the literature.

### **(2) State of the Question**

#### **(a) New Political Dispensation**

The 1990's saw enormous change in South Africa. The political dispensation changed with the introduction of democracy and the end of 450 years of effective colonial rule. In 1990,

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1. The HIV/AIDS Barometer of the Mail and Guardian, puts the figure at 4.7 million in November 2002. See [Http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.jsp?a=66&o=11367](http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.jsp?a=66&o=11367) viewed on 30 November 2002.

the liberation movements which had been banned in the 1960's were unbanned and allowed to operate freely. Symbolic of the new dispensation were the release on 11 February 1990 of Nelson Mandela, a prisoner of conscience for 27 years, and the holding of the first democratic elections, with universal adult suffrage on 27 April 1994.

During the most repressive years of apartheid, the churches were the only voice left unsilenced in the call for justice. Since the 1960's the English-speaking churches had to varying degrees taken a stand against the apartheid political and economic dispensation.<sup>2</sup> The white branches of the Dutch-Reformed (Calvinist) Churches were largely credited with providing the theological justification for the "State Theology" of racial segregation.<sup>3</sup> The focus of much of the social activity of the churches had been support of those who were suffering under apartheid, and the challenging of unjust structures. Much theological writing was in the mode of liberation theology, with a close identification of salvation in Christ with political liberation. Groups of theologians, such as those writing for the Institute of Contextual Theology, concentrated on the political dimension of the context.

In 2004, South Africa celebrated the tenth anniversary of its democratic transition. While many celebrate the liberation from oppression, arbitrarily repressive measures, state domination and internecine political violence, a new and more destructive scourge is sweeping the country. The pandemic of AIDS is proving a challenge of overwhelming dimension at almost every level of society.

With the advent of democracy there was a palpable sense of a job well-done and permission to return to what was perceived as a "normal" mode for the churches. Civil society, and democratic, representative state structures could take over where the

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2. For an analysis of the often-hesitant resistance of the English-Speaking churches to the apartheid regime, see Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

3. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985) offers an analysis of this "State Theology."

churches left off. To a certain extent, the agenda for theology was once again opened. Speckman and Kaufmann write optimistically of contemporary democratic South Africa: "While the details of what should be done may not be clear, it is obvious that a new agenda has to be set for Contextual Theology."<sup>4</sup> It is the contention of this thesis that the new agenda for contextual theology has to be the mounting AIDS crisis.

#### (b) The AIDS Pandemic

"The first two cases of AIDS were identified in South Africa in 1982. For the first eight years, the epidemic was primarily located among white homosexuals..... In July 1991, the number of heterosexually transmitted cases equalled the number of homosexual cases."<sup>5</sup>

The deaths,<sup>6</sup> economic effects,<sup>7</sup> social disruption and morale-sapping effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are slowly being reckoned and will be felt for decades to come.<sup>8</sup> The depredations of the pandemic are worsened by the heritage of the lack of investment in health, educational and leisure infrastructure during 450 years of skewed economy.

The churches, for so long preoccupied with the issue of socio-political justice, hear a new call. The scourge of AIDS poses as great a challenge to the churches' pastoral, sacramental and theological resources as did apartheid.

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4. McGlory T Speckman and Larry T Kaufmann, "Introduction," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T Speckman and Larry T Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 6.

5. Alan Whiteside and Clem Sunter, *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, Tafelberg, 2000), 47.

6. For actuarial projections of the numbers of deaths in South Africa due to AIDS, see Rob Dorrington, et al., *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Adult Mortality in South Africa* (Tygerberg: Burden of Disease Research Unit, Medical Research Council of South Africa, 2001 September), [www.mrc.ac.za/bod/complete.pdf](http://www.mrc.ac.za/bod/complete.pdf) viewed on 28 September 2001.

7. For estimates of how the AIDS will affect the welfare of children and families in South Africa, refer to Deborah Ewing, "Welfare," in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 79–93.

8. Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, Chapter 7, projects "The Economic, Developmental and Social Impacts of AIDS" using worst-case and best-case scenarios for the next 35 to 85 years.

Theological reflection on HIV/AIDS changed as more information about the disease became available and as understandings developed. Writings from the late-1980's debated whether AIDS is a punishment from God for the promiscuous behaviour of homosexual men.<sup>9</sup> Other writing of the time looked at appropriate pastoral care for these afflicted people.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1990's it became apparent that AIDS was not restricted to homosexual men, but that it was spreading like wildfire among the general population, especially sexually active people between the ages of 15 and 50. Theological writing shifted to the questions of pastoral care of people with AIDS, caring for orphans, the need for moral renewal, AIDS education in schools and the family, the use of condoms as a means of reducing the spread of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) responsible for the syndrome, etc. Towards the end of the 1990's the churches realised that the pandemic would be a feature of society for the foreseeable future, and that long-term planning and strategies should be in place.<sup>11</sup> It became apparent that even if life-saving drugs were available for everybody infected by the virus, society would be irretrievably changed.<sup>12</sup>

An exclusively biomedical approach to the pandemic is alien to the thinking of most Africans rooted in their traditions. The spiritual and social aspects of living with a killing disease were being investigated. The churches established AIDS desks to co-ordinate their response to the pandemic. The AIDS crisis has also given rise to tentative systematic theological explorations.<sup>13</sup> The present work is one such exploration.

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9. Daniel J. Louw, "VIGS: Die radikale siekte met 'n radikale uitdaging aan die pastorale bediening," *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif* XXIX, no. 1 (January 1988): 66–79.

10. Daniel Louw, "Ministering and Counselling the Person with AIDS," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 71 (1990): 37–50.

11. Philippe Denis, "Sharing Family Stories in a Time of AIDS," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (August 2001): 258–81.

12. For example, Emmanuel M. Katongole, "Christian Ethics and AIDS in Africa Today: Exploring the Limits of a Culture of Suspicion and Despair," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (August 2001): 144–60, discusses the ways in which people have changed their approach to intimate relationships.

13. See, for example, Susan Rakoczy, "Christology in the Context of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic," *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (2001): 5–15.

## (c) The Ancestors Reclaimed

During the years of colonialism and the height of apartheid, the churches proscribed and sanctioned the exploration of Christian theological expressions rooted in the traditional African ancestral cult. Political activism against racism grew from the 1970's onward, and theologians in other parts of the continent were exploring the cult of the ancestors as their countries were gaining independence. South African theologians also began exploring the life-giving dimensions of the cult of the ancestors,<sup>14</sup> its relation to Charismatic experience,<sup>15</sup> and in some cases introducing elements of this cult into the worship of the mainstream ("missionary" and particularly Roman Catholic) churches.<sup>16</sup>

Historically most of the writing about the cult of the ancestors had been by Western missionaries<sup>17</sup> and South African white theologians<sup>18</sup> or anthropologists,<sup>19</sup> in an academic setting. Thus, the cult was described from without, and not from the perspective of an insider's experience. At the least critical, the cult of the ancestors was

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14. See, for example, Jerome Skhakhane, "African Spirituality," in *The Church and African Cultures: Conference Papers*, Mhloni Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 101–13.

15. Teresa Okure, "Belief in the Holy Spirit and in Ancestral Spirits," *Grace and Truth* 15, no. 3, Steps of Inculturation (November 1998): 5–25.

16. See, for example, Buti Tlhagale, "Bringing the African Culture Into the Church," in *The Church and African Culture: Conference Papers*, Mhloni Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 169–85. For further discussion in the same volume, on the introduction of the ancestor cult into Catholic liturgy, the reader is referred to Letsie Moshoeshe, "Healing Rite," 86–90, and Bafana Hlatshwayo, "Proposed Rites of Marriage: Tswana Pastoral Region," 73–85.

For a response to such proposals, in Zimbabwe, see Josef Elsener, "Traditionelle afrikanische Ahnenverehrung im christlichen Ritual?" *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 57, no. 4 (2001): 261–86. A search of the Worldwide Web will give an impression of the responses to such proposals as Archbishop Tlhagale's to incorporate sacrifice to the ancestors in the Catholic Mass.

17. See Klaus Nürnberger, "The Sotho Notion of the Supreme Being and the Impact of the Christian Proclamation," *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, no. 3 (1975): 174–200. Also, M.L. Daneel, "The Christian Gospel and the Ancestor Cult," *Missionalia* 1, no. 2 (1973): 46–73, and Gideon Thom, "A Reformed Perspective on African Belief in Ancestors," *Missionalia* 1, no. 2 (1973): 73–85.

18. For example, Balcomb. A.O., "Modernity and the African Experience," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 3, no. 2 (1996), [Http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/mod.htm](http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/mod.htm) viewed on 30 November 2003.

19. In a distinguished career, the doyen of South African anthropologists, W.D. Hammond-Tooke has published a number of books and articles of direct relevance to our theme. These will be cited in the second and third chapters of this work.

Other anthropologists have studied various aspects of indigenous culture and have shown how they relate to the cult of the ancestors. See for example, Dan Bosko, "Why Basotho Wear Blankets," *African Studies* 40, no. 1 (1981): 24–32.

described as the manner in which “pre-modern” Africans explain the working of the universe and try to influence favourably the forces in control of their destiny.<sup>20</sup> More often than not, the missionaries’ writings were to condemn the cult as contrary to the First Commandment, and to warn against any attempt to reconcile the Christian life with the cult.<sup>21</sup> This negative attitude to the ancestors has been evident from the outset of Christian mission among the Basotho, for example, with the earliest catechisms.<sup>22</sup> The third chapter of this work examines the changing attitude toward the cult of the ancestors from the beginning of missionary work in Southern Africa to the present.

Many African Christians have internalised this dimension of mission theology, and regard the traditional cult of the ancestors as a remnant of paganism. So they eschew any family rites to do with their ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, many Africans have refused to join the mainline Christian churches, because they understand that this would mean they have to forsake the ancestral cult. Indeed, adherence to the ancestors has been presented as an impediment to membership in the mainline (or ‘missionary’) churches.<sup>24</sup> However, many faithful members of mainline churches practice the cult of their ancestors “in secret” during the week and come to church on Sundays. This kind of “religious

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20. Balcomb. A.O., “Modernity and the African Experience.”

21. In recent times, examples of such an outlook are: Klaus Nürnberger, “Ancestors and Christ: The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!” *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1996): 11–12, and Hans-Jürgen Becken, “Beware of the Ancestor Cult: A Challenge to Missiological Research in South Africa,” *Missionalia* 21, no. 3 (November 1993): 333–39.

22. See for example, A. Mabile, *Religione ea Bokreste* (Moriya: Morija Press, 1873).

23. On this point, the African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM) wrote in their *Memorandum Addressed to the Bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference (SACBC)* (Pretoria: 1999) para. 6:

Many black African members of the Church (including priests and bishops!) still suffer from a colonised mind which results from the phenomenon of internalised oppression. This, among other things, makes them to view things African as necessarily suspect and to uncritically work within the prevailing white-tailored structures, either because of complacency, fear or a sense of helplessness.

24. In 1948, Bengt Sundkler, a Swedish Lutheran missionary, wrote a seminal work, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press), in which he described the central role played by the ancestral cult in the African Independent Churches (now more acceptably called ‘African Initiated’ or ‘African Indigenous’ Churches) (AIC) of which there are some 6000 in South Africa alone. They have an organic combination of traditional African religious beliefs and practices with Christian beliefs, and attract an enormous following. They are led by indigenous ministers and have a much more ‘Africanised’ liturgy than the mainline churches. Sundkler’s work has spawned libraries on the topic of the AIC’s, with which I will only be obliquely concerned in this work.

schizophrenia” is so widespread as to be a pathological dimension of the mainline churches, in need of serious attention.

The mainline churches are in the process of modifying their stance on the ancestors. The ground-breaking change came with the doctoral thesis of a Tswana Christian minister, describing the life he has received from his family’s ancestral cult.<sup>25</sup> Setiloane’s work is seminal, and is widely quoted in works on the ancestors.

A new generation of scholars of religious studies have attempted to explain the way the cult operates as a cohesive force for societies under stress.<sup>26</sup> The cult is a rallying point in the quest for reconstructing identity in the new political dispensation.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, some people use it as a mark of identity, saying that only those people who practice the cult of the ancestors are truly African.

The debate about the cult of the ancestors in the Christian church is taking place as if it is in another theological universe to that of AIDS. Those theologians who call themselves proponents of “black theology,” such as Buti Tlhagale, Tinyiko Maluleke, S. Mtetwa, etc. write about the cult of the ancestors as the foundational African religious experience.<sup>28</sup> While their writings occasionally refer to the AIDS pandemic sweeping the country, they do not relate how the experience of the ancestors might help African Christians to respond to their experience of the scourge. Only three writers: George C.

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25. Gabriel Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam: AA Balkema, 1976), 298.

26. This fairly common theme can be seen in: Jim Kiernan, “The ‘Problem of Evil’ in the Context of Ancestral Intervention in the Affairs of the Living in Africa,” *Man* (N.S.) 17 (June 1992): 287-301 and in Jim Kiernan, “African Traditional Religions in South Africa,” in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 15-27.

27. Malinge Njeza says “It [African concern with the ancestors] is an affirmation of African-ness and Blackness and a rejection of the European derogation of ancestor cult.” in Malinge Njeza, “Christianity and Africanization Project: Possibilities of African Christianity Within Mainline Churches in South Africa” (Cape Town, 1989), [Http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/projects/african/afprop.htm](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/projects/african/afprop.htm) viewed on 24 September 2002.

28. See, for example, S. Mtetwa, “African Spirituality in the Context of Modernity,” *Bulletin for Contextual Theology: African Theology* 3, no. 2 (1996): <http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/tonyb.htm> viewed on 25 February 2002, and Tom Obengo, “The Role of Ancestors as Guardians of Morality in African Traditional Religions,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* (1991).

Bond, Letta Mosue and Vitus Siphon Ncube make the connection between the cult of the ancestors and the AIDS pandemic.

George C. Bond suggests that the cult of the ancestors is likely to undergo some modification as the number of people dying of AIDS increases. He writes from the perspective of religious studies (and not theology):

Thus, in the next decade, millions of Africans are expected to die of AIDS. This magnitude of death will impose a heavy strain not only on medical facilities but also on customary religious and medical systems, geared to localized, parochial misfortunes. A different order of explanation will no doubt be required.<sup>29</sup>

Bond explains that he has lived through a severe epidemic and witnessed death on an enormous scale in a smallpox epidemic in Zambia in the mid-1960's. He says that "the sheer number of organic deaths tested the order of religious explanation related to death and burial practices."<sup>30</sup> He suggests here that the cult of the ancestors may be inadequate for the explanation of large numbers of AIDS deaths. As one element of a dynamic cultural reality, religious explanation systems are also creative in the face of challenge. For example, it is already evident how changes are occurring in funeral rites in South Africa, as people are called upon to attend more and more funerals.<sup>31</sup>

Until 2001, a solitary theological article, by Sr Letta Mosue, spanned the gap between the cult of the ancestors and the AIDS pandemic.<sup>32</sup> Through arguments based on the cult in East Africa, she links the ancestors to the generation of life and the reproductive organs. She says the spread of HIV is due to a misuse of this gift which is justly the preserve of the ancestors. "The ancestors' participation in the healing process might help revive the sense of the sacredness of life and that of the sources of life, namely, the reproductive organs and sexual intercourse."<sup>33</sup> On page 31, Mosue also

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29. George C Bond, "Living with Spirits: Death and Afterlife in African Religions," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions*, edited by Hiroshi Obayashi (New York: Praeger, 1992), 4.

30. Bond, "Living with Spirits: Death and Afterlife in African Religions," 4.

31. See Ntombi B. Ngwenya, "We Are All Believers: Crisis in Living Conditions and the Intervention of Burial Societies in Botswana," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (2001): 282–303. She discusses the way in which burial societies are now helping members to deal with the increasing number of deaths.

32. Letta Mosue, "Ancestors and HIV/AIDS," *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (August 2001): 28–33.

33. Mosue, "Ancestors and HIV/AIDS," 32.

challenges the claim that tradition permits men to have to sexual intercourse before marriage.<sup>34</sup> Mosue hereby falls in line with the commonly held position that the cult of the ancestors functions primarily to guard moral behaviour in Africa.<sup>35</sup> If the ancestral moral injunction of premarital continence were followed, there would be less chance of spread of the HIV infection.

In 2002, Ncube delivered an MTh thesis,<sup>36</sup> which specifically linked AIDS to traditional Zulu divination and witchcraft in a pastoral theological context. This work was discussed and commented upon at a conference of Catholic theologians in February 2003.<sup>37</sup> Ncube's work brought the question of AIDS and the ancestor cult into mainstream theological thought in South Africa. The final chapter of this present thesis takes Ncube's ideas further in an enquiry into the meaning of salvation in the context of the AIDS crisis. I link his work particularly with the Christian mission of healing and care for the dying.

The absence of other theological writing linking the cult of the ancestors to the AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa is inexplicable and unexpected. The purpose of this present research is to address that shortcoming, specifically within the systematic theological category of soteriology.

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34. Mosue quotes Oliver Alozie Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion and Culture*. (Enugu, Nigeria: Bigard, 1991): 88 "The misconception that sex before marriage is culturally endorsed is not true because birth and childhood rituals, initiation and puberty rites all expressed the religious emphasis placed on the virtue of virginity among both males and females." I have not been able to verify this citation.

35. See Desmond Mpilo Tutu, "The Ancestor Cult and Its Influence on Ethical Issues," *Ministry* 9, no. 3 (July 1969): 99–104.

36. Vitus Siphon Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *Ukugula*, *Ukufa Nokuphumula Ngoxolo* (Sickness Unto Death and Rest in Peace) in Times of HIV-AIDS with a Special Reference to Zulu Concepts of *Ukubhula* (Divination) *Nokuthakatha* (Witchcraft)," dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (School of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, supervised by Dr Stuart C. Bate, 2002).

37. See Vitus Siphon Ncube, "Responsibility in Inculturation: The Healing Ministry in a Zulu Context," paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 78–115, and the response: Sithembele Sipuka, "A Response to Vitus Ncube's Paper," response to paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 116–20.

(d) Choosing Soteriology as an Appropriate Theological Category

The constellation of the AIDS pandemic and the ancestral cult opens numerous avenues for theological research. These include:

Moral Theology: the ancestors as the guardians of the group's morality. The changing nature of intimate relationships, the purpose and function of sexuality, and responsibility toward the sick and dying also feature here.

Liturgy: how to include in a meaningful way the ancestors in the celebration of Christian communal life and death.

Christology: Christ as an ancestor; the kenotic Christ suffering with AIDS.

Eschatology: the meaning of life, premature death and human fulfillment implied by the ancestors.

Soteriology: being saved from AIDS through the intervention of the ancestors.

Interfaith Dialogue: working with people of other faiths or none, in crucial healing ministry.

For reasons of originality and relevance, I have chosen to pursue the question of soteriology in this research. The pandemic confronts people daily with the existential questions of death and the meaning of life. The African notion of fulfillment involves living to great age, being a guardian of morality and tradition, handing on wisdom, having offspring who will venerate one as an ancestor, etc. When so many people are dying prematurely and unfulfilled, thoughts turn to the notion of a life hereafter in which there might be fulfillment and satisfaction, perhaps another chance, in continuity and community with the lived experience of family and friends. Is fulfillment of life attained in a "hereafter?" Does it consist in the memories that people retain of the deceased? In denial of the reality? Does the traditional articulation of the ancestral cult - which says that ancestors are those who died in old age, having handed on life and wisdom, having been sources of unity - not cause further distress for young, often childless people facing their

own mortality?

Where can one find salvation? What might salvation be in such a seemingly hopeless context? Life-prolonging drugs? The experience of a supportive community? A closer relationship with God or the ancestors? When despair can so easily take over, what is the source of the enormous hope that one sees daily in people's lives? What is the specific contribution of the Christian faith? Christians also contract HIV and die of AIDS.<sup>38</sup> What is the Church offering that is unique? Are traditional presentations of Christ as Saviour adequate to this situation? Can the Church consider the ancestors as salvific in any way?<sup>39</sup> Individuals and communities of believers are confronted with these issues when pastors or funeral ministers have to preach at the all-too-frequent funerals. What words of consolation don't eventually ring hollow? Which biblical passages speak of God and people in similar situations?

As the churches move away from an agenda that focussed mostly on the political dimension of the message of the Kingdom of God, they are confronted with a new *kairos*. Salvation is already and not yet - already, in the political realm, but not yet, in terms of a healthy life. This eschatological tension is acutely felt in the context of the AIDS pandemic.

### (3) Hypothesis

Two new topics have emerged on the South African theological scene since the late 1980's:

(i) Black theologians reclaim the ancestral cult as foundational to African spirituality.

(ii) Christians respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

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38. Marc-Éric Gruénais, "La religion préserve-t-elle du sida? Des congrégations religieuses congolaises face à la pandémie de l'infection par le VIH," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* xxxix-2, no. 154 (1999): 253-70.

39. See Patrick Kalilombe, "The Salvific Value of African Religions," *AFER* 21, no. 3 (June 1979): 143-57.

Yet surprisingly, these two topics are discussed in almost complete isolation from one another, and the link is not made that both should be part of a contextual South African theology.

It is the hypothesis of this research that no comprehensive contextual theology is possible which does not bring into dialogue these two ubiquitous realities in the context of the “new” South Africa. The theological category of soteriology plays an essential role in this dialogue.

#### (4) Methodology

This research will follow the Synthetic model proposed in Chapter 7 of “Models of Contextual Theology” by Stephen Bevans.<sup>40</sup> Before examining the actual models of contextual theology, I will consider some of Bevans’s presuppositions.

##### (a) Bevans’s Presuppositions

This research appropriates a number of the presuppositions Bevans makes in his first chapter.

(i) Primarily, present human experience is an important *locus theologicus* and a valid source for theological expression. The two traditional *loci* of Scripture and Tradition are not the exclusive sources for theological reflection. At the very least, theology is always articulated in the language and with the sets of thought-forms available in a particular time and place.

There is thus a recognition that theology is to some extent a subjective pursuit. In order to retain some objectivity, there is the need for a critical appraisal of the subject doing the theology. While it is recognised that experience, especially at the level of faith, is ultimately personal and private, and to a certain extent incommunicable, there is the

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40. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 88–102.

pragmatic recognition that people in similar situations share like experiences. The presumption of all language is that communication of ideas is possible and that people do make sense to each other. We are not in an impasse of a tower of Babel. Theology is thus possible within a community of people with similar experiences. In an African context, personal identity is often tied up with that of a group, what Teresa Okure calls "corporate personality."<sup>41</sup> If we accept this commonly held opinion as true, then the privacy and subjectivity of experience are less of an impediment to communication than in societies which elevate the individual to the basic unit of meaning.

Bevans also maintains<sup>42</sup> that the outsider or "nonparticipant," who does not share the experiences of a community, must therefore approach with great humility and respect, with an openness to learn and be evangelised. He or she may not presume to speak on behalf of a community whose experience he or she does not share. The expertise of a theologian may be useful to a community in helping them to order and systematise their reflection on and articulation of their theology. Further, the non-participant theologian may help a community to widen and deepen their reflection by relating it to experiences of other communities who have encountered similar situations. Finally, with great circumspection and humility, the outsider may venture a critique of inconsistencies and weaknesses of a culture, because culture is always ambiguous and no culture is totally good.<sup>43</sup> An outsider may thus help a community to develop its own contextualised

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41. Okure, "Belief in the Holy Spirit and in Ancestral Spirits," 12.

42. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 19.

43. While culture is not the primary category of this thesis, it is important to state here what I mean by the term. I find Geertz's semiotic approach (see, for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* [New York: Basic Books, 1973]) most useful for the purposes of this thesis, because Geertz analyses culture as a web of meanings, which shed light on the cult of the ancestors. Culture is a set of learned and transmitted behaviours that help to give meaning to our physical and social environment and to predict, control and modify this environment. Functionalist, materialist (economic) and elitist approaches to culture are equally useful for the purposes to which they are applied, but the present research concerns the *understandings* and *explanations* that underlie a certain set of behaviours.

The dimension of indigenous South African culture with which this work is most concerned is what I call the "worldview" of the ancestors, but which could equally be called a "cosmology" or "*Weltanschauung*." The ancestral worldview helps South Africans to describe, define and maintain relationships of kinship, and therefore to live in an economy that often mitigates against the survival

theology.<sup>44</sup>

(ii) Secondly, on page 7, Bevans quotes Douglas Hall by saying that “[c]ontextualisation ... is the sine qua non of all genuine theological thought, and always has been.”<sup>45</sup> By ‘contextualisation’ is meant making explicit reference to the culture and social changes of the context. This makes of theology a hermeneutical exercise done with a reflectivity on the context of the subject and on the context of any texts being used. This necessarily involves deliberate engagement with the live questions of the context in which the theology is being articulated. These questions arise from events or crises of the time. The focal questions of the present thesis are the way in which the cult of the ancestors is lived and experienced and the challenge posed by the AIDS pandemic.

A contextual approach to theology does not reduce the significance of theology which is retrospective in intent, trying to understand what was at stake in previous generations. Theology done with this focus also takes into account the context in which questions were originally considered. Indeed, contextual theology often requires a review of the history of a situation in order better to understand the present situation. This is evident in the third chapter of this present work, in which the reasons are considered for the demise of the cult of the ancestors under pressure from 19th Century European missionaries.

(iii) Thirdly, Bevans distinguishes between creation-centred and redemption-centred basic theological orientations:<sup>46</sup> The redemption-centred basic orientation sees nature as corrupt and in need of redemption. The world therefore distorts the reality of God and grace must replace, rather than build upon nature. This means that Christ must

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of nuclear or individual families. The set of understandings entails specific expected behaviours and also material obligations.

44. I am aware that I am an outsider in the sense that I do not have AIDS or practice the cult of the ancestors. But I am affected by the AIDS pandemic as is every other South African. Thus this research will be conducted with respect and a realistic awareness of its limitations.

45. Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 21.

46. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 21f.

be brought to the world for any chance of healing it. There is no analogy of being between God and humans, so theological language is dialectical rather than analogical. This approach allows very little room for contextualisation of theology.

The creation-centred approach operates from the conviction that "God saw all that God had created, and indeed it was very good."<sup>47</sup> Therefore culture and human expressions are generally good. Grace builds on nature which is essentially good. God's self-revelation takes place in the created world, through ordinary words and people. Human life gives us analogical access to God's goodness and there is thus a continuity between divine reality and human life. The aberration of sin can only be exterminated by confrontation with the power of good. The creation-centred approach allows that human events and culture are arenas of God's activity, and therefore valid sources of contextual theology.

In the original *Models of Contextual Theology*,<sup>48</sup> Stephen Bevans describes five different models, or approaches, which might be used to devise theology for a particular context. The models differ in their fundamental outlook, and therefore in their methodology:

Thus, the Translation model, sees the task of theology to translate faith, seen as a deposit of revelation, into terms that are best understood in a receiving culture.

The Anthropological model, at the other end of a spectrum, looks to a particular culture for the text of God's self-revelation, and accords a secondary role to the Scriptures and traditional formulations of the faith.

The Praxis model views faith as expressed most accurately in the socio-political commitment of the faithful, and thus the most important dimension of faith is intelligent action.

"The transcendental model proposes that the task of constructing a contextualised

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47. Gen 1:31

48. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992

theology is not about producing a particular body of any kind of texts; it is about attending to the affective and cognitive operations in the self-transcending subject.”<sup>49</sup>

In the revised and expanded version of *Models of Contextual Theology*,<sup>50</sup> Bevans adds a sixth model, the Countercultural model. Theologians using this model believe that all culture is radically ambiguous, and that any experience, past or present, is merely a clue to unmask the real meaning of history.

However, this present research uses Bevans's Synthetic model because it utilises elements that are already available in the context under consideration. It opens conversation with multiple partners, and recognises that this type of theology is always a “work in progress” and never a finished product.

#### (b) The Synthetic Model of Contextual Theology

In Chapter 7, Bevans outlines the particularities of the Synthetic model. The model comes closest to what Aylward Shorter describes as inculturation.<sup>51</sup> People who apply the model understand that there is a dynamic interaction between cultural change and developments in theology. They recognise a reciprocity between theology and the culture of people engaged in that theology. This means that culture shapes theological thinking, and that theological thinking has an impact on the lives and experiences of the believing community.

Arrupe writes of a reciprocal relationship in which theology and culture mutually enrich each other, when he writes of inculturation as:

the incarnation of the Christian life and message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’.<sup>52</sup>

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49. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 103.

50. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002

51. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

52. Pedro Arrupe, “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation,” in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe SJ*, edited by J. Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 172.

The Synthetic model does not eschew the theological and cultural resources of other situations, and is not developed in isolation from other world-contexts. People who use the model recognise that cultures are always in contact with each other, constantly forming a synthesis of the home and visiting cultures - a process Shorter calls "interculturalisation."<sup>53</sup> Contextual theology follows this same dynamic as cultures, borrowing ideas and themes developed in other contexts, in order to come to new expressions. There is a constant interplay between difference and similarity.

Accordingly, this thesis relies heavily on a framework developed in another context. The *Kairos Document*<sup>54</sup> was a collaborative, ecumenical reflection of South African theologians, pastors and lay Christians during the days of the struggle against apartheid. It had as its focus the spiral of violence into which the country was descending. I use this document, specifically, as a framework for the reflection on the meaning of salvation in the present context. In the fourth chapter, the document is introduced at greater length in its own historical setting, and in the fifth chapter I use its elements as a pattern for the present theology.

The Synthetic model views culture as morally neutral - neither essentially good nor essentially bad. There are elements of every culture that are praiseworthy, and others that are in need of redemption.<sup>55</sup>

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53. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 13.

It is important to remember that talk of culture is talk at least at one level of abstraction. Cultures are not agents. Individual or groups of people are agents of culture. Thus, talk about "cultures" interacting is really shorthand for talk about members of respective cultures interacting, with some of their ideas and behaviours affecting each other. It is this reciprocal process which Shorter calls "interculturalisation."

When a critical mass of sufficiently influential people approach a topic with new understandings, they can transmit these new ways of predicting, controlling and modifying their environment, and consequently the culture changes.

54. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*.

55. Thus, for example, the Sotho notion of *botho*, or what it means to be human, namely being a fundamentally social being, dependent on others and obliged to others by ties of relationships, is a laudable corrective to Western individualism. But the dimension that tolerates ritual killing in certain very prescribed circumstances, is frequently criticised by people from other cultures. As one is predisposed to the possibility of God speaking through one's own culture, it is equally necessary to remain open to the same possibility in other cultures. I attempt to maintain this openness throughout the thesis.

The major difficulty about doing theology with a synthetic model, is that there is no outline of steps to be taken in any particular order. Rather, it relies on an eclectic approach, using scripture, tradition, personal and group experience, traditional religiosity, cultural and social analysis, previous traditions, etc. Gleaning from Robert J. Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies*,<sup>56</sup> Bevans presents a diagram on page 93 of the elements from the past and present that have to be kept in constant dialogue. These elements are: Scripture and Tradition; culture; social change; and other thought forms and cultures. It is from attention to all of these that themes emerge. The ubiquity of AIDS and the ancestor cult in the "new" South Africa,<sup>57</sup> led this research to the point of identifying them as the two indispensable elements of a contextual theology.

The primary cultural resource used in the study is the wealth of published anthropological data and interpretation available in the country. For reasons of linguistic limitations, any first-language work has been restricted to the Sotho-Tswana group.<sup>58</sup> This necessary restriction has the disadvantage of not being able to consider first-hand accounts of people of the Venda, Tsonga and the Nguni language groups who are concentrated in the northern and coastal provinces respectively. As the ancestral cult is closely connected with the topography and thus ecology of the country,<sup>59</sup> this limitation has perforce omitted some local variants in the cult in South Africa. But the Sotho-Tswana-speaking region includes Botswana and the Kingdom of Lesotho.<sup>60</sup> Each of these countries has relative cultural homogeneity, particularly in rural areas. Limiting the

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56. Maryknoll, Orbis, 1985. This book was seminal in helping communities to express and own their understanding of the Christian life.

57. Chapters one and two, respectively, establish the ubiquity of AIDS and the ancestor cult.

58. There are 11 official languages in South Africa, two of European and nine of Bantu origin. Other indigenous non-Bantu languages are of the Khoi and San people, the region's earliest inhabitants, who have been reduced to living in small bands in areas set aside for their hunter-gatherer economy. In addition, hundreds of thousands of refugees and immigrants speak numerous other languages.

59. See Jim Kiernan, "African Traditional Religions in South Africa," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 15–27.

60. On the independence of Lesotho, see John E. Bardill and James H. Cobbe, *Lesotho: Dilemmas of Dependence in Southern Africa* (Boulder Colorado: Westview, 1985).

research to these, as much as possible, has made for more consistent work.

I am aware that there is the possible perception that this synthetic contextual theology has the weakness of being “neither fish nor fowl.” It is neither purely African nor traditionally Western, because it uses elements of both of these cultural milieux. An African might regard it as a “sell-out” to Western categories. A Western theologian might equally say that it is insufficiently rigorous, systematic or “tight.” Both of these critiques may be true. But it is my purpose to steer a middle path, using the best of both theological worlds - aiming at what Hegel called a synthesis: “developing, in a creative dialectic, something acceptable to all standpoints.”<sup>61</sup>

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61. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 90.

## CHAPTER 1: AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

### (1) Introduction

In this chapter I will consider the implications of the AIDS<sup>1</sup> crisis for theology in South Africa. I will begin with a review of the impact that the disease has on South African society and by extension on the Church. This will in turn elicit numerous theological questions which I will consider under the rubrics of systematic, ethical and pastoral. On the basis of criteria to be made clear at that point, only a couple of these questions will be selected for deeper consideration in subsequent chapters.

AIDS is a thoroughly modern disease, and as such modern means of communication are used rapidly to disseminate information and to exchange views. There is consequently an abundance of reliable current information accessible at numerous websites and in many medical and sociological publications. It is not our purpose to review all the medical, social and economic data which are very well documented elsewhere. However, in order to understand the magnitude and all-pervasiveness of the pandemic on the theological context of South Africa, it is necessary to cover some relevant areas.

As new research is constantly being published, I have decided in the writing of this thesis to draw a line at the end of June 2003, beyond which no further developments have been considered. This date might seem rather arbitrary. But it is when I returned to Ottawa from my last research trip to South Africa and Lesotho, to begin writing the thesis. Beyond this date I have access only to what is available in the public forum, in journals and online newspapers and to a few discussion groups to which I belong. From this

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1. "AIDS" is an acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is thus written throughout this document in upper case, except where a direct citation requires that it be written in lower case in order to be faithful to the source.

distance, it is not possible to follow the discussions in detail and be accountable for their theological interpretation.

For the sake of setting the context for our theological considerations in the coming chapters, this chapter will consider the following dimensions of the AIDS pandemic: Starting with the early days of the AIDS crisis, we will make the caveat that this study will not focus on homosexual men. We will consider the three principal modes of transmission of the HIV and the associated gender- and age-specific dimensions of the pandemic. Next we will examine particularly African social factors which might contribute to the pandemic. In South Africa, AIDS has flourished in the context of a legacy of neglect of health care for the majority of the population, so we shall consider the association of the pandemic with the already-raging tuberculosis epidemic in the country. Finally we shall consider AIDS as a cause of death, using professional actuarial projections to indicate just how deep and far-reaching the consequences will be.

After considering AIDS in general in South Africa, the chapter will proceed with a survey of the responses from ecclesiastical quarters to the pandemic since the mid-1980's. While the author's principal experience is that of the Roman Catholic Church, he will attempt to bring in the responses of other Christian denominations where the available literature permits.

## **(2) AIDS in South Africa**

### **(a) Early Days of the Pandemic**

Shortly after the worldwide outbreak of the AIDS, the disease was identified and treated among homosexual men in South Africa in the early 1980's. The sources differ on the dates to which they trace back the first cases of AIDS in the country. Whiteside and Sunter say "[t]he first two cases of AIDS were identified in South Africa in 1982."<sup>2</sup> This is

supported by the UN facts sheet of AIDS cases by year of reporting by country, showing that the first two in South Africa were in 1982.<sup>3</sup> Shilts says that on July 8, 1983 "health authorities in Cape Town announced that five gay men in South Africa were suffering from AIDS."<sup>4</sup> For the next eight years, AIDS was considered a disease of (white) homosexual men.

(b) Sexual Orientation Not the Issue

Whiteside and Sunter say "In July 1991, the number of heterosexually transmitted cases equalled the number of homosexual cases. Since then the homosexual epidemic has been completely overshadowed by the heterosexual epidemic."<sup>5</sup> The number of cases of homosexual or bisexual men with AIDS is now minuscule compared with heterosexual people.

One must be careful to avoid distinguishing between a 'homosexual epidemic' and a 'heterosexual epidemic' as Whiteside and Sunter do in the previous quote. There are not two separate epidemics, as it is the same virus that is responsible for the disease among homosexual and heterosexual people. In addition, sexual orientation and identity are not so clearly defined as to delimit two mutually exclusive populations with their separate epidemics. Nor should the impression be given that there might be two different standards of treatment or care according to the circumstances under which a person may have been infected with the virus.<sup>6</sup>

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2. Alan Whiteside and Clem Sunter, *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, Tafelberg, 2000), 47.

3. UNAIDS, Unicef, and WHO, *Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections: South Africa: 2002 Update* (2002), 6, [Http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact\\_sheets/pdfs/Southafrica\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact_sheets/pdfs/Southafrica_en.pdf) viewed on 13 August 2003.

4. Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 343.

5. Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, 47.

6. It is the presumption of this research that AIDS is caused by the the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The author concedes that factors such as poor nutrition, poverty, bad sanitation, etc. contribute to the progress of the disease once the virus has been contracted. However, these are

Thus for the purposes of this work, the sexual orientation and practices and the manner in which people contracted the virus will not be considered as an issue. Once people are infected with the virus, or have begun to develop symptoms of AIDS, the progress of the disease does not discriminate on how it was initially contracted.

This is not to deny the following two important points regarding sexual orientation and AIDS:

(i) Different lifestyles expose people living with HIV to different sources of potential infection, and thus to different opportunistic infections which might eventually be fatal. Notoriously, homosexual men are more exposed to enteric diseases like shigellosis, amoebiasis and giardiasis from the practice of oral-anal intercourse.<sup>7</sup>

(ii) The pastoral care offered to heterosexual and homosexual people with AIDS may differ according to their needs, which in turn depend to a large extent on their social, psychological and spiritual integration. In the early stages of the pandemic, in South Africa as elsewhere, the disease was noticed among homosexual men, and early writings on pastoral care of people with AIDS focussed on the pastoral care of this group.<sup>8</sup>

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co-factors for AIDS. He concedes also that there are other medical conditions that deplete a person's immune system, and render him or her vulnerable to opportunistic infections. However, the single prior necessary and sufficient condition for a person to have AIDS, is infection with the HIV. Thus the virus can be said to be 'the cause' of AIDS - which is the opinion of mainstream Western medical science.

The present author does not share the premise of the 'AIDS sceptics' who doubt the existence of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and its role in the pandemic. Nor is it the intention of this work to dedicate time and space to this debate. The reader may inform him or herself of the arguments of the sceptics which can be found on websites such as <http://www.virusmyth.net/aids/> viewed on 8 September 2003.

7. Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, 18f., 39f.

8. For example, in 1990, Daniel Louw, "Ministering and Counselling the Person with AIDS," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 71 (1990): 37-50 concentrates almost exclusively on the pastoral care of homosexual men with AIDS. While acknowledging that at that time the virus was spreading rapidly among the heterosexual population, he writes on page 41 that "AIDS is associated with homosexuality" and in people's minds with promiscuity. However as the pandemic has spread throughout the 1990's, the association of AIDS with homosexuality in South Africa has all but disappeared.

Thus, for example, the Catholic Church's response to people living with HIV/AIDS has been different in South Africa to that in North America. In this latter case, says Kowalewski, it has been a matter of "impression management" or retaining its firm teachings against homosexual activity and for the pastoral obligation to care of people living with HIV/AIDS. See Mark R. Kowalewski, *All Things to All*

### (3) Modes of Transmission in South Africa

The three principal modes of transmission of the HIV virus in South Africa are: sexual, perinatal and parenteral. I shall briefly examine each of these.

#### (a) Sexual Transmission

Sexual transmission is, as I have indicated above, mostly through heterosexual intercourse. It is this mode of transmission that has received the most attention and been most studied during the course of the pandemic - perhaps to the neglect of other possible modes of transmission. Most of the intervention at all levels has focussed on education about the sexual mode of transmission, changing risky sexual behaviour and spreading the use of condoms (this latter, except in the case of many Christian Churches.)

#### (b) Perinatal Transmission

Perinatal transmission can occur either in utero, during delivery, or through breastfeeding.

Studies conducted in pilot projects around South Africa the late 1990's and early 2000's have shown that the mother receiving a short course of antiretroviral therapy prior to giving birth and the baby being administered a dose shortly after birth, reduces by up to half the chances of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of the virus.<sup>9</sup> These studies are supported by articles suggesting that the treatment is so effective and safe, that it should be administered to all mothers of unknown serostatus in high-risk groups, and that it should not be dependent on prior testing and counselling.<sup>10</sup>

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*People: The Catholic Church Confronts the AIDS Crisis* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1994).

9. See Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, 147f.

10. See Jeffrey S.A. Stringer, et al., "Nevirapine to Prevent Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV-1 Among Women of Unknown Serostatus," *Lancet* 362, no. 9398 (29 November 1993): 1850-53.

There is at the time of writing widespread public demand that the government extend the provision of short-term antiretroviral therapy to all maternity facilities in the country. After major initial concerns about the safety of such therapy, the government has undertaken on principle to provide it. However, it maintains this will take time to 'roll out' because of the need to train nursing staff to administer the therapy, and of the cost of the drug, nevirapine.<sup>11</sup> The longer the government delays this simple and cost-effective treatment, the greater the number of infants who will be unnecessarily infected.

However, there is not much value in preventing MTCT during birth if the child is later to be infected in another common way. The question of breastfeeding is also fraught with difficulty. It is incontrovertible that many infants have been infected with HIV as a result of vertical transmission from the child being breast fed. As recently as March 2003, the results of a study were published "providing the first quantitative estimates of breast-milk infectivity per liter of breast milk ingested."<sup>12</sup> This article indicates that the probability of a child contracting HIV-1 from drinking one liter of breast milk from an infected mother is of the same order as a woman being infected with HIV-1 in one unprotected act of vaginal sex.

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11. The cost-argument is becoming weaker as pharmaceutical companies such as Boehringer Ingelheim have offered to make this therapy available free for five years to governments of resource-poor countries. See "World AIDS Day 2003 - Boehringer Ingelheim extends Viramune Donation Programme" at <http://www.boehringer-ingenelheim.com/hiv/news/ndetail.asp?ID=1514> viewed on 15 January 2004.

The training involved in the administration of the therapy is also minimal, since it involves giving the mother a single tablet prior to delivery, and a single dose of the syrup to the child shortly after birth. Recent studies are showing that the administration of nevirapine alone increases the risk of the HIV developing resistance to the drug. It is being suggested that the single dose of nevirapine be packaged with two to three days' doses of zidovudine and lamivudine to make a combination therapy that is less likely to result in the virus developing resistance. See Karen Palmore Beckerman, "Long-Term Findings of HIVNET 012: The Next Steps," *The Lancet* 362, no. 9387 (13 September 2003): 842-43.

12. Barbra. A. Richardson, et al., "Breast-Milk Infectivity in Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1-Infected Mothers," *Journal of Infectious Diseases* 187, no. 5 (1 March 2003): 736-140, <Http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/JID/journal/issues/v187n5/30087/30087.html> viewed on 11 April 2003.

This raises a dilemma typical to developing countries. Ideally a mother who is tested HIV positive, should be able to nourish her infant on a substitute milk formula. In South Africa, this would mean that the health authorities provide the mother with sufficient milk substitute formula for her child. However, often the quality of the water is parlous and the child risks contracting fatal gastroenteritis from the water used in the formula, if it is not first boiled or chemically treated. In such situations the mother is faced with the dilemma of seeing the child die of AIDS or of waterborne parasitic disease, presuming, of course, she herself does not die first. Thus the need to provide not only milk substitute, but also the means of disinfecting the water with which it is to be mixed.

As an alternative to using a milk substitute formula, mothers who are HIV-positive, wishing to give their child the benefits of breast milk, are encouraged to pasteurize their expressed breast milk. It is believed that micropasteurization kills the HIV. This involves heating the expressed breast milk to 62.5°C for 30 minutes, and then cooling it as rapidly as possible. This raises the question of resources. If the resources are available for this treatment, it seems to be the best solution to the dilemma of breastfeeding.

It is not obvious that there is much value in preventing MTCT if the child born healthy will not have a mother to care for him or her. So, the ethics of preventing MTCT are questionable if similar efforts are not made to ensure the continued health of the mother. This will usually mean long-term antiretroviral therapy (ART). Thus MTCT prevention is only one part of a much broader strategy for dealing with the AIDS pandemic.

### (c) Parenteral Transmission

Parenteral transmission has been the least studied of the modes of transmission in the country.

The blood supply is deemed to have been rendered relatively safe by screening of

donors and of blood products.<sup>13</sup> I will thus not consider it at any length here.

Shared infected needles by intravenous drug users were identified early on in the pandemic as one of the vectors through which the HIV may be transmitted. There are proportionally fewer intravenous drug users in South Africa than in wealthier countries, because the cost of such drugs places them out of the reach of most users. The drugs of preference are alcohol, mandrax tablets and marijuana, which are readily available and relatively inexpensive. None of these requires needles for their administration. Thus there has been less concern in South Africa about the use of shared needles.

The route of the spread of HIV through medical facilities is referred to only in passing in articles from the 1990's. For example, in his eight-page survey of modes of transmission, Thomas Quinn makes only this mention: "Parenteral transmission includes blood transfusion, and exposure to blood through re-use of needles or syringes among IDU's, or in healthcare facilities where sterilisation of instruments is inadequate."<sup>14</sup>

However three studies published in February 2003 suggest that the use of infected needles has in fact been a major cause of the spread of the epidemic in Africa. Not among drug users, but in the hospitals and medical facilities around the continent. These studies relativise the sexual spread of AIDS and cast an enormous responsibility on healthcare facilities to improve their sanitation.

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13. The 2000 Haemovigilance Report of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) acknowledged that five confirmed cases of transmission of HIV had occurred in the previous five years, from a total of three million blood transfusions, and that no confirmed cases had been reported in 2000. See "South Africa's Blood is Safe" published on 23 April 2002 by the Department of Health, viewed on 23 April 2003 at [Http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/news/2002/nz0423.html](http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/news/2002/nz0423.html). However, in March 2003, the SANBS was warning that the rate of one infection per year may well jump to three per year through the action of "irresponsible donors who expose patients to unnecessary risk when donating blood." See the report in the Dispatch newspaper: "HIV Transfusion Risk Set to Triple" [Hhttp://www.dispatch.co.za/2003/03/17/southafrica/BHIV.HTM](http://www.dispatch.co.za/2003/03/17/southafrica/BHIV.HTM) viewed on 23 April 2003. Three infections through blood products per year remains a minuscule proportion (although no less tragic) of the infections of HIV through other means.

14. Thomas C. Quinn, "Global Burden of the HIV Pandemic," *The Lancet*, no. 348 (13 July 1996): 102.

The first<sup>15</sup> of three articles questions the assumption which became accepted since 1988 that heterosexual intercourse is responsible for 90% of HIV transmission in Africa. Brewer et al. say that this assumption appeared as if out of nowhere and rapidly became the received wisdom. If it were the case that heterosexual transmission was the major vector in Africa, then vaginal intercourse would be three times more efficient than anal intercourse in the spreading of the virus. This has been shown not to be the case in other contexts.

The second<sup>16</sup> article argues that heterosexual intercourse is in fact responsible for about only one third of the cases of HIV transmission on the continent. Through a series of calculations starting from base population infections rates, the authors show that heterosexual intercourse is responsible for 25-29% of HIV incidence among women in Africa and 30-35% among men. They write:

The third objective has been to present our estimates that roughly one-third of the spread of HIV in Africa can be associated with heterosexual transmission. This estimate is far below those that are usually invoked to explain the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and we suggest that the discrepancies should be addressed.<sup>17</sup>

While the estimation of one-third might be a vast underestimate, the point remains that there is sufficient latitude to warrant the investigation of other modes of transmission.

The third article argues that the majority of the cases of HIV transmission in Africa has happened in medical facilities. "Since early in the African epidemic, when AIDS was demographically associated with sexually active populations, studies of HIV transmission in Africa have generally failed to control for possible parenteral confounding. The importance of this route of infection was well known in the West and in Asia but quickly

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15. Devon D. Brewer, et al., "Mounting Anomalies in the Epidemiology of HIV in Africa: Cry the Beloved Paradigm," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 144-47, [Http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf](http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf) viewed on 2 April 2003.

16. David Gisselquist and John J. Potterat, "Heterosexual Transmission of HIV in Africa: An Empiric Estimate," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 162-73.

17. Gisselquist and Potterat, "Heterosexual Transmission of HIV," 171.

dismissed in Africa.”<sup>18</sup> Brewer et al. argue that in countries where there is relatively good access to medical care, and where other STI’s are generally decreasing in prevalence, HIV infection is increasing. Further, in countries which have high reporting rates of sexual practices regarded as high-risk, but where the people have less access to medical facilities, the rates of infection of HIV are lower. In particular, in receiving health care, people are exposed to contaminated medical injections and other articles carrying infected blood.

A fourth article, a review of medical literature from 2000, published in November 2003, gives the proportion of injections using reused equipment worldwide at 39.3% of some 16 billion injections administered annually. This amounts to some 6.7 billion potentially unsafe injections in which HIV might be transmitted.<sup>19</sup>

The implications of these four studies are enormous.

(i) The most immediate implication is that medical and healthcare facilities must dramatically improve the sterilisation of all needles that are being reused. Greater care must be taken that nobody be exposed to contaminated sharp objects. These steps must be taken even before the results of further and deeper studies are available.

(ii) Better epidemiological studies are needed to research more accurately the routes of transmission of HIV in Africa. It is not good enough to rely on an assumption that became the norm in the late 1980’s. More detailed knowledge is required in order to combat more effectively the spread of the virus.

(iii) If it should be demonstrated that sexual transmission is in fact responsible for only a proportion of all HIV transmission, then this seriously undermines programmes premised upon the use of condoms and changing sexual behaviour as the only way to

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18. Brewer, et al., “Mounting Anomalies in the Epidemiology,” 146.

19. Yvan J.F. Hutin, Anja M. Hauri, and Gregory L. Armstrong, “Use of Injections in Healthcare Settings Worldwide, 2000: Literature Review and Regional Estimates,” *British Medical Journal* 327 (8 November 2003): 5, [Http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/327/7423/1075](http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/327/7423/1075) viewed on 10 November 2003.

stop the spread of AIDS. Obviously the avoidance of risky sexual behaviour will always remain a major strategy in the control of the spread of the virus.<sup>20</sup> But de-emphasising the role of sexual transmission will allow space for the introduction of other preventive programmes.

More profoundly, if it is no longer assumed that AIDS is spread solely through sexual interactions, then this could help enormously to de-stigmatise AIDS.<sup>21</sup> The stigma attached to AIDS is based on the following two pillars:

- (i) it is associated with death, and thus a limit situation of humanity,
- (ii) it is associated with sexuality, and thus an area frequently associated with guilt and shame, in which people find it difficult to express themselves.<sup>22</sup>

20. As more information becomes available, what is regarded as risky sexual behaviour will also evolve. For example, Scott Gottlieb, "Unprotected Oral Sex Can Transmit HIV," *British Medical Journal*, no. 326 (5 April 2003): 730 extends concern for the transmission of HIV to practices that were previously considered quite safe.

21. Janine Pierret, "Everyday Life with AIDS/HIV: Surveys in the Social Sciences," *Social Science and Medicine* 50 (2000): 1589–98 presents a review of the literature concerning people living with HIV/AIDS, or with members of the family living with HIV/AIDS. A major factor is how people organise their lives around the stigma associated with AIDS. The literature reviewed does not cover living with HIV in Africa, where patterns of shame and taboo contribute to the ostracisation of people living with AIDS.

22. While enormous public-education efforts have been made in South Africa, to inform people of the connection between sexual behaviour and AIDS, these have had to work against cultural representations that do not associate disease with sexual behaviour. For example, Carol S. Goldin, "Stigmatization and AIDS: Critical Issues in Public Health," *Social Science and Medicine* 39, no. 9 (1994): 1363 citing B. Ingstad, "The Cultural Construction of AIDS and Its Consequences for Prevention in Botswana," *Med. Anthropol. Q.* 4, no. 28 (1990) and E.C. Green, "Sexually Transmitted Disease, Ethnomedicine and Health Policy in Africa," *Social Science and Medicine* 35, no. 121 (1992) shows how the Tswana and Swazi have different etiologies of disease to each other and to the Western biomedical model, which leads neither group naturally to associate AIDS with sexual transmission. Thus among black South Africans, stigma associating AIDS with sexuality is considerably weaker than in the 'Western mind.'

Writing in 1987, D.J. Louw is dealing with the early days of the pandemic in South Africa, before it spread like wildfire among black people. Louw associates the stigma clearly with a permissive lifestyle: "Die verband tussen VIGS en 'n permissiewe lewenstyl veroorsaak dat so 'n pasiënt onmiddellik 'n etiket ontvang." See Daniel J. Louw, "VIGS: Die radikale siekte met 'n radikale uitdaging aan die pastorale bediening," *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif* XXIX, no. 1 (January 1988): 71. The label the person receives when he or she has AIDS has to do with the disease's association with sexuality. Louw says that there are often hidden criteria by which people categorise some diseases as 'clean' and others as 'unclean.' People living with AIDS often have the perception that they are being isolated as worthier people distance themselves from the disease. They have the sense of being the 'lepers' of our time who have to live outside the camp, cover their

If it were known that a large number of people with AIDS in South Africa could have contracted it through means other than sexual intercourse, this would help to disassociate the disease from the area of sexuality which people find difficult to discuss. The stigma of the disease would thereby be reduced so that people could talk about it with slightly less difficulty. This would help in programmes to educate people and reduce the spread of HIV. But as we shall see, there are very strong reasons adduced for not reducing the association between sexual intercourse and the transmission of HIV.

Naturally the response to this series of articles has been swift and categorical. However immediate responses did not entirely refute any of the arguments proposed by Gisselquist et al. A joint response from WHO and UNAIDS reads: "Following a review of evidence, which included recent articles suggesting that a majority of HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa are due to unsafe medical practices, particularly injections, the experts concluded that such suggestions are not supported by the vast majority of evidence and that unsafe sexual practices continue to be responsible for the overwhelming majority of HIV infections."<sup>23</sup> The response says that injections are responsible for only 2.5% (or one in 40) of AIDS transmission in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it acknowledges that of the 16 billion injections administered annually worldwide some 30% (or 4.8 billion) are unsafe. I would suggest that on a continent where health services are often at best rudimentary, there is a probability that a disproportionate number of these 4.8 billion unsafe injections are in Africa, and that they would be responsible for the transmission of HIV. If this conservative estimate of 2.5% of AIDS transmissions in sub-Saharan Africa were applied

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faces and shout 'Unclean! Unclean!' as prescribed in Lev 13:45.

I would note that similar connotations of uncleanness were associated with cancer from the 1950's to 1980's. This cluster of diseases challenged the Western notion of the ability of medical science to overcome disease. Stigma was associated with cancer because it confronted society with mortality in the face of the promise of scientific triumph over death.

23. WHO / UNAIDS, *Expert Group Stresses That Unsafe Sex Is the Primary Mode of HIV Infection in Africa* (Geneva, 2003, 14 March),

[Http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html](http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html) viewed on 9 April 2003.

to South Africa alone, it would amount to 110 000 people infected by unsafe medical practices. Clearly this warrants further investigation and action.

In terms of programmes for the prevention of the transmission of HIV, the WHO/UNAIDS response says that the promotion of safer sex must remain the mainstay of the response to AIDS in the region. However it also concedes that "More work needs to be done to eliminate unsafe injection practices around the world." for which the WHO has issued a *Managing an Injection Safety Policy*. Of course, the two programmes must go hand-in-hand. But allowing for an avenue by which one pillar of the stigma, and thus secrecy, associated with AIDS can be reduced, can only be of benefit in communication about the disease.

I foresee two dangers inherent in reducing the publicly perceived significance of the sexual transmission of HIV, and thereby the stigma of the disease, namely;

(i) People may develop a false sense of security, become complacent and disregard completely sexual transmission as a factor, leading to 'open season' on risky sexual behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

(ii) There may arise in discourse about AIDS in Africa an unhelpful categorisation of innocent / guilty, with the innocent being those who were infected by needles in a medical situation, and the guilty those who were infected through sexual intercourse. This blame-discourse may drive the people who know they received the virus through sexual transmission into a greater silence and secrecy about their AIDS.

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24. This phenomenon has been noticed among homosexual men particularly in North America, for whom AIDS is not associated with an automatic death sentence. With the development of life-prolonging medication, a new generation of homosexual men, who have not had to bury partners and friends, regard AIDS as a treatable chronic disease and do not accord "safe sex" paramount ethical status.

#### (4) AIDS and Gender

The disease does seem to have a gender bias, in that women are more frequently infected than men. The *2002 Epidemiological Facts Sheet* shows, for example, that male youth (aged 15 to 24) have a prevalence rate of 5.8% and female youth a prevalence rate of 21.6%. Among adult males and females, the figures are much closer, at 23.3% and 23.5% respectively.<sup>25</sup> Using the data on the previous page, this translates into 947 680 female and 263 069 male youths living with HIV/AIDS in July 2002. Thus in South Africa, there are almost 800 000 more women than men living with HIV/AIDS. Death rates are consequently higher among women in their twenties than among those in their sixties.

Radhika Sarin explains there are several reasons for this discrepancy:

Biological, economic and social factors all contribute to women's vulnerability. Women have a large surface area of reproductive tissue that is exposed to their partner's secretions during intercourse, and semen infected with HIV typically contains a higher concentration of the virus than a woman's sexual secretions. Young women are especially at greater risk because their reproductive organs are immature and more likely to tear during intercourse. Women also face a high risk of acquiring other STIs, which multiply ten-fold the risk of contracting HIV when left untreated.<sup>26</sup>

Based on her research in the pseudonymous 'Summertown,' which can be generalised across the country, Catherine Campbell adds two time factors to explain further this discrepancy:

Second, in unprotected sex, women are exposed to infectious fluids for longer than men. While men are in contact with body fluids containing the virus for the duration of the sex act, women remain in contact with the semen for much longer..... Young women in Summertown tend to have sexual relations with men who are, on average, five years older. Given that HIV levels increase with age, this means that young women are at greater risk from older partners than young men are from their younger partners.<sup>27</sup>

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25.UNAIDS, Unicef, and WHO, *Epidemiological Fact Sheet, 2002, South Africa*, 5.

26.Radhika Sarin, "The Feminization of AIDS," in *Correcting Gender Myopia: Gender Equity, Women's Welfare and the Environment*, Danielle Nierenberg (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2002), 30.

27.Catherine Campbell, 'Letting Them Die,' *The International African Institute's African Issues* (Cape

Tallis extends this line of argumentation to gender inequality. She argues that when the imbalance of power in the relations of male and female are not addressed, then discussion cannot take place that will impact on the spread of the disease. "Gender inequalities affect, amongst other things, the possibilities of prevention, access to appropriate materials, information and resources, the quality of care received, and survival chances. Few people in the HIV/AIDS field would dispute the fact that gender roles and unequal gender relations are fuelling the epidemic by rendering both men and women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS."<sup>28</sup> So, for example, she argues, men are under social pressure to 'perform' sexually and with numerous partners. This exposes them to greater risk of infection. Conversely, women are often unable to negotiate safer sexual practices such as the use of male condoms. Men have a number of reasons for not wanting to use condoms, and having the upper hand in sexual power relations, often do not use them. As the female condom is not widely available in South Africa, women are frequently powerless to prevent their own infection.

In the first such statistical study conducted in South Africa, the research of Dunkle et al. shows conclusively that "women who have experienced partner violence or who are currently involved with controlling male partners are at increased risk of HIV infection, even after their own risk behaviour is taken into account."<sup>29</sup>

Dorrington and Johnson write: "...South Africa remains a fairly patriarchal society, in which women are vulnerable to sexual abuse." They cite statistics indicating that there are almost one million cases of rape per year, including marital rape. Given the violence of these assaults, with accompanying by physical trauma to the victim, as well as the fact that there is a high HIV-infection rate in the population, many women are infected with HIV

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Town: Double Storey Books, 2003), 123.

28. Vicci Tallis, "Gendering the Response to HIV/AIDS: Challenging Gender Inequality," *Agenda*, no. 44 (2000): 59.

29. Kristin L. Dunkle, et al., "Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV Infection in Women Attending Antenatal Clinics in South Africa," *The Lancet* 363, no. 9419 (1 May 2004): 1419.

during the rape. Girls, too, are often forced into sexual relationships, often with older men such as their teachers. Dorrington and Johnson conclude: "In many cases, therefore, women have little control over their sexual activity, and are thus more vulnerable to HIV infection."<sup>30</sup>

However, it is an anachronism (if it ever was true in the first place), to think of South African women as completely submissive in gender relations. Women are more and more visible in the workplace, in top managerial positions, in politics and in establishing enterprises. They are certainly not to be universally portrayed as 'victim' of unequal relations. Nor are they to be cast invariably as 'homemaker' or mother. Decades of the policy of labour migrancy have seen men and women separated from their families for up to eleven months of the year. Many households are headed by women, and some of them in the wealthier parts of town, for example in Protea North in Soweto. It is thus evident that women are increasingly assertive, particularly in urban life in South Africa.

But the roles played by men are also changing in the light of changing social circumstances. Janet Bujara says that as societies change (and South Africa is a society undergoing rapid transition), so the representations of masculinity change. She is optimistic that they are changing for the better in South Africa:

Shire's view is of masculinities continually made and remade within the shifting structures of social and political power. The transformation of such relations in South Africa has created a political climate where the questioning of hegemonic masculinity, framed as rampant heterosexuality and male dominance, is a public issue, unlike elsewhere in Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Bujara concludes the first half of her article:

The shift to a language of plural 'masculinities', perceived as social constructions, has positive consequences for work on AIDS, for it raises the possibility that men may change their ways in changing social circumstances.

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30. Rob Dorrington and Leigh Johnson, "Epidemiological and Demographic," in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow, Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, UNICEF, 2002), 17.

31. Janet Bujara, "Targeting Men for a Change: AIDS Discourse and Activism in Africa," *Agenda*, no. 44 (2000): 12.

It remains to be seen whether this optimistic possibility is borne out in reality. Clearly, according to the conclusion of Dunkle et al., it is a pressing concern to address gender roles and inequality of power in relationships in South Africa. They conclude that “addressing problems of gender-based violence and HIV will require broad community and societal level transformations that challenge entrenched cultures of violence and male-dominated norms of gender behaviours.”<sup>32</sup> This must form part of the education and socialisation agendas of civil society.

### **(5) Ages Affected**

#### **(a) Young Adults**

Although AIDS can and does affect people of any age from infancy to old age, it is much more prevalent among young people between the ages of 20 and 40 than among older people.<sup>33</sup> This is principally due to the sexual mode of transmission. Younger people are sexually more active, and during the age of exploration of relationships, have a greater number of sexual partners. Due to pressure from older men, girls are generally sexually active at a younger age than boys, and are exposed to infection earlier than their male counterparts. We have seen in the previous section how more younger women than men are HIV-infected.

Stan Brennan, pastor of Reiger Park, Boksburg, says: “It is sad. Most burials I perform are those of young people. We are losing promising youngsters to violent crime and AIDS.”<sup>34</sup> The article in the *Saturday Star* newspaper reports that he has recently conducted over 100 funerals per year. This comes to an average of two per weekend. The majority of these are of young people.

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32. Dunkle, et al., “Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV,” 1420.

33. Whiteside and Sunter show how in 1995, for women, the highest prevalence rates of HIV was in the 25 to 29 year age group, and for men the highest prevalence rate was in the 35 to 39 age group. Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, 32.

34. Zondi Mahlangu, “It’s Tough Having to Bury Young People,” *Saturday Star*, 24 May 2003, 8.

## (b) Children

**(i) Perinatal Infection**

AIDS is not a killer only of young adults. It should be remembered that hundreds of thousands of babies are born with HIV infection, and on average live no more than 2 years. Most of the children with HIV are infected vertically, i.e. HIV is transmitted to them by their mothers, either in utero, during childbirth, or through breastfeeding.

**(ii) Child Rape**

Rape is another disturbing source of possible HIV infection in infants and young children. It is difficult to ascertain the true dimensions of this potential method of infection through sifting reports in the mass media. Nor are health professionals in agreement about its prevalence.

In the popular press, headlines scream "U.N. Troubled by Rise in Child Rapes in South Africa"<sup>35</sup> attributing the apparent rise in child rapes to the myth that a man can be cured of AIDS by having sexual intercourse with a virgin. Some journalists go further by stating that this myth is spread by traditional healers who encourage their patients to have sex with a virgin.<sup>36</sup> Another says, noting similarities between two cases of infant rape: "Offenders were members of ethnic group[s] where the pervasive myth in the so-called Virgin Cure as a prevention/cure for HIV/Aids is relatively well entrenched within the

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35. Thalif Deen, "U.N. Troubled by Rise in Child Rapes in South Africa," *Inter Press Service*, 4 October 2002, [Http://www.aegis.com/news/ips/2002/IPO21006.html](http://www.aegis.com/news/ips/2002/IPO21006.html) viewed on 9 September 2003.  
 36. See Gavin du Venage, "Rape of Children Surges in South Africa: Minors Account for About 40% of Attack Victims," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 February 2002, [Http://www.aegis.com/news/sc/2002/SC020203.html](http://www.aegis.com/news/sc/2002/SC020203.html) viewed on 9 September 2003. Hearsay reports of this nature will do little more than further undermine the minimal collaboration between western-style and African traditional health professionals.

cultural belief system.”<sup>37</sup>

This putative myth is evidently a distortion of the reasoning from the knowledge that one cannot be infected with HIV by someone who is himself or herself not infected. To this knowledge is applied the mistaken view that no virgin is HIV-infected. Then there is a major slip in the logic of causality to the belief that having sex with a virgin can actually remove the infection. As more people have AIDS, the logic runs, so more men try to cure themselves by raping infants.

More sober medical journals do not rely on the increasing frequency of reports of child rape in the mass media to base their judgement. Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga and Bradshaw<sup>38</sup> write that prior to 1998 the rape data was not aggregated by age, so it is not possible to discern a trend on the basis of police records. However, in their 1998 study of 11 735 women aged between 15 and 49, the number of women who reported having been raped as a child under the age of 15 decreased with age. This leads Jewkes and her colleagues to suggest: “The negative age trend suggests that child rape is becoming more common in South Africa, although reporting bias cannot be ruled out. Our findings, however, lend support to perceptions of increases in the number of child rapes reported in the media, seen in health facilities, and reported to the police.” This does not constitute clear evidence of an increase in the prevalence of child rape.

In the same edition of *The Lancet*, Pitcher and Bowley<sup>39</sup> attribute the perceived increase in the number of child rapes in part to the myth that is said to have its origins in

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37. See Michael Earl-Taylor, “HIV/AIDS, the Stats, the Virgin Cure and Infant Rape,” *Science in Africa*, April 2002, [Http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2002/april/virgin.htm](http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2002/april/virgin.htm) viewed on 9 September 2003. Earl-Taylor does not say, however, how the myth has become “relatively well entrenched” in this South African cultural belief system when HIV/AIDS has only been known for 20 years worldwide, and for even less time in the country. He may be drawing on the work earlier in his report where he looks at Virgin Cure beliefs in general in Africa and Asia, that are not linked to AIDS. But he does not make this connection obvious.

38. Rachel Jewkes, Jonathan Levin, Nolwazi Mbananga, and Debbie Bradshaw, “Rape of Girls in South Africa,” *The Lancet* 359 (26 January 2002): 319.

39. Graeme J. Pitcher and Douglas M.G. Bowley, “Infant Rape in South Africa,” *The Lancet* 359 (26 January 2002): 274–75.

Central Africa. Pitcher and Bowley do not explain why there is not a commensurate increase of reporting of the number of child rapes in Central Africa, and why this is only a phenomenon in South Africa. Could it be, simply, that isolated incidents of child rape, previously under-reported, are now being reported as part of a trend?

On the other hand, Jewkes, Martin and Penn-Kekana are emphatic that the myth of virgin cleansing of HIV is not the principal reason for the perceived rise in the number of child rapes. In a reply article in *The Lancet*, they write: "In more than a decade's work as a district surgeon and forensic pathologist, L.M. [Lorna Martin] has seen raped babies periodically, but the numbers have not risen. The perception of a rising rate may be related to the media giving a few cases prominence."<sup>40</sup>

In an effort to dispel the idea that the number of childhood rapes is increasing due to the myth of the virgin cure, they quote the manager of the child sexual abuse referral clinic for the Johannesburg metropolis, The Teddy Bear Clinic. Mr Luke Lamprecht says that he has only come across one case, in 1998, when the perpetrator said he believed the myth. Jewkes, Martin and Penn-Kekana also note that only 1% of children raped in a series of child rapes reported in Cape Town converted from HIV -ve to HIV +ve. Given the physical trauma and injuries associated with child rape, the authors would expect more seroconversion if the men perpetrating the rapes were mostly infected with HIV. They conclude that: "most evidence suggests that this motivation [having sex with a virgin to cure a man of HIV-1 infection] is infrequent." They adduce numerous other reasons for the horrific frequency of rape in South Africa, including poverty, gang initiation rites, "a culture of male sexual entitlement, and the climate of relative impunity for rape",

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40. Rachel Jewkes, Lorna Martin, and Loveday Penn-Kekana, "The Virgin Cleansing Myth: Cases of Child Rape Are Not Exotic," *The Lancet* 359 (23 February 2002): 711. The substance of this article can also be found on the website of the Medical Research Council of South Africa, of which Jewkes is the director of the Gender and Health Research Group. See <http://www.mrc.ac.za/mrcnews/april2002/virgin.htm> viewed on 9 September 2003.

brutalisation of many South Africans during years of political repression, and high levels of violence in general.

In an attempt to explain the rhetorical usefulness of the myth, Moffett of the African Gender Unit at the University of Cape Town, writes:

Meanwhile, I suspect that this explanation for the epidemic of sexual violence of children has been eagerly seized upon partly because it fits in neatly with the variation of the "monster" stereotype that paints the rapist as a barbarian or superstitious savage. It also dovetails with the stigma and marginalization that attaches to those who are HIV-positive or have Aids. The rapist can thus be assumed to be a backward peasant, "tainted" by a dread disease, and in thrall to an evil or ignorant witchdoctor.<sup>41</sup>

As more women become assertive of their rights to physical integrity in the advancing democracy in South Africa, it is foreseeable that children might be more frequent victims of sexual violence. Wood et al. show how sexual coercion and violence are already common experiences for young Xhosa women and teenage girls.<sup>42</sup> Moffett writes: "The obvious reasons for singling out children is that they are more vulnerable, more easily bullied or bribed into silence, less likely to report and less likely to be believed when they report."<sup>43</sup>

This clearly has disturbing implications for the possible transmission of HIV to children. But the available evidence does not lead one to the conclusion that the 'virgin cure myth' is a trend that will lead to substantial increases in the number of transmissions of HIV to children and infants. Even Leclerc-Madlala, in her important work among the Zulu in Kwa-Zulu Natal, does not say that this is a major source of new infections.<sup>44</sup>

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41. Helen Moffett, "Speaking the Unspeakable: Narratives Surrounding the Rape of Children," unpublished paper forwarded by the author (Cape Town, 2003), 5, [Http://www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk) awaiting publication.

42. Katharine Wood, Fidelia Maforah, and Rachel Jewkes, "'He Forced Me to Love Him': Putting Violence on Adolescent Sexual Health Agendas," *Soc. Sci. Med.* 47, no. 2 (1998): 233–42.

43. Helen Moffett, personal communication, e-mail correspondence (Ottawa, Cape Town, 2003)

44. See Suzette Leclerc-Madlala, "On the Virgin Cleansing Myth: Gendered Bodies, AIDS and Ethnomedicine," *African Journal of AIDS Research* 1, no. 2 (2002): 87–95.

On the basis of this conclusion, one might ask why this report has included child rape at all. It has been included because of what it represents for people living with HIV infection or AIDS. A sinister side of the myth is that it is an indication of the kind of misinformation, stigma, demonisation and isolation to which people living with AIDS are subject. An already marginalised group can only be more stigmatised and isolated by myths of this kind. Rumours such as this virgin-cure myth make the disease more pernicious as they contribute to the 'social death' of people with AIDS.

(c) The elderly

Old people are also infected by HIV and succumb more readily than younger adults who generally have a better base health. The Department of Health publishes results from the annual antenatal clinic surveys. However these only record HIV infection among women of child-bearing age attending antenatal clinics, and do not give an indication of the infection rate among elderly men and women. The 2002 Update for the UNAIDS Epidemiological Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections for South Africa does not give data in its fields the AIDS cases by age.<sup>45</sup> The data for this particular field was unavailable in 1996. At the time of writing the most recent data showing the distribution of AIDS cases by age and gender was published in 1995 by the Department of Health.<sup>46</sup> This shows several hundred men and women above the age of 55 who have AIDS. There is no reason to believe that by the time of writing, this number hasn't increased by an order of magnitude.

Elderly people commonly have to care for their orphaned grandchildren. This has a direct effect on the standard of living, as more people are dependent on the old-age pensions of the caregivers. This increased 'pension-burden' has to cover the educational,

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45.UNAIDS, Unicef, and WHO, *Epidemiological Fact Sheet, 2002, South Africa*, 6.

46.Department of Health, *Epidemiological Comments* 22, no. 10 (October 1995).

nutritional and clothing requirements of the young dependents. The consequent increase in poverty makes all the people of that household more susceptible to illness and infection. Although income support grants and child-maintenance grants are available, they are not yet sufficiently effectively administered to provide help to those most in need.

### **(6) Other Social Factors in the Transmission of AIDS**

The reason for the high rates of infection are not only to be explained in biological terms. Social analysts also seek to explain the factors contributing to the high rates of infection in South Africa. Whiteside and Sunter maintain that AIDS is more likely to spread in societies where there is the combination of a relatively high income and low levels of cohesion in civil society.<sup>47</sup> They use the Gini index, a measure of inequality of income, as a predictor of the rates of HIV-infection in a number of sub-Saharan African countries. Those countries with a lower average income, greater equality of income, or a greater degree of social cohesion, the theory goes, are not as hard hit by the pandemic. As South Africa has a high Gini index, and relatively high average income, it is hit by a rapid spread of the disease.

Romero-Daza<sup>48</sup> explains how the migrant labour system has been a major social force in spreading AIDS in Southern Africa. Her work corroborates that of Charles W. Hunt<sup>49</sup> who shows how the patterns of migrant labour in central, eastern and southern Africa have made an epidemiology quite different to that in countries with a settled labour force. Another study, that of Denise Gilgen et. al.,<sup>50</sup> shows how in Carletonville, a mining

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47. Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, 62.

48. Nancy Romero-Daza, "Multiple Sex Partners, Migrant Labour and the Makings of an Epidemic: Knowledge and Beliefs About AIDS Among Women in Highland Lesotho," *Human Organization* 55, no. 2 (1994): 192–205.

49. Charles W. Hunt, "Migrant Labor and Sexually Transmitted Disease: AIDS in Africa," *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour* 30 (December 1989): 353–73.

50. Denise Gilgen, et al., *The Natural History of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: A Biomedical and Social Survey in Carletonville* (Johannesburg: CSIR, 2000).

town in the vicinity of Johannesburg, the migrant labourers employed in the gold mines have a greater disposable income, and frequent the services of commercial sex workers. They consequently have a greater incidence of HIV infection than the unemployed men living in the township beside the migrant workers' hostels. Jochelson, Mothibeli and Leger<sup>51</sup> illustrate a "partner network" for migrant labourers in the mines of South Africa, to demonstrate how the system of migrant labour plays a major role in the spreading of disease in South Africa. They conclude with an argument for mining houses to provide housing for stable families at the workplace.

(a) Daniel Hrdy's contribution

Daniel B. Hrdy<sup>52</sup> considers methods of transmission of HIV that are perhaps more particularly African. Particular cultural practices expose some people in various parts of the continent to greater risk of contracting the virus. We shall enumerate these as Hrdy deals with them, but consider only those that are of particular relevance to South Africa.

**(i) Female Circumcision and Infibulation**

Hrdy begins with a consideration of the practice of female circumcision and infibulation. He says it is inconclusive that these practices contribute to the transmission of HIV, as they do not correspond geographically to the areas of high HIV seropositivity. As this is not a practice in South Africa, and is performed only among refugees from further North in the continent, we shall not dwell on it.

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51. Karen Jochelson, Monyaola Mothibeli, and Jean-Patrick Leger, "Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Migrant Labor in South Africa," *International Journal of Health Services* 21, no. 1 (1991): 157–73.

52. Daniel B. Hrdy, "Cultural Practices Contributing to the Transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus in Africa," *Reviews of Infectious Diseases* 9, no. 6 (November-December 1987): 1109–19. This is a relatively early study (1987) of the pandemic on the continent. Modes of transmission and details and geographical patterns of infection were still not fully understood.

## (ii) Promiscuity

Considering what he calls promiscuity in Africa, Hrdy does not compare with other continents. He postulates that the movements of peoples and armies, refugees, migrant workers, etc. "contribute to the 'sexual mixing' of various African groups and may be related to the spread of AIDS."<sup>53</sup> He also says that matrilineal societies have ways of dealing with questions of inheritance in the case of uncertain paternity. Finally he observes that women are often forced to supplement their meager income by prostitution in exchange for goods and services essential for survival. This latter phenomenon is frequently registered as a contributing factor to the spread of HIV in Africa.

However, we should bear in mind that 'promiscuity' is a social construct. We must understand what is meant by the term in this context. It is important not to accept uncritically the assertion that Africans are more promiscuous than people of other continents.

Whiteside and Sunter show results of the 1998 Durex Global Sex Survey indicating that "South Africans seem to be no more nor less sexually active than their foreign counterparts."<sup>54</sup> The 1998 survey shows the average age at which South African report having their first sexual experience as 17.3, and the average number of episodes of sexual intercourse per annum as 109, compared with 16.3 and 138 for the United States and 19.6 and 80 for Thailand, respectively. It must be borne in mind that the Durex Sex Survey is based on self-reporting on the internet at the Durex website. So there is the probability that it is not an accurate representative picture of behaviour in the country, because many people do not self-report with complete veracity, and many rural people do not have access to computers or the internet.

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53.Hrdy, "Cultural Practices Contributing to the Transmission," 1112.

54.Whiteside and Sunter, *AIDS*, 59.

What I find a matter of concern in the 2002 survey, is that 70% of South Africans said they are likely to have a one-night stand.<sup>55</sup> This is only 2% less than Norwegians, who recorded the highest likelihood of having a 'one-night stand.' If this is taken as a measure of 'promiscuity', then it is undeniable that South Africans reflect a high level thereof.

However, Janet Bujra warns against the danger of racist constructions suggesting that African men are more promiscuous than their European counterparts. She considers that the balance of evidence is that "men on average have more sexual partners than women, whether we do the counting in Britain or Botswana."<sup>56</sup> It is notoriously difficult to obtain data on sexual behaviour, as most surveys rely on the truth of self-reporting. In addition, sexual behaviour is so context-dependent. So one should be cautious to avoid the assumption that AIDS is more likely to spread through Africa on the basis of promiscuity, than in any other context.

### **(iii) Homosexuality and Anal Intercourse**

Hrdy is correct in observing that these practices are said to be very limited in Africa, particularly if one is to believe the protestations of political leaders that homosexuality is "un-African," abhorrent, a Western deviation, etc. The fact that it is illegal in many countries of Africa drives any potential homosexual activity underground and ensures that it is not reported or openly practised. However, that it is illegal, means that it is not unknown in Africa.<sup>57</sup> The particularly strong stigma attached to homosexual

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55. Durex, *Global Sex Survey 2002* (2002), [http://www.durex.com/uk/sexsurvey/globalsexsurvey2002/global\\_sex2002b.htm](http://www.durex.com/uk/sexsurvey/globalsexsurvey2002/global_sex2002b.htm) viewed on 16 September 2002.

56. Bujara, "Targeting Men for a Change," 10.

57. For a case in point, refer to the fate of the former vice-president of Zimbabwe: "Banana Sentenced for Gay Assault," *BBC News Online*, 18 January 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/257189.stm> viewed on 8 September 2003.

behaviour in Africa has to do with the value of fecundity, and the 'cosmological duty' to extend the family lineage. We shall consider this in the following chapter under the heading of 'who becomes an ancestor.'

Hrdy does not consider the prisons and single-sex hostels where there are consistent reports of homosexual activity. While homosexuality in these circumstances can be regarded as situational, rather than as a chosen lifestyle, the rates of HIV infection are not to be ignored as these men eventually return to the general population.<sup>58</sup>

South Africa with its liberal constitution of 1994 forbids the discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation *inter alia*. Although homosexuality is legal it is still regularly denounced by some as un-African. There is said to be a thriving 'gay' subculture in the black townships and the significant number of black men openly living a homosexual lifestyle leads one to question just how alien to Africa homosexuality really is. In consequence, as opposed to Hrdy, the possibility of homosexual transmission of HIV is not to be dismissed lightly in South Africa.

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Staying with the example of Zimbabwe, where there is particularly strong denial of the existence of homosexuality, Epprecht concludes his article: "Happily, and for all its over-determined invisibility, knowledge about the history of homosexualities in Zimbabwe is accessible through fairly conventional historical methods including painstaking archival work, linguistics, close and comparative textual analysis, and sensitive interviewing." See Mark Epprecht, "The 'Unsayings' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 2 (December 1998): 651.

58. In 2001, the University of Natal and the Medical Research Council conducted a study of the incidence of HIV in the Durban-Westville Medium B Prison. Based on this study, Washington-based researcher, KC Goyer, consulting for the Institute of Security Studies (ISS), estimates a 42.5% HIV infection rate in the South African prison population. The Department of Correctional Services says that its own estimate of 3% is probably too low, while saying that the estimate of 60% proposed by Judge Johannes Fagan, inspector of prisons is "unrealistic and unreliable." So, whatever the true number is, it is very difficult to make an accurate assessment. However nobody doubts that there is a serious problem in the prisons in South Africa. See: Chantelle Benjamin, "Prisons Cannot Manage AIDS Plight," *Business Day*, 11 March 2003, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200303110099.html> viewed on 25 April 2003. The Department of Correctional Services estimates that between 90 and 95% of all natural deaths in the prisons are due to AIDS. See: South African Press Association, "Prison AIDS Deaths Grow by 750 Percent" (2003), <http://allafrica.com/stories/200302190270.html> viewed on 25 April 2003.

#### **(iv) Practices Resulting in Exposure to Blood**

Next Hrdy considers traditional African incisions, scarifications, blood-letting, blood-brotherhood, assisting at childbirth, administering of enemas, etc. These might all expose the people involved to the blood of another, which may be infected. In South Africa all of these may be considered potential sources of HIV infection, with the exception of blood-brotherhood which is not a traditional practice, and enemas which do not involve any bodily fluids known to transmit HIV.

#### **(v) Practices Involving the Use of Shared Instruments**

Hrdy then looks at the danger of HIV infection from contaminated needles and blades. Needles for intravenous drug use and injections by 'injection doctors', blades for scarification, tattooing, incisions, 'witchcraft', circumcision, etc. are possible vectors in Africa.

In South Africa, both needles and blades are potential sources of infection. Among some tribes, including the Basotho, traditional male circumcision is done with a cohort of young men or adolescents going into isolation in the veld or the mountains, attending an initiation school, the highlight of which is the circumcision ceremony. For a number of reasons parents are nowadays commonly taking their sons to hospitals and clinics for circumcision. This avoids the danger of their son being operated on using the same blade as a number of other initiates. There are also programmes for the 'circumcision doctors' to be supplied with sterile blades to perform their function in the initiation schools.

Scarification, when it is performed, is usually done on one child and is not a cohort activity. Thus, even if the blade - possibly a scarce resource in rural areas - is used for a number of other operations, it may have time to dry between uses. So the relatively weak HIV virus, which may have contaminated the blade at one time does not survive between uses of the blade. Hrdy says that the "rarity of AIDS in children argues against

scarification as a significant factor in the transmission of HIV.” Clearly he does not have in mind here children who have inherited AIDS from their mothers, as discussed in our section on perinatal transmission.

#### **(vi) Contact with Nonhuman Primates**

Finally Hrdy considers - more speculatively than based on any evidence - the possibility of transmission of Immunodeficiency viruses from species to species in Africa. In particular, the Simian Immunodeficiency viruses may have jumped the species barrier between *Cercopithecus aethiops* (commonly called the ‘vervet monkey’ in South Africa). Early theories about the origin of HIV suggested that it may have been a mutation of a similar virus in monkeys. It is true that there is frequent contact between people and vervet monkeys in Africa, and people are occasionally bitten, or may come into contact with simian blood in the hunting and preparing of these monkeys for the pot, but there is insufficient evidence to support a wariness of HIV transmission from vervet monkeys.

#### **(b) Other Cultural Factors**

Other factors in South Africa involved in the transmission of HIV are practices which relate specifically to cultural representations and methods of sexual enjoyment. For example the practices of “dry” or “tight” sex and of male or female circumcision are all cultural practices which relate directly to the transmission of HIV.

#### **(i) ‘Dry’ Sex**

In regard to ‘dry’ sex, some South African cultural representations regard vaginal secretions as a sign of a woman’s infidelity. Thus women attempt to dry up these secretions with absorbent material, or apply astringents to make the vagina tighter.<sup>59</sup>

During sexual intercourse the vagina is dry, without its normal protective mucous layer which:

- (i) contains antiseptic lactobacilli, and
- (ii) provides a lubricant during intercourse, thereby reducing the risk of abrasive injuries through which infections may be transmitted.

There is a sizeable body of polemics around this practice. Studies have been conducted to see whether there is a relation between the practice of dry sex and greater risk of HIV transmission.<sup>60</sup> Halperin says Beksinska's and several other studies are inconclusive: "Some studies suggest an association between these often mucosally abrasive practices and increased risk of infection by HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, although the evidence is not entirely conclusive."<sup>61</sup>

## **(ii) Circumcision**

Another possible explanation for the close geographical relation between dry sex practices and increased incidence of HIV transmission, lies in the fact that dry sex seems to be practised more frequently in areas where men are generally not circumcised.<sup>62</sup> There is a strong relationship between non-circumcision of men and HIV infection, with many more men who are not circumcised being HIV positive. We will cite here three studies that regard the correlation between HIV infection and non-circumcision.<sup>63</sup>

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59. NS Morar and SS Karim, "Vaginal Insertions and Douching Practices Among Sex Workers at Truck Stops in KwaZulu-Natal," *South African Medical Journal* 88 (1988): 470.

60. ME Beksinska, HV Rees, I Kleinschmidt, and et al, "The Practice and Prevalence of Dry Sex Among Men and Women in South Africa: A Risk Factor for Sexually Transmitted Infections?" *Sex. Transm. Inf.*, no. 5 (1999): 178–80.

61. Daniel T Halperin, "Dry Sex Practices and HIV Infection in the Dominican Republic and Haiti," *Sex Transm Inf* 75 (1999): 445.

62. Halperin says: "Dry sex practices appear to be primarily restricted to certain predominantly non-male circumcising regions of eastern and southern Africa, including many of the countries reporting the world's highest HIV seroprevalence.... Presumably, such practices would appear to be less appealing to the drier (non-prepuccial secreting) circumcised males of western Africa or other regions." Halperin, "Dry Sex Practices and HIV Infection," 446.

63. There is an abundance of other such studies, and again, no shortage of polemics around the question of male circumcision.

Royce et al. write:

Male circumcision consistently shows a protective effect against HIV infection. This may be due to the abundance of Langerhans' cells in the foreskin or to a receptive environment for HIV in the sulcus between the foreskin and the glans. The prevalence of HIV infection is 1.7 to 8.2 times as high in men with foreskins as in circumcised men, and the incidence of infection is 8 times as high. A greater proportion of sex partners of uncircumcised men than of circumcised men are infected with HIV, which suggests that the presence of the foreskin may also increase infectiousness.<sup>64</sup>

In support of the same theory, John and Pat Caldwell write:

The link between lack of circumcision and elevated levels of HIV infection appears robust. In some parts of the AIDS belt,<sup>65</sup> nearly all men are uncircumcised - a situation unlike almost anywhere else in Africa...

Thus, we concluded that in the AIDS belt, lack of male circumcision in combination with risky sexual behaviour, such as having multiple sexual partners, engaging in sex with prostitutes and leaving chancroid untreated, has led to rampant HIV transmission.<sup>66</sup>

Gilgen, Campbell et al. show how among mine workers in Carletonville, men who are circumcised have a lower rate of HIV infection.<sup>67</sup> Their study, which looks at several factors, and isolates a few, compares migrant workers of different ethnic origins, which have traditions of circumcision and non-circumcision respectively. Their statistics show a significantly lower proportion of men who are circumcised and have HIV than men who are not circumcised and have HIV. Thus, for example, Zulu mineworkers who are not circumcised have a 43.6% HIV prevalence, while Xhosa miners who are circumcised have a 20.5% HIV prevalence.

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64. Rachel A Royce, Arlene Sena, Willard Cates, and Myron S Cohen, "Sexual Transmission of HIV," *N. Eng. J. Med.* 336, no. 15 (10 April 1997): 1072-78.

65. By the 'AIDS belt' the Caldwells mean a chain of countries in eastern and southern Africa in which lived about half of the world's people suffering with AIDS (in 1995).

66. John C. Caldwell and Pat Caldwell, "The African Aids Epidemic," *Scientific American*, March 1996, 46.

67. Gilgen, et al., *The Natural History of HIV/AIDS*, 57-59.

### **(iii) Traditional Healers**

A final cultural reason that we shall consider that contributes to the transmission of HIV, is the fact that many South Africans still have recourse to traditional healers as their primary health care professionals. Rather than attending hospitals or clinics in which Western-style biomedicine is practised, they will first consult traditional healers who address the diagnosis and treatment in ways that are considered to be culturally appropriate. The delay in seeking Western medical interventions in many cases contributes to the unchecked progress of the disease. We shall return later in this work to the contribution of Edward C. Green on the co-operation between traditional healers and Western-style medical practitioners in stemming the flow of HIV transmission.

It is clear, therefore, that there are cultural co-factors which add to the likelihood of HIV transmission. The evidence is circumstantial in the case of dry sex, but more conclusive in the case of non-circumcision. Recourse to traditional healers delays access to biomedical interventions, which might otherwise retard the onset and progress of AIDS-related diseases. But apart from cultural factors, there are also historical medical conditions that have rendered Africans particularly vulnerable to the spread of HIV infection.<sup>68</sup> We shall examine only one of these, namely, tuberculosis, in relation to the spread of the virus in South Africa.

## **(7) AIDS and Tuberculosis**

Cedric de Beer traces the spread of the tuberculosis (TB) epidemic in South Africa back to the mid-nineteenth Century with the arrival of white people in the interior of the country. The disease spread to black people dramatically with the discovery of gold on

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68. See Susan Hunter, *Black Death: AIDS in Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) for a discussion of how colonial exploitation and subsequent dependency has left a legacy of poor base health across the continent, which provided a fertile field for the rapid spread of AIDS.

the Witwatersrand in 1886. Black men were then compelled by the imposition of a 'hut-tax' to begin working in the mines as unskilled labourers. Conditions of damp, dust and overcrowding made for ideal conditions for the disease to spread. TB is a highly infectious disease, which, before the start of the AIDS pandemic, de Beer regarded as the most serious in the country.<sup>69</sup>

AIDS has contributed to the spread of TB. When a person's immune system is weakened by the activity of HIV, he or she can readily be infected by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Overall, TB is the biggest killer of people with AIDS in South Africa. Corbett et al. quote research showing: "[TB] is one of the most frequent serious HIV-1 associated infections, and the commonest cause of death in HIV-1 positive Africans," and further: "Latent tuberculosis infection was already highly prevalent in Africa before the spread of HIV-1, and in consequence, at least a third of HIV-1 infected Africans are co-infected with tuberculosis."<sup>70</sup> This disease, usually attacking the lungs, is often associated with poverty and bad nutrition and spreads rapidly among people living in close proximity to each other. Thus, it spreads rapidly among people confined in prisons, living together in hostels, and in overcrowded houses and shacks.

Although TB treatment is readily available in the country, and many people receive treatment, the disease continues to spread. There are two obvious reasons for this: Firstly, many people who begin treatment do not conclude the four-month course of medication, and stop when they begin to feel better. This has led to multi-drug resistant

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69. Cedric de Beer, *The South African Disease: Apartheid Health and Health Services* (London: CIIR, 1984), 1. De Beer's book is interesting because it was published shortly before the AIDS pandemic took off in South Africa. So it gives a picture of the situation of health in the country as a result of colonialism which had its apogée in the apartheid system. De Beer makes the obvious causal link between poverty, exacerbated by the 'homelands' policy, and falling standards of health. It is evident, from de Beer's work, that political democratisation and economic equalisation are necessary steps for an improvement in health care.

70. Elizabeth L. Corbett, et al., "HIV-1 AIDS and the Control of Other Infectious Diseases in Africa," *The Lancet* 359 (22 June 2002): 2182.

strains of TB, which are then more difficult and more expensive to treat.<sup>71</sup> Secondly, as the immunity of people living with HIV is lowered, they are more susceptible to infection by TB, and the TB is able to spread.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Harries et al. state: "The numbers of patients acquiring tuberculosis has increased 300%-400% in high HIV-prevalent countries in the past decade."<sup>72</sup> There has not been a commensurate increase in the resources made available for the treatment of TB.

### **(8) AIDS and Death, AIDS and Life**

In South Africa, when a person is diagnosed as being HIV-infected, this is frequently perceived as the pronouncement of a death sentence. It is notoriously difficult to estimate how long a person might live with the virus. Dabis and Ekpini say baldly: "Survival with AIDS tends to be short in Africa," and further: ".... [African women with AIDS] median survival without care is 9 years (range 8-11)."<sup>73</sup> An individual's survival depends on his or her background health, nutrition, living conditions, stress, etc. For children with HIV-1, "[m]ortality is estimated at 26-45% by the first birthday, and 35-59% at 2 years."<sup>74</sup>

Studies in Uganda and Ivory Coast have shown that between 40 and 79% of adults remain symptom-free for three years of being infected with HIV.<sup>75</sup> This so-called 'incubation period' is believed to last up to ten years in otherwise healthy people in

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71. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), *SOUTH AFRICA: Feature: Tackling the World's Worst TB Epidemic* (Johannesburg: Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) News, 2003),

[Http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=33082&SelectRegion=Southern\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH\\_AFRICA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=33082&SelectRegion=Southern_Africa&SelectCountry=SOUTH_AFRICA) viewed on 9 April 2003.

72. Anthony D. Harries, et al., "Deaths from Tuberculosis in Sub-Saharan African Countries with a High Prevalence of HIV-1," *The Lancet* 357 (12 May 2001): 1520.

73. François Dabis and Ehounou René Ekpini, "HIV-1 AIDS and Maternal and Child Health in Africa," *The Lancet* 359 (15 June 2002): 2097 f.

74. Dabis and Ekpini, "HIV-1 AIDS and Maternal and Child Health," 2100.

75. Dabis and Ekpini, "HIV-1 AIDS and Maternal and Child Health," 2097.

developed countries. During this period, HIV is reproducing itself and infecting T4+ white blood or CD4 cells, which are responsible for fighting infections. The HIV-infected person is consequently less and less able to resist infections, and eventually the capacity of the immune system to overcome these infections is depleted. A person is said to have AIDS when he or she is unable to overcome opportunistic infections, or when neurological diseases or tumours show.

An indication of the fact that South Africa is a country in development, is that there is a vast gap between those who have and those who do not have access to quality health care. Rural areas, for example, have very poor health infrastructure and resources. Some people have medical insurance or belong to medical aid schemes which afford them medical treatment of first world standards. Thus some people with AIDS are able effectively to medicate themselves, and live a long, productive and relatively healthy life. But at the time of writing, medication for the majority of people with AIDS is simply beyond their financial means, and as a result they succumb to AIDS-related infections.

At the time of writing, numerous nongovernmental organisations and, more famously, activist groups such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) are importing and making less expensive generic antiretroviral drugs available in defiance of international and national commercial law. These help to prolong the lives of people who then have access to them. But this can only be regarded as an interim solution, because the nongovernmental groups do not have the finances to sustain the distribution of the medications.

With medication, AIDS has become a chronic manageable disease. There are debates about the morality and legality of provision of generic life-saving drugs, about the Doha agreements on TRIPS of the World Trade Organisation, about access to some of the trade deals in President George W. Bush's March 2003 budget of US\$15 billion for combating AIDS worldwide, etc. It is not the purpose of this paper to navigate these complicated issues.

On this issue, I would say only that it is the responsibility of governments to provide, to the very best of their ability, for the health of their citizens. More and more pharmaceutical companies are making their drugs available to the South African and governments of other developing countries at costs much lower than can be commanded on the international market.<sup>76</sup> Those governments thus have less and less reason not to make such life-saving medication available to their citizens.

### **Actuarial Projections of Mortality**

While there have been many scare-stories on the effects of AIDS on South African mortality,<sup>77</sup> there are also numerous more sober actuarial projections for the effect of AIDS on the South African population. While these may differ substantially in detail, they are all in agreement that the effect will be devastating. Millions of people will die of the disease, and it is mostly younger, potentially economically active, people who will succumb.

We will consider here only two of the many projections, namely the September 2001 projection of the Medical Research Council<sup>78</sup> (MRC) in conjunction with the November 2002 projection of the Centre for Actuarial Research (CAR) at the University of Cape Town.<sup>79</sup> This collaborative work was the most recent at the time of writing, considers sources of its own possible inaccuracy, and gives an idea of what the effect of AIDS will be up to the year 2010.

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76. See GlaxoSmithKline, *GlaxoSmithKline Again Reduces Its Not-for-Profit Price of HIV/AIDS Medicines for the Developing World*, press release (GlaxoSmithKline, 2003, 28 April), <http://www.gsk.com/media/pressreleases.htm> viewed on 29 April 2003.

77. Piet Meiring, "Laaste woord oor VIGS is nog nie gespreek," *Die Kerkbode* 149 (26 June 1992): 6.

78. Rob Dorrington, et al., *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Adult Mortality in South Africa* (Tygerberg: Burden of Disease Research Unit, Medical Research Council of South Africa, 2001 September), [www.mrc.ac.za/bod/complete.pdf](http://www.mrc.ac.za/bod/complete.pdf) viewed on 28 September 2001.

79. Rob Dorrington, Debbie Bradshaw, and Debbie Budlender, *HIV/AIDS Profile in the Provinces of South Africa: Indicators for 2002* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Centre for Actuarial Research, Medical Research Council, Actuarial Society of South Africa, 2002 November), [www.mrc.ac.za/bod/AIDSindicators2002.pdf](http://www.mrc.ac.za/bod/AIDSindicators2002.pdf) viewed on 15 April 2003.

On page 21, figure 6, the MRC model indicates that by the year 2010 "Premature adult mortality, indicated by the probability of a 15 year old dying before the age of 60 (45q15) will more than double, rising to as high as 800 out of 1000, i.e. 80%." In other words 80% of South Africans will not reach 60 years of age.

Page 25, table 5 shows that life expectancy in 2000 was 55 years. By 2010, this will drop to 40. So AIDS is responsible for a drop in life expectancy of 15 years. This means that the average South African will not reach old age. This is in marked contrast with the situation in 1990, of which the projection says on page 40: "...the age distribution of the deaths of Africans in 1990 shows the mode for the adult deaths is still in old age for both men and women." Thus the country is changing from one in which the majority of the population die in old age to one in which the majority of the population die before they are forty.

On page 22, figure 7 shows: "...by the year 2010 the cumulative number of HIV/AIDS deaths is expected to exceed 6 million, while the number of AIDS sick people will be well over 1 million." In 2000, AIDS accounted for 25% of all deaths in South Africa, and was the single biggest cause of death. By mid-2002, the CAR model estimated that AIDS was responsible for 40% of the deaths in the country.<sup>80</sup> In the future it will be even more significant a cause of death, as more and more people succumb to opportunistic infections.

The MRC projection used an actuarial model called ASSA600, published early in 1996. The results of the application of this model were compared with three others (- the US Bureau of the Census, the United Nations and the Metropolitan-Doyle model) all of which gave results of a similar order of magnitude. As more data became available about the effects of the pandemic, and as more understanding was gained, the model has been

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80. Dorrington, Bradshaw, and Budlender, *HIV/AIDS Profile in the Provinces*, 6.

modified, and the CAR based their 2002 calculations on the ASSA2000 model, using antenatal data from 2000. Whichever actuarial projection is used, consensus exists around the fact that AIDS is responsible for and will continue to account for the deaths of millions of people in South Africa.

The AIDS pandemic in South Africa will have previously unseen social and economic effects. As parents die, the number of orphans will increase, many of whom, themselves will be infected with HIV. Those children who are fortunate enough to have living relatives who are able to take them in and care for them will often be perceived as a burden on their new families. Many children are being cared for by their grandparents. Those who do not have relatives to care for them may end up in foster homes or institutional care, of which there is woefully inadequate provision in South Africa. Many more children will end up as 'street children,' relying on their wits to survive with no fixed shelter or source of income. The phenomenon of child-headed families is growing, in which a child is caring for younger siblings, and often for ill relatives. Children will be increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>81</sup>

Households will be increasingly poor as money is spent on medication and ultimately funerals. The presence of greater numbers of ill people in a household will mean a reduction in household income, as members are unable to go out to do regular remunerative work.

In the field of education, declining numbers of educators will be healthy enough to continue teaching. Those who are ill or who die will have to be replaced. Badcock-Walters predicts a corresponding reduction in the age and experience of the professional

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81. For the texts of a workshop on Christian responses to the orphan crisis, held at the Goedgedacht Trust in Cape Town, on 28 September 2000, the reader is referred to [Http://www.goedgedacht.org.za/new/reports\\_pub/divine.doc](http://www.goedgedacht.org.za/new/reports_pub/divine.doc) viewed on 23 September 2003.

educational corps.<sup>82</sup> Learners are likely to drop out of the system with lower levels of education as members of their family require care, or as there is no money available in the home for education. Badcock-Walters sees the AIDS crisis as an opportunity for creative thinking to review and restructure the provision and way of education in the country.

### **(9) Conclusion**

We have seen that AIDS is an all-pervasive reality in South African society. People of all ages are afflicted by the pandemic. The HIV is transmitted through a number of different means, of which we considered sexual, parenteral and perinatal vectors. Some cultural and social features, among which the migrant labour system features prominently, exacerbate the spread of the disease.

The disease has taken root in South Africa in the context of a legacy of imbalance in the provision of health care for black people by the previous government, and of the denial of the gravity of the situation by the present government. In a subsequent chapter we will consider the contribution of the traditional (non-Western) health care givers to the treatment of the pandemic.

HIV-infection invariably leads to death for the majority of South Africans who have no access to antiretroviral treatment, and who are often poor and under-nourished. It is not entirely clear what effects this high rate of mortality will have on the county as a whole, but there are foreseeable problems in the provision of education, care for orphans, maintaining a skilled workforce, and even in the provision of sufficient ground to bury so many people. This is to say nothing of the effects on morale and optimism that the

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82. Peter Badcock-Walters, "Education," in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 109.

pandemic will wreak. It is to these more spiritual dimensions that we now turn our attention.

### **(10) AIDS Raises Context-Specific Questions for Theologies - A Brief Survey**

It is the purpose of these few pages to give an impression of where the theological discussions and reflection around the AIDS pandemic has taken place, with particular reference to work in South Africa. We propose neither to cover all the ground, nor to offer full consideration of each topic raised. Rather, it is to situate the systematic work which we will do in the coming chapters. We will look here at some systematic, ethical and pastoral questions that have arisen in publications in South Africa, and where necessary, relate them to international material. But it is two of the systematic questions that we will investigate further in subsequent chapters.

#### **(a) "Systematic" Questions**

The major theological implication of the crisis is surely a consequence of the fact that AIDS is responsible for the deaths of millions of young people. They have not lived what would under normal circumstances be considered a full life, leading to old age and handing on of wisdom and the transmission of the faith to their own children. The very act of transmitting life has become a source of death. Thus the questions of the meaning and purpose of life and its fulfillment are raised.

For a society in which the attaining of the status of ancestor is regarded as fulfillment of life, the very meaning of life comes under scrutiny. AIDS prevents the attainment of ancestor-status, since most people who succumb to some AIDS-related illness die young, certainly prematurely in most ways of considering the normal lifespan.

Akin to this question is: what, if anything, awaits us after this temporal experience. This is where the question of the ancestor cult in South Africa is of relevance. Does the

cult of the ancestors hold a more optimistic eschatological outlook than traditional Christian eschatology? This will be studied in depth in a subsequent chapter of this work.

Christianity, being a religion of salvation, should have something to say about the soteriological implications of a crisis in which hundreds of people are dying daily. How can talk of salvation not ring hollow in the face of probable premature death? In what way can Christ be considered to be universal saviour when there is a situation crying out for divine remedy? Is the multivocality of the term "salvation" not a potential source of false expectation? Does salvation amount to avoidance of infection and its accompanying death sentence? Clearly the meaning of salvation should be clarified.

Nürnberg<sup>83</sup> relates the suffering caused by AIDS to salvation wrought by the suffering of Christ on the Cross:

Here a terrible human catastrophe is proclaimed to be God's act of salvation. If he can turn such a disaster into his prime tool of redemption, then he can also turn our own disasters into tools of redemption. Looking at the cross, Christians believe that, in spite of all the evil encountered in this world, God is for us, and with us, and not against us. In Christ he leads us through suffering to glory, through death to life.

The circulated but unpublished Lutheran / Moravian document<sup>84</sup> to which Nürnberg is offering a critical introduction, chooses to speak of redemption, rather, in terms of God's suffering acceptance. The parable of the Lost Son is cited as an example of God accepting the unacceptable person into fellowship with God. "It is the fellowship of God itself out of which redeeming power flows.... Transformation is not the condition of acceptance, but it is indeed the consequence. God expects us to get healed in his fellowship."

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83. Klaus Nürnberg, *Theology of AIDS - A Lutheran/Moravian Case Study*, Critical Introduction to the Lutheran/Moravian Proposed Programme (2002), 3,

[Http://www.cpsajoburg.org.za/hivaids/theology\\_of\\_aids.htm](http://www.cpsajoburg.org.za/hivaids/theology_of_aids.htm) viewed on 16 April 2003.

84. Lutheran and Moravian Churches in Southern Africa, *Proposed Programme for the Lutheran and Moravian Churches in Southern Africa to Respond to the HIV/AIDS Crisis* (2000), 6f.

It appears that here is the nexus of salvation for the Lutheran / Moravian study in the context of AIDS. It takes place within the Christian community. Christians are called upon to accept people suffering with HIV/AIDS and in their suffering acceptance of the unacceptable, to be transformed themselves, and to assist in the redemption of the person with AIDS:

Not only the infected persons themselves, but, together with them, the affected families, the congregation, and the community as a whole enter into a process in which they are transformed into a responsible, accepting, coping, caring, supporting community.

This introduces the equally systematic questions of christology and ecclesiology. Susan Rakoczy IHM advances the argument that the AIDS pandemic presents a new *kairos* for South African society, in which “[t]he future of the country and the credibility of the Christian community is (sic.) at stake.”<sup>85</sup> In the tradition of liberation theology, Rakoczy proposes three images on which the Christian community might model its transformative praxis: the compassionate Christ, “voice of the voiceless” and iconoclastic prophet.

In the ecclesiological vein, Kevin Dowling notes: “The body of Christ has AIDS. The Church has AIDS. It is our people who are living, suffering and dying because of this virus.”<sup>86</sup> One cannot separate the Church and AIDS. Bishop of Rustenburg, a diocese which is the temporary home of many migrant mine workers, Dowling is also responsible for the AIDS Desk of the SACBC and is confronted daily with the pandemic.

The AIDS crisis raises the question of theodicy. The pandemic brings enormous personal emotional, physical, familial and social suffering. How do Christians explain such suffering? Casimir Ruzindaza says: “Due to the acute sorrow involved in most cases of

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85. Susan Rakoczy, “Christology in the Context of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic,” *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (2001): 15.

86. Kevin Dowling, “Africa’s Aids Heroines,” *The Tablet*, 30 November 2002, 6.

AIDS-caused premature deaths, there is always a temptation of looking at this kind of calamity as a punishment from God.”<sup>87</sup>

On the question of suffering, Dowling writes:

It is vital that we do not make an instinctively defensive response to those who criticise our positions. A theology of Aids must reflect how people live. When, for example, the child whose parents have died of Aids tearfully looks up at one of our sisters and asks “Why does God hate us so much that he takes away our parents?”, we must be careful not to take refuge in doctrines. There are times when, in the face of the great suffering of the infected and affected, we can only be speechless. In the face of Aids, we need a trustful willingness to rest in uncertainty, without grasping at reason.<sup>88</sup>

Writing from a Calvinist perspective, J.H. van Wyk,<sup>89</sup> relates the theodetic question to that of eschatology. He makes the connection between AIDS, sin and the judgement of God. While the Scriptures present an undeniable relationship between sin and God’s judgement, the nature of this relationship is neither transparent nor of a simplistic causality. Because this relationship is not completely transparent, one must not think that AIDS is outside of the sovereign reign of God and the lordship of Christ. Suffering, says van Wyk, is one way in which God prepares the new order, and is thus a call to repentance in preparation for the coming judgement, forgiveness and fulfillment.

In an even more moralistic manner, Andrew White<sup>90</sup> also links the AIDS pandemic with eschatology and divine judgement. The suffering of people with AIDS is a manifestation of God’s revelatory, retributive, purificatory and corrective judgement. This judgement is both present and future, particularly for homosexual men and intravenous drug users. These were the two core groups of AIDS sufferers in the USA when White wrote. On p.81, White regards the AIDS pandemic and associated judgement as events

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87. Casimir Ruzindaza, *Living Positively with AIDS: An African Experience* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001), 86.

88. Dowling, “Africa’s Aids Heroines.”

89. J.H. van Wyk, “VIGS in visier: ’n teologies-etiese besinning,” *Koers* 56, no. 3 (1991): 409–23.

90. Andrew A. White, “AIDS as Divine Judgement,” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine* 2, no. 3; 4 (1988): 60–67; 79–82.

of significance for the modern world: "Further, the failure to recognize God's disposition of judgement in this major event in the history of the world is to fail to recognize a significant aspect of its meaning." They are signs of a realised eschatology.

(b) "Ethical" Questions

In a more ethical vein, are the questions of human relationships and the place of sexuality in the context of these relationships. Dowling says:

Catholic moral theologians can no longer assess human actions in the abstract regardless of context, but as choices arising out of a "fundamental option" about the way to live. They also highlight the sinfulness of structures which make individual choice all but impossible.<sup>91</sup>

For the first time, the Catholic Church is articulating a more comprehensive sociologically-informed understanding of sexual behaviour. Beyond the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act acknowledged in *Humanae Vitae*, it is indisputable that sexual intercourse is a means of economic exchange in situations of grinding poverty. This reality falls short of the Christian ideal, but the hierarchy is careful not to characterise the behaviour as 'sinful.'

Dowling is perhaps best known for his lone stand in the SACBC that would permit the less restricted use of condoms as a means of preventing transmission of death. He sees this stance as consistent with the tradition of Catholic moral teaching of promoting life. In more general terms, Dowling would condone the use of condoms to prevent the transmission of the HI Virus when there is the possibility that either of the partners has the virus.<sup>92</sup>

The SACBC's "Message of Hope"<sup>93</sup> encourages sexual abstinence before

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91. Dowling, "Africa's Aids Heroines."

92. Kevin Dowling, "An Explanation of What Has Been Published About Bishop Dowling and AIDS/condoms: Statement Issued Before the Plenary Meeting of the SACBC," *Sunday Times*, 9 July 2001, <http://www.sundaytimes.co.za/health/aids/dowling.asp> viewed on 30 July 2003.

93. SACBC, *A Message of Hope from the Catholic Bishops to the People of God in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland*, Message from the July Plenary Session (Pretoria: SACBC, 2001),

marriage and faithful monogamous relationships. It has a call to conversion, prayer and action. The Message, however, is unequivocally against the use of condoms. The bishops argue that the promotion of condoms contributes to a message undermining the moral fiber of the nations. However they concede the permissibility of the use of condoms as a means of preventing the transmission of HIV between serodiscordant spouses.

This Message has not been without its critics within and outside the Catholic Church. For example, Philippe Denis OP considers that while the bishops' call for abstinence and conjugal fidelity as the answer, and their condemnation of the use of the condom, make sense, they are also unjust and dangerous. They are unjust because they do not consider the real lives of broken families in South Africa, and are not within the grasp of ordinary men and women. They are dangerous because they contribute to the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexuality in South Africa.<sup>94</sup> Denis believes it is important to re-examine sexuality, particularly in the case of sexually active youth.

A group of Dominican theologians have published a similar view, maintaining that the Church should consider more compassionately the debate in favour of the use of condoms. While the condom is not an entirely reliable means of defence, it does prevent the transmission of the virus in the majority of cases. If even one life is saved from infection, it is a victory. The Conference is urged also to bear in mind that many people are unable to live up to the Christian ideal of marital fidelity, due to circumstances of poverty, isolation, and exploitation often entirely beyond their control. The Dominicans say that: "HIV/Aids is a social problem, not only a problem of personal morality. It is not only the individual who is called to conversion. Industry, advertising, corrupt officials who leave people in poverty and despair through their selfish acts, persons who regard HIV as God's

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[Http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm) viewed on 21 September 2001.

94. Philippe Denis, "Sexuality and AIDS in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 115 (March 2003): 73f.

course, all of us, in fact, are called to conversion.”<sup>95</sup>

A notable characteristic of the Catholic debate over condom use in South Africa has been the shortage of reference to the same question in similar conditions outside of the country. For example, the debate between Jon Fuller, James Keenan and Jacques Suaudeau (of the Pontifical Council for the Family) was widely reported in the Catholic media. But this debate has not been used to enlighten either side of the discussion in South Africa. In essence, Fuller and Keenan<sup>96</sup> see in Suaudeau’s article<sup>97</sup> a signal tolerant of the use of condom as prophylaxis for the containment of HIV. They read in the article an acceptance of the ‘lesser evil’ of the use of condoms after establishing the primary principles of sexual abstinence and marital fidelity. The riposte by Suaudeau<sup>98</sup> maintains this is an erroneous interpretation of a particular passage citing the use of condoms among prostitutes in Thailand. The term ‘lesser evil’ is used in an epidemiological and not a moral sense.

In June 2001, Fuller and Keenan argued in a lecture tour of six European cities, that:

... an effective response to the need for immediate prevention through condoms and needle exchange need not threaten Catholic orthodoxy. The Church’s teaching in *Casti Connubii* and *Humanae Vitae* is directed against contraceptive acts, not just against condoms or birth control pills as such..... [C]ondoms can be used for purposes other than contraception.

It is this aspect of the use of condoms that must be borne in mind when couples are being advised to use them as protection against the transmission of AIDS. The

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95.Martin Badenhorst, Philippe Denis, Kees Keijsper, and Munyaradzi Murove, “A Catholic Opinion on Condoms and AIDS,” *Sunday Times* (2001),

[Http://www.suntimes.co.za/health/aids/dominican.asp](http://www.suntimes.co.za/health/aids/dominican.asp) viewed on 30 July 2003.

96.Jon Fuller and James F. Keenan, “Tolerant Signals: The Vatican’s New Insights on Condoms for HIV Prevention,” *America* 183 (23 September 2000): 6–7.

97.Jacques Suaudeau, “Prophylactics or Family Values? Stopping the Spread of HIV/AIDS,” *L’Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition*, 19 April 2000, 9–10.

98.Jacques Suaudeau, “Prophylactics or Family Values? Stopping the Spread of HIV/AIDS,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 27 September 2000, 2.

technology, while originally designed to prevent the transmission of life, is now being used in the battle against death.

Other ethical issues centre around the provision of medical treatment, of drugs, and the uneven distribution of life-enhancing medications across the world. These issues are raised by Noël Simard<sup>99</sup> and are also addressed by Marliese Smurthwaite.<sup>100</sup> The worldwide AIDS crisis has led governments to re-evaluate TRIPS and allow that generic copies of life-saving drugs be manufactured and distributed in the circumstances of pending disaster.

J.H. van Wyk makes a very clear connection between the pandemic and political ethics in South Africa. He asks whether the high rate of HIV infection among black people in South Africa 'goes together with poverty and squatting, job-reservation and unemployment, migrant labour and political discrimination, in short, with the total political framework in which the black population lives.'<sup>101</sup> He says that government policies hold consequences for sexual and marriage ethics, and that an immoral structuring of society brings damaging moral consequences, and that these will last a long time. Acknowledging that the country is in a situation of transition, van Wyk does not make specific recommendations for radical political change.

Obviously the possibility of contracting a deadly virus from one's sexual partner has a profound effect on the way people regard each other. Emmanuel Katongole<sup>102</sup> argues that suspicion is becoming "a cultural pattern of life." This will be a lasting legacy of AIDS on African life, resulting in cynicism and nihilism. Promoting condoms as the

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99.Noël Simard, *AIDS: Ethical and Spiritual Considerations*, translated by Marie Evans Bouclin (Sherbrooke, Québec: Médiapaul, 1997), 207–11.

100.M.E. Smurthwaite, "The Moral Responsibilities of the Pharmaceutical Companies, Government Leaders in South Africa and the World Health Organisation and NGOs as Regards the Issue of AIDS in Africa," *St Augustine Papers*, March 2001.

101.van Wyk, "VIGS in visier," 418.

102.Emmanuel M. Katongole, "Christian Ethics and AIDS in Africa Today: Exploring the Limits of a Culture of Suspicion and Despair," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (August 2001): 146.

solution to the crisis will make people see their partner in terms of a potential 'danger' from whom they must protect themselves. They will consequently lack any serious commitment and attachments to the other. This profound philosophical change will undermine the interdependence which is the fabric of African social life. People living with the virus will move to despair and nihilism and want to take others "down" with them.

Katongole concludes<sup>103</sup> that it is the theological and ethical challenge to "provide alternative symbols, images and practices" to prevent this cultural change. The death and resurrection of Christ should become the primary hermeneutical grid through which Christians narrate their existence. The Church must provide a vision which values rather than deflates individuals living with AIDS. A powerful cultural regeneration is necessary, which does not simply retrieve or reaffirm African traditions, but which displaces the power of the pandemic. The paschal mystery should be celebrated in the Eucharist in a way that replaces despair with hope, cynicism with love, nihilism with commitment.

Last but not least among the ethical questions to be considered is how patriarchal theological assumptions and practice of some churches have contributed to the situation that women are in a position of weakness when it comes to negotiating relationships. An urgent return to the sources of Christian life is necessary to redress this situation. Christian witness should be a prophetic voice in this wilderness.

### (c) "Pastoral" Questions

The AIDS pandemic raises the question of pastoral care of people living and dying with HIV and AIDS. "Christians have to develop a pastoral theology that measures up, based on a deep appreciation of the value of human life and a holistic understanding of the human person."<sup>104</sup> Should there be a special pastoral outreach to people dying of this

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103. Katongole, "Christian Ethics and AIDS in Africa Today," 158f.

104. Dowling, "Africa's Aids Heroines," 7.

particular disease? Or should people with AIDS form part of the ordinary pastoral care of the Church? The particularly tragic circumstances clearly require a greater pastoral sensitivity, given the relative youth and the family circumstances of the people receiving care.

Certainly every effort must be made by the pastoral care-givers to abandon any prejudice they might associate with the disease. The hint of any negative judgement of the patient suffering from AIDS will be counterproductive in the caring relationship. In a (relatively) early article on AIDS and pastoral care in South Africa, Saayman and Kriel write of the necessity to dispel the stereotypes that associate AIDS with homosexuality and with race, respectively. "[B]ecause both are a tremendous hindrance in pastoral and educational work. AIDS has nothing to do with homosexuality as such, nor has it any specific relationship with Africa or African culture."<sup>105</sup>

In a subsequent article, Saayman feels that the Christian community is still not doing enough to confront the pandemic. The biomedical interventions aimed at spreading the use of condoms are not geared towards "altering the pattern of sexual relations underlying the spread of HIV/Aids, but simply at preventing or retarding the spread of the 'harmful agent'."<sup>106</sup> He states that we "have to move outside the dominant biomedical "philosophy," into the realm of cultural, sexual and moral norms."

Saayman, professor emeritus in the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), probably does not have the Catholic Church in mind here, when he speaks of the necessity to move into the realm of sexual and moral norms. Both of the statements of the SACBC before 1999 are firmly in the realm of sexual and moral norms.

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105. Willem Saayman and Jacques Kriel, "Towards a Christian Response to AIDS," *Missionalia* 19, no. 2 (1991): 155.

106. Willem Saayman, "AIDS - Still Posing an Unanswered Question," *Missionalia* 27, no. 2 (August 1999): 212, footnote 3.

The first,<sup>107</sup> proposes “premarital chastity and marital fidelity as the best protection against Aids.” The bishops state the “Conference regards *equally abhorrent* the scourge of Aids, so destructive of human life, and the response of the South African government making provision for so-called safe sex, however indiscriminate, by the use of condoms.” (emphasis mine.) After emphasising the Christian pastoral response to the pandemic, the second statement,<sup>108</sup> dwells on the need for a change in sexual responsibility and it makes the link with the need for radical changes in structures of social injustice which promote the spread of AIDS. With remarkable prescience the statement begins to spell out some of the future effects of AIDS on South African society. It also calls on those responsible for the general welfare to ensure that no incidence of AIDS might be used as an opportunity for exploitation.

Sam Pick<sup>109</sup> considers the pastoral responsibility of the Church under a number of rubrics: The Church is a healing community and should approach the pandemic in a hands-on way. He advises members to give pastoral accompaniment to patients, their families and the broader community. The book, written in Afrikaans, for a mainly Dutch Reformed readership, is clearly written with the ordinary lay person in mind. The Calvinist churches in South Africa do not have as large a corps of professional religious workers who are involved in full-time ministry as does the Roman Catholic church for example. So the book is timely in encouraging the non-professional lay person to become involved in hands-on ministry.

Stephen Lewis, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for HIV/AIDS in Africa, acknowledges the pastoral work that religious organisations do in the realm of AIDS. In

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107. Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), “Statement on AIDS,” in *The Bishops Speak*, Volume V (Pretoria: SACBC, 1988, 5 May), 30.

108. Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), “Pastoral Statement of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference on AIDS,” in *The Bishops Speak*, Volume V (Pretoria: SACBC, 1990 January), 129–36.

109. Sam Pick, *MIVVIGS - ons grootste uitdaging nog! Die pad vorentoe vir die kerk in Suid Afrika* (Wellington (Cape): Lux Verbi B.M., 2002).

his address to the Assembly of African Religious Leaders on Children and HIV/AIDS, he says that

“[r]eligious communities provide vital care to the ill and the dying at village level.”<sup>110</sup>

However he challenges the religious leaders of Africa to be proactive in denouncing the stigma attached to AIDS, in abolishing school fees in order to enable orphans and vulnerable children to attend school, in influencing political leaders in the North and the South to make good their promises of assistance. His vision has religious leaders co-operating not only among themselves, but also with secular powers in order for death not to be the final victor.

This raises the question of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. These were important factors in the struggle against apartheid from the 1970s to the 1990s. The experience of many people involved in this struggle was that dialogue itself did not prove very useful, but that it was in joint action that people of different faiths and of none came together with a common task and vision. It is evident that such common action should be a feature of the struggle against AIDS. It is likely that there will be different agendas and visions, but that should not detract from the active demonstration of love and commitment to overcome the scourge and to deal with its effects.

### **(11) Afterword**

In August 2003, after years of resistance, the President of South Africa announced that he would instruct his cabinet to make provisions for the nationwide deployment of

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110. Stephen Lewis, “Address by Stephen Lewis, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Africa to the African Religious Leaders Assembly on Children and HIV/AIDS, Nairobi, Kenya” (2002, 10 June), 3, [Http://www.uoguelph.ca/~citizen/doc/African\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_Assembly.pdf](http://www.uoguelph.ca/~citizen/doc/African_Religious_Leaders_Assembly.pdf) viewed on 21 August 2003.

antiretroviral therapy (ART) within a month. Thus, by September 2003, ART was supposed to be available across the country. This major policy change was greeted with enthusiasm and considerable justifiable self-congratulation by many lobby groups and activists who had been advocating the universal provision of affordable ART.

However, this is more of a symbolic than a definitive victory. The rapid deployment of ART is not going to mean the 'salvation' of the situation. It is imperative not to overestimate the immediate significance of this decision. As the Chief Director: HIV/AIDS and TB of the Department of Health explains, the health care system is not ready to rise to the task. If suitable health care professionals can be found, it will take some time till they are sufficiently trained to implement the programme. "It is therefore important to ensure that health workers are trained in this component of AIDS care, especially on issues such as drug interactions, adherence, and managing adverse events."<sup>111</sup> To provide this training, Silemela proposes the establishment of centres of excellence in AIDS care in the existing medical schools. This is clearly a long-term goal and does not reflect the urgency with which the ART is needed in order to begin saving lives immediately.

This is not unnecessary foot-dragging on behalf of the government, but is in line with current best practice. ART is relatively complicated therapy that requires frequent monitoring, and has side-effects and long-term complications. If the therapy is not administered consistently, drug-resistant strains of HIV may develop, which will be more difficult to treat in the future.<sup>112</sup> For these reasons, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) is opposed to the rapid deployment of ART in resource-poor settings. Besides redirecting scarce resources from prevention programmes, ART may be

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111. Nono Silemela, "Achieving Excellence," *Perspective: African Journal on HIV/AIDS*, no. 5 (2003): 83.

112. It is important that the drugs be taken according to a strict schedule. Hence the concern of articles such as Ivan Oransky, "African Patients Adhere Well to Anti-HIV Regimens," *The Lancet* 362, no. 9387 (13 September 2003): 882, which allay fears that the precision required in the ART is beyond the ability of African patients.

perceived as the panacea that leads people no longer to be as vigilant in prevention of HIV transmission.

The central issue is the capacity of the country to deliver ART rather than the cost of the drugs themselves. The Association, while recognizing that there will be obvious benefit for some who have access to ART, believes that the long-term solution lies only in developing a safe, effective and equitable delivery system, which cannot be achieved by merely flooding the market with drugs.<sup>113</sup>

Karim, of the Medical School of the University of Natal writes of the enormous task to introduce HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy) in 27 pilot sites in four of the nine provinces:

Efforts to overcome operational constraints to national coverage of AIDS treatment include: urgent procurement of medicines; speedy accreditation of treatment sites; resource allocation to underdeveloped sites to build capacity for site accreditation and treatment roll out; clear, accurate, and appropriate advice on testing, treatment, nutrition, and prevention; and training and support of health-care personnel.<sup>114</sup>

Hence, while it is a step in the right direction, the decision of the South African government to provide ART is not going to salvage the situation overnight. The drugs are one major strategy in the battle against HIV/AIDS but can only be effective in the context of a comprehensive improved health and nutritional infrastructure.

The question of the treatment of people with AIDS directs the further work of this thesis. The Prime Minister and Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang maintain that as a disease affecting Africans, AIDS should be treated with African remedies. Making the point that good nutrition is an essential dimension of preventing the onset of AIDS, Tshabalala-Msimang has said repeatedly that African potatoes, olive oil, lemon and garlic are essential ingredients of a balanced diet that can help to boost the immune

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113.CPHA, "2002 Position Paper on the Opportunities and Challenges of Introducing Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) in Resource-Poor Settings," paper presented at Annual General Meeting of Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) (2002), 4.

114.Quarraisha Abdool Karim, "HIV Treatment in South Africa: Overcoming Impediments to Get Started," *The Lancet* 263, no. 9418 (24 April 2004): 1394.

systems.<sup>115</sup>

I do not share the ideological stance of the ministers. But I do recognise that it is appropriate to use what tools are available to Africans in dealing with a crisis that is affecting millions of Africans. While the ministers seek African nutritional and medicinal ways to assist people with AIDS, other Christians wishing to offer “spiritual” support to people with AIDS might look among African spiritual resources.

The primary resource to which many Africans turn is the cult of the ancestors. This ancient part of life in Southern Africa belongs within a worldview with its own eschatological dimension. It is used to explain suffering and misfortune, as well as to offer ritual healing and social integration. It connects individuals with their forebears as well as rooting them to the earth from which they spring up and to which they return upon death.

In the following chapter I will examine the cult of the ancestors in the context of present South Africa. I will try to show as clearly as possible the way it is lived in the modern situation, with reference to current and historical anthropological and religious writing. The subsequent chapter will take a more diachronic approach, to show the way in which the cult was initially persecuted by Christian missionaries and later cautiously allowed into mainstream Christian life and practice. This will allow us to address the question, in the fifth chapter, of what “salvation” might be hoped for in the context of the AIDS pandemic.

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115. See, for example, Kalay-Vani Nair, “Manto Again Prescribes Garlic,” *Mail and Guardian*, 9 February 2004, <http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=30905&t=1> viewed on 5 July 2004.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ANCESTOR CULT IN SOUTH AFRICA

### (1) Introduction

The cult of the ancestors is deeply rooted in Southern African tradition - a tradition predating European colonial expansion and missionary effort in the subcontinent. Inseparable from the cult is the belief in a supreme God. However, the Christian missionary effort beginning in the 18th Century saw fit to suppress the cult in favour of the Western Christian religious paradigms. In so doing, a profound spiritual resource was driven underground to the detriment of African Christian life. The cult is now resurgent and offers hope of a fresh approach to theology in the context of the crisis of AIDS in South Africa.

In this chapter I will begin with a consideration of the present extent of the cult of the ancestors in Southern Africa, to show that it is worthy of consideration as a contemporary religious phenomenon in the context of the AIDS crisis. I will then approach a working definition of the cult, analyse, expand and qualify it. I then consider the criteria by which a number of South African groups determine who becomes an ancestor. The definition and criteria together render a rather dry formal overview, with no sense of the lived experience. In order to illustrate what the cult means to the people who live it, I conclude the chapter by situating the cult in the wider worldview of which it forms a part.

Apart from the problem of trying to understand a religious experience from the point of view of a non-participant, there is another obvious hermeneutical obstacle in our approach: Because there are so few first-hand "user accounts" of the cult, I shall necessarily be restricted to the accounts of the cult recorded by anthropologists and missionaries. The latter are, for theological rhetorical purposes, almost universally disparaging in their tone, while the former treat the cult as a phenomenon to be examined from the outside and explained through their Western interpretive filter. Despite these obstacles, I believe that it is a worthwhile exercise, which conveys the value of the cult in terms of a source of moral injunction and of an optimistic communitarian eschatological horizon.

## (2) Extent of the Cult of the Ancestors

The cult of the ancestors has historically been practised by all the Bantu<sup>1</sup> groups of South Africa who speak 'Bantu' languages. It is a form of religion that is spread widely across the whole continent among all but a few groups. In South Africa in particular, the groups which did not historically practice the cult of their ancestors were the San and the Khoikhoi.<sup>2</sup> The San now live mostly in the Northern Cape and in the Kalahari desert in Botswana. The Khoikhoi have mostly been assimilated into other groups, and, in so far as they still exist, have taken on the religious practices of their neighbours.

In 1913, H. Dieterlen encouraged the catechist or evangelist of the Evangelical Church to criticize but not to insult or mock Sotho traditions and customs. Their time is over and the day of the Lord has dawned.<sup>3</sup> One might be inclined to copy Dieterlen in thinking of the cult of the ancestors as an atavistic remnant of a bygone pre-Christian magical age which has neither relevance nor adherents in the modernised South Africa. The cult might thus be considered as irrelevant, practised only by a few diehards of a

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1. 'Bantu' is a linguistic term. It refers to languages structured on numerous classes of nouns recognised by their prefix. Euphonic concords link the noun to its verb and adjectives. These concords also govern the form taken by the adjective.

The Bantu languages in South Africa are divided into two 'groups' and in addition to these, there are a couple of other single languages which do not form part of groups in the country, but have links to languages in the neighbouring countries of Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The Nguni group is represented by Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi and Ndebele and has the greatest number of people who speak these languages. The Sotho group comprises Southern Sotho (Sotho), Northern Sotho (Pedi) and Tswana. There are also cross-over languages, like Bhaca, which contain elements of both the Nguni and the Sotho groups. The non-group languages are Venda and Tsonga. The indigenous non-Bantu languages in South Africa are the dialects of Khoisan. These are also spoken in Botswana and Namibia.

It must also be noted here that the question of language and group is a minefield of sensitivities. Why, for example, did the apartheid government recognise some languages as such, and yet only accord official status to English and Afrikaans, preferring the other languages to be spoken in 'homelands' of which speakers of these languages were citizens? What criteria were used by the present government in recognising only 11 official languages? As this is not a thesis about language, we shall not explore this question at greater length.

2. Kiernan says: "[N]either the San nor the Khoikhoi had any clear idea of what such an afterlife might be. The influence of the dead was mischievous, often being the cause of illness, but there was no organised cult of the dead remotely approaching ancestor worship." See Jim Kiernan, "African Traditional Religions in South Africa," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 17.

3. H. Dieterlen, *Bukana ea 'moleli* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1913), 89.

passing generation, and not worthy of consideration in our response to the AIDS pandemic.

It is the purpose of this first section to disabuse the reader of this misconception, and to demonstrate that the cult is of great relevance even to highly 'modern' young people. This section will consider seven studies from the past two decades showing that the cult of the ancestors is not relegated to the history books, but that it still thrives in rural as well as urban areas. The studies will be presented in chronological order, and not in any rank of importance or persuasiveness.

#### (a) Manona

In 1981, Manona<sup>4</sup> was convinced that the cult was resurgent after years of Christians dissociating themselves from the power of the ancestors. He based his conclusions on surveys he had done in Grahamstown and in the Ciskei in 1980. He did not provide hard numeric evidence for his claim, but had the general impression that Christians were reclaiming what previous generations had abandoned. The reasons he advances for this resurgence are telling: "The development is inspired not by conservatism among the people but by a conviction that what the earlier generations of Christians abandoned was right and valuable."<sup>5</sup> It is the purpose of this chapter to evaluate just how 'right and valuable' the cult of the ancestors is in the light of the AIDS pandemic.

#### (b) Kitshoff

Kitshoff<sup>6</sup> is convinced of the continued currency of the cult of the ancestors, even

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4. C.W. Manona, "The Resurgence of the Ancestor Cult Among Xhosa Christians," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief*, edited by Heinz Kuckertz (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 34.

5. Manona, "The Resurgence of the Ancestor Cult," 38.

6. M.C. Kitshoff, "Moderne swart jeug se siening oor Christus en voorouers as middelaars," *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif* XXXIII, no. 3 (September 1992): 417-27.

among modern black youth. 51% of the 92 bible college students at the University of Zululand whom he surveyed, believed that ancestral spirits play a mediatory function.<sup>7</sup> He quotes Staples' PhD 1981 findings<sup>8</sup> that more than 75% of the black members of established churches believed that the ancestors are a source of help for them. He ascribes the difference between his finding of 51% and Staples' of 75% to the following factors:

- (i) that the students he surveyed knew the bible
- (ii) that they were not entirely free in their responses to express their true opinions
- (iii) that they were relatively young, so not representative of the wider population
- (iv) that their educational goal (ministry) played a role.

Kitshoff is clear that his survey shows that the cult of the ancestors cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to modern youth. This corresponds to my experience in conversations with young people in Soweto, where I worked for two years, and in chaplaincy to tertiary students for five years. I found that they have a lively interest in the cult of the ancestors, although they are neither universally informed, nor entirely clear on what they mean by the ancestors.

#### (c) Anderson

Drawing on field surveys of 1638 families in Soshanguve township outside Pretoria between 1990 and 1992, Anderson writes:

The ancestor cult is the central feature of African religion, the heart of the African spirit world. It is not an outmoded belief which is dying out in South Africa's urban areas. The veneration of ancestors is still widely practised in the black townships of South Africa, even though the incidence of the ancestor cult among church members is not as high today as it was thirty years ago. . . . For a great many

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7. According to Kitshoff's analysis, the students see the ancestors' mediatory role variously as parallel to Christ, to the exclusion of Christ, previous to Christ or in Christ. This opens up all sorts of interesting questions regarding mediation and belonging to dual systems, which we shall consider later.

8. R.L. Staples, "Christianity and the Cult of the Ancestors: Belief and Ritual Among the Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa. An Interdisciplinary Study Utilizing Anthropological and Theological Analysis," Ph.D. thesis (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981).

urban black people the ancestors are a reality, to be given due acknowledgement and to whom recourse is had for the provision of felt needs.<sup>9</sup>

A total of 44% of all the families surveyed, practised the ancestor cult, with more members of mainline churches than of Pentecostal churches doing so. Thus Anderson says that in order to be relevant in Africa, Christians have to "respond to the objective reality of ancestors."<sup>10</sup> This response can be of either confrontation or accommodation and compromise.

(d) Kriel

In in-depth interviews with 256 respondents over a 13-year study in the former Lebowa, ending in July 1990, Kriel had the opportunity to discover the extent of belief in the influence of the ancestors. He asked specifically whether in the respondents' opinion, the *badimo* (ancestors) can influence the lives and world of people. The replies were tabulated as follows:

	Men	Women	Nurses
Yes, the <i>badimo</i> do influence people and their world	132 (95%)	54 (96%)	41 (67%)
No, the <i>badimo</i> have no influence	6 (4%)	2 (4%)	9 (15%)
Unsure / don't know	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	11 (18%)
Total	139 (100%)	56 (100%)	61 (100%)

**Table 1** Extent of belief in the influence of the ancestors<sup>11</sup>

In response to the question of whether they had had dealings with the ancestors in the previous 12 months, Kriel received the following affirmative replies: men 46%, women 66% and nurses 16%.

9. Allan Anderson, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor Cult: Confrontation or Compromise?" *Missionalia* 21, no. 1 (April 1993): 29.

10. Anderson, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor Cult," 37.

11. J.D. Kriel, "*Lewendes, gestorwenes en voorouergeeste in die Noord-Sotho-ontologie*," *South African Journal of Ethnology* 18, no. 3 (1995): 114.

These two sets of figures indicate the pervasiveness of belief in the ancestors' influence, which is noticeably less among those who have subscribed to Western medical practice. They also show that contact with the ancestors is not a daily occurrence. Indeed not everyone has dealings with the ancestors even once a year. That the women had more dealings with the ancestors can be ascribed to the absence from home of many men for at least part of the year as they are migrant workers.

(e) Dreyer and Mjwabe

On the basis of conversations they conducted, specifically aimed at finding the extent of traditional black religious beliefs, Dreyer and Mjwabe<sup>12</sup> say that the cult of the ancestors is a real part of black culture. While conceding that westernised people do not hold on to the traditions as strongly, they say that the cult is practised in the cities and also in Christian communities. Dreyer and Mjwabe conclude that particular insight into these traditional beliefs is necessary in order for the Gospel to be spread effectively.

(f) Tlhagale

In conversation with Buti Tlhagale<sup>13</sup> on 16 May 2003, he was emphatic that young people do have contact with the cult of the ancestors. In a broad generalisation, Tlhagale claims that when a child is sick, the parents most often turn first to the traditional healer before consulting a Western-style medical practitioner. This applies to practising Christians as well as to those living in urban areas. When somebody begins to develop symptoms of AIDS, therefore, initial diagnoses and prescriptions will be made by a traditional healer, whose stock in trade is in terms of the cult of the ancestors.<sup>14</sup>

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12. W.A. Dreyer and F.E. Mjwabe, "Tradisionele geloof," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 51, no. 2 (June 1995): 554.

13. Buti Tlhagale OMI was Archbishop of Bloemfontein at the time of our conversation, and shortly thereafter was installed as Bishop of Johannesburg. He has written and published extensively on inculturation in the church in South Africa.

14. This is confirmed in the important work by Ncube, which we will consider at length in a subsequent chapter. Ncube writes:

## (g) Denis

Denis reports on wide-ranging interviews conducted with twenty women of whom eight were leaders of women's groups within six mainline Christian churches in Sobantu township outside of Pietermaritzburg.<sup>15</sup> The aim of the report is to show how the women combine their prominent positions in their respective churches, and thus their Christian faith with their African culture and heritage. He concludes in general that "African traditional religion remains a constitutive element of the mental and cultural landscape" even for these women who were so firmly rooted in the Christian practice. Whether they were trying to integrate their customs or oppose them to their church practice, "reference to the religion of the ancestors is unavoidable."<sup>16</sup>

## (h) Conclusion

The above evidence from Manona, Kitshoff, Anderson, Kriel, Dreyer and Mjabwe, Tlhagale and Denis shows that the ancestral cult is not to be dismissed as a bygone relic. Rather it is a vital and widespread dimension of the religious landscape of South Africa. It features in the awareness and practice of ordinary South Africans, including practising Christians. It is thus worthy of consideration in relation to the pervasive problem of AIDS.

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It is when the sickness has shown its category that diviners can identify its aetiology. This section poses a problem in the AIDS pandemic because it can delay a patient to get help immediately but is important to make an awareness of the sick member to the whole family. See Vitus Siphon Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *Ukugula, Ukufa Nokuphumula Ngoxolo* (Sickness Unto Death and Rest in Peace) in Times of HIV-AIDS with a Special Reference to Zulu Concepts of *Ukubhula* (Divination) *Nokuthakatha* (Witchcraft)," dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (School of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, supervised by Dr Stuart C. Bate, 2002), 10.

15. The interviews were conducted in 2000 by research assistants of the Sinomlando Oral History Project of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

16. Philippe Denis, "*Chrétiennes et africaines: Le dilemme d'un groupe de femmes sud-africaines*," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 35, no. 1 (January-March 2004): 67.

*Cette étude montre que, pour des femmes aussi fermement enracinées dans la pratique chrétienne que ces huit dirigeantes de manyanos, la religion traditionnelle africaine demeure un élément constitutif du paysage mental et culturel. Qu'elles soient opposées aux coutumes ou qu'elles cherchent à intégrer celles-ci à la pratique ecclésiale, la référence à la religion des ancêtres est incontournable.*

Schreiter regards this as the second of his three types of dual system.<sup>17</sup> It is pleasing that Schreiter does not consider this to be “syncretism” (which in most contexts carries a pejorative sense.) But I go further than Schreiter and argue that the fact that many people feel compelled to participate in the cult of the ancestors in the face of ecclesiastical censure, indicates that it is inextricably tied up with what it means to be “African.” Thus, the type of “dual belonging” which is seen among Christian adherents of the cult of the ancestors, is of the same type as Christian-Shintos or Christian-Buddhists in Asia. Indeed, I have Jesuit colleagues who say “I am Christian and I am African.” and who do not feel free not to participate in the rituals of their families. What has long been regarded as laxity or lack of commitment, is in fact little recognised as similar to what holds sway in Asia. But this thesis is not attempting to resolve this question.<sup>18</sup>

### (3) Who Are the Ancestors?

For the African, death does not represent an abrupt and total discontinuity of life. A person who has died proceeds to the world of the ancestors, from which he or she still has contact with the living. The dead are intimately involved in the affairs of the living, and depend on their living descendants for their remembrance and continued existence. The

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17. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 148. Schreiter enumerates (i) Christianity operating alongside another tradition, such as among Native American groups.

(ii) Christianity practiced in its integrity, with selected elements from another system also being practiced. He says this is what happens in (West) Africa, with sacrifices being offered at the shrine of a local spirit or deity, especially in times of distress. People try to “exhaust all possible channels of mediation.” Church leaders see this as incompatible with Christianity, but the local members have no such misgivings.

(iii) “Double belonging” as occurs in Asia, where Christianity is practiced as well as a national religion which is inextricably tied up with citizenship.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the Roman Catholic Church’s resolution of this third type of dual system was to understand the Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. rites as “civic duty” and thus not a question of religious adherence in conflict with Christianity. But, Phan has said it is the most religious thing that many people do, so its religious dimension should not be denied. See Peter C. Phan, “Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case,” *Worship* 76, no. 5 (2002): 403–30.

18. For a timely, and I believe very important, contribution to this discussion, I refer the reader to Peter C. Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” *Theological Studies* 64, no. 3 (September 2003): 495–519.

ancestors are concerned with the well-being of their lineage and descendants and are perceived to obtain favours on behalf of their kin.

### Toward a Definition

The following is a useful initial general grammatical definition and description of ancestors. I shall clarify, analyse and expand on it, in relation particularly to the cult in South Africa.

An ancestor is a named, dead forebear who has living descendants of a designated genealogical class representing his continued structural relevance. In ancestor worship such an ancestor receives ritual service and tendance directed specifically to him by the proper class of his descendants. Being identified by name means that he is invested with attributes distinctive of a kind of person.<sup>19</sup>

I should note at the outset that in South Africa ancestors are not exclusively male. Writing in the 1960's, Fortes uses masculine pronouns. His work is mostly with the Ashanti and Tallensi in West Africa, where the ancestors may well all be masculine. In Southern Africa, however, the cult concerns both male and female ancestors. Nxumalo's informant shows that the Zulu are somewhat ambivalent about the ancestral status of women and children. These, he says, are "in the *amadlozi*," but he accords greater status to the fathers and grandfathers.<sup>20</sup>

Mönnig<sup>21</sup> ascribes the lesser awareness of women among the ancestors to the fact that most South African societies have a patrilocal tradition. That is, when women marry, they leave their own homes and go to live with the husband's family. They do not therefore have roots over a number of generations in the home in which they raise their children. While the husband's forebears are remembered more than three or four

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19. Meyer Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship in Africa," in *African Systems of Thought: Studies Presented and Discussed at the Third International African Seminar in Salisbury, December 1960*, edited by M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1965), 124.

20. J.A. Nxumalo, "Zulu Christians and Ancestor Cult - A Pastoral Consideration," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief*, edited by Heinz Kuckertz (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 66.

21. H.O. Mönnig, *The Pedi* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1967), 56f.

generations, the wife's forebears may be known only through the rare visit of one of her parents.

It is probably in the '*designated genealogical class*' of Fortes' definition that the cult of the ancestors varies most from one group to another. Among the Nguni, the ancestors to whom cult is offered are more commonly patrilineal. However Hammond-Tooke is unambiguous that in South Africa ancestors are on both sides of the family: "The bilaterality referred to above is much more evident in other Bantu-speaking groups such as Venda, Tsonga and Sotho, especially Sotho of the Lowveld (Lobedu, Kgaga)."<sup>22</sup> So, among the Basotho, our particular study group, ancestors who represent the clan, as well as those who "communicate" are both male and female, on both sides of the family.

Fortes uses the term '*ancestor worship*' of the human relationship towards the ancestors. This is controversial, since for Christians, 'worship' is reserved as an attitude towards God. Others, like Hammond-Tooke, Clarke and Charumbira<sup>23</sup> also choose this term over terms such as 'reverence,' 'venerate,' 'honour,' 'respect,' etc. I shall look into this question of terminology in the present chapter, but until the question is settled, I shall follow Shorter, Lapointe, Triebel and Nyamiti<sup>24</sup> and others in using the theologically less charged term 'venerate' and 'veneration.'<sup>25</sup> When speaking about the relation of people

22. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "The Aetiology of Spirit in Southern Africa," *African Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 159.

23. See W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Do the South Eastern Bantu Worship Their Ancestors?" in *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa: Essays in Honour of Eileen Krige*, edited by John Argyle and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978), 134–49; also Edith Clarke, "The Sociological Significance of Ancestor-Worship in Ashanti," *Africa* III, no. 4 (1930): 431–71; and Ruramisai Charumbira, "Ancestor Worship: Just Who Is Worshipping Whom? Theoretical and Methodological Reflections on Power and Knowledge About Africa," M.A. Thesis (Robarts Library, OISE/ UT Library: University of Toronto, 2001).

24. See Aylward Shorter, "Conflicting Attitudes to Ancestor Veneration in Africa," *AFER* XI, no. 1 (January 1969): 27–37; also Eugene Lapointe, "Ancestor Veneration and Christian Worship," in *The Church and African Culture: Conference Papers*, edited by Mhloni Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 39–52; as well as Johannes Triebel, "Living Together with the Ancestors: Ancestor Veneration in Africa as a Challenge for Missiology," *Missiology: An International Review* XXX, no. 2 (April 2002): 187–97; and Charles Nyamiti, "Ancestor Veneration in Africa," [Http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/nyamiti.htm](http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/nyamiti.htm) viewed on 11 March 2002.

25. However, Mtetwa is opposed even to the use of the term 'veneration' because it does not convey what the ancestor-directed rituals represent. He insists that the only way to speak of the cult of the

to their ancestors in general, in a way that does not refer to specific acts of veneration, I shall use the term 'cult' following the example of Nxumalo, Tutu, Becken, Anderson, Daneel, Manona, Staples and others.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to our working definition, Fortes says an ancestor is a *named* forebear. Hammond-Tooke and Kuckertz distinguish between the ancestors in general and particular named ancestors to whom special attention is paid in specific ritual acts.

On the one hand, in routine (ordinary) rituals such as at rites of passage surrounding death, birth, initiation and marriage, or at agricultural occasions like sowing or harvest time, or when decisions have to be made concerning the welfare of the whole family, a kinship group invites or invokes the presence of its entire set of ancestors. This set is often all the descendants of one particular ancestor going back variously four to six generations, depending on the memory of those present and the practice of that particular descent group.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, in times of particular crisis such as illness, barrenness, suffering, misfortune or tragedy, a diviner or traditional healer may diagnose the cause of the suffering as the discontentment of one particular ancestor. Typically, this ancestor is

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ancestors is to use the terms in the original languages: *ukhabela amadlozi* (Zulu) or *ukukhumbula izinyanya* (Xhosa) or *go phasa badimo* (Tswana). The weight of these verbs rests respectively on sacrificing, remembering and offering libation. See S. Mtetwa, "African Spirituality in the Context of Modernity," *Bulletin for Contextual Theology: African Theology* 3, no. 2 (1996): <http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/tonyb.htm> viewed on 25 February 2002. We shall continue to use the term 'veneration' and refer in particular to sacrificing, remembering and libation, as appropriate.

26. See Nxumalo, "Zulu Christians and Ancestor Cult.;" also Desmond Mpilo Tutu, "The Ancestor Cult and Its Influence on Ethical Issues," *Ministry* 9, no. 3 (July 1969): 99–104; and Hans-Jürgen Becken, "Beware of the Ancestor Cult: A Challenge to Missiological Research in South Africa," *Missionalia* 21, no. 3 (November 1993): 333–39; as well as Anderson, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor Cult.;" and M.L. Daneel, "The Christian Gospel and the Ancestor Cult," *Missionalia* 1, no. 2 (1973): 46–73; and Manona, "The Resurgence of the Ancestor Cult.;" and finally Staples, "Christianity and the Cult of the Ancestors."

27. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Who Worships Whom: Agnates and Ancestors Among Nguni," *African Studies* 44, no. 1 (1985): 47–64 presents a detailed discussion of agnatic descent groups, lineages, clans, kin-groups, etc. among the Nguni. In W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Boundaries and Belief: The Structure of a Sotho Worldview* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1981): 86–87, we have a similar discussion for the Kgaga clan of the Basotho. It is not necessary for us to record the details here, as we will discuss them as the need arises.

angry because some taboo has been broken, or the ancestor has been neglected.

Alternatively, an ancestor may communicate directly in a dream with a member of his or her descent group. This is where the particular forebear is '*named*' and stands out from the general collective. '*Ritual service and tendance directed specifically to him,*' is offered to assuage his or her anger. During this ritual, the whole collective of ancestors is invited but the communicating ancestor in particular is named, addressed and mollified.

The '*continued structural relevance*' to which Fortes refers, relates inter alia, to the taboos of marriage within certain degrees of kinship, to expectation of hospitality when on a journey, to laying down norms of behaviour, to the inheritance of property and land, and to defining jural relations. Fortes is much more emphatic on this last point than other writers on the ancestral cult. He says: "*Ancestor worship is a representation or extension of the authority component in the jural relations of successive generations.*"<sup>28</sup> He believes it is neither about the continuation of personal relationships nor about the continued life of an individual. It is rather about maintaining jural and power relationships. Hammond-Tooke says "the fundamental religious objective in the ancestor cult is the sacralization and expression of basic principles of social organization." Among the Cape Nguni, these are respect for genealogical seniority and defining marriage taboos.<sup>29</sup> This functional emphasis is somewhat unique to Fortes and Hammond-Tooke, and is not the way in which the cult is popularly understood in South Africa.

Returning finally to Fortes' definition, for an ancestor to have relevance to the lives of his or her descendants, it is essential that the ancestor be '*invested with attributes distinctive of a kind of person.*' In other words, ancestors are only significant to those who accord them significance of a particular kind. Or as a member of the Independent Pentecostal Church said to Anderson: "Ancestors would only reveal themselves to those people who believed in them."<sup>30</sup> This is not as banal a statement as it might first appear.

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28. Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship," 133.

29. Hammond-Tooke, "Who Worships Whom," 51.

30. Anderson, "African Pentecostalism and the Ancestor Cult," 35.

Depending on the group under consideration, there are a number of criteria a person is expected to fulfil to qualify for being '*invested with the attributes distinctive of a kind of person.*' I examine some of those criteria in the next section.

#### (4) Who Becomes an Ancestor?

The sources are not in complete agreement on what criteria must be fulfilled in order for a person to be considered an ancestor. This is largely because the practice varies considerably among the various groups present in South Africa. Some require only that the deceased person have a fitting funeral. Other groups, like the Zulu, require that the family perform the ceremony of *ukubuyisa* after the period of mourning in order to return the wandering spirit to the homestead. I shall consider briefly some divergent accounts of the requirements for incorporation among the ancestors.

##### (a) Obengo

Obengo concludes his considerations of mainly second-hand accounts of who can become an ancestor thus: "It seems clear from the preceding, therefore, that parenthood, status, funerary rites, and goodness are all significant factors that qualify the departed to become ancestors worthy of worship and with the responsibility of moral guardianship."<sup>31</sup> I shall examine these criteria in two more systematic works.

##### (b) IMBISA

In 1996, the Standing Committee of the InterRegional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) met in Botswana to discuss the question of ancestor veneration

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31. Tom Obengo, "The Role of Ancestors as Guardians of Morality in African Traditional Religions," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* (1991): 48. Although succinct, it is clear that this material is not a primary source. This is because Obengo uses authors for this topic, who, with one exception, write at second hand. Obengo's only first-hand account, that of Bolaji Idowu, is not from the subcontinent. He writes, for example, of a form of judgement by the Deity or the court of the ancestors, akin to canonization to the state of ancestor. I have not come across similar thinking in South Africa, and consider it unrepresentative of the thinking on that part of the continent.

in the subcontinent. They considered the various requirements for 'ancesthood' in the countries they represent. These they listed as:

[a]n ancestor is a person:

- who died a good death, after having faithfully practised and transmitted to his descendants the laws left to him by his ancestors
- who contributed to the continuation of the line by leaving many descendants
- who was a peacemaker, a link, that fostered communion between the living and the dead, through sacrifice and prayers
- A person who is a first-born is a candidate 'par excellence' to become an ancestor because he is able to maintain the chain of generation in a long genealogy. The right of the first born is thus an inalienable right.<sup>32</sup>

The bishops admit that they have difficulty in speaking of the role of the ancestors, because they are "nowhere and yet everywhere." It is certainly impossible to speak on behalf of all the cultural groups in the subcontinent.

(c) Michalek

In line with the thinking of the bishops, that not just any deceased person is "consecrated" an ancestor, Michalek<sup>33</sup> arranges criteria under the heading of four conditions which he calls, 'juridical,' 'moral,' 'formal 1' and 'formal 2.' It is helpful for us to consider these headings:

juridical: one must have descendants, have passed on the gift of life

moral: one must have lived an exemplary life, according to traditional virtues, and being a bridge of unity between people

first formal: one must have had a good natural death, in advanced age, having passed on one's message to one's own, and having had a good burial

second formal: one must have had a sumptuous funeral, after a rite which indicates the passing on of life.

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32. IMBISA Standing Committee, "Who Is an Ancestor in African Traditional Religion?" *AMECEA Documentation Service, Nairobi* (1996), [Http://afrikaworld.net/afre/atr-ancestor.htm](http://afrikaworld.net/afre/atr-ancestor.htm) viewed on 11 March 2002.

33. Adam Michalek, "Christ et ancêtre - Médiateurs en compétition? Approche théologique de la religion traditionnelle africaine," *Verbum SVD* 42, no. 2 (2001): 196f.

The bishops' first criterion corresponds to Michalek's first formal and moral criteria. Their second corresponds to Michalek's juridical criterion.

Their third corresponds again to Michalek's moral criterion.

Their final criterion has no corresponding criterion in Michalek's system.

Similarly Michalek's second formal criterion has no correspondent in the bishops' system.

That these criteria do not perfectly co-incide is a good indication that it is not possible to systematise a cult that firstly is so varied across a vast continent or even subcontinent, and secondly represents the application of an overarching worldview and not a set of principles. So, for example, Michalek agrees that a person might be called an ancestor if he or she does not fulfil the four criteria, but only those who fulfil all four can act as mediator between God and their descendants.

The first formal criterion seems to be universally accepted - that the deceased have a good death. A person who dies in tragic circumstances, or away from the family, such as a migrant labourer, or someone who is killed violently, or in an accident, or prematurely of a disease, is not considered to have had a good death.<sup>34</sup> In cases like these, the funeral arrangements have to be extra special, in an attempt to mitigate the tragedy of the death. So one often sees really lavish funerals laid on by families who can least afford them. This leads us to the second formal requirement.

Hammond-Tooke writes: "Death alone is not a sufficient condition for being an ancestor entitled to receive worship. Proper burial, with the correct funerary rites, performed by the socially appropriate person, is a *sine qua non*."<sup>35</sup> The second formal

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34. It is mostly for this reason that many South Africans consider Jesus not eligible for consideration as an ancestor. He suffered a violent death, hanged as a criminal rejected by political and religious leadership. This logic has been applied also to victims of political oppression in South Africa. In considering whether Christ might be considered as an ancestor, or a brother-ancestor, Shorter enunciates the following principle: "One must, after all, be true to anthropological fact, if the theological exercise is to be valid." It fulfils no purpose to stretch the category of ancestor so much, that it eviscerates it of any meaning, simply in order to find an African category for Christ.

35. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "Ancestor Religion," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief*, edited by Heinz Kuckertz (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological

critterion is thus that there be funerary rites appropriate to the status of a deceased person. These rites must be visible so that everybody concerned can see that they are being performed according to tradition. The deceased person must also be left with no doubt that the appropriate prescriptions were observed on his or her behalf.<sup>36</sup>

For example, if a person dies away from home, his or her spirit must be brought back home in order to be at rest. This is done ritually by a responsible person who goes to the place of the death, and talks to the spirit of the deceased, informing him or her that he has come to bring the deceased home. Traditionally this was done by dragging a branch back from the place of death to the homestead or cemetery where the deceased person was to rest. Obviously in modern times, with people dying great distances from their homes, it is not possible to drag branches. So other ritual are devised to perform the same function.

Nor are the rituals necessarily completed when the body is laid in an appropriate grave, in an appropriate location. The rites continue with the due observation of a determined period of mourning and further rituals after the conclusion of that period.<sup>37</sup>

The moral critterion does not appear to be universally recognised. It is not necessary for a person to have lived a good life, or to have transmitted ancestral morality. Fortes is quite clear that the function of the cult of the ancestors is to preserve the jural relations in families. It is not about recognising good or bad people, or continuing affective relationships. It is a duty. The ancestor may have been a complete rogue, but still the cult must be performed. Or a deceased person may have been a paragon of virtue, but has

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Institute, 1981), 24.

36. Because funerals are public affairs and most of what happens is observable without too much intrusion, anthropologists have been able to study these in some depth. There is thus a substantial body of material describing funerals throughout Southern Africa, as well as interpretations of the meaning of these actions. The route through which many outside observers have access to African tradition is by asking informants: "Why do you do that?" or "What does that mean?"

37. For example, C. Masilo Lamla, "The Dead: Prepared to Live in the Spirit World," in *Ancestor Religion in South Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief*, edited by Heinz Kuckertz (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 14–21, describes "The making of an ancestor: Southern Nguni mortuary rites and formal incorporation into the spirit world." He writes how the ritual of *ukubuyisa ithongo* is performed 'two or more years after death.'

no descendant of a particular lineage, so has no ancestral cult directed towards him or her.<sup>38</sup>

The juridical criterion seems to be the one on which most authorities agree: To be an ancestor, one must have descendants. To indicate what a problem childlessness is, Kemdirim writes that it represents no heirs in the present life and no future in the next life, and is thus a cause of worry and concern:

In most African cultures, child birth is seen as one of the essential requirements for a befitting burial. Childless couples, therefore, feel that they will miss it. Even more disturbing is the belief that these couples can neither reincarnate (having no offspring or surviving families into which their spirits can be born) nor be regarded as ancestors in the true sense of the word. They do not have children who will pour libation to them.

The overriding concern of childless couples is that there will be no one to uphold the family lineage and inheritance after the couple's death. As a result, the man, in particular, is in perpetual agony and worry at the mere thought that nobody will answer his name after his death and inherit his property.<sup>39</sup>

As I have shown, Fortes insists that the cult of the ancestors is about the extension of jural relationships. That is why the cult of the ancestors follows particular lines of descent - matrilineal, patrilineal or bilateral, according to the specific tradition of each group. Michalek sees the cult of the ancestors primarily in terms of a person's own identity. "*L'homme africain est avant tout descendant d'un Ancêtre. Cette filiation doit se déterminer socialement et non seulement biologiquement.*"<sup>40</sup> This can be expressed as "I am because I belong" and is central to people's self-understanding in South Africa. This is expressed in a proverb: "*Motho ke motho ka batho ba bang*" or a person is a person in,

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38. Fortes, "Some Reflections on Ancestor Worship," 134.

39. Protus O. Kemdirim, "A Call to the Church in Africa to Address the Plight of Childless Couples," *AFER* 38, no. 4 (August 1996): 241. The notion of reincarnation is not of relevance to Africans in South Africa, but the thought of not having descendants to respond to one when one is dead, is a major concern.

Kemdirim is obviously writing about married couples who have not been able to have children. But often young men seem unable to wait for marriage in order to assure the future of their lineage. I would imagine, without any evidence to support it, that this concern is one of the contributing factors to a very high rate of teenage pregnancies in South Africa.

40. Michalek, "*Christ et Ancêtre*," 196.

through, and because of other people. Nobody's identity is separate from those people to whom he or she belongs.

Thus, returning to the juridical criterion, a person who has died young is not considered an ancestor because he or she has not transmitted life. This is why children may traditionally be buried by their mothers without a mourning period or further rituals. They are not candidates for being ancestors and there are no prescribed rituals in their regard.<sup>41</sup>

Erasmus extends this to all deceased young, unmarried males among the Sotho and Xhosa. "Because deceased, young, unmarried male people cannot transmit a direct (vertical) link with earthly descendants (due to a lack of it), their name cannot 'live' after their death and they cannot become ancestors and are therefore excluded from any cosmological importance regarding personhood."<sup>42</sup> Erasmus says this is because it is seen as a 'cosmological duty' to procreate and thus to extend the line of the founding male ancestors of a family or clan. Failing to do so, makes a person not merit ancestor status, and thus cosmologically insignificant.<sup>43</sup>

This consideration brings us neatly to the following section of cosmology, or as I will call it 'worldview.' I will consider how integrally ancestors feature in the overall picture of the world, of which they form part. They are part of a world which has historically known a god, as well as numerous other spiritual realities, and in which intelligent beings

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41. This is not to say that they are buried without emotion or ceremony. Any parent is distressed at the death of a child, and rituals are there to help the survivors, as much as to "effect" a ritual transition. It is just to say that from the perspective of the ancestral cult, a child does not require particular rituals. However, one of Nxumalo's informants said that in times of crisis she speaks to all deceased members of her family, not distinguishing between adult and child. See Nxumalo, "Zulu Christians and Ancestor Cult," 67. This shows how mistaken it is to expect hard and fast rules in a popular cult.

42. P.A. Erasmus, "Perspectives on Black Masculinity: The Abortion Debate in South Africa," *South African Journal of Ethnology* 21, no. 3 (1998): 204.

43. Erasmus does not amplify on what he means by "cosmological importance regarding personhood." I take it to mean that in the worldview (cosmology) in which continuing the ancestral line of the family or clan is paramount, having no descendants nullifies one's personal significance. This does not mean that the life of the deceased person was of 'cosmic' insignificance -- a much more value-laden judgement.

play a vital role in causation, and have a somewhat undetermined place.

### (5) Worldview of the Ancestors

John Mbiti opens his *African Religions and Philosophy* with the assertion: "Africans are notoriously religious, . . ."44 While it may be the case that African people traditionally lived in a world of magic and spirits, this is no longer uniformly the case. Many Africans have accepted Western scientific paradigms and no longer live in a cosmos of divinities, spirits, totems, mythical creatures and familiars. However, when the Western science fails, as it invariably does at times of crisis and social stress, many Africans return to traditional religious discourse to make sense of the crisis. AIDS presents one of these times of crisis, when people return to find strength and meaning in a traditional worldview.

The cult of the ancestors belongs within a larger traditional worldview or cosmology. It is not our purpose to analyse this cosmology in depth, as this has been done in a number of publications. For detailed descriptions of the cosmology within which the cult operates, the reader is referred to Hammond-Tooke,<sup>45</sup> Ramashapa,<sup>46</sup> Bereng,<sup>47</sup> Manyeli<sup>48</sup> and Malan.<sup>49</sup> However, it is useful at this stage to illustrate that belief in ancestors is inseparable from belief in a supreme god, as well as in other spirits. I shall conclude these considerations on the ancestral worldview with the notion of causality that differs from the Western scientific paradigm, and with a note on where ancestors are

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44. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 1.

45. Hammond-Tooke, "The Aetiology of Spirit.," and W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "World View I: A System of Beliefs," in *The Bantu Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Second Edition, 1974), 318–43; and Hammond-Tooke, *Boundaries and Belief*.

46. J.M. Ramashapa, "Northern Basotho Worldview: A Theological Reflection," *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 37, no. 2 (1996): 352–59.

47. Patrick Mohlalefi Bereng, *I Am a Mosotho* (Moriya: Morija Printing Works, 1982).

48. Thomas Lesaoana Manyeli, *Religious Symbols of the Basotho* (Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works, 1963).

49. J.S. Malan, "The Cosmological Factor in Development Programmes," *South African Journal of Ethnology* 11, no. 2 (1988): 61–66.

thought to live.

(a) God

Despite assertions to the contrary,<sup>50</sup> Africans historically believed in a single supreme god. I shall here consider arguments for and against the notion that this traditional African god is the same as the God proclaimed by the missionaries. I will consider mainly the missionary work among the Basotho, although it must be emphasized that similar research into the history of the awareness of a god or God can be done for the other ethnic and cultural groups in South Africa.

Linguistic arguments show that names and thus the notion of a supreme god pre-existed the arrival of missionaries. Worger<sup>51</sup> analyses early dictionaries and records of nineteenth-Century missionaries to show that *Molimo*, *uNkulunkulu* or *uMvelingqangi* and *uThixo* were the names given to this god by the Sotho, Zulu and Xhosa respectively. The missionaries found these names to be conveniently applicable to the God of the Christians whom they were proclaiming. In each case, these became the adopted name of God in South Africa.<sup>52</sup>

As a missionary Oblate, Laydevant saw that the Basotho distinguished between the ancestors and God. In times of need, the ancestors are ritually called upon to intercede on behalf of their descendants with the supreme god. In an often-quoted analysis of an often-quoted poem, Laydevant says that the verse "New god, pray to the old god."<sup>53</sup> is evidence of an ancient Sotho practice of asking the ancestor (new god) to

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50. "Bien que ces pauvres païens ne croient pas à un seul et vrai Dieu, ils sont pourtant adonnés à diverses superstitions." writes Fr. Maeder in *Journal de la Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris* 30 (1855): 44.

51. William H. Worger, "Parsing God: Conversations About the Meaning of Words and Metaphors in Nineteenth-Century Southern Africa," *Journal of African History* 42 (2001): 417–47, <http://www.journals.cambridge.org/bin/bladerunner?pdf> viewed on 19 August 2003.

52. Maeder suggests that the missionaries did not necessarily want to adopt these ready-made names for God. He gives the impression that there was no suitable alternative: "*La langue sessouto n'a pas d'autre mot pour exprimer le nom de Dieu que Morimo, qui est le singulier de Merimo.*" See Fr. Maeder, *Journal de la Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris* 30 (1855): 44.

53. "*Molimo o mocha, rapela oa khale.*" This poem is quoted, for example, in François Laydevant,

intercede on behalf of the people to the supreme god (old god). Laydevant writes: "*Ils avaient une croyance vague en une divinité suprême qu'ils appelaient le Dieu Ancien, par rapport aux dieux nouveaux qui n'étaient autres que les mânes des ancêtres.*"<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere he argues that the god whom the missionaries found among the Basotho was accepted to be the Christian God. "*Ce Dieu ancien a toujours été considéré par les Basotho comme étant le même que le Dieu des missionnaires.*"<sup>55</sup> This is the strongest argument in this direction.

More recent writers, whose work shall proceed to examine, are reluctant to find an identity between the two gods.

In his doctoral thesis, Setiloane<sup>56</sup> says that what he learned about the Christian God differs from his radically Sotho-Tswana experience of *Modimo*. He looks at the attributes of the Christian God and of *Modimo* recorded in poems and praise-songs, and concludes that it is clear that they are not the same. For example, *Modimo* was not traditionally considered to have been the creator. Nor was cult rendered to *Modimo*. So, Setiloane distinguishes between *Modimo* and God throughout his work, by using the impersonal pronoun 'IT' for *Modimo*.

In his resumé of the appropriation of the name '*Modimo*' into Christianity, Chidester<sup>57</sup> looks at the works of early nineteenth-Century explorers, naturalists, missionaries and administrators. He shows that the naturalist William Burchell, who was among the earliest explorers to record mention of *Modimo*, among the "Bachapin," understood their *Modimo* to be a powerful demon, and that the people had no religion.<sup>58</sup>

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"*La poésie chez les Basuto,*" *Africa* 3, no. 4 (1930): 232 as a basis for analysing the religious ideas of the Basotho.

54. François Laydevant, "*Étude sur la famille en Basutoland,*" *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 1, no. 1 (1931): 232.

55. François Laydevant, "*Idées religieuses des anciens Basotho,*" in *Basutoland* (Namur, Paris, Berne: Editions Grand Lacs, 1949), 27.

56. Gabriel Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam: AA Balkema, 1976), 79.

57. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), 180–82.

58. See William Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa (2 Vols.)* (London: Longman,

Similarly, Chidester quotes Andrew Geddes Bain, a hunter-artist, writing that the Sotho-Tswana applied the term *Modimo* to himself, because of his extraordinary power of making things come alive on paper.<sup>59</sup>

Conradie writes:

*Molimo*<sup>60</sup> is the supreme being which lives somewhere in an underground cave, and which is always inclined to do mischief to people. It is an invisible evil spirit, a merciless master who is to blame for all their [the Basotho's] suffering and misfortune. . . . In general the Basotho only attributed bad characteristics to *Molimo*.<sup>61</sup>

Rolland writes of *Modimo* as the same kind of punishing, vindictive spirit with unlimited power, who does not forgive unless propitiated by sacrifice. However he

Hurst, Reese, Orme, Brown & Green, 1824), 2:550. I have not verified this source for myself.

59. See Andrew Geddes Bain, *Journeys to the North* (1826), 31, reprinted by the Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town (1945). I have not been able to verify this for myself.

60. To add to the confusion of the reader coming across Sotho terms for the first time, there are orthographic considerations. Sotho orthography was not standardised until the mid-20th Century. This standardisation is in fact not total, as there are two orthographies currently in general use: one in the Republic of South Africa, and the other in the Kingdom of Lesotho, shaped by English and French missionaries respectively.

In an ancient, occasionally-encountered orthography, an 'r' is used before an 'i' or a 'u' to represent the sound of a 'd.'

In the current Lesotho orthography, the most likely sources of potential confusion are: the sound 'd' is represented by the letter 'l' before an 'i' or a 'u.' The semivowel 'y' is represented by the letter 'e' before an 'e' and an 'o.' The semivowel 'w' is represented by the letter 'o' before an 'a,' and an 'o.' An aspirated 's' is represented by the diacritical 'š.'

In the current South African orthography, the explosive 'ch' is represented by the letters 'tjh.'

Thus, to take one example that will frequently be encountered in the present work, the words '*Modimo*', '*badimo*' and '*medimo*' are written '*Molimo*', '*balimo*' and '*melimo*' or '*Morimo*', '*barimo*' and '*merimo*' depending on the orthography being used by the writer. Since both the Mazenod and Morija Presses are in Lesotho, they publish in the Lesotho orthography. The newspapers *Moeletsi oa Basotho* and *Leselinyana la Lesotho* are published at Mazenod and Morija, respectively, so always use the Lesotho orthography, although they have a wide readership in South Africa.

For the sake of accuracy, in this thesis, any citations are copied exactly as they appear in the original text.

For the sake of ease and consistency, when I am writing, I always use the South African orthography. I believe this orthography is more intuitive for a reader of English, as it is closer to standard English orthography.

For more information on the language and orthographies, the reader is referred to the websites [Http://www.sesotho.web.za](http://www.sesotho.web.za) and [Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sesotho\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sesotho_language) viewed on 22 December 2003.

61. H.N. Conradie, "*Die Basoeto-gewoontes, godsdiens, ens,*" *Die Basuin* 1, no. 3 (July 1930): 6. "*Molimo is die opperwese wat ergens in 'n onderaardse grot woon en wat maar altyd geneig is om die mens kwaads te doen. Dit is 'onsigbare bese gees, 'n genadelose meester aan wie hulle al hul lyding en teenspoed te wyte het. . . . Maar oor die algemeen het die Basoeto's net slegte eienskappe aan Molimo toegeskryf.*"

continues: "The term *Modimo* has been adopted by the Missionaries to translate the word God, and appropriately so, as the ultimate ancestor or father is necessarily the oldest God of God of gods."<sup>62</sup>

Manyeli<sup>63</sup> argues on the basis of the existence of the word *Molimo*, on the existence of burial rites, and on an analysis of the myth of *Kholumo-lumo* that the Basotho had a God before the arrival of the missionaries. He writes that the root of the word *molimo* is *-limo*, meaning sky, heaven, elevated or above. Thus the divinity to which "*molimo*" refers, is remote, inaccessible, in the heavens, inactive in daily life, and not the object of cult. There are thus active *balimo* which eclipse the *molimo* in terms of seeing to the daily needs of the people.

Nürnbergger is emphatic that the God of the missionary proclamation is not the *Modimo* of the ancient Basotho.<sup>64</sup> He cites three reasons for his assurance:

- (i) *Modimo* does not speak and thus has given no self-revelation.
- (ii) The Basotho had no cult or worship of *Modimo*.
- (iii) *Modimo* does not act, and is thus not the 'God of history.'<sup>65</sup>

Thus, says Nürnbergger, *Modimo* is not experienced in any personal manner, and is ethically neutral. This is why impersonal, rather than personal concords are used when speaking of *Modimo*. It is mistaken to identify the supreme god of the Basotho with the God of Christian proclamation.

62. Emile Rolland, "Note by the Rev. Emile Rolland," *Folk-Lore Journal* 1, no. 5 (September 1879): 115.

63. Manyeli, *Religious Symbols of the Basotho*, Chapter 3.

64. See Klaus Nürnbergger, "The Sotho Notion of the Supreme Being and the Impact of the Christian Proclamation," *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, no. 3 (1975): 174–200.

65. Nürnbergger insists that the prayers are offered to the ancestors in their own right and not in terms of potential intercession with a further authority. The notion of intercession, is akin to the (particularly) Catholic cult of the saints, which Nürnbergger perceives to displace Christ as the only mediator between God and people.

See Klaus Nürnbergger, "Ancestors and Christ: The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!" *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1996): 11–12 and Klaus Nürnbergger, "The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!" in *The Church and African Culture: Conference Papers*, edited by Mohlomi Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 158–62.

From the considerations above, it is evident that whatever the original referent of the term '*Modimo*' might have been, it was not the God of the missionaries. The traditional names of the supreme god were taken by the Christian missionaries and applied to the God of their proclamation. However, it is also evident that in over a century-and-a-half of Christianity among indigenous South African people, the original god has not lost all of its original attributes. There remain notions of god which better fit the ancestral worldview. Principal among these is that of a *deus absconditus* or *deus otiosus*. This god is not involved in the day-to-day affairs of the world and thus leaves significant space for the activity of spirits in mediating fortune and misfortune.

(b) Other spirits

In the ancestral worldview, God and the ancestors are not the only populace of the spirit world. Hammond-Tooke<sup>66</sup> writes of local and nature spirits, which are *ad hoc* rather than systematic beliefs, in the sense that they are specific to particular people or areas. They inhabit groves or are associated with particular rocks or pools in a river. Their presence is of significance to the particular group, for reasons associated with the particular spirit.

In answering the question of the source of suffering and evil, it is not always appropriate to blame the ancestors. Much evil is attributed to sorcerers or witches who act alone or through the medium of a familiar.<sup>67</sup> Ramashapa writes:

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66. Hammond-Tooke, "World View I," 321–24.

67. Kiernan acknowledges that witches are one source of evil and suffering: "Evil is therefore predominantly translated as an anti-social capacity or tendency of social persons and is ideally personified in the witch." See Jim Kiernan, "The 'Problem of Evil' in the Context of Ancestral Intervention in the Affairs of the Living in Africa," *Man (N.S.)* 17 (June 1982): 287. Kiernan also understands non-lineal (as opposed to descent-group) ancestors and maternal ancestors to be directly responsible for illness and suffering. It is the duty of the descent-group ancestors to protect their descendants. They may withdraw this protection in certain cases, but never directly cause harm. These considerations will become relevant in our considerations of an ancestral aetiology of AIDS in the fourth chapter of this work.

Aston writes that where there is no explicit indication of sorcery such as a person actually uttering a curse, "the bone-thrower rarely makes specific allegations against anyone in particular. . ." The intention is not to identify a particular source of the sorcery, but rather to pronounce a very vague

Sorcerers (*baloi*) are the persons who cast evil spells on other people. Among the Northern Basotho sorcery (*boloi*) represents all evil and destructive practices, and that is why *boloi* (sorcery) is feared very much by many people; Christians included.<sup>68</sup>

So, writes Hammond-Tooke,<sup>69</sup> there is widespread belief that witches use hyenas, polecats, wildcats, owls, snakes, etc, to do their bidding, as well as “a complex system of bizarre familiars which include *tikoloshe* . . . *impundulu* . . . *ichanti* . . . and *mamlambo* . . .” and finally, zombies.<sup>70</sup>

Next, Hammond-Tooke writes of ‘spirits of affliction,’<sup>71</sup> which are neither ancestors nor witches. They enter and take possession of an individual, who learns to accommodate and control them, by apprenticing herself to a cult leader. This phenomenon is of recent origin in South Africa, says Hammond-Tooke, having arrived in the country in the last century. Hammond-Tooke makes the interesting point that it is mainly women who suffer from spirits of affliction, and it seems to be a mechanism for balancing the concentration on the patrilineal and male interests of the cult of the ancestors.

Stech, a Member of the Berlin Missionary Society, recorded in his diary of 19 October 1877, that the Basotho had names for at least twelve different gods.<sup>72</sup> This

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suggestion that “[t]here is trouble in the village” or “[a] stranger hates you.” He also writes that witches usually “use their powers and medicines for amusement, perverted though this may be.” Their “activities are not immediately dangerous and anti-social, though they may be mischievous and immoral.” See E.H. Ashton, *Medicine, Magic and Sorcery Among the Southern Sotho* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1943), 7f.

Kriel says that among the Northern Sotho, the person identified as responsible for the sorcery should be dealt with in an appropriate way, in order that he or she is no longer to be feared. See J.D. Kriel, “Noord-Sotho-beskouinge oor Medemense as siekteveroorsakende agente,” *South African Journal of Ethnology* 19, no. 4 (1996): 178. (“Northern-Sotho views regarding fellow human beings as illness-causing agents.”)

68. Ramashapa, “Northern Basotho Worldview,” 357.

69. See Hammond-Tooke, “The Aetiology of Spirit,” 161, for a discussion of the spirits used by witches.

70. Belief in witches is so widespread in many communities, that it is a danger for elderly women (and occasionally men) to be marginal or in any way antisocial. The accusation that they are a witch, or practice witchcraft (*boloyi, ubuthakatha*) spreads like wildfire, and they are often the victims of lynching as a scapegoat for the woes of their neighbours.

71. Hammond-Tooke, “The Aetiology of Spirit,” 162–64.

72. Stech, “The Gods of the Basuto,” *Folk-Lore Journal* 1 (1879): 32.

contradicts the belief that they had no god at all. The gods being referred to are all associated with some natural phenomenon, such as water, a bird, a poisonous snake, etc. It is clear that Stech's informants are referring neither to the ancestors nor to a single creator God, the object of missionary proclamation. These gods may be what Hammond-Tooke has called the 'local or nature spirits.'

Finally, among the other spirits, I would classify the Holy Spirit, which, apart from its position in the Holy Trinity of mainline Christian churches, is also the animating principle of numerous indigenous churches.<sup>73</sup> In summary, Hammond-Tooke writes<sup>74</sup> that the Holy Spirit is used as a metaphor of power in these churches, by people who are so disempowered by South Africa's heritage of apartheid. Their rituals harness the language of power from on high, to bring transformation to the lives of the members. Clearly the Holy Spirit is not part of the traditional cosmology of South Africans, as it came with the missionaries. But it does play an important role in the lives of many contemporary South Africans.

### **(6) Conclusion: Causation and Location**

Two notes are important in the conclusion of our consideration of the worldview of the ancestors. The first concerns causation. The second concerns location.

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73. These African Independent Churches (AICs) are alternatively called African Initiated Churches, or African Indigenous Churches. There are some 6000 denominations in South Africa, and are a religious phenomenon that has been the object of much study. The seminal study is the comprehensive description and analysis, Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1948). A more recent sociological work is Martin West, *Bishops and Prophets in a Black City: African Independent Churches in Soweto, Johannesburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975). A more recent work by members of an AIC is Absolom Vilakazi, Bongani Mthethwa, and Mthombeni Mpanza, *Shembe, The Revitalisation of an African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986).

Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) is a study of the way in which the Barolong use 'spirit' language in AICs to empower themselves in a situation of disempowerment.

74. Hammond-Tooke, "The Aetiology of Spirit," 164–68.

### (a) Causation

Before the arrival of Western biomedical theories and the theories of physical causation by objects and invisible physical forces, there were indigenous African theories of what makes things happen. Most of these theories involved the agency of some personal intentional power, which was responsible for fortune or misfortune. These theories are not to be scoffed at, as they were known 'to work,' and to offer explanations of what was happening in the African world. They were much more people-centred and community-focussed than their Western scientific counterparts.

#### (i) Impersonal

However, it would be mistaken to believe that Africans had no notion of *impersonal causation*.<sup>75</sup> Hammond-Tooke notes that some substances are believed to have powers of impersonal causation.<sup>76</sup> He writes that among the Basotho, pollution is caused by heat<sup>77</sup> which must be cooled down. And among the Zulu, blackness, *umnyama*, is an explanation of pollution. These sources of contagion act 'automatically' and are attached to states such as widowhood, bearing twins, miscarriage, etc. They do not have moral or personal causes.

#### (ii) Personal

The ancestors are the causative agents *par excellence* in the African worldview. They are generally benevolent towards their descendants and watch over and protect them. Thus, a good harvest, health, wealth, childbirth, multiplication of livestock, a

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75. There is the notion of a diffuse power (*amandla* or *matla* - the rallying cry of the freedom struggle against apartheid) akin to Placide Tempels' *force vitale*.

Tempels writes: "Tout l'effort des Bantu est orienté vers la puissance vitale. La notion fondamentale de leur conception de l'être est le concept de la force vitale." (Placide Tempels, *La Philosophie Bantoue*, translated by A. Rubbens [Elizabethville: Lovania, 1945], Ch. 2, *L'ontologie des Bantu*, 4.a] *La notion de l'être*.) This would be an overstatement of the significance of *amandla* in South Africa. *Amndla* can be harnessed to aid people against difficulties. It is not as well understood as causation by personal agency, because less theoretical work has been done on the meaning and operation of *amandla*.

76. This paragraph is a summary of Hammond-Tooke, "Ancestor Religion," 23.

77. Hammond-Tooke, *Boundaries and Belief* explores in more depth the notion and treatment of heat (*ho tjhesa*) among the Kgaga.

promotion at work, etc., are all attributable to the intervention of the ancestors.

On occasion, for good reason, an ancestor may withdraw its protective power, and leave a descendant or descendants vulnerable to malevolent spirits or forces. In this case, illness or misfortune may befall them. It is then necessary to find out the reason why the ancestor has withdrawn its protective power, and to remedy the situation.<sup>78</sup>

A member of the affected family will consult a traditional healer who has received his or her calling from the ancestors, and is an expert in these matters. The consultation often involves a ritual of divination in which the healer consults the ancestors to ascertain the cause of the illness or misfortune. Most often the diagnosis is that an ancestor has been neglected, or is displeased with the breach of some taboo. It is then necessary to appease the wrath of the ancestor in order to remedy affairs. This is usually done by means of a family celebration of a ritual sacrifice of the blood of an animal, or of tobacco, beer, grain or some other object desired by the ancestor.

Often, the traditional healer or diviner also operates as a traditional chemist, and prescribes a medicine (*muthi*) to be taken orally, smeared on the body, applied in small cuts to the skin, sprinkled around the house to ward off malevolent spirits, etc.<sup>79</sup>

Frequently in the case of a sick person, the healer prescribes that the family gather

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78. It is because of the ancestors' tendency to withdraw their protective power when they are displeased, that critics of the cult frequently characterize the African's relationship to the ancestors as one of *fear*. The message of Christianity is thus presented as one of liberation from this servile fear.

However, the God of the Christians also wields enormous power. People who do not understand that God's primary relation to people is one of *love*, may also distort their relationship to one of *fear* of God's potential wrath. Thus, as with Christianity, it is a criticism of the distorted way in which some people might live the cult of the ancestors, and not of the cult itself, to say that it is one of fear. Obengo tries to achieve this balance when he writes: "People want to live in harmony with their departed relatives and experience peace among themselves. This anticipation finds fulfillment in regular normalizing of relations with the ancestors." See Obengo, "The Role of Ancestors," 61.

79. Many remedies dispensed at traditional chemists are prescribed for their symbolic potency. Others have been shown to have pharmacological action similar to those of Western medicine. An interesting and growing area of research in South Africa concerns ethnobotany, ethnopharmacology and ethnomedicine. It is not possible to deal with this here, but the interested reader is referred to the website of the National Botanical Institute, <http://www.nbi.ac.za/research/ethnobot.htm> viewed on 10 November 2003. The departments of medicine and botany of a number of universities are also doing research into the curative properties of a number of traditional remedies.

around the patient, in order to perform a healing ritual.<sup>80</sup>

(b) Location

A final word in this discussion of the ancestral worldview remains to be added about the *location* of the ancestors. Ancestors are said to live in a world much like our own. They inhabit villages not dissimilar from those they knew while alive on the earth.

Opinion is divided over whether the ancestors live in the cattle kraal, in sacred groves, in the heavens, or under the earth, or elsewhere. Part of the confusion arises from attempts at etymological understandings of the term 'ancestor.'

In Sotho, the root *-dimo* means 'up.' So, *hodimo* means above, *mahodimo* means heavens, and the reduplicated *hodimo-dimo* means the highest, etc. So, the reasoning goes, *badimo* (the ancestors) are somehow associated with being above, somewhat akin to a Christian heaven. However, lest one think this is clear, Sanders writes: "The *balimo* were thought to lead much the same sort of existence as the living, but in another world in the bowels of the earth. . . ."<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, in Zulu, the root *-phansi* means 'down.' One of the names for those who have died, and by inclusion, the ancestors, is *abaphansi*. Nxumalo explains the reasoning thus: "The term *ophansi* (plural *abaphansi*, 'those below'), takes the picture from the burial practice of interment. It places the dead literally 'below', *phansi*."<sup>82</sup> So, by this etymological reasoning, the ancestors are associated with the earth.

Acknowledging this confusion, Kiernan writes: "There is little consensus over where dead ancestors reside - underground, in the skies, on the western horizon and so on - but a persistent feature is their *constant attachment to the living space of their*

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80. This ritual might not bring physical relief from the symptoms of the illness, but its effect lies in the way it brings families together, heals relationships, and confronts members with the illness and reconciles them to possible loss.

81. Peter Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 15.

82. Nxumalo, "Zulu Christians and Ancestor Cult," 66.

*progeny*.”<sup>83</sup> Junod believed that the ancestors could be where they wanted by sheer willpower, in order to be close to their descendants.<sup>84</sup> Thus, irrespective of their physical location, the point is that Africans are “living together with the ancestors”<sup>85</sup> who are involved in their day-to-day affairs.

While ancestors are ever present to many people in Southern Africa, the Christian churches have been reluctant to acknowledge this intimacy. Early missionary endeavours sought to eliminate the cult of the ancestors, if not totally, then at least among Christians. In the next chapter I shall examine the history of the relationship between the Christian missionaries and the cult of the ancestors. I shall show that there have been two distinct periods, with vastly different attitudes to the ancestors.

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83. Kiernan, “African Traditional Religions,” 20 (emphasis mine.)

84. Henri A. Junod, *Mental Life*, vol. II of *The Life of a South African Tribe* (London: Macmillan, 1927), 358–61.

85. Triebel, “Living Together with the Ancestors.”

## CHAPTER 3: CHRISTIAN MISSION AND THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

### (1) Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis it was shown how AIDS disrupts and threatens every level of society. Gow and Desmond have shown how the pandemic has consequences at the demographic, health, welfare, educational and household levels.<sup>1</sup> Their analysis has not, however, dealt with the religious or spiritual dimension of the crisis.

I showed in that chapter that there are definite theological questions raised by the pandemic. The questions mentioned were raised on the levels of systematic, ethical and pastoral theology. It is on the systematic level that this research will proceed. More particularly, the research will focus on the eschatological and soteriological questions raised by the pandemic. What does it mean to say one is 'saved' in the context of the pandemic? Are there any more hopeful eschatological systems than that of traditional Western Christian theology, which for example, do not have a moment of judgement?<sup>2</sup>

The cult of the ancestors in traditional Southern African religious thought presents alternative responses to both of these questions. At least as a point of comparison, the cult helps to clarify a Christian response that is appropriate to the context. At a first glance, the conditions for entry into the ancestral world of eschatological fulfillment and perhaps 'salvation' seem less rigorous than those of Western Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This might

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1. Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond, eds., *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and UNICEF, 2002).

2. For example, John Mbiti writes of the Akamba understanding of the afterlife: "But [God] neither punishes [the departed] nor rewards them for whatever they did in this life. On their part they do not thirst for His holiness or righteousness; nor do they have spiritual 'communion' with Him." See John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 138.

3. This is not to say that the ethical demands the ancestors make on the lives of their descendants are less rigorous than Christian ethics. But ancestral belief sees reward and punishment in the present life, and not projected into an afterlife after a moment of judgement. The cult of the ancestors requires that one remains in good relationship with one's family, neighbours and ancestors, and does not breach certain traditional taboos.

offer hope to people living with HIV or AIDS. This was my motivation for considering the cult of the ancestors in the second chapter.

The Church is commissioned to make disciples of all nations, baptising and teaching all the commands Jesus gave.<sup>4</sup> It is my belief that this evangelical mission of the Church requires us to use all resources at our disposal. People who are affected by the AIDS pandemic need to access their deepest religious and spiritual resources, in order to find healing, consolation and resolution. Theologically and spiritually reflective Christians should help others to find and employ these resources, even if they do not come from a traditional Christian source.

In the second chapter I considered the African cult of the ancestors as it is practised in South Africa. I outlined those aspects of the cult that have survived a history of suppression, as well as the present manifestations of the cult. I used contemporary material to attempt to provide a definition and description of the cult. I also demonstrated that the cult is not an isolated set of ideas and practices, but that it forms part of a larger, living worldview, which has survived the introduction of Western scientific reasoning to Southern Africa. With the use of data collected by anthropologists, I demonstrated how the cult is now perceived and practiced by South Africans.

It is clear that the cult of the ancestors is a profound, culturally-located African spiritual resource. As such it has an important role to play in the approach to the AIDS pandemic. The second chapter approached the cult of the ancestors with this outlook. I showed that the cult is a vital reality in the South African religious scene. It is neither an irrelevant relic nor a *recherché* romantic re-invention of the past. It is a reality that cannot be wished away, even if one should want to do so.

This present chapter will consider the history of the relationship between the Christian missionaries, and subsequently indigenous Christians, and the cult of the

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4. See Mt. 28:19-20.

ancestors. Examining the Church's attitude to the cult of the ancestors, I will show that there have been two distinct stages. In the initial stage of the mission to Southern Africa, there was an all-out effort to eradicate the cult. Missionaries came with a mindset of 'conversion' to Christianity, which implied the abandoning of all that was not perceived to be Christian. It will become apparent that the cult went 'underground' and that Christians practised their cult of the ancestors in secret, or abandoned it altogether. In the second stage, there is a resurgence of the cult of the ancestors in the late-twentieth Century. I will present evidence for this assertion, and explain this revival in its ecclesial and social context.

Following a wider trend in Southern Africa, there is a rediscovery of the cult of the ancestors in the Catholic Church, accompanied by a semi-officially sanctioned exploration of its use in some liturgical settings. This is not without considerable and understandable resistance on the part of many Catholics, as the Church has had a particularly ambiguous relationship with this cult. People have learnt that the ancestors are demonic, that Christians may not venerate their ancestors, that such behaviour could result in exclusion from the Church. Now they are confronted with a new reasoning that allows them to approach their ancestors. Little wonder that they are confused at the new openness within the Church.

## (2) Preliminary Notes

The first preliminary note concerns methodology. I explain why I have used the Basotho as a case study for the demise of the cult of the ancestors among Christians during the 19th and early 20th Centuries. I will trace the history of the suppression of the cult, making particular use of 19th Century missionary correspondence and early catechisms, which I have been able to find in Lesotho.

The second preliminary note explains why it is necessary for this chapter to take a diachronic approach, illustrating the interaction between adherents of the cult and

messengers of the Gospel. I will establish that it is not possible to give a synchronic 'snapshot' of a 'pure' or 'original' cult before the arrival of white people, and consequently of Christian influence.

#### (a) The Basotho as Case Study

I believe it is justified to take one group as a representative case of the way in which the cult of the ancestors was suppressed among Christians in Southern Africa, because this was a general and widespread occurrence in the development of the church. To try to detail the demise of the cult across the entire subcontinent would be too complicated, and a much larger task than our present study requires. Thus, for the sake of defining parameters, this section will focus largely but not exclusively on the Basotho, using them as a representative sample of the general situation of the ancestral cult in South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason for using the case of the Basotho has to do with the limitations of the present author. Of the nine official African languages in South Africa,<sup>6</sup> I am only sufficiently familiar with the (Southern) Sotho language and culture to make sense of documents written in this language.

A further reason for using the Basotho case as a study is that the early evangelisation of this people was done mostly by two groups: The Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS)<sup>7</sup> and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI). The relevant

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5. See N.J. van Warmelo, "The Classification of Cultural Groups," in *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, edited by W.D. Hammond-Tooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 72-78. Van Warmelo makes the point that the Southern Sotho are not a homogeneous group, and are made up of numerous clans and remnants of smaller tribes. In van Warmelo's classification, the Western Sotho (or Tswana) and the Northern Sotho (or Pedi) also call themselves *baSotho*. One must be wary of accepting uncritically the racial classifications that were advanced during the years of apartheid, and which served the ideology of separate and irreconcilable ethnic differences.

6. These are in addition to English and Afrikaans, both of European origin.

7. In this thesis, I use the English form of "Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS)" for the *Société des Missions Evangéliques chez les peuples non-chrétiens à Paris (SMEP)*.

The Society was formed in Paris in 1822 by people influenced by the evangelical revival movement which gave rise to the London Mission Society and the Basel Missions. Correspondence from

documents are thus not too dispersed, and are neatly contained in two archives, which were accessible for this study. The first is in Morija, Lesotho, and belongs to the Evangelical Church of Lesotho. It houses a complete set of the documents of the PEMS, which was the first and major Protestant society to evangelise the Basotho. Access to the archives was very generous and open. The second archive is that of the French Canadian OMI Province housed at Deschâtelets Residence, in Ottawa. Again, this archive has a complete set of documents and published material relating to the Roman Catholic mission to Lesotho, including a full set of *Extraits des missions des O.M.I.*, and is accessible in Ottawa.

The case of the Basotho is atypical in one important respect: their political unity during the early missionary period. The people of Basutoland were under the stable reign of a single king (Moshoeshe I) from 1823 to 1870. Beginning in 1818 Moshoeshe forged the nation from a number of groups that had escaped the tribal wars of the subcontinent (*difaqane*) by taking refuge in the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosiu in the present Lesotho. Moshoeshe welcomed the missionaries to the territory under his influence, which included expanses of the present eastern Free State. The missionaries' presence would lend prestige<sup>8</sup> and, Moshoeshe hoped, some degree of protection

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Eugène Casalis in Lesotho, one of the first three members of the Society to be sent to Africa, dates back to 1827. Casalis and Adolphe Mabillé were advisers to King Moshoeshe of the Basotho for about 20 years.

In Africa, members of the Society evangelised in Lesotho, Congo-Gabon, Cameroon, Madagascar, Senegal, Togo, Zambia and Algeria. Publications of the Society were: *Bulletin*, which was founded in 1825 and *Journal des Missions Evangéliques*, founded in 1826.

In 1935, the Society ceased work in Lesotho, with the establishment of the Basutoland Evangelical Church. The PEMS ceased to exist in 1971, with the creation of its successor, the *Département Evangélique Français d'Action Apostolique (DEFAP)*. This latter seems now to be known as the *Service Protestant de Mission*.

The ethnographic documents of David Frédéric Ellenberger as well as his history of the Basotho from early times to 1854 are important resources of one of the members of the Society. The archives of the society are housed by the MUNDUS project at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Further information on the society can be found on the website of the MUNDUS project: [www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/1060.htm](http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/1060.htm) consulted on 17 January 2005.

8. Claude-Hélène Perrot, "Premières années de l'implantation du christianisme au Lesotho (1833-1847)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* IV #1, no. 13 (1963): 100.

against the British, Zulu and Dutch neighbours who were gnawing away at his territory. The Basotho welcomed the introduction of schools, Western clothing and technology such as the hoe, rifles, ox wagons, and particularly books, reading and writing.<sup>9</sup>

(b) The Impossibility of Describing a 'Pure' or 'Original' Cult

Since the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa relied on oral tradition to convey their cultures from one generation to the next, there are no written accounts of the cult of the ancestors before the advent of the white agriculturalists, explorers, missionaries and settlers.<sup>10</sup> However, attempts have been made to reconstruct the worldview and religion of Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans in 1487.

One such attempt, by Krüger, claims to offer '*das Weltbild der Sotho-Chuana, unbeeinflusst vom Weißen*' and several pages later, the contrasting '*unter dem Einfluß der Weißen*.'<sup>11</sup> It is unfortunate that Krüger was unable to give the sources of his insights into the ancestor cult of the Sotho-Tswana people before the influence of the white people. Other parts of his work are better documented. So we must take with a great deal of scepticism his claim to offer a historical snapshot of the ancestor cult before the advent of white influence.

Having made that caveat, let us examine what Krüger has to say. Two paragraphs, give an overall description of the cult, as he understands it, before the influence of white people:

For the Basotho, the ancestors are the most important representatives of the spiritual world. They are the gods on whom their wellbeing and woe are mainly dependent. The most significant and particularly the most recently deceased chiefs are prayed to. These live in the holy groves in which they were buried. In

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9. Perrot, "*Premières années de l'implantation*," 108f.

10. There may be records written by Arab traders operating along the East coast and interior of Africa as far south as the present province of the Eastern Cape, between the 12th and 16th centuries, but the present writer has no access to these.

11. Ferdinand Krüger, "*Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana-Gruppe der Bantu in Südafrika*," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, Dritte Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien* 38 (1935): 98ff., edited by Diedrich Westermann (Berlin).

addition, each family honours its familial ancestors who are buried in the cattle kraal (enclosure).<sup>12</sup>

Krüger draws a contrast between knowledge of a Creator God and of the ancestors:

The Basotho know a Creator God, to whom they have not given a name. He,<sup>13</sup> the creator of the above and the below, is also the final cause of death. Because he thus is to be feared, the Basotho are reluctant to speak his name. Pronouncing his name makes this infinitely distant one angry and he causes the death of the person who uses the name. So there are only very few ancient prayers which invoke this Creator God on specific occasions. He plays no role in the religious life of the people.<sup>14</sup>

Early European observers, who make no claims of access to 'uninfluenced' religion among the Bantu of Southern Africa, paint the general picture much as Krüger has described it: a distant Creator God and much more proximate ancestors. The ancestors, who are either familial or of the tribe at large, are the objects of veneration (some say 'worship', as we shall consider in the second section of this chapter), while the God is accorded no place in religious practice. It should be noted here that Krüger does not say that the ancestors play any intercessory or intermediary role between living people and the Supreme God. The attribution of this intercessory role seems to be a subsequent Christianization of the cult, as we shall see later.

Poems and praise songs render an impression of what the original religion might have been like, but do not constitute historical documents. Despite its great accuracy and reliable transmission from one generation to the next, oral tradition does change, and oral texts are modified in the course of history. Anthropologists and missionaries have reduced many of these texts to writing, so they give an account of what the tradition held at the time of writing.

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12. Krüger, "Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana Gruppe," 99. See Appendix 1 for all non-English language texts which have been quoted at any length. In the main body of the thesis, I will provide my own English translations of these texts.

13. I will use the masculine pronouns: he, him, his, etc. for want of a more fluent means of pronominal reference to this God. This does not imply that the Basotho or I attribute gender to the God.

14. Krüger, "Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana Gruppe," 98. See Appendix 1.

I would conclude that it is not possible to access ancient pre-colonial religion. Nor is it essential for our purpose to do so, because we are concerned with the present state of the cult of the ancestors. We are neither involved in a project in archaeology, nor trying to reconstruct a practice that does not meet today's perceived needs. It is more important for present purposes to see the interaction that took place between the cult and the missionary proclamation beginning in the 19th Century.

### **(3) History of the Cult of the Ancestors and Christianity**

This history is presented in two clear and distinct stages. The first traces the demise of the cult of the ancestors among Sotho Christians. In the second stage, I will examine evidence for a re-emergence of the cult into mainstream Christianity from the 1970's onwards as well as reasons for this re-emergence. Finally, I will examine the minimal use to which theologians have put the cult in the face of the present AIDS crisis.

#### **Stage One: The missionary movement and the ancestor cult**

The first missionary work among the Basotho began with the arrival in 1833 of Eugène Casalis, Thomas Abrousset and Constant Gosselin of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS). Moshoeshoe, king of the Basotho was very quick to offer place to the missionaries in his kingdom. He saw the advantages of having Europeans in his territory, and hoped they would lend some protection from invasions. The PEMS set up its first mission station at Morija. De Clark says that the mission was relatively successful, in that approximately 1.5% of Moshoeshoe's subjects had become church members within the first 15 years of the arrival of the missionaries.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>See S.G. de Clark, "The Encounter Between the Basotho and the Missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, 1833–1933: Some Perspectives," *Kleio* XXXII (2000): 5. In 1863 some of the mission posts were handed over to Basotho, and in 1872, the local Evangelical Church of Basutoland was established, with a presbyterian, synodical polity.

Bishop Allard and his companions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) were similarly welcomed by Moshoeshe when they arrived in 1862. The Catholic missionaries arrived with the promise of schools to teach literacy and skills. They too received a large tract of land (which was to be called 'Roma') from the king and were able to establish a mission and begin evangelisation among the very receptive Basotho. In 1865 the arrival of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux meant that the mission could establish a school for boys and girls.

Both the Catholic and the Evangelical missionaries took pains to learn the language and customs of the Basotho, and to come to understand their people. From the outset, the missionaries of both denominations were very intolerant of the Sotho worldview which had the ancestors as its cornerstone. It was maintained that the ancestors were false gods, and that their veneration was equivalent to worshipping false gods and thus not permissible to Christians.

This intolerance of the cult of the ancestors might be explained, at least on a certain level, by a misunderstanding of the etymology of the words for 'God,' 'ancestors' and for 'false gods.' These are nowadays translated as '*Modimo*,' '*badimo*' and '*medimo*' respectively. The distinction was not always so clear, as I demonstrate in the following example.

Maeder gives an early example of this confusion.<sup>16</sup> He writes: "*Après leur mort, ils sont changés en merimo (ancêtres, décédés, mais existant encore en esprits.) . . . La langue sessouto n'a pas d'autre mot pour exprimer le nom de Dieu que Morimo, qui est le singulier de Merimo.*"<sup>17</sup> Thus, *Modimo* (or God), is thought to be the singular of the plural *medimo* (or the ancestors.)

In my opinion, Maeder is mistaken on two counts:

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16. It will be noted that Maeder was writing in 1855, before even the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in 1862.

17. Fr. Maeder, *Journal de la Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris* 30 (1855): 44.

(i) on dying, people change into *badimo*, (not *medimo*) which is the correct term for ancestors, and

(ii) *Modimo* is not the singular of *medimo*. In fact, the word *Modimo* is in a linguistic category of its own, with no plural, and does not take the same euphonic concords as would the singular of *medimo* and *badimo*. These latter are 'false gods' and 'ancestors' respectively, and are almost invariably used in the plural.

Thus the Basotho do not put God in the same category as either the ancestors or false (other) gods. *Modimo* has an independent and unique existence. If this had been better understood from the beginning, and the etymological mistakes not made, the churches would perhaps not have opposed the cult of the ancestors as virulently. This speculation may, of course, be quite mistaken, given the conception of their religion held by the earliest missionary, Eugène Casalis: "*C'est en effet aux mânes de leurs ancêtres que ces peuples adressent leurs prières. Un prophète a décrit leur religion d'un seul mot: 'ils vont aux morts pour les vivants.'*"<sup>18</sup>

#### (a) Forbidden Practices

I shall demonstrate here how anything to do with the cult of the ancestors was systematically eliminated from the lives of members of the churches. In the Evangelical Church, Christians were explicitly forbidden to partake in the consumption of beer, in dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage arrangements (such as *lobola*, polygamy, levirate marriage, etc.) traditional healing, etc., all of which had close connections with the cult of the ancestors.

The problem is that the social aspects of beer consumption, dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage, traditional healing, etc., all form part of a wider social and

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18. Eugène Casalis, *Les Bassoutos ou vingt-trois années d'études et d'observations au sud de l'Afrique* (Paris: Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1859). This early history was re-edited in 1993 for the centenary of the mission to the Basotho, and the quote is taken from p.304 of the re-edition.

cultural web. By attempting to eliminate them, the missionaries were undermining and weakening the cultural integration of the Sotho Christians. Many Christians were unable to, or unwilling to forgo these dimensions of normal social life, so continued them clandestinely. As Robert Schreiter says: "For too long, embracing Christ and his message meant rejection of African cultural values. Africans were taught that their ancient ways were deficient or even evil and had to be set aside if they hoped to become Christian."<sup>19</sup>

By 1887, the Evangelical Church of Lesotho had developed a sufficient knowledge of the Sotho culture to instruct each missionary to combat every type of superstitious practice. The *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* lists exhaustively these superstitious practices to be combated: sorcery, belief in reincarnation, in spirits which haunt the living in their sleep, in bones, in divination, in amulets, in contamination by touching a dead person, in lustral ablutions, in purification with chyme or gall, in prayer to the ancestors, in prophylactic incisions and finally exorcism performed by people under hallucination.<sup>20</sup>

The *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* continues with a list of practices which are forbidden to any Christian or person attending class to become a Christian. This list includes eating meat sacrificed to ancestors, as well as using charms to drive the birds off the fields, or leaving charms in the paths of enemies, or praying to the gods to increase the crops, to avoid hail, to send rain, and participating in ritual hunts in times of drought, and using incense, etc.<sup>21</sup>

These two lists are repeated in the *Status et Règlements* of 1895,<sup>22</sup> a more digestible version of the *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale*. Thus the synods

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19. Robert J. Schreiter, "Introduction: Jesus Christ in Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), viii.

20. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution presbytérienne et synodale* (Moriija: Moriija Sesuto Book Depot, 1887), 18f.

21. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution prebytérienne*, 19.

22. Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements: Extraits des procès-verbaux de la Conférence* (Moriija: Moriija Sesuto Book Depot, 1895), 41f.

repeatedly declared a whole range of normal social activities off bounds to Christians. I shall now consider five of these activities in greater depth.

### (i) Beer Consumption

It is clear that the consumption of alcoholic beverages in Southern Africa predates the arrival and influence of Europeans. The earliest records of beer consumption come from the survivors of the shipwreck of the *Santo Alberto* off the Natal coast in 1583. The link between beer drinking and the ancestral cult is made in writing in the early 17th Century. "Dos Santos, writing in 1609, . . . points out that it [pombe] was used in feasts and rituals in honour of royal ancestors."<sup>23</sup> Beer-drinking was, and still is, an important part of the social and ritual life of many South African peoples. However its ritual associations and leading to licentious behaviour made this activity the target of prohibition by missionary bodies in the subcontinent.

In 1895 the Conference of the (Evangelical) Church of Basutoland forbade its members to participate in any activity intimately associated with the cult of the ancestors. They were to refrain from the consumption of beer (*joala*).<sup>24</sup> This *Verbot* was strengthened by the leading body of the Church in 1900, when it forbade even the participation in the preparation of the beer.<sup>25</sup>

This stance was softened when, in Chapter XIV on 'The Church and Heathen Customs' of the *Constitutions and Regulations* of 1927, the consumption of light beer was permitted, with the provisos that it did not lead to drunkenness, and that members of the

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23. P. A. McAllister, "Indigenous Beer in Southern Africa: Functions and Fluctuations," *African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993): 71f.

24. "2. *Il convient aux chrétiens de s'absentir en tout temps et en tout lieu des chants païens et des danses païennes.*" and "6. *Les chrétiens doivent s'absentir de toute boisson enivrante, telle que l'eau de vie et le yoala.*" See Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements*, 42f.

25. "*Joala ba Sesotho. - Seboka se tiisa hore balumeli ha ba na ho noa joala, leha e le ho bo etsa* (1900)." ("Sesotho beer. - The assembly confirms that believers are not to drink beer, or even to make it.") See Church of Basutoland, *Litaba tse reriloeng ke seboka sa baruti le synodo* (Morija: Morija Printing Office, 1909), 4.

Church were not to own premises on which alcohol was sold.<sup>26</sup> However, the same chapter had begun by forbidding members to attend any "heathen feasts" and strongly disapproving of "all heathen practices such as divining bones, purifications, charms, circumcision, prayers to ancestors or to gods, etc."<sup>27</sup>

It is possible that the permission for Christian women to continue to brew for their 'pagan' husbands comes from situations similar to that of a story told by Chere. A husband was not going to stand in the way of his wife (Sekamotho) becoming a Christian. But he said: ". . . but what I will not let her give up is helping me in my heathen practices and in making strong beer."<sup>28</sup>

By 1979, the *Law Book* had softened its stance on the consumption of alcohol to: "Drunkenness is a great annoyance to the life of men, and the word of God states in no uncertain terms that habitual drunkards cannot enter the Kingdom of God."<sup>29</sup> Thus, it seems that the prohibition of the consumption of alcoholic drink was no longer as strictly enforced.

One of the many AIC's which had its constitutions printed at Morija has also forbidden its members to drink beer. The reason given is that the consumption of beer is associated with vice (*bohloa*).<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is not because of its association with the cult of the ancestors that beer is forbidden.

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26. "To prevent drunkenness, Church members are not allowed to consume brandy, whisky or strong native beer, or any intoxicating drink. They shall not frequent beer drinking parties.

"Women shall not brew Kaffir beer either for home consumption or for people doing any work for them in the fields or otherwise. But a woman compelled by a heathen husband to do so and who does not drink herself, shall not be subjected to any blame. She shall however try to be relieved from such obligations.

"Christians may use light native beer, but in small quantities, to avoid drunkenness.

"There shall be some punishment in case of drunkenness.

"It is forbidden to all members of the Church to keep canteens for the sale of strong or light Kaffir beer or any other intoxicating drinks." *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1927), 35f. Chap XIV, article 3.

27. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 35.

28. Lysiase Chere, "The Conversion of Sekamotho," *Gospel Work in Basutoland - by Native Agency Report for the year 1913*: 9.

29. Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book* (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1979), Ch.19, article 235.

30. "Ha re noe joala hobane ke moo bohloa bo leng teng." See *The Apostles and Christian Brethren*

The consumption of traditional beer was a bone of contention among those being admitted to the churches. Whether it is true or not, the perception among Protestants was that Catholics were not forbidden to drink beer, and thus to participate in some dimension of the ancestor cult. Competition between the Catholic and Protestant churches was strong,<sup>31</sup> and encounters such as the following were commonplace:

"When we went about evangelising the people would answer 'Go away, we do not want you; we want the Roman Catholics who allow us to drink as we want and to marry as many wives as we want.'<sup>32</sup> It is clear that this report in the mission magazine, written by a Mosotho for a European (mostly Scottish) Protestant audience, is entirely incorrect about polygamy in the Catholic Church.<sup>33</sup> But while it is wrong in this major detail, it

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*Church of South Africa, Church Constitution (Pretoria: Morija, 1954).*

31. I will cite only one instance of many tensions in the 19th Century between the Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Basutoland. Joseph Gerard writes on 4 February 1864: "*Je vous dirai, mon bien-aimé Père, que les ministres [Protestants] ne cessent de nous calomnier dans leurs prêches d'une manière affreuse. Marie, notre bonne Mère, a aussi sa part dans ces blasphèmes horribles dignes de Luther et de Calvin. . . . Chaque fois que j'en ai l'occasion, je suis heureux de venger l'honneur de notre Mère Immaculée, et les Basutos, même ceux qui ont été pervertis, ne peuvent s'empêcher de reconnaître combien il est juste d'honorer et de prier la sainte Mère de Dieu.*" See Joseph Gerard, *Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* 17 (March 1866): 22.

The correspondence on both sides of the Catholic / Protestant divide is peppered with accounts of such rivalry. This is not surprising, as it is a reflection of the religious tensions of the time between Catholic and Protestant in Europe. The age of ecumenism had not yet begun.

In a 20th Century missionary encyclical, we see this suspicion of and competition with the evangelising work of Protestants. In 1926, Pius XI writes in *Rerum Ecclesiae*, encouraging Catholics to be more generous to the work of the foreign missions: ". . . the Catholic people shall never permit themselves to be outdone in generosity by non-Catholics who are wont to assist so liberally the propagators of their false beliefs." (R.E. 17.)

32. Everitt Sehoéte, "Missionary Work at Kueneng, Basutoland, 1899–1906," *Gospel Work in Basutoland by Native Agency Report for 1906–1907*: 6 The Evangelical Church, as well as all the others had forbidden its members to practice polygamy. Their Constitutions and Regulations say: "Polygamy is absolutely prohibited by the Church." in *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

33. Mgr. Allard, Vicar Apostolic and Superior of the OMI mission in Basutoland, writes on 5 November 1865, to the Superior General: "*Nous apprenons que bien des personnes, surtout parmi les femmes, sont touchées de la grâce et manifestent le désir d'embrasser la religion chrétienne, désir qu'elles n'osent pas mettre à exécution par crainte de leurs maris, qui redoutent de se voir abandonnés par leurs femmes. Combien de conversions ne compterions-nous si la polygamie n'y mettait obstacle!*" See François Allard, *Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* 21 (March 1867): 83.

Joseph Gerard writes in 1864 that polygamy was widespread and part of the economy of Basutoland: "*Nous le voyons, il règne parmi eux [les Basutos] une grande crainte de devenir chrétiens: ils redoutent la séparation de leurs femmes, car tous sont polygames. . . . La polygamie*

conveys the underlying tension over alcohol. I have not come across any prohibition of Catholics to use alcohol.

McAllister shows how important beer and dancing are for people in Southern Africa. In his survey of the records concerning beer, McAllister shows that it is central to the cult of the ancestors, and that beer was more often brewed and consumed as an indispensable part of ritual, than for purely social or nutritional reasons. He asserts that "The ritual significance of beer, common throughout Africa, seems to have been greater among Sotho-speakers and Venda than among Nguni."<sup>34</sup>

Bosko notes how important beer is to the Basotho, when he says that its preparation is linguistically patterned on the "making of a human being and the re-making of a person in changes of status."<sup>35</sup> "Basotho praise sorghum beer's nourishing quality and often refer to it as Sesotho, i.e. they identify it with their life."<sup>36</sup> This means that it is so much part of the Sotho culture, that it is considered part of what it is to be a Mosotho. To separate a Mosotho from the beer is an assault on his or her identity.

Correspondence from 1907 shows that members of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) were aware of this close association between beer and the ancestor cult. H. Dieterlen writes of two rituals associated with harvest.<sup>37</sup> In the first, one or two handfuls

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*pratiquée non-seulement par passion, mais par intérêt: c'est la seule source de tous leur revenus, et presque l'unique commerce du pays."* See Gerard, *Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 28.

While Gerard was still in Natal, before he was transferred to open the Sotho mission, he had already perceived polygamy to be an obstacle to the Zulus embracing the Christian faith. Interestingly, in a letter of 29 September 1856, he reckons polygamy to be more of a problem than the cult of the ancestors: "*Cependant, Monseigneur, ces pratiques superstitieuses, [le culte des esprits de leurs ancêtres, les sacrifices], auxquelles les Cafres sont fortement attachés, ne sont encore qu'un petit obstacle comparées à celui qu'offrent la polygamie et leurs mœurs dépravés, dont on peut difficilement soupçonner en Europe toute la corruption.*" See Joseph Gerard, "Correspondence de R.P. Gerard," in *Afrique du Sud: Extraits de missions de la Congrégation des O.M.I. (1862-1881)* (Rome), 335.

Thus, from the outset of the Catholic mission to Southern Africa, polygamy was an obstacle to conversions, and it cannot be said that Catholic converts were permitted to "marry as many wives as we want."

34. McAllister, "Indigenous Beer," 74.

35. Dan Bosko, "Why Basotho Wear Blankets," *African Studies* 40, no. 1 (1981): 25.

36. Bosko, "Why Basotho Wear Blankets," 24.

of grain are buried in the fields for the ancestors (*pha-balimo*). In the second ritual, beer is brewed, neighbours come for the party, and the ancestors are thanked by the libation of some beer in a special place in the principal hut of the homestead. Then all the members of the family drink from the calabash of beer, while reciting the praises of the ancestors. Therefore, when the Evangelical Church forbade its members to partake in beer and singing and dancing, this was a direct, conscious prohibition on partaking in any ancestor-related ritual.

Besides being ill-considered from the point of view of the Christians' social and cultural integration, prohibiting them to drink, was also dietetically ill-advised. The weak beers of Southern Africa were major sources of nutrition, particularly of vitamins B and C, mineral salts and proteins. Brewing was also an important method of utilising produce not suitable for cooking or consumption as solid food.<sup>38</sup>

It is not my purpose to deny that drunkenness did become a problem as the people of Southern Africa were exposed to stronger and stronger alcoholic beverages in the 19th Century. This is adequately recorded by McAllister, who indicates the dissatisfaction of employers whose labourers did not arrive for work on Monday mornings.<sup>39</sup> Drunkenness may also have been a cause of scandal in the community of the Evangelical Church. But this church made a blanket prohibition of the use of any alcoholic beverage, thereby preventing the members from partaking in any ancestor rituals.

## (ii) Dancing

To restrict further Church members' participation in any ritual associated with the cult of the ancestors, the Evangelical Church forbade its members to participate in singing and dancing. The *Constitution of 1887* says among its *Articles de Discipline: Coutumes à*

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37. H. Dieterlen, "La fête des récoltes," *Journal de la société des missions évangéliques de Paris* 82 (1907): 334–41.

38. On the nutritional value of the beers, see McAllister, "Indigenous Beer," 72f.

39. See McAllister, "Indigenous Beer," 81 ff.

*combattre: "Il convient aux chrétiens de s'absentir en tout temps et en tout lieu des chants païens et des danses païennes, ainsi que du stapo."*<sup>40</sup> Apart from the consumption of beer, the cult of the ancestors was accompanied by singing and dancing. To deny members permission to join in the celebrations, was a means of ensuring their distance from the cult of the ancestors.

### **(iii) Rites of Passage**

As the ancestors are intimately involved in the lives of their descendants, it is clear that they are present at the important rites of passage. The rituals of birth, initiation, marriage, death and returning the spirit to the homestead, are all accompanied by invocation of and conversation with the ancestors of the family. To forbid the participation of Christians in these rites of passage, therefore, is to forbid their having anything to do with the cult of the ancestors at these crucial moments in their lives.

Thus, when members of the Evangelical Church of Lesotho are forbidden to have their children circumcised - the fundamental rite of initiation into adulthood - they are denied an important encounter with their ancestors and their tradition.

The 1887 articles of discipline of the church read: "*La circoncision des enfants de chrétiens, filles et garçons, est défendue. Les parents coupables d'avoir directement ou indirectement favorisé cette pratique seront punissables.*"<sup>41</sup>

The 1927 *Constitutions and Regulations* enforce the prohibition with the threat of excommunication: "The Church condemns the circumcision of boys and the initiation rites for girls. It shall exclude any one submitting himself to such rites. The Church shall exclude members who submit their children or let them be free to submit to such heathen practices."<sup>42</sup>

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40. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution presbytérienne*, 19.

41. Églises Évangéliques du Lessouto, *Constitution presbytérienne*, 19.

42. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 37.

This prohibition remains in force up to the present, with a softening of the threat of excommunication in the case of children: In the 1979 *Law Book* "The Church rejects circumcision. All Christians who deal in it will be regarded as having left the Church."<sup>43</sup> However it seems that excommunication does not apply to the children of the Church schools who go for circumcision. They may not return to school for six months, unless they were forced to be circumcised, in which case their ban from school is only three months.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly there is some reason for Christians to be wary of the traditional initiation schools. Boys and girls go off to these schools separately, and are ritually initiated into adulthood in the tradition. That includes having elder people teaching the young about the traditional, ancestral ways of the people, including gender roles and expectations. The boys are often treated very harshly, and made into 'men' in the eyes of their elders. They have to learn songs that are considered unchristian because they are very demeaning and offensive to the dignity of women.

Occasionally there are serious medical problems, as the initiation schools were traditionally isolated huts in the remote countryside. On occasion a boy might die from the harsh treatment he received. What is particularly odious to the Christians, is the secrecy surrounding the whole process, and particularly when an initiate dies. Nowadays more parents are opting to have their pubescent sons circumcised in Western-style medical facilities, in order to avoid the danger of sepsis and shared blades at the initiation schools, with the attendant dangers of contamination and infection.

Initiation schools often play an important role in bringing together members of a cohort of men or women, and traditionally the king's battalions were made up of the various cohorts at the school. The cohort could claim a person's primary allegiance, and this would mean that the Christian communities would not be the men's first concern.

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43. Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book*, Ch. 19, article 237.

44. Lesotho Evangelical Church, *Law Book*, Ch. 22, article 259.

Often men who had not been initiated would be treated as boys or immature, or as sub-adult. As an indication of the social importance of circumcision, Sechefo says: "Of all the observances to be complied with by the families and the different clans in general, circumcision by far stands foremost and above any other performance, it being the backbone of the nation itself."<sup>45</sup>

To oppose the initiation altogether was seen as the only Christian response to the schools. There was very little attempt to offer alternative, Christian initiation schools, or to try to engage constructively with this key dimension of Sotho culture.<sup>46</sup>

#### **(iv) Marriage**

Marriage in Sesotho is not only about the happiness of the couple involved. It is an arrangement that takes place in a wider social context. It involves bringing together and establishing permanent ties between two families. It is thus not undertaken lightly or without the consultation of the wider family, including the ancestors, who are the guardians of the fortunes of their respective families. Marriage is traditionally contracted with many negotiations, and celebrations at various stages, including the transfer of goods (most commonly cattle) from the family of the groom to that of the bride. In that way, the families are merging their fortunes, getting to know each other, sharing hospitality, and ultimately, sharing a member of the family, when the bride goes to live at the home of her husband. The transfer of cattle (called *lobola*) is a way of ensuring that the prospective groom is able to support his wife and future family.

The 1897 Synod of the Church of Lesotho judged *lobola* to be a bad practice and condemned it.<sup>47</sup> The *Status et Règlements* of 1895 prescribe what may take place at a

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45. Justinus Sechefo, *Customs and Superstitions in Basutoland* (Mazenod: The Catholic Centre, n.d.), 14.

46. I am aware of some attempts in the 1970's and 1980's of Catholics, such as Fr Sylvester Pheku OMI to offer alternative initiation schools teaching Sotho Christian morality and customs. I have not had access to information about why these attempts were soon discontinued.

47. Synod of the Church of Basutoland, *Litaba tse reriloeng ke seboka sa baruti le synodo ea kereke*

marriage: Firstly, parents of the bride are not permitted to demand one or several cattle for the marriage feast. Secondly, no pagan custom which binds the families of the bride and groom, or which involves the exchange of any cattle or other object are tolerated in the church. Thirdly, the parents of the bride and groom respectively are recommended to provide the marriage clothes of their child. Finally, in order to make the celebration a really joyous occasion, "*Que les fêtes du mariage se fassent avec ordre, sans chants, de nuit et sans la danse dite du stapo.*"<sup>48</sup>

In its *Constitutions and Regulations* of 1927, the same church "forbids absolutely marriage where cattle have been given to the girl's parents according to the native custom."<sup>49</sup> It takes a full page to underline this prohibition, making allowances in very exceptional cases. The main rationale for the prohibition is that on the death of the husband, the widow would have to remain at the home of the late husband's relatives and "become the concubine of one of them."<sup>50</sup>

In forbidding Christians to participate in the practice of *lobola*, the Church of Basutoland was demanding a completely countercultural stand, which few Christians were able to take. It was requiring that the traditional considerations of the families' combined wealth and fortune not be taken into consideration and that the ancestors not be included in the marriage process of the couple.

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*ea Lesotho* (Moriya: Morija Printing Office, 1909), 7.

48. Evangelical Church of Basutoland, *Status et Règlements*, 40.

49. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

50. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 36.

The exchange of cattle at the time of the marriage would be seen to have made the wife somehow the "property" of the husband's family. In a society where widow-headed households were not considered viable economic units, levirate marriage was a matter of the family of the deceased husband continuing to care and provide for the widow, as well as to maintain the relationship that had been forged between the two families when the marriage was originally contracted. The duty of the surviving brother to marry the widow of his deceased brother was a way of ensuring the continued survival and protection of the widow.

However, the Church saw this arrangement as a restriction of the right of the widow to freedom. It would be particularly odious in cases where a Christian woman would be expected to remarry a 'heathen' brother-in-law. See Michael C. Kirwen, *African Widows: An Empirical Study of the Problems of Adapting Western Christian Teachings on Marriage to the Leviratic Custom for the Care of Widows in Four Rural African Societies*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979). Kirwen concludes that levirate

### (v) Healing

The ancestors are intimately involved in the practice of healing and the calling of diviners and traditional healers to their *métier*. However, Casalis says that the commandments given by Moses forbid the participation of Christians in this kind of practice. The religious law commands the people of Israel to fear and serve Jehova alone. Sorcery, calling the dead, becoming a diviner, using charms, or other such things, must be left well alone, because they call God's judgement and anger upon people who live by them.<sup>51</sup> Christians are thus not to receive the call to be traditional healers or diviners.

Forbidding Christians from "being present at heathen feasts" and strongly disapproving of "all heathen customs such as divining bones, purifications, charms, circumcisions, prayers to the ancestors, etc."<sup>52</sup> means that Christians could not follow the vocation of a traditional healer. It also prescribed that Sotho Christians were not allowed to receive traditional Sotho medical treatment. If a Mosotho were to follow this law strictly, it would mean he or she would be obliged to seek help from Western medical sources. Given that these were not readily available, it is inconceivable that many Sotho Christians conformed closely to the law not to seek traditional healing.

### (vi) Conclusion

We have seen that the Evangelical Church in Lesotho forbade Sotho members to partake in the following social activities: beer drinking, dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage and healing ceremonies. In so doing, they effectively proscribed the participation of the members in any aspect of the cult of the ancestors.

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marriage is less in conflict with Christian theology than with Western Christian marriage custom.

51. Alfred Casalis, *Histori ea sechaba sa Israele, ho tloha mehleng ea Bapatriareka ho isa tšenyehong ea Jerusalema 70 AD* (Moriya: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1926), 74.

52. *The Church of Basutoland: Its Constitutions and Regulations*, 35.

### (b) The Ancestors and the Commandments

Different churches used the commandments differently in their teaching against the cult of the ancestors. The common ground is that it is seen as a breach of the first or second commandment to practice the cult of the ancestors. I shall examine here the use made of the commandments by the Lutheran and Catholic churches in their respective catechisms.

The Lutheran catechism of 1905 forbids dealings with the ancestors under the aegis of the second commandment. It says "This law tells us that we must fear God and love him by hating and despising any service of false gods and other enemies; and heathen ways, such as laying charms to scare away birds, or trusting in divination, or ancestors when a person is sick, or sacrificing to them, etc."<sup>53</sup> The instruction continues that we should pray to God alone when in need of assistance. This is a very brief but to the point renunciation of the cult of the ancestors in the Lutheran Church.

#### (i) Ancestors and Sins

As we have seen above, the Evangelical Church of Lesotho (Basutoland) made many *ex tempore* synodical rulings concerning the behaviour of Christians with regard to the cult of the ancestors, and elements of the Sotho culture intimately connected with that cult. During the same period, the Catholic Church had a different way of dealing with the question.

The Catholic Church used its catechisms as a way of dealing with the cult. These catechisms are presented as doctrine, usually with an imprimatur or other ecclesiastical authority. They deal with the cult of the ancestors under the first commandment: "There

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53. *Katekismanyane e nkiloeng ho ea Luther*, 9th ed. (Morija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1905), 9f "Molao oo o bolela hore e ka khona re tšabe Molimo le ho o rata ka ho ila le ho furalla tšebeliso efe le efe ea melimo ea bohata le ea liila tse ling; le ea mekhoa ea bohodene e kang oa ho upa linonyana leha e le ho tšepa bonohe, kapa balimo mohla motho a kulang, le ho ba hlabela, etc."

shall be no other gods for you before my face."<sup>54</sup> Anything to do with the cult of the ancestors is identified as superstition or idolatry, and therefore a sin against the first commandment.

The earliest such example I found was that of 1888, or twenty-six years after the Catholic missionaries arrived among the Basotho. It has the imprimatur of Bishop A. Gaughran, the Vicar Apostolic of the Orange Free State and Basutoland. In its examination of the first commandment, the following series of questions and answers occurs:

**What are the sins opposed to religion?**

The sins opposed to religion are superstition, idolatry and sacrilegium.

**What is idolatry?**

Idolatry is to serve other creatures with the respect that is due to God alone.

**Who commits the sin of idolatry?**

Those who commit the sin of idolatry are the heathens who say that their relatives who have died are ancestors.

**What is superstition?**

Superstition is to believe that creatures, actions, and certain words have powers which were not given them by God.

**What are the sins of superstition?**

The sins of superstition are to wash oneself with bile, to be circumcised, to protect a place with charms, to scarify or make incisions, to divine, to wear charms, and many other things that the heathens do.<sup>55</sup>

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54. Ex. 20:3 and its parallel in Deut. 5:7 "You shall have no gods except me."

In the Evangelical Church this is most often translated into the Sotho: "*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng pel'a sefahleho sa ka.*" or "Do not have other gods before my face." See M.R.L. Sharpe, *Lipaki*, translated by Mosebi Damane (Moriija: Sesuto Book Depot, 1950), 41 and *Lipolelo tse ling tsa bible ho qala ka popo ho qetella ka Jesu Kreste* (London: Religious Tract Society, for the Sesuto Book Depot, 1905), 108. F. Coillard translates it: "*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng mahlong a ka.*" or, "Do not have other gods in my eyes." in Kurtz, *Matšohlo a lentsue le halalelang la Molimo tse khetiloeng: Testamente ea Khale*, translated and edited by F. Coillard (London: Religious Tract Society for the Paris Evangelical Mission Society, 1907), 78.

The Lutherans translate the commandment: "*U se ke ua ba le melimo e meng pel'a sefahleho sa ka.*" See *Katekismanyane e nkiloeng ho ea Luther*, 9.

The Wesleyans translate the commandment: "*U se ke ua ba le medimo e meng pel'a ka.*" or "Do not have other gods before me." See Wesleyan Conference, *Katekisisa ea bobeli ea ba-Wesele* (Johannesburg, 1907), 61.

In Catholic catechisms the commandment is usually rendered: "*U khumamele Molimo a le mong feela hammoho ka tumelo, tšepo le lerato.*" or "Worship God alone with faith, hope and love." See Bernard Mohlalisi, *Katekisisa ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre, 1975), 18 and Bernard Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo: Tumelo e Katholike, Katekisisa 3* (Maseru: Archdiocese of Maseru, 1991), 256.

55. A. Gaughran, *Katekisisa ea lekholla le leng* (Bloemfontein: Express, 1888), 45 See Appendix 1.

According to this catechism, it is thus the sin of idolatry to say that one's deceased relatives are ancestors. It is the sin of superstition to participate in any traditional healing ritual. As these were invariably associated with the cult of the ancestors, Catholics were told that anything that they did in this regard was sinful.

The catechism for children and catechumens printed in 1900 is much more direct. It has the following dialogue:

What does the first commandment forbid us?

The first commandment forbids us many heathen ways such as circumcision, divination, drugs and charms, washing with bile.<sup>56</sup>

The catechism of the same name, but in its 1975 version, with the *imprimatur* of Bishop Des Rosiers, has the following dialogue:

93 What are the sins opposed to the first commandment?

The sins opposed to the first commandment are kneeling down before (worshipping / adoring) images of false gods, dishonouring holy things and superstition [*tumelo-masaoana*].

95 What are the sins of superstition?

The sins of superstition are heathen ways, such as circumcision, divination, charms, washing with bile, putting out pegs to protect a place, scarifying and many others.<sup>57</sup>

Thus almost a full century later, the condemnation of the sin of superstition of the 1888 catechism is repeated almost verbatim. There appears to have been no movement in the understanding of the cult of the ancestors in any positive light.

An interesting catechism is *Tumelo ea Baapostola*.<sup>58</sup> It does not follow the normal question and answer pedagogical method, but rather has short chapters on matters of the faith. It is a very positivist presentation of the faith, through discussion of the articles of the Apostles' Creed, written for a more educated audience. While it has a developed

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56. *Katekisisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mariannhill: Trappist Press, 1900), 12.

"Molao oa pele o re hanelang?"

"Molao ao pele o re hanela mekhoha e mengata ea bohetene, yualeka lebollo, litaola, meupello, hlatsuo ea nyoko."

57. Mohlalisi, *Katekisisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 20. See Appendix 1.

58. Henri Lebreton, *Tumelo ea Baapostola* (Maseru: Mazonod Institute, 1948).

demonology,<sup>59</sup> it has almost no discussion of Sotho culture or the traditional religious dimension of Sotho life.<sup>60</sup> One might regard this as a step in the right direction away from criticising deep cultural traditions.

However, the 1991 catechism, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*<sup>61</sup> more than makes up for the lack of cultural critique in *Tumelo ea Baapostola*. It also uses a developed demonology, as seen in *Tumelo ea Baapostola*, to present as demonic any participation in the ancestral cult. There is, for example, the following dialogue:

479 How does a person give created things the respect and service that is due to God alone?

A person gives created things the respect and service due to God alone'

1. by worshipping created things or their images: this is the sin of idolatry;
2. by wanting to know hidden or lost things in ways that are not worthy, like by consulting the bones: this is the sin of divination;
3. by hoping in or fearing things or certain ways, too much, as if they had power to help or endanger him, while they don't have this power: this is the sin of superstition.

480 Who incites people to the sins of idolatry, divination and superstition?

Satan incites people to the sins of idolatry, divination and superstition, he who is the enemy of our souls, who is hidden in the ways, customs and traditional medicines, by which he deceives people, because 'he is a liar and the father of lies' (Jn 8:44).

481 What are the acts of superstition by which Satan frequently deceives people?

The acts of superstition by which Satan frequently deceives people are: leading people in a state of possession, sorcery, circumcision, killing in order to use flesh for medicinal purposes, divination, planting pegs to protect a place, cursing, making incisions, anointing children with red ochre, wearing charms, spells and many other things (Deut. 18:9-16).

482 How does a Christian find the helps for body and spirit he needs?

A Christian find the helps for body and spirit he needs from the Lord God, through sacraments, sacramentals, prayers and advice from spiritual guides.<sup>62</sup>

Thus it is clear that it is a demonic power that leads people to all kinds of actions

associated with the ancestors, to traditional diagnosis and healing. Traditional healers and diviners are thus agents of Satan and of deception.

The following page<sup>63</sup> of the catechism gives ways in which people can take this

59. See pp. 54-63.

60. There is, on p. 320, a discussion of the Sotho tradition of burying a person in preparation for a resurrection of the dead. But this is dismissed as unchristian, because it is understood to anticipate only a bodily resurrection.

61. Mohlali, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*.

62. Mohlali, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 259f. See Appendix 1.

63. Mohlali, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 261.

knowledge home and into their ordinary lives. They resolve to avoid all heathen things and to encourage their neighbours to drop these bad ways. They pray that God will help all of Africa, and in fact, the whole world, to serve God alone and to throw away all bad heathen ways. They resolve to use and to encourage their neighbours to use, instead, sacramentals like holy water, blessed candles, the crucifix, the rosary, the scapular, and images representing the Lord Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the saints. Thus Christians are encouraged to replace the traditional Sotho set of aids to psychological health, and coping with perceived evil, with the Catholic set. Replacing the traditional healers and diviners, are the spiritual guides. The sacramentals like holy water and candles are to replace the charms and amulets and rubbing medicines into incisions, or smearing with ash or ochre. Holy pictures are to substitute for protecting a place from evil by putting ritual pegs in the ground.

The catechism indicates that there is a major struggle going on for power and influence in people's lives. There are two conflicting worldviews: in the first, from Sotho tradition, evil is caused by human individuals, and can thus be predicted, understood and controlled through recourse to the ancestors. In the second, God is supremely powerful, and calling on his assistance and that of the saints, is enough to overcome evil. The task is to convince Basotho to replace the first with the second.

Traditional Sotho ways, which rely on physical, rather than metaphysical connections, are to be replaced with (Western) traditional Christian ways, which are perceived in some way to be universal. The Christian helps are based on the universal symbols of purity (holy water), light (blessed candles) and images of holiness and having overcome evil. The Sotho helps are more immediately physical in the sense of wearing charms and amulets and applying medicines to protect a path, a place, a human body.

**(ii) Ancestors and Saints**

Along with the instruction to worship God alone, and therefore to regard the ancestral cult as idolatry and superstition, the Catholic catechetical discussion of the first commandment touches on the cult of the ancestors in a second way. The catechisms instruct on the appropriate cult of the saints, angels and the Virgin Mary. This is of relevance because of the religious similarity of the cults of the saints and ancestors.

In this consideration I shall deal only with the two more recent catechisms at my disposal: *Tseleng ea Leholimo* (1991) and *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (1975). I shall look at the reasons they give for respect and prayer to the Virgin Mary, the saints and angels, and conclude that they are no more compelling reasons than venerating and praying to the ancestors. At the outset, it is important not to equate the saints and the ancestors. Nobody says that these two groups are coterminous, and there are significant differences between the cults in the mainstream Catholic Church and in popular religion.

The lesson of *Tseleng ea Leholimo* dealing with the worthy respect of the Virgin Mary and the saints, as well as relics of saints, follows immediately on that dealing with the "heathen practices".<sup>64</sup> The reasons given for the respect due to the Virgin Mary, angels and saints and their relics and images are in the rather slim dialogue:

**487 Why do you respect and pray to the angels and saints?**

I respect and pray to the angels and saints because they are friends of the Lord God, and my protectors and interceders.

**488 Must you respect relics of the saints?**

Yes, I must respect relics of the saints, because they are already in heaven, and their bodies were the temple of God.

**489 Must you respect images of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints?**

Yes I must respect these images because they remind me of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints.<sup>65</sup>

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64. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, lesson 25, pp. 262–67 See Appendix 1.

65. Mohlalisi, *Tseleng ea Leholimo*, 264.

In *Katekisima ea Bakatekumena le ea Bana*, the teaching on Mary and the saints immediately precedes that on the ancestors.<sup>66</sup> Reasons for respecting and praying to the Virgin Mary and the saints are given in the following dialogues:

90 Must we pray to them [the Virgin Mary, saints and angels]?

Yes we must pray to them, because they have been given power to help us.

92 Must we respect them [images of the Virgin Mary, saints and angels]?

Yes we must respect them, because our respect is directed to Jesus Christ and to the saints who are represented in them.<sup>67</sup>

The catechisms thus encourage the invocation of the saints, but forbid seeking any help from the ancestors. The reasons given that the saints and angels are to be respected are that they are God's friends, my protectors and intercessors, and have been given power to help us.

However these are precisely the reasons adduced for the veneration of the ancestors. They are said to be closer to God, and to have power to protect and intercede for their descendants. This is most probably a later Christianisation of the cult of the ancestors, modelling it more on the cult of the saints. There is little evidence to suggest that the ancestors were initially perceived as fulfilling the primary role of intercessor with *Modimo*. That the ancestors are now perceived as having the power of intercession with God, rather than power in their own right, is an indication that the cult, as all cultural constructs, changes and is modified when it comes in contact with aspects of another culture. This is perfectly consistent with the notion of 'interculturalisation' as recorded by e.g. Shorter:

If the argument were whether the ancestors or the saints are one's primary protectors, it would be reduced to an intractable argument over authority: The Church would say that it is the saints. Sotho tradition would say that it is the ancestors. In the absence of some kind of material proof of which system is better, each side would be

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<sup>66</sup> Mofhatisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana*, 19 See Appendix 1.

equally strong, and the argument would result in a stalemate.

Catholic theology speaks nowadays of the *community of the Saints* who are all the deceased who are in the presence of God. Not all the saints have been officially canonised in a church, or “raised to the altar.” In fact, the majority of saints are anonymous, good people who have died. It is sometimes not even considered necessary to have been an explicitly Christian or God-fearing person to be a member of this saintly community.<sup>68</sup> It might be argued that the terms ‘saints’ and ‘ancestors’ refer to the same group of deceased.<sup>69</sup>

However, while there appears to be at first glance a convergence of the understanding of the identity and roles of the saints and ancestors, there is still the very clear understanding that they are two distinct groups. Tihagale illustrates conclusively that the two groups are not to be confused.<sup>70</sup> He outlines many differences between the two cults, of which I shall mention only two here:

(i) The saints relate to any Christian who relates to them, while the ancestors are concerned only with the affairs of their descent group, and with their family obligations.<sup>71</sup>

(ii) The ancestors’ power derives from their attaining a supernatural status on their death, and is not dependent on their relationship to God. The saints’ power is perceived entirely in terms of their proximity to God.<sup>72</sup>

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68. For a broad, inclusive reading of *Lumen Gentium* 16, See Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” in *Theological Investigations VI: Concerning Vatican Council II*, translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 390–98.

69. Alternatively it is argued that since saints and ancestors occupy similar functional positions (assuming that of the ancestors’ is the more Christianised version of intercession with God, rather than intervention on the basis of their own power) the ancestors can be seen as “stepping stones” to the saints:

This communion of the living and the dead, once it is transformed by faith in the risen Christ and the power of his resurrection, can, I believe, give new and vital expression to the doctrine of the communion of saints.

See Aylward Shorter, “Ancestor Veneration Revisited,” *AFER* 25, no. 4 (August 1983): 202.

70. See Buti Tihagale, “Saints and Ancestors: A Closer Look,” *Entre Nous*, no. 2:18–22, 3:9–17 (1999).

71. Tihagale, “Saints and Ancestors,” 2:19.

72. Tihagale, “Saints and Ancestors,” 2:19.

Further, as I illustrated in the previous chapter there are criteria for incorporation among the ancestors, and these are quite different to those normally understood for saints. It would thus be a false harmonisation to say that the saints and the ancestors are the same, or that there is thus no qualitative difference between the two cults.

### **(iii) Conclusion**

The catechisms were the means used by Catholics to discourage any contact with the ancestors. Catholic Christians are catechised that having dealings with the ancestors is a breach of the first commandment. Catholics are to replace their cult of the ancestors with the phenomenologically similar, but theologically different cult of the saints.

### **(c) The Missionary Motivation**

Van der Walt does an "analysis of the prevailing *Zeitgeist* in South Africa, Europe and elsewhere early in the 19th century, and of the concomitant philosophical and theological trends at the time."<sup>73</sup> He also scrutinises the "personal motives and circumstances of the individual missionaries"<sup>74</sup> to show that "[t]he main aim of the missionaries in their contact with the blacks was to Christianise them and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the heathen."<sup>75</sup> Often, he says, the missionaries were from the working class, and unable to afford the training to become pastors in their own congregations, so joined the missionary societies.<sup>76</sup> Van der Walt continues that they were fired by great benevolence, and an analysis of their correspondence shows the overwhelming desire to win converts, or in the words of Benedict XV, to "snatch a soul from the mouth of hell."<sup>77</sup>

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73.J.L. Van der Walt, "The Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances of Some 19th-Century Missionaries Teaching in South Africa," *Koers* 57, no. 1 (1992): 75.

74.Van der Walt, "Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances," 75.

75.Van der Walt, "Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances," 77.

76.Van der Walt, "Culturo-Historical and Personal Circumstances," 80.

77.Benedict XV, "*Maximum Illud*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 11 (1919): under "Missionary Virtues.\*"

In order to show their gratitude for the grace of their own faith, missionaries were encouraged to offer their brotherly assistance to "the Gentile races which, in ignorance of God, are enslaved to blind and unbridled instincts, and live under the awful servitude of the evil one[.]"<sup>78</sup> This was frequently done with great insensitivity to the culture of the people receiving the missionaries, as we have seen in the case of the outright suppression of the cult of the ancestors and all that went with it.

The 19th and early 20th Centuries were marked by European expansionism and cultural imperialism. That the missionaries studied and wanted to comprehend the people they were sent to evangelise, is not disputed. It is evidenced by titles such as Eugène Casalis's *Les Bassoutos ou vingt-trois années d'études et d'observations au sud de l'Afrique*.<sup>79</sup> However, it is not surprising that the missionaries were men and women of their time, and that they failed to appreciate the values and meanings in the cultures they encountered.

Often the cultural attitudes with which they came to the mission dominated their perspective. Setlaba notes three unhelpful attitudes in a paternalistic Europe:

- (i) Africa was the 'dark' continent;
- (ii) Africans were the descendants of the biblical Ham and thus shared his curse;
- (iii) "Africa's culture was 'inferior,' her religion far from attractive and her people's way of life generally barbaric."<sup>80</sup>

There was often an identification of the spread of the Christian message and the prorogation of a 'superior' Christian culture. Even until the second quarter of the 20th

English translation taken from *The Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters* (London: Sword of the Spirit, 1958).

78. Benedict XV, "*Maximum Illud*," under "The Support of the Missions."

79. (Paris: Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1859).

But Gray suggests that many of the studies conducted by the missionaries were essential ordnance in the cultural colonisation of South Africa. See Stephen Gray, "Missionary Researchers and Researching Mission: A South African View of Cultural Colonisation at the Millennium," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 105 (November 1999): 17–27.

80. Seth Tšeliso Setlaba, "One Hundred Years of the French Protestant Mission's Effort Among the Ba-Sotho (1833 - 1933)," Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) project (University of the Witwatersrand,

Century, there seems to be an equation of these two tasks. In 1926, Pius XI wrote of the history of papal involvement in the missions: "... the Roman Pontiffs . . . might spread the light of the Gospel and the benefits of Christian culture and civilisation to the peoples who 'sat in darkness and in the shadow of death'.<sup>81</sup> Is there a greater love, he asks "than to assist [our neighbour] in putting behind themselves the darkness of error by instructing them in the true faith of Christ?"<sup>82</sup> Thus mission was perceived to introduce a complete Christian 'package' in which the truth of the Gospel was combined with Western clothing, skills, education and worldview, and most importantly the rejection of 'heathen' customs and religion.

This rejection of heathenism can be seen in terms of three 'struggles' in Magnan's history of the beginnings of the (Catholic) Church in Lesotho. In his third chapter on methods of the apostolate, he lists the struggles against (i) polygamy, (ii) sorcery and superstition and (iii) Protestantism. Evidently the way to combat sorcery and superstition was with the solemnity of the Catholic ceremonies of adult baptisms and the opening of missions. Splendid religious ceremonies with vestments, processions and solemn receptions gave Catholics the advantage over Protestants, because "*[[]es noirs sont sensibles aux démonstrations grandioses. Ces déploiements extérieurs satisfaisaient leur besoin d'expansion.*"<sup>83</sup>

This Gospel 'truth' was considered to be incompatible with African traditional religious outlook. Inspired by the Greeks, Western philosophy is pervaded with the law of the excluded middle, the notion of binary opposites: "either ... or ..." This is reflected in titles such Nürnberg's "The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your

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1987), 18.

81. Pius XI, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 18, no. 3 (1 March 1926): 1. English translation taken from *The Papal Encyclicals 1903-1939*, compiled by Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981).

82. Pius XI, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*," 6.

83. Louis de Gonzague Magnan, "*Les Débuts de l'Église au Basutoland (1862-1894)*," M.A. dissertation (Faculty of Arts: University of Ottawa, 1951), 83.

Mind"<sup>84</sup> Although he is a contemporary missionary, I use the example of Nürnberger to illustrate this school of thought. After drawing what he regards as the distinction between fear of God and fear of the ancestors, Nürnberger challenges his readers to make what he regards as an exclusive choice: "Now make up your mind in freedom. Are you in your deepest heart, a Christian or a traditionalist? Whatever your answer be honest about it. Follow *Badimo* or follow *Modimo*, but do not confuse the two."<sup>85</sup>

#### (d) Conclusion

As a result of the missionary targeting of the ancestor cult, it seems not to have been practised openly by members of the mainline Christian churches. This does not mean that the cult disappeared altogether from public life. There are many people in Southern Africa who are not members of the mainline churches and who do practice the cult openly. They are either not Christian, or are members of the AIC's, where it is permissible, if not mandatory, to practice the cult of the ancestors.<sup>86</sup> In addition, De Clark

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84. Klaus Nürnberger, "The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!" in *The Church and African Culture: Conference Papers*, edited by Mhloni Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazonod Institute, 1995), 158-62.

85. Klaus Nürnberger, "Ancestors and Christ: The Power of the Dead or the Risen Christ - Make up Your Mind!" *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1996): 11.

An equally eloquent reply to this argumentation can be read in Buti Tihagale, "Christianity and Tradition Compatible," *Woord en Daad* 36, no. 355 (Autumn 1995): 12-13. Not written in the heat of this particular controversy is Adam Michalek, "Christ et ancêtre - Médiateurs en compétition? Approche théologique de la religion traditionnelle africaine," *Verbum SVD* 42, no. 2 (2001): 189-213.

A Zulu priest, subsequently bishop, writes: "This faith in Christ is not in conflict with what is performed by the family in relation to the deceased." He appreciates having been invited to family houses to celebrate with them the rites of the dead, and judges these rites to be "... not incompatible with Christian faith. They were just gestures of respect towards the dead." See Jabulani A. Nxumalo, "Christ and the Ancestors in the African World: A Pastoral Consideration," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 32 (September 1980): 12.

86. The seminal study on the practice of the cult of the ancestors in the AIC's is Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Lutterworth, 1948). Written in the mid-20th Century, it illustrates the multiplicity of these churches, as well as the similarities in their style of worship. Sundkler shows that frustration in their attempts to bring more authentic African worship and ministry into the mainline churches, led many potential leaders to abandon the missionary churches and to found their own AIC. In these they could synthesise (syncretise?) African and traditional Western theology and forms of ministry. The first AIC began in 1872 in Lesotho. See Martin Prozesky, "Important Events in the History of South Africa's Religions," in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, edited by Martin Prozesky, John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 232.

shows that the Sotho converts did not generally acknowledge a binary opposition between the religion of the missionaries and their own cultural practices:

Although many Basotho adopted several Evangelical tenets, other Christian notions were largely rejected, even by converts. This was especially true of the idea that Christianity constituted a set of beliefs incompatible with 'traditional' ones, and which consequently required that converts should reject their previous world-view. From the outset, the Basotho regarded the missionaries' religious notions as compatible with their traditional ones, the validity of which were beyond doubt.<sup>87</sup>

As we have seen from the *Constitution Presbyterienne*, the *Law Book* and the *Constitutions and Regulations* of the Evangelical Church, any church member involved in the cult of the ancestors, was subject to severe penalties, not excluding excommunication. Catholics learnt that it was a sin against the First Commandment to venerate their ancestors. Wesleyans and Lutherans were also not permitted to continue the cult of the ancestors. Thus those members of the mainline churches who did practice the cult of their ancestors did so clandestinely, and did not bring the cult to church along with other dimensions of their everyday lives. Church authorities were aware that practicing members had this dual life and continued to venerate their ancestors. The authorities discourage it in the strongest terms.<sup>88</sup>

It was not possible for African members of mainline churches to explore in a public ecclesiastical forum the possible benefits of the cult. When white members of the churches studied the cult of the ancestors, it was often with a view to affirming its theological inadequacy.<sup>89</sup> Some missionaries wrote from an anthropological perspective and maintained a strict neutrality. An example of such a writer is François Laydevant OMI

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87. de Clark, "The Basotho and the French Missionaries," 16.

88. The bishops of Lesotho write:

"Let us face facts: there are many baptized Catholics, who have not renounced their pagan traditions fully, and who still try to reconcile them with their Faith, because they have not understood its profound exigencies. Some Christians have two moral codes, one based on their ancestral custom and the other as witnesses of Christ."

See Emmanuel Mabatoana, Joseph Delphis Des Rosiers, and Ignatius Phakoe, "Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Founding of the Church in Basutoland," *Vinculum* 18, no. 1 (January-March 1962): 7.

89. See Klaus Nürnberger, "The Sotho Notion of the Supreme Being and the Impact of the Christian Proclamation," *Journal of Religion in Africa* VII, no. 3 (1975): 174-200.

writing from the second to the sixth decades of the 20th Century. His work at the popular and academic levels is remarkable in not carrying a judgmental tone.

### **Stage two: The resurgence of the ancestor cult**

There has been a refound interest and acceptance of the reality of the cult of the ancestors among Catholic Christians in recent times. It is difficult to trace exactly when this gradual reacceptance began, or whether it began with local initiative or in response to some central authority. Without doubt the mid-20th Century witnessed a softening of attitudes in Rome towards the cultures of recently evangelised peoples. Included in this softening of attitudes is an apparent reversal of the condemnation of the cult of the ancestors in Africa. Indeed, there seems to be a positive esteem of the cult.

In evidence of this changing attitude, I will present Roman documents permitting the cult of the ancestors, initially in Asia, but then later in Africa. I will also show how two important later papal documents deal explicitly with the cult. To explain this change in theology, it is necessary to examine changes in the sociopolitical and ecclesial context. I shall show that the end of direct colonial domination of African countries (and in South Africa in particular, of white minority rule) and the changes around Vatican II represent significant contextual changes which allowed a rethinking of the value of the cult. I will show that there has been a move away from the theology of adaptation prior to Vatican II, to a theology of inculturation. This has been enthusiastically taken up in South Africa as theologians reclaim the ancestral dimension of indigenous culture as a factor in local theology.

#### **(a) Documents Indicating a Changing Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors.**

In this section I will examine two sets of documents of Roman provenance which point specifically to a major change of attitude towards the cult of the ancestors. The first

set deals with the lifting of restrictions on Catholics participating in civil ceremonies honouring the ancestors in Asia and Africa. The second set is from popes Paul VI and John Paul II, where they deal explicitly with the cult of the ancestors in Africa. The positive and permissive tone of these documents gives reason to believe that there has been a re-evaluation of the significance of the cult, and that official Roman Catholic teaching has brought the ancestors into the Church.

**(i) Ancestor Cults Permitted in China, Japan and Congo**

The 1930's saw a number of moves on the Vatican diplomatic front to resolve theological and pastoral disputes that had been pending since the missionary expansion of the 17th and 18th centuries. In China, Japan, Korea, and significantly for our study, Africa, bans on Catholic participation in civil ceremonies were revoked. These bans had arisen in most cases due to an unwillingness to recognise the values represented in the indigenous cultural practices. The value most closely identified with the cult of the ancestors in Asia and Africa is respect for the elderly and the moral tradition which they represent. It was thought that veneration of the ancestors was superstition and idolatry, as I have demonstrated in the consideration of the first commandment, above.

In 1935, the government of Manchuria declared that the ceremonies honouring the ancestors and Confucius were part of a civic duty and did not represent a religious adherence. This declaration paved the way for the granting of ecclesiastical permission to Manchurian Catholics to attend these ceremonies. The Chinese Rites controversy was settled in 1939, when this permission was extended to all Catholics in China.<sup>90</sup>

In 1936, similar permission was granted to Japanese Catholics to attend the Shinto ceremonies, since the Japanese government did not attach religious significance to these

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<sup>90</sup> Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "*Instructio circa quasdam caeremonias et iuramentum super ritibus sinensibus*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32, no. 1 (22 January 1940): 24-26.

ceremonies.<sup>91</sup> However, the distinction between religion and culture (in this case, civic duty) is now understood to be not as clear as it was presumed to be in the 1930's. Particularly in the case of the ancient religious cultures of China, Japan and Korea, there is a close relationship between the two.<sup>92</sup>

Less well known, but of great significance for our study, was the lifting of the ban in 1938 on Catholics attending funeral rites in Congo.<sup>93</sup> The letter permits Catholics to participate in traditional funeral rites when they have been well instructed in the meaning of their participation, and when any superstitious or immoral elements have been removed. In a good example of subsidiarity, the Roman letter does not state which "superstitious" elements are to be removed, but rather leaves it to the discretion and prudence of the Apostolic Delegate and ordinaries to apply the principle.<sup>94</sup>

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91. Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "Instructio Ad Excmum D. Paulum Marella, Archiepiscopum Tit. Doceense, Delegatum Apostolicum in Iaponia, Circa Catholicorum Officia Erga Patriam," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 28, no. 12 (15 October 1936): 406–09.

92. Indeed, of the cult in Vietnam which was covered by the Chinese permission of 1939, Phan writes:

... [T]here is little doubt, at least with regard to ancestor worship, that it is a deeply religious act, indeed the most religious act in the everyday life of the followers of indigenous religions in Southeast Asia."

Again, he evaluates the cult as deeply religious:

Given the undeniably religious nature of ancestor worship, its liturgical inculturation can no longer be legitimated on the basis of its alleged 'merely civil and political' character. Such a view, while making things easier for theologians and liturgists empties the rituals of ancestor veneration of their deepest meanings and transforming power.

See Peter C. Phan, "Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case," *Worship* 76, no. 5 (2002): 419f. He insists that religious significance of the cult should not be downplayed in the interest of Christian religious purity.

93. Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide, "A Sua Eccellenza Revma Mons. Giovanni Delle Piane, Delegato Apostolico del Congo Belga," in *Sylloge praecipuorum documentorum recentium Summorum Pontificum et S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide necnon aliarum SS. Congregationum Romanarum ad usum missionariorum.*, edited and compiled by J. Dindinger (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1939), 576–78.

94. Whether or not this letter of permission had any effect in Southern Africa, I have not been able to discover from a reading of the documents of the SACBC. In the series *The Bishops Speak*, a compilation of the statements of the SACBC from 1952 to the present, there do not appear any references to the 1938 letter.

## (ii) Papal Documents on the Cult of the Ancestors

### Paul VI's *Africae Terrarum*

Written in 1967, on the tenth anniversary of *Fidei Donum*, *Africae Terrarum* is Paul VI's expression of good will towards "future religious and civil prosperity" in African countries as they moved towards independence.<sup>95</sup> In addition to being words of "greeting, advice and encouragement,"<sup>96</sup> the words are an affirmation that Africans should "become the artisans of their [own] destiny."<sup>97</sup>

But more than a message of goodwill, the message recognises that in the light of developing human sciences, aspects of African culture that were once considered unacceptable, are now better understood and command respect in the Church. "Many customs and rites, once considered to be strange, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect."<sup>98</sup> In particular the pope mentions the spiritual view of life, the respect for human dignity, the sense of family and community, and respect for authority in Africa.<sup>99</sup> These are co-incidentally some of the key notions of the cult of the ancestors. These are respected by the Church in their own right, and regarded as providential for the spreading for the Gospel.

In terms of the cult of the ancestors, what Paul VI has to say is noteworthy:

Another characteristic element of African tradition is the sense of family. On this, it is significant to note the moral and also the religious value, seen in attachment to the family, evidenced further by the bond with ancestors, which finds expression in so many widespread forms of worship [*vereratione*].

For Africans the family thus, comes to be the natural environment in which man is born and acts, in which he finds the necessary protection and security, and

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95. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59, no. 17 (28 December 1967): 2. English translation taken from *Afer* 10, no. 1 (January 1968): 71-84.

96. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 22.

97. Paul VI, "*Populorum Progressio*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59, no. 4 (15 April 1967): 65. English translation taken from *The Papal Encyclicals 1958-1981*, compiled by Claudia Carlen (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981).

98. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 7.

99. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 8-12.

eventually through union with his ancestors has his continuity beyond earthly life.<sup>100</sup>

Thus Paul VI locates the cult in terms of attachment to the family and eschatological hope. These are seen as a source of moral and religious value, and are not condemned as contrary to Christian faith. Absent are the judgement and condemnation of the ancestral cult we saw in the first stage of this history. Indeed Paul VI admits that the missionaries were men and women of their time who did not always appreciate sufficiently the value and truth of local customs:

Sometimes, the missionaries of the past are said to have lacked understanding of the positive value of customs and ancient traditions, and we must frankly admit that, although they were inspired and guided by the highest motives in their unselfish and heroic labours, they could not be wholly free of the attitudes of their time.

However, although they were not always able in the past to understand the full significance of the customs and unwritten traditions of the people they evangelized, . . . Many of them also became famous for their original and important contributions to the anthropological sciences. But, above all, it should be recognised that the action of the missionaries was always disinterested and animated by the charity of the Gospel. . . .<sup>101</sup>

#### The "African Synod" and John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Africa*

From April to May 1994, Pope John Paul II convoked the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. Much enthusiastic consultation across the continent had gone into the preparation for the synod, and the proceedings were followed with great interest. Many hoped, and were not disappointed, that inculturation would be one of the major topics of discussion. Others were profoundly disappointed with a restrictive understanding of inculturation in the *Lineamenta*.<sup>102</sup>

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100. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 10.

101. Paul VI, "*Africae Terrarum*," 24. In this regard, I have mentioned the excellent anthropological work done by Fr F. Laydevant.

102. See Aylward Shorter, *The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document* (Nairobi: St Paul Publications - Africa, 1991), 68. "That the *Lineamenta* can so clearly define the ideal, and in the same breath, toss it on one side, is profoundly disappointing." The ideal described was the vision of *Ad Gentes* 22, of particular churches each with its own tradition having its "own place in the ecclesial communion." But this vision was circumscribed with the statement that until this vision is able to be realised "each Church should constantly speak a language common to all and remain open to fraternal correction." (*Lineamenta* 51.) Shorter believes this is giving with one

The post-synodal *Ecclesia in Africa* was published in 1995. For an exhortation specifically addressed to the Church in Africa, this document makes remarkably little reference to the cult of the ancestors.<sup>103</sup> In fact, the word "ancestor" appears only four times in the 149-page document.<sup>104</sup> Of these, only two mention the cult of the ancestors *per se*. However, these two references to the cult represent a new line of thinking with respect to ancestor veneration.

The first mention of the cult of the ancestors is in paragraph 43 of *Ecclesia in Africa*, where the pope quotes from his homily at the opening liturgy of the synod. He praises the veneration of the ancestors as an indicator of Africans' belief that life cannot be destroyed, and that the dead remain in communion with the living. This intuitive belief is seen as an affirmation of a life-affirming ethic, in the face of "so-called 'progressive civilizations'" whose economic systems are hostile to life. It is also seen as "in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints."<sup>105</sup>

This is the theological methodology of *preparatio evangelii*, which reduces the significance of an aspect of indigenous culture to that of a means towards an end. The African worldview of survival after death is seen not in its own right, but as a preparation for the Gospel. It finds its fulfillment in belief in the cult of the Saints, to which it is perceived to be a pointer.

In paragraph 64 of *Ecclesia in Africa* - the second mention of the cult - the veneration of the ancestors is listed as one of three areas (along with marriage and the

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hand and taking back with the other. The vision is spelt out, but the Church in Africa is said to be insufficiently mature to embody the vision.

103. Of the interventions of the bishops from Southern Africa alone, four specifically mentioned the cult of the ancestors as a matter of note. These were by the bishops of Harare, Inhambane, Windhoek and Witbank. The bishop of Maputo referred to Christ as the first Ancestor.

104. See John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Africa*," *Origins* 25, no. 16 (5 October 1995): 249-76. "Ancestor" appears in paragraphs 32, 35, 43 and 64. In the first two instances, it does not refer to the cult of the ancestors, but rather in the generic sense of "[y]our ancestors heard the message of the Good News. . . ." and "the debt of gratitude which their Continent owes to its ancestors in the faith." Thus the role of the Christian ancestors is recognised as the Africans who accepted the faith.

105. Emphasis in the original.

spirit world) that call for an application of inculturation. Episcopal conferences are exhorted to establish study commissions to examine these areas of culture which have proven resilient to a long history of evangelisation, and in which “justice and true pastoral sensitivity” are required. The single principle enunciated in this paragraph is that “fidelity to the Church’s teaching must be maintained.” The appropriate paragraph of *Ecclesia in Africa* reads:

The Synod also reaffirmed that, when doctrine is hard to assimilate even after a long period of evangelization, or when its practice poses serious pastoral problems, especially in the sacramental life, fidelity to the Church’s teaching must be maintained. At the same time, people must be treated with justice, and true pastoral charity. Bearing this in mind, the Synod expressed the hope that the Episcopal Conferences, in cooperation with Universities and Catholic Institutes would set up study commissions, especially for matters concerning marriage, the veneration of ancestors, and the spirit world, in order to examine in depth all the cultural aspects of problems from the theological, sacramental, liturgical and canonical points of view.

The suggestion to establish this study commission on the cult of the ancestors can be traced back to three sources. Firstly, individual bishops requested that the cult be studied more deeply. For example, in his intervention at the synod, Mogale Paul Nkhumishe said:

My strong recommendation to this Synod Assembly is that there is a great deal of richness and potential in this cult. Let us not allow this to get lost. Let us set up a commission of experts to study this cult in its totality and report its findings to our various conference regions for decision and action. Finding an appropriate solution to this problem will not only enhance and accelerate inculturation on the continent, it will indeed unlock the door to the African heart.<sup>106</sup>

A second, probably more important reason for the establishment of commissions of study about the cult of the ancestors is the list of “Propositions Submitted by IMBISA

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106. See “Chapter 3: The Interventions of Bishops” in Theological Reflection and Exchange Department of IMBISA, *IMBISA Speaks as the African Synod: The Contributions of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa to the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops 1994* (Harare: IMBISA, 1998), 57. Other IMBISA interventions mentioning the cult of the ancestors can be found on pages 15, 30f., 39, and 43f.

Concerning Inculturation”<sup>107</sup> Their first proposition recommends that “[t]he role of ancestors in African tradition should be the object of special consideration with a view to integrating it into the Christian vision of life.” This does not amount to requesting the establishment of commissions of study, and even less to listing the practice of the cult as a serious pastoral problem. Rather, the aim of the propositions is the integration of the cult into a unified Christian vision.

A third impetus for the pope’s recommendation that the cult be studied is the thirty-sixth in the final list of propositions submitted to the pope by all the bishops gathered at the synod. It should be noted that after their reflections, the bishops did not list the cult of the ancestors among those areas of serious pastoral concern for which they recommended the formation of study commissions. Instead, they had a much more positive evaluation of the ancestral cult:

In many African communities, the ancestors occupy a place of honour. They are part of the community together with the living. In many cultures, there are clear ideas of who merits to be called an ancestor. Were many of these not seeking God with a sincere heart? The ancestors are venerated, a practice, which in no way implies worshipping them. We therefore recommend that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God or to play down the role of the saints, should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorized, and proposed by competent authorities in the church.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, in the context of the synod, *Ecclesia in Africa* 64 is not identifying the practice of the cult of the ancestors as an area that poses serious pastoral problems. Rather, if the pope is following the assembled bishops’ proposition thirty-six, with the positive ceremonial role it proposes for the veneration of ancestors, he is calling for an exploration of ways that the cult might be incorporated in Christian liturgy. I regard this as a major change in the official position on the cult of the ancestors, which is not sufficiently recognised in considerations of this post-synodal apostolic exhortation.

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107. See “Propositions Submitted by IMBISA Concerning Inculturation” in *Theological Reflection and Exchange* Department of IMBISA, *IMBISA Speaks at the African Synod*, 3.

108. Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa, “Propositions,” in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, compiled and edited by Africa Faith and Justice Network,

It is important not to foreclose the discussion prematurely in the name of fidelity to the Church's teaching, particularly as we have seen in the first part of this history, what has passed as the Church's teaching has been unduly negative and not untainted by 19th Century Western supremacy. Much theological reflection of this possibility of including the ancestors in the liturgical action of the church is still necessary.<sup>109</sup> Where the cult of the ancestors might be of pastoral benefit, it is not to be dismissed lightly.

These two sets of documents - the permissions of the 1930's and *Africae Terrarum* and *Ecclesia in Africa*, coming from the Synod discussions - represent a major change of fortune for the ancestor cult in the official Church teaching. The cult of the ancestors has come a long way since its outright condemnation by the early missionaries. It remains to be seen how this shift will be implemented in practice.

The shift, however, did not occur in a sociopolitical and theological vacuum. The context of which it is a product was of changes taking place in the wider church and society. We shall examine these contextual changes in the next section.

#### (b) A Context of Social and Ecclesial Changes

Ideas arise within a context, and what was unthinkable in one era may become the new orthodoxy of another era. It would seem that this has been the case with the cult of the ancestors. The context in which the new thinking on the cult of the ancestors has

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~~under~~ the direction of Maura Browne SND (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 99.

109. Plastow has shown how recent Roman liturgical documents tend to interpret in a restrictive, rather than a broad sense, the recommendation for liturgical inculturation in Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 40. As one example, he cites the instruction: Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation: IVth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy (Nn. 37-40)* (1994). This instruction, published ten days before the opening of the synod, makes the *editio typica* the normative liturgical text, with very little leeway for adaptation, never mind "creative assimilation." See Thomas Plastow, "Differing Views on Liturgical Inculturation: Conflicting Agenda for the Church," *Grace and Truth* 17, no. 2 (August 2000): 5-21.

It seems to me evident that a pontifical post-synodal exhortation carries more weight and authority than an instruction from a Roman congregation. As the exhortation was published more recently than the instruction, this is another reason for considering it to be worthy of greater consideration if there should be a perceived conflict between it and the instruction.

arisen, is different to the context of the 19th and early 20th Centuries which saw the outright condemnation of the cult. The new context is that of decolonisation, the recognition of indigenous cultures and a new demographic profile of the Church. We shall briefly examine these three elements here.

### **(i) Decolonisation**

The initial encounter between the European missionaries and the cult of the ancestors in Southern Africa was during the period of rapid colonisation of the subcontinent. Whether they desired it or not, the missionaries shared much of the mentality of their colonising compatriots, which held scorn for the cultures of the indigenous people, comparing them with those of Europe.

During the Second World War many soldiers from the colonised parts of Africa and Asia contributed to the liberation of Europe from the threats of Nazism and fascism. Some of these soldiers returned home, inspired to work for the freedom of their own countries. 1951 saw the beginning of the large-scale political decolonisation of African countries.<sup>110</sup>

With independence came a move to reappropriate and reintegrate traditional African ideas and worldviews. It was no longer assumed that Western epistemologies were the only way of understanding how the world works. However, the complete decolonisation of the thinking on the continent has not yet been achieved.<sup>111</sup> As more

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110. Some countries, like Egypt and South Africa had political independence since the early 20th Century.

111. Underdevelopment (or dependency) theorists maintain that education systems help to perpetuate unbalanced economic, intellectual and social relations between developing and developed nations. See, for example, Bade Onimode, *A Political Economy of the African Crisis* (London: Zed Books with the Institute for African Alternatives, 1988).

Without subscribing to this theory in its entirety as it is stated by Onimode, I was interested to see whether the same applies in the case of theological education in seminaries in South Africa and Lesotho. Surveying 29 of my fellow undergraduate theology students from Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, I discovered a varying scale of awareness of the appropriateness or otherwise of the seminaries' dependence "on expatriate staff and curricula prescribed by outside agencies." Many of the students mentioned that the theological formation in their respective

African thinkers discovered the freedom of thinking outside of Western categories, it was inevitable that the traditional African cult of the ancestors - a mainstay of historical African societies - should receive critical attention. Christian laity and theologians were also involved in this reappraisal.<sup>112</sup>

The Church has had to take this postcolonial world as the reality in which it operates. No longer can it be assumed that what is decreed in the metropole will be accepted meekly and obediently in the periphery.

### **(ii) Recognition of and Adaptation to Foreign Cultures**

Between the First and Second World Wars, with improvements in communication and transportation, there was an expansion in missionary work. Improved means of communication between missionaries and their superiors in the sending countries, allowed for a greater correspondence and exchange of information and experiences. The missionary exhibition in Rome commissioned by Pius XI in 1925 gave a vision of the universality of the Christian Church. It was no longer possible to say that the Church's engagement in evangelising peoples was peripheral and shrouded in mystery. It also became necessary to acknowledge that the peoples with whom missionaries were engaged had deep cultural traditions of their own, which were not going to be replaced by

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seminaries is highly theoretical, and that there is a "corresponding de-emphasis of practical skills and training." See Peter Knox, "Students' Perceptions of the Education in the Catholic Seminaries in South Africa and Lesotho in the Light of Underdevelopment (or Dependency) Theory," B.Ed. research rept. (Faculty of Education: University of Natal, 1992), 13.

112. In the project of development, Cosmao says it is incumbent upon the church to help the people of developing nations to reinterpret their traditional religions. The church so often accompanied the process of colonisation, which destroyed the epistemological systems by which people made sense of their world and experience. Justice demands that the church attempt to redress the cultural and social disintegration left in the wake of colonisation.

Here, then, the church has a duty to perform. By paying respectful attention to traditional attitudes and mores, and by trying to understand them, the church must help peoples to envision the possible perdurance of their religious life amid the societal upheavals that they can do so little to control.

See Vincent Cosmao, *Changing the World: An Agenda for the Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 46f, Thesis 15.

European mores and behaviours. As more and more laypeople began to travel as tourists after the Second World War, they too became aware of different cultures and realised that these were as ancient and venerable as their own, and warranted respect.

Written with an unconscious revisionist history, Pius XII enunciates in his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, that customs and usages in varied civilisations had *always* been understood, sponsored and developed when they were not bound up with religious error:

Pioneer research and investigation, involving sacrifice, devotedness and love on the part of her missionaries of every age, have been undertaken in order to facilitate a deeper appreciative insight into the most varied civilizations and to put their spiritual values to account for a living and vital preaching of the Gospel of Christ. All that in such usages and customs is not inseparably bound up with religious errors will always be subject to kindly consideration, and, when it is found possible, will be sponsored and developed.<sup>113</sup>

What is important in this statement is not the accuracy or otherwise of its reading of missionary history, but its recognition that local spiritual values can be employed in the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>114</sup> The idea here is not to employ these “usages and customs” as the vehicle for carrying the Christian message, but to adapt them and fit them to a ready-formed message from outside.

In his 1944 discourse to the directors of the Pontifical Missionary Society (PMS), Pius XII said that as Apostles of Jesus Christ, missionaries are not required to transplant specifically European civilisation on foreign soil.<sup>115</sup> It is their task to teach and form people

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113. Pius XII, “*Summi Pontificatus*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 31, no. 13 (28 October 1939): 548f. English version.

114. Of course, something like this happened in the early centuries after the Resurrection, when the Christian faith was developing from a Jewish sect and spreading in the Graeco-Roman world. The categories of Greek philosophies were employed in the expression of the faith to a wider audience than its original Hebrew hearers. This articulation of the Christian faith became the norm for the Western Church for the subsequent centuries. But were these philosophies the “spiritual values” of which Pius XII writes?

115. Pius XII, “*Allocutio ac officialibus Pontificiarum Operum Missionalium*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36, no. 7 (28 July 1944): 210. For Italian original, see Appendix 1.

Of course, this is a reiteration of the famous instruction to the first vicars apostolic to Indochina in 1659:

What would be more absurd than to try to transplant France, Spain, Italy, or some other part

freely to accept the principles of Christian life and morality, which principles fit into any good and sound culture, and render it stronger in safeguarding human dignity and happiness.

In 1951, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pius XII published the encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*. In it he recognises that local customs are worthy of respect and should not be damaged. In another instance of revisionist history he writes:

The Church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful.<sup>116</sup>

While he believes that all human nature is tainted by original sin, he says that it retains something that is “naturally Christian” and with divine illumination and grace can be changed into “true and supernatural virtue.” Therefore the Catholic Church has not rejected, but rather purified and perfected pagan philosophies, and similarly appropriated, encouraged and perfected native art and culture.<sup>117</sup>

Again, the point of these citations is not to discuss the veracity of the claim, but rather to illustrate three principles of adaptation that Pius XII was enunciating. These principles show an openness to adapt local cultures to fit the Christian message, rather than an attempt to replace them entirely. And conversely, some Church practices might be adapted to fit some elements of local traditions.

(1) Proclamation of the Gospel does not imply the destruction of what is good, just and beautiful in a society. Rather, the Gospel can in some way ‘perfect’ native

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of Europe into China? It is not these that you have to introduce but the faith, which will never despise or violate the rites and usages of any people provided they are not perverse but instead intends to safeguard and strengthen them.

See: Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith: *Collectanea*, Rome, 1907, I, 42f.

116. Pius XII, “*Evangelii Praecones*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 43, no. 11 (6 July 1951): para 56, English translation taken from

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_02061951\\_evangelii-praecones\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_02061951_evangelii-praecones_en.html) viewed on 5 January 2004.

117. Pius XII, “*Evangelii Praecones*,” 57f.

philosophies, culture and art. (*Evangelii Praecones.*)

(2) Christian life and morality can fit into any sound culture, not only the European (Allocution to the directors of PMS).

(3) The Church is to build on spiritual values and to develop customs and usages that are not erroneous, using them in the proclamation of the Gospel (*Summi Pontificatus*).

### **(iii) Growth of the Church outside the Western World**

Bühlmann shows how there has been a major demographic shift in the membership of the Christian Churches, and of the Catholic Church in particular.<sup>118</sup> He projected that by the year 2000, some 70% of the Catholic Church would live in the southern countries. This new Catholic geography would have an inevitable effect on the Church's identity, as proportionately more and more laypeople and members of the hierarchy would be in the southern countries.

Bühlmann notes that at the same time as the world of the "South" (Africa, Asia, Latin America) was being decolonised, more people than ever before were travelling as tourists from the "North," and encountering other cultures on their own terms. It was apparent that the cultures of the South were robust enough to survive on their own terms, and were not going to be homogenised into some pan-Christian culture rooted in Europe.

### **(c) Major Theological Changes at the Second Vatican Council**

The new social and ecclesial realities had deep consequences for the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). The most visible sign of the new ecclesial context was on the demography of the Council participants. For the first time since the ancient Church, there

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118. Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church*, translated by Ralph Woodhall and A.N. Other, from the third Italian edition (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1976), 20f.

was an audible minority of bishops who were not from Europe or North America. The Council participants were more reflective of the changing demography of the world-wide Church. However, Karl Rahner cautions that one should not overestimate the modest but real contribution made by the bishops from outside of Europe and North America.<sup>119</sup>

Bosch maintains that the Council was run along traditional lines with most of the control in the hands of the Roman authorities. It is only at the subsequent synods "that the bishops of local churches in the Third World really began to influence Catholic thinking in a profound way."<sup>120</sup>

Much more profound changes of the identity of the Church are reflected in the discussions and documents issuing from the Council. Rahner believed that the Council was the first truly universal act of the Church in the sense that precisely its international composition had effects to be felt in Europe and North America.<sup>121</sup> He wrote that the Council ushered the Church into a third age, which represents a rupture as deep and significant as the change from its being a Jewish sect to being the Church of the Gentiles. ". . . it is incontestable that at Vatican II the Church appeared for the first time as a world Church in a fully official way."<sup>122</sup>

The council enabled the Church to develop outside of the Western world, taking root in indigenous cultures, rather than merely having an institutional presence in these lands. The significance of Vatican II for the cult in Southern Africa can be seen in three conciliar documents in particular, which we shall discuss here. They are *Lumen Gentium* (LG), *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and *Ad Gentes* (AG).

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119.Karl Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda: A Look to the Future*, edited by Lucien Richard, with Daniel Harrington, and John W. O'Malley, (New York: Paulist, 1987), 12.

120.David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 380.

121.Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation," 10.

122.Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation," 11.

**(i) *Lumen Gentium***

The dogmatic constitution on the Church, opens by locating the Church within the mystery of salvation wrought by Christ. The members of the Church are nourished in Christ by their participation in the sacraments. The Church is thus a mystical body, a pilgrim People of God. It is not primarily understood in the hierarchical mode of Vatican I. Only in the third chapter is the hierarchical nature of the Church discussed. The bishops are spoken of as a 'college,' each responsible in his own right, and not as a vicar of the Pontiff, for the pastoral care of the people assigned to him, his 'particular church'.<sup>123</sup>

. . . Bishops have a sacred right and duty before the Lord of legislating for and of passing judgement on their subjects, as well as of regulating everything that concerns the good order of divine worship and of the apostolate.<sup>124</sup>

Bühlmann writes that the great ecclesiological step of the Second Vatican Council was the rediscovery of the (local or) particular Church with legitimate autonomy and particular characteristics.<sup>125</sup> No more is the paternalistic language of mother and daughter used, but there is talk of partnership between local churches of equal stature. The Church retains one centre, but at the same time is polycentric, with subsidiarity of authority of the local bishops. Tillard writes of this as a "Church of Churches"<sup>126</sup> and is convinced that "communion" is the best way to understand the nature of the Church as a community of communities.<sup>127</sup>

This is of significance for the Church in Southern Africa, because in principle it accords the local bishops the authority to make decisions on issues of local theological

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123. LG 23. Unless specifically stated otherwise, all citations from the documents of Vatican II in this thesis will be taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1975).

124. LG 27.

125. Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, 272.

126. Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

127. He works out this ecclesiology of communion in *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, translated by Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001).

significance. In other words, it makes room for local contextual theologies. At the same time, bishops have the responsibility to maintain the 'unity of the faith' in order that local churches not become too different and unrecognisable as members of one universal Church. So the bishops of Southern Africa have the responsibility and freedom to develop a local understanding of the cult of the ancestors. In my opinion, they have not yet fully exercised their authority in this respect, such as in pastoral instructions, the development of catechisms or liturgical rites reflecting local understandings.

(ii) *Gaudium et Spes*

The pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world includes teaching on the relationship between the Church and culture.<sup>128</sup> It represents a recognition of humans as cultural beings, influenced by and able to influence the culture of which they form part. The relationship between Church and local cultures is seen as potentially positive for both the Church and the culture concerned: "... [The Church] can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves."<sup>129</sup> There is thus a mutual enrichment of Church and culture, whereby the Church benefits from the manifold cultures in which it is present.

This second chapter of Part Two of *Gaudium et Spes* represents a new cultural consciousness in theology, and forms the basis of the theology of inculturation, which we will examine in brief in the following section. GS 54 analyses 'modern' scientific culture, which significantly specifically includes the social sciences, and the paragraph uses

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128. Jaouen notes a shift in *Gaudium et Spes* between an elitist and an anthropological understanding of culture. The anthropological understanding is evident in GS 53, but tends to waver throughout the chapter. It is noteworthy that culture is not understood only as the fine arts, architecture and higher education, but is what ordinary people live in their everyday encounter with their social and physical environment. A elitist understanding implies that the poor and people with few resources have no culture of their own, whereas an anthropological understanding recognises the wealth of what they have. See René Jaouen, "*Le concept de la culture dans la constitution pastorale 'Gaudium et Spes' du concile oecuménique Vatican II*," M.A. Thesis (Faculty of Theology: St Paul University, 1983).

129. GS 58.

sociological tools to analyse and predict a greater human solidarity. It reflects a very optimistic notion of technological society and does not recognise the exclusion of billions of the world's population from this culture.

What is significant for our purposes is that an anthropological hermeneutic is brought into the realm of theology. In effect, theology can only be done with an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which it is being done. So no theology of AIDS or the ancestors in Southern Africa can be done without taking into account the other.

### **(iii) *Ad Gentes***

The decree on the Church's missionary activity carries enormous weight in missionary tradition. As one of the four final documents published by the Council on 7 December 1965, *Ad Gentes* benefits from the reflections and theological innovations of the previous conciliar documents.

It declares the earthly Church as missionary by its very nature, participating in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of the Father.<sup>130</sup> It is imbued with the conviction that the Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation" according to the ecclesiology of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* 48.<sup>131</sup> *Ad Gentes* speaks of "young churches" or "particular churches" rather than "missions," because the distinction between those sending and those being sent was losing its former clear geographical definition.

*Ad Gentes* 22 recognises that the young churches "borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of their peoples everything which could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, . . ." That is, the Council had a vision that ". . . the Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture. . ." and "new

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130. AG 2.

131. See AG 1, 5, etc.

particular churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the community of the Church.” The unity of the universal Church would be guaranteed by the primacy of the pope. It is to be noted here that *Ad Gentes* has a vision of the Christian life being adapted, or made to fit, or accommodate itself to the local mentality and culture. There is thus scope for diversity in many aspects of Christian life, and uniformity is neither necessary, desirable nor possible.<sup>132</sup>

#### **(iv) Conclusion**

Thus, the renewed attitude towards the cult of the ancestors has taken place in the context of major changes in the latter half of the 20th Century. These changes are of a social and of a theological nature, which were felt in the Church, as it opened up to the reality of the time. On the social front, the reality is of a world with its postcolonial politics, its culture of modernity which excludes so many, and a major shift in Christian demography. On the theological front, the Second Vatican Council represents a moment of crystallisation of changes in theological thinking. Most significant among these for our purposes was the rediscovery of the local church with the local bishop responsible for matters of faith and pastoral care. This allowed for legitimate differences between the local churches with communion among the churches and the papacy being the visible sign of unity. A cultural awareness has come into theology, as it became apparent that theology can only be done with reference to the context in which it is being done. The Church’s identity has changed to include both its institutional presence and its part in the mystery of salvation.

However, the council is not the final word in the changes in theology that were to open the way to a greater openness to the cult of the ancestors. The council theologians

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132. Bosch writes of a changing theology of mission over twenty centuries of Christian history, akin to a paradigm shift. He maintains that this transformation of mission is continuing today, and is not ended. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, xv. I believe that Vatican II and particularly the document *Ad Gentes* will be recognised in retrospect as one of the most significant steps in the change of the

were still thinking in terms of *adaptation* of the Christian life and message to local circumstances. A more profound recognition of the interplay between theology and culture was to issue in the theology of *inculturation* which had its roots in the council. It is to *inculturation* that we now turn our attention.

#### (d) Inculturation

While the writing of Pius XII and the reflections of Vatican II had prepared the way for a more positive appreciation of the role of culture in evangelisation, an important hermeneutical realisation had not yet been made. During the pontificate of Paul VI, it was realised that all people live within a culture, and that their culture effects every aspect of their lives. Consequently, the Gospel is necessarily lived within a culture, and so culture is an inevitable vehicle in the transmission of the Gospel. Put in another way, the Gospel cannot be lived in a cultural vacuum. Even Jesus Christ, the 'content' of the Gospel, lived within a cultural milieu - that of first-Century Palestine. This realisation led to a flourishing of reflection on the relationship between faith and culture, and a new branch of theology emerged, that of 'inculturation.'

#### (i) Transitional Text: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

I believe that the transitional texts between the theology of adaptation in *Ad Gentes* and the theology of inculturation, can be found in key passages of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The world synod of bishops on Evangelisation in the Modern World was convened by Paul VI in 1974. On the tenth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, Paul VI published the post-synodal exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which addressed many of the more practical aspects of the new theology of mission since Vatican II.

A notion of holistic evangelisation pervades the document. "[T]he church may be truly said to evangelise when, solely in virtue of that news which she proclaims, she seeks

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missionary paradigm of the Church.

to convert both the individual consciences of men and their collective conscience, all the activities in which they are engaged and, finally, their lives and the whole environment which surrounds them.”<sup>133</sup> This does not admit of reduction to a political agenda or temporal liberation.<sup>134</sup> Nor is evangelisation to be superficial, but it is to penetrate to the very core of human existence, as well as transforming cultures where this is necessary. Thus there is not a necessary incompatibility between the Gospel and human cultures.<sup>135</sup> But the Gospel is above all cultures and cannot be subservient to any. Therefore while evangelisers use the resources of a particular culture, they are to do so critically, transforming and converting those aspects understood to be incompatible with the Gospel.

The encyclical encourages individual churches to express the Gospel in their own idiom, but it urges extreme caution that the message (the ‘truth’) not be lost in the process. In their adaptation of secondary ecclesiastical structures and theological principles, the churches must exercise judgement and care combined with competence and reverence so that the unity of the universal Church not be damaged.<sup>136</sup>

### **(ii) A Description of Inculturation**

It is not my purpose here to give a full description and history of inculturation. These have been amply covered in the works of Carrier,<sup>137</sup> Peelman,<sup>138</sup> Shorter,<sup>139</sup> Starkloff<sup>140</sup> and many others. However, it will be helpful here to offer at least one

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133. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68, no. 1 (31 January 1976): 18. English translation in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1982), 711–61.

134. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 32.

135. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 20.

136. Paul VI, “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*,” 63.

137. Hervé Carrier, *Guide pour l’inculturation de l’Évangile* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1997).

138. Achiel Peelman, *L’Inculturation: L’Église et les Cultures*, (Paris / Ottawa: Desclée / Novalis, 1988).

139. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

140. Carl F. Starkloff, “Inculturation and Cultural Systems,” *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 66–81, 274–94.

understanding of the neologism, 'inculturation.' As a seminal description, I use that of Pedro Arrupe, who says inculturation is:

the incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation.'<sup>141</sup>

Arrupe has a very optimistic understanding of the transformative power of the Christian life and message.<sup>142</sup> These two are able to alter a culture radically, becoming the guiding principle of that culture, and in fact, creating a new culture, a new way for people to understand themselves and their relation to the universe. At the same time, the Christian life and message do not replicate the way they are lived elsewhere. They are 'incarnated' anew in each culture, as 'the Word became flesh'<sup>143</sup> in first-Century Palestine. Thus people give flesh to the Gospel using elements proper to their culture.

### (iii) John Paul II and Inculturation

One might, however, distinguish between what is essential or "core" and what is accidental, such as the particular culture in which the Christian life and message are enfleshed in any one incarnation. It is the challenge of inculturation to make this discernment. It has been a particular concern of Pope John Paul II that in the process of inculturation, none of what is 'essential' to the Church, the Gospel, the Christian life and message be lost. I believe that while he enthusiastically embraces the language of inculturation, John Paul II is generally cautious that inculturation should not compromise

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141. Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation," in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe SJ*, edited by J. Aixala (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 172.

142. Here the second sense of the title of Bosch's book is revealed: Christian mission has the power to transform persons, situations and cultures to which it is directed. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, xv.

143. Jn. 1:14

the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith<sup>144</sup> I have argued elsewhere that he is reluctant to accept the greater diversity in expression of the Christian life and message necessarily implied by inculturation.<sup>145</sup>

An example of how he embraces the language of inculturation, and is at the same time reticent to accept the full implication of inculturation can be read in *Redemptoris Missio*. In this major encyclical on evangelisation, written on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, the pontiff is quite realistic about inculturation. He is aware that it is not a process that happens overnight. It is holistic, profound and difficult, involving the Christian message and life, neither of which may be compromised.

The process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation "means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."<sup>146</sup> The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.<sup>147</sup>

It is interesting to note that for John Paul II, as for Arrupe, a transformation takes place. It is not to be assumed that anything in a culture remains unaltered by its integration into the Church. At the same time, the culture remains as a visible, distinct, identifiable vehicle. It is not the intention of inculturation to make a pan-Christian lowest common denominator culture. Nor is it acceptable that the interaction of Christian faith and culture produce a *tertium quid* which cannot be recognised as distinctly Christian. Living the Christian life and message within the context of the ancestral cult should respect the identity and integrity of both.

John Paul II appears to associate inculturation with some potential threat to the

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144. John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83, no. 4 (8 April 1991): 52.

145. See Peter Knox, "Appropriation and Domestication: Inculturation of the Christian Life and Message in the 'New Evangelization,'" L.Th. seminar paper (Faculty of Theology: Saint Paul University, 1995).

146. Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (December 7, 1985), Final Report, II,D,4.

147. John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," 52.

unity of the Church. For example:

... [T]he difficulty of finding a balance between the need for the inculturation of the Gospel and the unity of the message contained in it, ... threaten[s] to compromise the very foundations of your presence and evangelical activity in many countries.<sup>148</sup>

In response to this suggestion, I would maintain that this balance between inculturation and unity of the Church is a creative one. Firstly, unity does not require uniformity. There are numerous Oriental rites in the Catholic Church which do not compromise the unity of the faith. It should not be presumed that an African rite will do so. The demise of the Tridentine Mass with the celebrations of the Eucharist taking place in the vernacular was a major blow to uniformity in the Church. But in itself, I can only see how this move made local churches stronger and more deeply rooted, rather than undermined the unity of the Church. Secondly, I believe that true unity can only be attained when local churches have so appropriated and inculturated the Christian life and message, that they are on an equal footing, with equal respect due to them. It is divisive to maintain distinctions between those churches that have inculturated the Gospel over many centuries and those that are at the beginning of this process. Nor is inculturation as a missionary paradigm unique in its potential ability to wreak disunity. One has only to look at the history of political expediency that accompanied the *plantatio Ecclesiae* in South America for an example of disunity being sown.<sup>149</sup>

(e) Local Changes in Christians' Attitude to the Cult of the Ancestors

It is difficult to determine cause and effect in attempting to relate why there has been a growth in the awareness of the cult of the ancestors in the Church in Southern Africa. Is it because 'permission' has been granted from above? Or is it that the greater

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148. John Paul II, "Allocution to the Delegates of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus," in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 247-54.

149. Further instances of where the John Paul II associates inculturation with potential disunity in the Church can be found in *Familiaris Consortio* 10, *Redemptoris Missio* 54 para. 1, "Fully Christian and Fully African," Address to Zairean Bishops in *Origins*, vol. 10 (1980), 7, etc.

openness at higher levels is a response to the what is happening at the popular level? Of course, as these processes have been happening simultaneously from the 1970's onwards, they may have been happening independently of each other, or there may have been a mutual causation. Perhaps understanding the exact causal relationship is not so crucial in this context.

The openness to indigenous cultures and traditions witnessed in magisterial teaching of Vatican II and encouraged in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* allowed for a change in theological mood in the Church in Southern Africa. Christians were encouraged to explore the ways in which their cultural heritage might contribute to the life of the community. Paul VI's explicit endorsement of the cult of the ancestors in *Africae Terrarum* opened the way for a more concerted effort to understand this central part of the South African culture in the light of Christian faith. His explanation of the earlier missionaries' failure to appreciate the positive value of the cult made way for a new assessment of the cult with less fear of censure.

Pius XI's command that seminaries be built in the mission territories for the formation of indigenous clergy with an equal ministry<sup>150</sup> had the benefit of training priests who understand not only the local language but also the culture.<sup>151</sup> Thus we have today in South Africa prominent priests, bishops and archbishops who write encouragingly and with confidence about the cult of the ancestors. Many of these writings have already been cited in the previous chapter, and will form the substance of our discussion in the following two chapters.

At the same time as the struggle for liberation from oppressive political structures was being waged, there was also a movement away from foreign intellectual constructs.

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150. Pius XI, "*Rerum Ecclesiae*," 21–26.

151. However, an understanding of the local language and culture does not necessarily imply a sympathy with, or natural desire to see elements of the culture installed in the Church. It is even likely that local clergy have a greater reluctance to take up issues of local culture because they know precisely how sensitive these points are.

Well educated local clergy and laity<sup>152</sup> were manifesting greater confidence in formulating theological concepts in terms of African cultural ideas, and applying them to the task of evangelisation. Other Africans, however, were studying in the West and learning and appropriating Western intellectual tools, or perhaps gaining confidence to engage with Western theology on their own terms.

The movements of black consciousness<sup>153</sup> and black theology<sup>154</sup> reflected a newfound confidence in the cultural and intellectual heritage of Africa, and recognised similar situations of oppression across the globe. The African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM) was established in South Africa.<sup>155</sup> African priests and archbishops began to write on the ancestor cult,<sup>156</sup> traditional religious symbols,<sup>157</sup> mortuary rites,<sup>158</sup> African traditions in general,<sup>159</sup> etc.

The fruits of reflection on the Gospel and African traditions have been published, recognising that it is useless to try to oppose traditions that are so deeply rooted in

152. There has been an insistence on the formation of excellent local clergy in many of the missionary documents we have considered, from Benedict XV's *Maximum Illud* to Pius XI's *Rerum Ecclesiae* 19ff., etc. To this is added the appeal to address the formation of local lay people for evangelisation, in Pius XII's *Evangelii Praecones* and *Fidei Donum*, John XXIII's *Princeps Pastorum*, Vatican II's *Ad Gentes* 20 and Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, etc.

153. In South Africa, this movement arose in the 1970's under the leadership of the charismatic Steve Biko. His thoughts on black consciousness can be read in the posthumous collection, *Steve Biko, I Write What I Like*, edited by Aelred Stubbs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

154. For an overview of black theology in South Africa, and its roots in the liberation struggle, written by a white academic theologian, consult Louise Kretschmar, *The Voice of Black Theology in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986).

155. This group of priests formed initially to address the perception of racism within the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa. The group wrote of cultural and racial marginalisation within the church. See African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement (ACAPSM), *A Call to Action, A Memorandum Addressed to the Bishops of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC)* (Pretoria, 1999).

156. See Augustinus Lekhotla Pula, *Tšabo ea Balimo: Maemo a litaba tšabo ea balimo le boloi har'a Basotho "A shejoa ke Mosotho oa Mokriste"* (Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works, 1988) (Fear of the ancestors: The situation regarding fear of the ancestors and sorcery among the Basotho as seen by a Sotho Christian.)

157. See Thomas Lesaoana Manyeli, *Religious Symbols of the Basotho* (Mazenod: Mazenod Printing Works, 1963), M.Th. Thesis at the University of Ottawa.

158. See Buti Tihagale, *Death, African Funeral Rites and the Gospel* (1998), privately circulated monograph.

159. Buti Tihagale, "Seafrika le Evangelii," *Moeletsi oa Basotho* (2000–01) This weekly column on African custom and the Gospel has examined the dimensions of rites of passage, remembering the dead, ancestors, Easter, divination, etc.

people's traditions.<sup>160</sup> Seminars have been held on the theme of Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa.<sup>161</sup> The cult of the ancestors has formed essential subject matter in seminars on pastoral practice<sup>162</sup> and inculturation.<sup>163</sup>

Experiments have been conducted which include the ancestors in Christian liturgy,<sup>164</sup> not always entirely in keeping with the guidelines proposed by the conference of bishops<sup>165</sup> or the instruction *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation*. I have attended three significant celebrations of the Eucharist in which the ancestors have been invoked, one of them concelebrated by a bishop, in which a sheep was led through the sanctuary at the offertory, with the suggestion that this was to be sacrificed to the ancestors.<sup>166</sup> At the same celebration a number of traditional Xhosa healers (*amaqirha*) were blessed by the clergy and in turn prayed over those members of the congregation who wished to approach. Another celebration invoking the ancestors was at the annual national conference of the Association of Catholic Tertiary Students (ACTS) in 2000. A third was at a workshop on inculturation for the youth of the Archdiocese of Cape Town in 1996.

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160. See Lesotho Catholic Bishops Conference, *Boithatlhobo ba Kereke: Pastoral Letter* (Maseru, 1988, 25 March).

161. See Kuckertz, Heinz, ed., *Ancestor Religion in Southern Africa: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ancestor Belief* (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981).

162. See H. Slattery and H. Bucher, eds., *Pastoral Orientation in a Changing World: Lectures, Recommendations of a Seminar Held at Lumko Institute 11–16 March 1974 and Repeated at Mariannhill Mission Centre 5–9 August 1974* (Lumko, Transkei: Lumko Institute, 1976).

163. See Mohlomi Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya, eds., *The Church and African Cultures: Conference Papers* (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995).

164. See for example, Kaizer Ngwenya, "Enjoying Mass with Your Ancestors: Welcome to the Catholic Church Where the Congregation Prays with Their Dead Relatives," *Drum*, 13 May 1999, 12f and Archdiocese of Cape Town, "Order of Mass According to the Roman Rite in the Proposed African Expression," Conference on the Theme: "African Customs in the Light of Our Faith" (Montana, Cape Town, 1996).

165. See SACBC, *Statement on Inculturation: Our Journey Towards Wholeness* (Pretoria: SACBC, 2002). The SACBC has appointed a committee for liturgy, one of whose principle tasks is to consider liturgical inculturation.

166. Archbishop Buti Tlhagale caused much consternation in South Africa (and abroad among animal rights activists, and evangelical Christians) when he suggested that there might be place for the sacrifice of animals to the ancestors in the Catholic celebration of the Eucharist. One response among many was United Church of God - British Isles, "Africa's Catholics in Row Over Sacrifice," *Good News Magazine* (2002), [Http://www.goodnews.org.uk/articles/wnr0003.htm](http://www.goodnews.org.uk/articles/wnr0003.htm) viewed on 2 December 2002.

These celebrations are by no means unique, and are happening more frequently, often on the inspiration of an individual pastor or at special events.

In these celebrations there is always a tension between the domestic and the public dimensions of the cult of the ancestors. The cult is traditionally a domestic affair, invoking the ancestors of a particular family as it is gathered for an event of significance to them. In times of unusual crisis, a clan or nation might invoke its collective ancestors. Thus to invoke the ancestors of all those gathered for a liturgical celebration of the Eucharist is a significant deviation from the familiar familial practice of the cult. Indeed it is often the case that some people gathered for the liturgy are not from a domestic culture which celebrates the cult of their ancestors. It cannot be assumed that everyone feels at home with the invocation of the ancestors of the whole congregation. This is an area for further study and catechesis.

#### **(4) Conclusion to Chapter**

In this chapter I have illustrated the changing fortunes of the cult of the ancestors among Christians in Southern Africa. Because of the availability of material and my knowledge of the language, I concentrated primarily on the cult among the Basotho, using this as a case study for the generalised suppression of the cult. I divided the history into two stages.

In the first stage, I showed how the Protestant missionaries, forbade the participation of Sotho Christians in anything to do with the cult of the ancestors: drink, dance, rites of passage, marriage and healing. I have also shown how Catholic missionaries thought that participation in the cult of the ancestors was in contravention of the first commandment, and how they encouraged the Sotho Catholics to turn rather to the cult of the saints. I looked at what motivated the missionaries in their contemporary outlook on the religions of others.

In the second stage of the history, I traced the resurgence of the cult of the ancestors, and this time particularly among Catholic Christians. The first step was to show with explicit evidence from two papal documents, *Africae Terrarum* and *Ecclesia in Africa* that there has been a change in attitude to the cult of the ancestors at the highest level in the Church. I then traced some reasons for this change of stance. I showed how there have been new social and ecclesiastical circumstances since the second half of the twentieth Century. These include the lifting of colonial rule in the developing countries, recognition of the cultures of peoples outside of Europe and North America, and a changing demography in the Church. The changing circumstances have been accompanied by changes in theology, which were evident at the Second Vatican Council, and especially visible in documents such as *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes*. A new vision of the Church has been accompanied by a new understanding of mission, and the use of culture as a theological category. I showed how the theology of inculturation was a development from that of adaptation, and how Pope John Paul II has a cautious approach to inculturation, insisting that it should in no way compromise the integrity of the Universal Church. Finally I showed how the changes of attitude evident at the hierarchical level of the Church have also been seen at the level of the laity and theological writers. There has been an explosion of energies surrounding the cult of the ancestors in South African Catholic circles.

This explosion of writing has accompanied a gradual political and mental decolonisation of South Africa. From the late 1960's onwards, there has also been an explosion of energies to rid the country of its odious apartheid rule. This has generated its own body of theological reflection. In the following two chapters, I will use arguably the most famous document of this industry, the *Kairos Document*, as a pattern to examine how local theological writing can be applied in an appropriate systematic and pastoral manner to the AIDS crisis. I will demonstrate how the resurgent cult of the ancestors enhances the possibility of "salvation" in the context of the AIDS pandemic.

## CHAPTER 4: AIDS AND KAIROS

### (1) Introduction

The opening chapter of this work is a theological reflection on the reality of the AIDS pandemic in the "new" South Africa, and on how this pandemic affects the lives of millions of people. In the second chapter I examined another reality that forms part of people's daily experience; namely, the cult of the ancestors. This relationship with the ancestors keeps many Bantu people of South Africa rooted in their tradition and culture, and in touch with their origins. It is an essential part of the identity of black South Africans. In the third chapter I showed how the Christian missionaries of the 19th Century tried to eliminate the cult of the ancestors from the lives of ordinary Christians. Membership of the Christian faith entailed abandoning traditional religious practices. I demonstrated, in the second stage of this history, signs of a changing attitude in the Catholic Church towards the cult of the ancestors, most particularly since the Second Vatican Council. This changing attitude towards the ancestors was accompanied by a more general recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in cultures apart from Western Christianity.

In the present chapter, I will synthesise my reflections on the AIDS pandemic and the cult of the ancestors. Both are unavoidable features of the context in which Christians live in South Africa, and in which they have to make sense of their faith. As a hermeneutical key for bringing the reflections together, I will use the idea of *kairos* which was popularised in the *Kairos Document* - a major theological work, influential during the struggle for liberation from apartheid. The document is also useful for our considerations here, because it represents a third strand of the present context, namely the fact that the country has recently emerged as a democracy after 350 years of racist rule and fifty of

resistance to white domination in apartheid politics. This emergent democracy is, in turn, of relevance in the considerations of AIDS and the resurgence of the ancestor cult.

AIDS, the ancestor cult and political liberation raise the questions of the meaning of salvation, death and the mission of the Church. These questions I will examine using the structure of the *Kairos Document* as a device with which to compare and contrast the theologies represented (sometimes implicitly) in traditional church teaching, in the cult of the ancestors, and finally in a more prophetically-engaged reflection on the context.

## (2) AIDS as a *Kairos*

In considering the AIDS pandemic in the "new" South Africa, I propose that it is appropriate to treat the pandemic as the new "*kairos*." I will apply this familiar theological category to a new situation. The following three articles (which I cite in alphabetical order) appeared in 2001, suggesting a *kairos*-type of theological reflection for the AIDS crisis:

(i) Maluleke says that the "HIV/AIDS pandemic has ushered in a new *kairos* for the world in general and for the African continent in particular."<sup>1</sup> Using the definitions of *kairos* from the *KD* he says: "The AIDS crisis catapults us into a 'moment of truth' because it brings us face to face with the failures, sinfulness, frailty and interdependence of human beings. It reveals the 'truth' about the limits of human knowledge, the inability of science and technology to save us."<sup>2</sup> It also forces us to confront the reality of death and our own frailty.

As Professor of Black and African Theologies at UNISA, Maluleke's particular concern in this article regards theological education and educators. He suggests that "the challenge of HIV/AIDS would aptly highlight a dimension of theological impotence for

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1. Tinyiko Maluleke, "The Challenge of HIV/AIDS for Theological Education in Africa: Towards an HIV/AIDS Sensitive Curriculum," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (August 2001): 125.

2. Maluleke, "The Challenge of HIV/AIDS," 130.

theological education today.”<sup>3</sup> That is, there is no ready-made theology that is suitable for helping people to reflect on their experiences of HIV/AIDS, neither among traditional Western, nor among black and African theologies. The “*shibboleths* no longer suffice.” Just as the world and South Africa were celebrating the end of the cold war and apartheid, the AIDS pandemic came along and “makes a mockery of many of our hopes and claims - sending us all into a deep crisis.” Maluleke “argue[s] that in our times, there is no theological discipline that can afford to ignore HIV/AIDS issues in one way or another.”<sup>4</sup>

Maluleke argues elsewhere<sup>5</sup> that as the “*new kairos*,” HIV/AIDS is connected to many of our “preferred agenda [-] race, gender, culture, etc.” Thus, from whatever angle one approaches Christian ministry, AIDS is a factor. This reality “beckons us to deeper analysis of culture and globalization so that we are able to penetrate” what is hidden or open, what is said and done.

(ii) Rakoczy says that a *kairos* is a “sacred time of God’s presence” which we ignore at our peril. She maintains that the HIV/AIDS pandemic constitutes one such “*kairos* for South Africa, a time to realise that the future of our country is literally at stake - both in terms of the economic and social indicators of life and more importantly, in the quality of the human response to those who suffer.”<sup>6</sup> The credibility of the Christian community is also at stake, as it must become engaged again in the future of the whole country.

(iii) In his article on prophetic theology and the challenge of the *kairos*, Van der Water lists HIV/AIDS as one of the factors in the “new” South African context that calls for a renewed prophetic theology:

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3. Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS,” 127.

4. Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS,” 129.

5. Tinyiko Maluleke, “Theology in (South) Africa: How the Future Has Changed,” in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 378.

6. Susan Rakoczy, “Christology in the Context of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic,” *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (2001): 15.

Other factors such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the abuse of women and children, the breakdown of family life, corruption in the private and public sectors, secularisation and the escalation of violent crime merely underline the need for a re-defined prophetic theology that is coming to grips with the vicissitudes and vagaries of the post-Apartheid social order.<sup>7</sup>

While not specifically using the language of *kairos*, the SACBC link AIDS, which they call a "crisis," to the past struggles in South Africa, to the need for divine intervention.

I believe that this is *kairos* implicitly theology. The bishops write:

We invite all people to unite in prayer to Almighty God in this time of crisis in our nations. In the past in South Africa, we approached God to help us in our struggle for freedom and human dignity and we experienced the great miracle of transition.

Now we pray for another "miracle" to bring us that inner freedom which will enable our nations to choose the right way to uphold human dignity in our new struggle - the battle against HIV/AIDS. Jesus is with us still today on our way of the cross of HIV/AIDS.<sup>8</sup>

Thus it is not an exaggeration, and nor am I alone in stating that the AIDS pandemic represents a moment of testing for South African society in general, and the churches in particular.<sup>9</sup> Realising the implications of 5 million people being infected with HIV; these authors envision a concerted response, similar to that elicited by the system of apartheid repression. As the ideology of apartheid touched every level of society, so too,

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7. Desmond Van der Water, "A Legacy for Contextual Theology: Prophetic Theology and the Challenge of the *Kairos*," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 47.

8. SACBC, *A Message of Hope from the Catholic Bishops to the People of God in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland*, Message from the July Plenary Session (Pretoria: SACBC, 2001), [Http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm) viewed on 21 September 2001.

9. AIDS is not only a *kairos* for the churches in South Africa. In his North American context, William Henry Barcus III describes AIDS as a similar challenge for the Church, without actually using the term:

Occasionally in human history great clouds pass over us that, with all their lightning, thunder and darkness, become litmus tests for the human race. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is precisely such a litmus test. To humanity the question posed is, "Will you stay humane?" For the Church, with its curious mixture of humanity's worst and best, the AIDS crisis is a challenge to raise ourselves toward the Divine, for that is what we call the more humane. Or will the Church cling with unquestioning and easy adherence to the beliefs and dictates of earlier primordial times?

See William Henry Barcus III, "The Gospel Imperative," in *The Gospel Imperative in the Midst of AIDS: Towards a Prophetic Pastoral Theology*, edited by Robert H. Iles (Wilton CT.: Morehouse, 1989), 3.

the AIDS pandemic highlights the issues of poverty, migrant labour, unequal access to medical care, gender relationships and exploitation, church teaching, unemployment, etc. Neglecting to respond to this “moment of truth” would be a betrayal of the Christian mission. Or as Ross says: “[The HIV/AIDS pandemic] is a defining issue for Christian mission. If the church is not able to confess its faith in the eye of this storm, then it will have missed a part of its core calling in these times.”<sup>10</sup> It is appropriate at this stage to examine in greater depth, this concept of *kairos* or “moment of truth” as it was presented in the *Kairos Document*.

### **(3) Introduction to the *Kairos Document***

The *Kairos Document (KD)* was drafted as an ecumenical<sup>11</sup> collaboration of South African theologians and church leaders. After extensive consultation with lay Christians, the document was published in September 1985, at the height of government repression of black people living in the townships of South Africa. The military clampdown was particularly severe on young people who were boycotting the inferior education of their black schools and who were highly mobilised to overturn apartheid.

### **(4) Contents of the *Kairos Document***

Citing Lk 19:44, the *kairos* theologians describe Jesus foreseeing the imminent destruction and massacre of Jerusalem and weeping over the city “and all because you did not recognize the time of your overseer” (αὐθ’ ὧν οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς

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10. Kenneth R. Ross, “The HIV/AIDS Pandemic: What is at Stake for Christian Mission?” *Missiology: An International Review* XXXII, no. 3 (July 2004): 346.

11. There were several editions of the *Kairos Document*. Affixed to the edition published by W.B. Eerdmans in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1986, were the signatures of 151 theologians and leaders from twenty-seven Christian denominations. These twenty-seven denominations represent mostly mainline churches, a few AIC’s and one or two which would usually be considered Pentecostal. Thus the signatories of the *Kairos Document* came from a broad spectrum of church membership. That does not mean that they were signing officially on behalf of their respective churches.

σοῦ). They maintain that South Africa is at a similar *kairos*, a dangerous time of crisis. The theologians say that as well as a moment of truth, a *kairos* is also a moment of grace and opportunity which calls for serious decision and action. Thus a *kairos* is a time in which people and organisations are exposed for what they really are. Not to take advantage of a *kairos* can only lead to peril. The *kairos* being referred to is the political upheaval and the threat of all-out war between the oppressed and the oppressors. This *kairos* also has an ecclesiastical dimension because, the theologians assert, the Church is divided into black and white churches, in which the oppressed majority is radically at odds with the affluent minority within the churches. There seem to be two Gospel messages: one for each group, and this seriously compromises witness to the Gospel.

Displaying a critical<sup>12</sup> consciousness, the *KD* then identifies and analyzes *three* *theologies* that were current in South Africa:

(i) The document is highly critical of "State Theology" which was used to support the apartheid ideology. It points out how Rom 13:1-7 was misused to justify authoritarian state rule. This in turn was used to ground an imperative to support the enforcement of law and order. The state declared how it was opposing the threat of atheist communism on the subcontinent, and thus God-fearing Christians owed it their allegiance. The *KD* then points out how the state-created image of God was false and was being used to lend a veneer of religious legitimacy to the dealings of the state.

(ii) The *KD* is marginally less scathing in its critique of what it calls "Church Theology." This is the traditional theology proposed by the church leaders as they

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<sup>12</sup> I use the term "critical" here in reference to the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas advanced the theory that knowledge can be used in technical, practical and emancipatory interests. The latter cognitive interest involves, *inter alia*, the recognition that oppressive societies use language to establish and maintain the interests of one or some groups, often at the expense of another or others. See Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt / Main, 1968) translated into English as *Knowledge and Human Interests* in 1971. Since the Kairos Document was published by a committee, it is not clear who among of the 151 signatory theologians was responsible for the introduction of this hermeneutical theory. However,

responded to the growing crisis of violence and repression. It relies on the stock ideas of reconciliation, justice and non-violence without examining the underlying causes of the problem. The *Kairos* theologians say that the theological response of the churches was largely barren because it completely lacked social analysis, and was based on an inadequate understanding of politics and political strategy. This brand of theology made "a virtue of neutrality and sitting on the sidelines."<sup>13</sup>

The *KD* identifies the fundamental reason why "Church Theology" had not developed a social analysis as:

*the type of faith and spirituality that has dominated Church life for centuries. As we all know, spirituality has tended to be an other-worldly affair that has very little, if anything at all, to do with the affairs of this world. Social and political matters were seen as worldly affairs that have nothing to do with the spiritual concerns of the Church. Moreover, spirituality has been understood to be purely private and individualistic. Public affairs and social problems were thought to be beyond the sphere of spirituality. And finally the spirituality we inherit tends to rely upon God to intervene in his own good time to put right what is wrong in the world. That leaves very little for human beings to do except to pray for God's intervention.*<sup>14</sup>

(iii) The document calls for a "Prophetic Theology" that is a "biblical, spiritual, pastoral, and above all, prophetic" response from Christians, that is seen to be "clearly and unambiguously taking a stand."<sup>15</sup> This prophetic response must be specific to the particular problem of South Africa, and hence begins with a social analysis or reading the signs of the times. It looks at the biblical evidence for God's rejection of oppression, siding with the oppressed, and calling the oppressors to repentance. It looks to the Christian tradition of denouncing tyranny, concluding that the South African regime of the day is tyrannical, and irreformable. Thus there was an imperative for the present regime to be removed for the good of all the people. Finally, a prophetic theology conveys hope, founded not on illusion, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The core of this hope is the coming Kingdom of God.

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Marxist theory was quite prevalent as a tool for analysing contemporary South African society.

13. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985), 35.

14. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 35.

15. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 37.

A final chapter of the *KD* challenges churches to action, reassuring them that God takes the side of the oppressed. Christians must become involved in the struggle for liberation and for justice. Church activities should be made relevant to the real needs of the poor and oppressed, and should include campaigns that promote the struggle for liberation. In order for Christians not to duplicate the efforts of civil society, they are urged to participate within the existing structures of the liberation movements: "We all have the same goals even when we differ about the final significance of what we are struggling for."<sup>16</sup> The Church leaders should mobilise their members to work and plan for a change in the illegitimate government, and if necessary themselves participate in campaigns of civil disobedience. The Church should take moral leadership in action as well as in words.

A concluding *methodological note* is made by the theologians. They recognise the provisional nature of the document, as a work in progress. It is a response to a particular situation, and is designed to provoke and stimulate but not to prescribe reflection, discussion and action. The document ends with a call for the support of Christians around the world.

This methodology has come to be known as "people's theology"<sup>17</sup> in which many people reflect together, in small groups, sometimes with the help of theologians, to come to a theological understanding of their situation. It shows that non-specialists can and should reflect theologically, not necessarily in the presence of, or under the guidance of trained theologians. When the fruits of this theological reflection are brought together, and issue a challenge and inspiration for other Christians, it is called "prophetic theology."

The *KD* is an example of contextual theology, addressing issues relevant to a specific people as they try to understand one dimension of their experience in the light of

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16. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 49.

17. The epithet "people's" is designed to lend popular grass-roots validity to the method. Being 'of the people' is a very important claim in a society that has come to reject elitism as a mark of privilege and unfair access to the wealth that was denied to the majority for so many generations.

their faith. Its strength lies in its addressing one particular context and drawing on the Christian tradition to illuminate the situation in question. The document makes no attempt to be universally significant or applicable for all situations of oppression. It corresponds with Bevans' Praxis model of contextual theology in that it follows the basic circular hermeneutical movement from (1) committed action to (2) reflection (a) on the situation and the action and (b) on the Bible and tradition, to come to (3) further committed and intelligent action.<sup>18</sup> As such, it may be considered to be in the same theological stable as Latin American liberation theologies, and the Asian feminist theologies described by Bevans. This poses problems of its own, which I shall now examine.

#### **(5) Disadvantages of Using the *Kairos Document***

I will consider here two reasons for regarding the *KD* as an inadequate model on which to base one's theological reflections on the current AIDS crisis. Chief among these is the document's affinity to liberation theology. Because of this close association with liberation theology, I believe it is necessary at the outset to address some potential criticisms of the *KD*. Less importantly is its provenance in the heat of a struggle, and thus its very confrontational tone. I do not consider either of these to be overwhelming reasons to reject the document.

Firstly, the *KD* is closely identified with the liberation struggle in South Africa. It is what passed for "liberation theology" in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> There are some legitimate criticisms of liberation theology raised, in particular, by the Congregation for the Doctrine

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18. See Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 68f.

19. The use of the term "liberation" was severely restricted and controlled under the Security and State of Emergency legislations. Until 1990 it was forbidden to belong to any of the liberation movements. To quote them or meet with their members was punishable. A number of popular circumlocutions and codes were devised to get around this restriction. Thus the term "liberation" was not applied to theology, although what was being called "contextual theology" looked remarkably similar to what was called "liberation theology" in other contexts.

of the Faith.<sup>20</sup> However from a close reading of the *KD*, it is evident that it avoids many of the concerns of the Congregation of the putative failings of theologies of liberation. Most importantly, the *KD* is not premised on the dialectical materialist presuppositions of Marxist social analysis.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the *KD* neither reduces the novelty of the New Testament to a political or social agenda, nor identifies the Kingdom of God with a new secular order. The document does not regard sin as only in the political realm, and salvation as the abolition of apartheid. Nor does it subscribe to the theory of the necessity of the class-struggle and the inevitability of the victory of the working class. Finally, in its epistemology, truth is not a reality which is constructed in the engagement in the liberation struggle.

On the other hand, the *KD* has many traits in common with liberation theology. Its primary concern is for people suffering under the yoke of apartheid repression, and how through 'praxis' this suffering might be alleviated. The theologians relativise and critique some of the authoritative theological positions of church and state in South Africa. They write that there can be no compromise with evil and oppressive social structures. In denying that reconciliation and non-violence be the definitive theological ethical responses

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20. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City, 1984). However, this document is not the final word on liberation theology, and is not beyond criticism, itself. For example, Leonardo Boff has a major critique of the document. He says its methodology is that of Central European speculative thought, beginning with a *a priori* speculation which is then applied to a practical problem. On the other hand, liberation theologians begin with a concrete reality, namely oppression, and ask pertinent theological questions about liberation in that context. Liberation theology thus has an "essential relationship with liberating action." Consequently "most of the charges of reductionism leveled against the theology of liberation (. . .) do not really apply to this type of theology." See Leonardo Boff, "Vatican Instruction Reflects European Mind-Set," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by Alfred T. Hennelley, Originally Published in *Folha de São Paulo* on 31 August 1984 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 416f.

21. In his comment on the CDF Instruction, Gutiérrez distinguishes between using Marxist social analysis and adopting Marxism in its entirety: "Many schools of social thought have influenced theology, and one of them happens to be the social thought of Marx. But one thing is the critical use of the social sciences and another is the adoption of Marxist analysis in its entirety, with all the ideological presuppositions that implies." See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Criticism Will Deepen, Clarify Liberation Theology," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by Alfred T. Hennelley. Interview in Peruvian newspaper *La República* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 421.

to apartheid, they appear to accept that conflict is an inevitable dimension of society at this stage of its history. However, this is not presented as a *necessary* state of human life. They also raise the familiar theme of liberation theology, namely, God's preferential love for the poor and oppressed, and the Church's obligation to do likewise.

Secondly, the document is a product of the heat of the moment when townships across the country were in flames with severe military repression. The authors deliberately used jarring, sometimes violent, expressions to stimulate reflection and to evoke a response. The document is thus not designed as a polished, nuanced theological statement. It was thus sometimes appropriately criticised for its strong language and lack of nuance. The document met much negative reaction and positive indifference from the established churches, some of which is recorded by Villa-Vicencio.<sup>22</sup> The main thrust of the opposition seems to have been directed at the document's presentation of stark polarisation in the country and in the church, its denying the legitimacy of the apartheid government, and its support for violence as a means of overthrowing the regime.<sup>23</sup>

Neither of these arguments amounts to sufficient reason to reject the use of the *KD* on the basis of its structural or theological inadequacy. I find the structure particularly fortuitous in allowing a juxtaposition of three different theological positions.

#### **(6) Justification for Using the Kairos Document as a Structure**

It may not be immediately evident why I propose to use the structure of a document from the history of the South African liberation struggle. There are five reasons why I find the *KD* singularly appropriate.

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22. See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 158–68.

23. See, for example, KwaZulu Government Bureau of Communications, "The Kairos Document," *Clarion Call* 3 (1986): 29, <http://disa.nu.ac.za/articledisplaypage.asp?articletitle=The+Kairos+Document&filename=CCV386> viewed on 28 April 2004.

Firstly, as shown above by Maluleke, Rakoczy and Van der Water, the category of *kairos* applies to the current context. The crisis of AIDS illustrates the economic realities and social division that prevail in the country. There are those who have access to privately-funded medical care, and can thus afford life-prolonging medications, while others die unmedicated. The overwhelming majority of the people living with AIDS are black. It is they who attend funerals weekly and mourn the loss of their loved ones. While it is said that "everybody is affected," or the weaker claim everybody in the country knows someone with AIDS, the reality is that black people suffer disproportionately.<sup>24</sup> The experience of black and white people in the religious contexts are thus quite different, when so many black people attend funerals so often, and white people have more time for recreation at the weekend. It cannot be otherwise that the churches are divided.

South Africa is also facing a time of opportunity. The sooner the country acknowledges the gravity of the situation, and makes provision for the prevention of transmission and the care of people infected with HIV, the less the economic and social impact will be.<sup>25</sup> It is a time to stop political prevarication and to take decisive and bold action. It is a time that is calling for greater compassion, sympathy and support between those more and those less directly affected by the pandemic. It is a time that has seen campaigns of civil disobedience in the importing of generic drugs from Brazil, and special campaigns for the provision of medications. It is an opportunity for the churches again to

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24. The reasons for this are manifold: partly due to an initial lower health condition, and hence susceptibility to opportunistic infections, as a result of apartheid, partly due to a prevailing culture of men's entitlement to sexual intercourse on demand, partly due to the migrant labour system, which still sees many men separated from their families for prolonged periods, partly due to less information about the prevention of AIDS, partly due to the use of sex as a means of transaction among poor and vulnerable people, partly due to the greater economic marginalisation and thus alienation of many black youth, who engage in risky behaviour, etc.

25. "Intelligence" sources in the country have been warning of the pandemic as the greatest threat to "security" in South Africa. See Margriet Malan, "The Influence of HIV/AIDS on National Security for South Africa: The Concerns and Implications from a Human Resources Perspective" (2000), [http://www.mil.za/CSANDF/CJSupp/TrainingFormation/DefenceCollege/Researchpapers2000\\_02/malan.htm](http://www.mil.za/CSANDF/CJSupp/TrainingFormation/DefenceCollege/Researchpapers2000_02/malan.htm) viewed on 9 April 2003.

reflect theologically on the unique situation, to offer ethical teaching and to show moral leadership in care for ill people and orphans. In such a time of *kairos*, the *KD* offers a solid basis for reflection.

Secondly, the *KD* is uniquely familiar in South Africa and abroad. The document is well known in South African theological and lay circles. It has contributed to the recognised pedigree of a number of other documents. The *KD* initiated what became a tradition of calling an ecumenical range of Christians to give theological consideration to realities particularly affecting South African society. It was the first in a series of popular ecumenical theological responses to the oppression of apartheid,<sup>26</sup> and is the best known among them. Other such documents include, *inter alia* in chronological order:

(i) *The Road to Damascus*,<sup>27</sup> a document by third world theologians who consider the historical perspective of colonialism and oppression in the developing world,

(ii) *The Rustenburg Declaration* of 1990, from a conference which brought together delegates from 85 South African churches, who confessed their complicity with structures of oppression and resolved to become more engaged in the struggle to end apartheid.

(iii) *Violence: The New Kairos: Challenge to the Churches*, published by the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) in September 1990 when the townships were again on fire, and the army was engaged in battles against the youth. This document was very specific in naming the causes for the present violence, and the authors went as far as to suggest that there was explicit government involvement in maintaining a state of low intensity conflict in the townships.

I would argue that the *KD* remains the best known, the most influential and widely used of these ecumenical documents, and is in some sense seminal among popular

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26. "It was the first of a number of statements calling for a new look at the role of the church in South Africa." See J.W. Hofmeyer, J.A. Millard, and C.J.J. Froneman, eds., *History of the Church in South Africa: A Document and Source Book* (Pretoria: UNISA, 1991), 362.

27. *The Road to Damascus* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989).

contextual theologies. However, there is little hard evidence that the documents did in fact effect a conversion of practice or theological stance of any church or group of individuals. The value of the documents lay in the process of bringing together a wide front of ecumenical theologians who publicly articulated a South African Christian response to injustice and repression, thereby undermining the claims of the state to theological legitimacy.

The *KD* has also been used internationally to stimulate reflection groups in developed and developing nations.<sup>28</sup> For example, the Kairos Covenant in the USA was the fruit of a convocation organised by the National Council of Churches to "reflect on the Kairos Document and to formulate appropriate responses to the situation in South Africa."<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, the *KD* is also closely identified with the ecumenical movement of mainline churches through the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and ICT (established in 1981). While it is neither the first nor the only contextual theological document, its narrow association with the SACC and ICT lent it added weight and prominence, and helped to boost the profile of the emerging ICT. The document is considered foundational and the exemplary seminal work in contextual theology in South Africa. For this reason, it has become a reference point in ecumenical contextual theology, and one to which South African theologians often turn in theological writings.

AIDS is an issue that affects Christians across the spectrum. Whether they belong to the mainline churches, AIC's or the Pentecostal movement, whether they participated in the original *KD* or not, members of all the churches in South Africa suffer from HIV infection and AIDS. As we saw in the previous chapter, the cult of the ancestors is

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28. One only needs to browse the internet to find *Kairos Documents* proposed for Europe and for Zimbabwe.

29. Willis H. Logan, ed., *The Kairos Covenant: Standing with South African Christians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1988), vii.

increasingly in the consciousness and practice of mainline churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and is thus no longer the preserve of some AIC's. The experience and reflection of the AIC's on the cult of the ancestors would be a valuable contribution to a new ecumenical reflection on AIDS in the current context. As very few AIC's participated in the original *KD* process, it would be enriching for them to participate in this kind of contextual reflection. Thus the ecumenical nature of the *kairos* process has the potential to bring together two strong strands of local theology.

Fourthly, the *KD* took the notion of *kairōs* and turned it into a hermeneutical category for analysing a current situation from theological and political perspectives. Without going into in-depth justification for linking a social situation to faith-inspired action, the theologians take it as self-evident that the political crisis elicited a response of a certain kind. The nexus is made between orthopraxis and orthodoxy without getting lost in the details of the connection. I find this very useful in the search for an appropriate response to the AIDS *kairos*, which should be doctrinally sound but also issue in action that esteems human life and dignity.

Finally, I find the structure of the *KD* opportune because it illustrates two less than adequate theological responses to a given context, and proposes a third, more appropriate, prophetic theology. This is a useful structure for developing my theological considerations, as I believe that neither classical Christian nor ancestral theologies provide satisfactory responses to the AIDS crisis. It is toward a third response to this crisis that this thesis is directed.

## **(7) Conclusion**

On balance, I believe the *KD* offers a legitimate template for pursuing an enquiry into the AIDS crisis and the cult of the ancestors. The document is closely associated with liberation theology, which means that it uses as starting point the lived experience of

millions of Christians. A problem is that it is neither as nuanced nor as refined as might be expected from another document which would have been several years in the making. But it has the advantages of being relevant to the crisis of AIDS in the current South Africa, of being familiar to many Christians, of being the fruit of ecumenical collaboration, of providing a clear hermeneutical category, of providing a contrast of differing theological positions, and finally of issuing a call to move from reflection to action.

In line with the structure of the *KD*, I will compare the theologies implicit in the ancestor cult of the African worldview, and in classical Christian theological responses, and finally offer a more prophetic theology for the AIDS crisis.

The reader will notice that in place of the "state theology" of the *KD*, I am using what I call the ancestral worldview. This does not suggest any equivalence between the two theologies. In particular, the *KD* rejected state theology as evil and deficient and, in line with the resolution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, in 1982, heretical. No such judgement is implied in my work. In fact, elements of this ancestral worldview will be taken into the proposed prophetic theology.

The areas of theology I consider most relevant to the ancestor cult and AIDS are eschatology, soteriology and ecclesiology. These form a matrix with the ancestral worldview, classical Christianity and a prophetic response as follows:

	Ancestral worldview	Classical Christianity	Prophetic Respose
Soteriology: The meaning of salvation in the context of AIDS?	ancestral helpers; right relationships; preventing isolation; care of the dying	in Christ alone; many metaphors;	prevention and cure; addressing stigma
Eschatology: What does the future hold?	criteria for becoming an ancestor; structural amnesia	the Four last things; the Kingdom of God; survival of the soul; resurrection of the body	The <i>presence</i> of the Kingdom of God; cultic dimensions; assuring memories
Ecclesiology: What is the role of 'believing' community?	role of ritual; caring for orphans	community of saints; sacraments; "community serving humanity"	prophetic action; address gender issues; Christian "healing"

It is important to note that the prophetic response, as exemplified by the *KD*, is neither simply a hybrid of nor a plain opposition to the other two theological outlooks. It is based on the recognition that no response to any question is adequate if it remains in the abstract and theoretical realms and does not consider the effects on the lives of people who might be involved:

It is not enough in these circumstances to repeat generalized Christian principles. We need a bold and incisive response that is prophetic because it speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis, a response that does not give the impression of sitting on the fence but is clearly and unambiguously taking a stand.<sup>30</sup>

The pandemic of AIDS also raises the questions of evil and suffering, or what has historically been called "theodicy." This question might also be usefully studied from the perspectives of classical Christianity, the ancestral worldview, and a more prophetic stance. Related to the topic of salvation could be that of 'healing,' which might also be studied from these three perspectives. The table above is therefore not meant to be an exhaustive list of theological questions that arise in the context of the AIDS pandemic.

Each cell of the matrix above represents a potential thesis in itself. However, due to constraints of space, it is my purpose in this thesis to address only those questions concerning soteriology specific to the context of AIDS in South Africa. In a work of this size, it is not possible to deal exhaustively with two millennia of the Christian tradition on salvation. It will only be possible to give the outlines of the history of Christian soteriology.

Accordingly, in the following chapter I will consider the question of salvation in the context of AIDS from:

- 1) the perspective of the ancestor cult
- 2) a classical Christian approach
- 3) a prophetic response.

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30. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 37.

Following the structure of the *KD*, I will conclude these considerations with a reflection on methodology, and a recognition of the challenge that AIDS poses across the world.

## CHAPTER 5: AIDS AND SALVATION

### (1) Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the *Kairos Document*, the product of an ecumenical group of theologians and pastors reflecting on the deepening political crisis in South Africa in the 1980's. I applied the document's key notion of "kairos" to present day South Africa, demonstrating that the AIDS pandemic is of sufficiently grave a nature to be considered such a kairos - a moment of testing and opportunity for the Christian community, and the country in general. Analysing the content of the document, I showed that an integral feature is its critical juxtaposition of three types of theology being used by three interest groups. Finally, I showed how this juxtaposition might, in the present kairos, be applied to the question of salvation from the perspectives of the cult of the ancestors, of classical Christianity, and of a prophetic approach.

It is the purpose of this present chapter to pursue further the question of salvation in the context of AIDS using this tripartite juxtaposition. I will begin by making it clear how AIDS raises the question of salvation, and why soteriology is relevant to the present crisis. Then I will begin the study of the meaning of salvation from the three perspectives of the ancestor cult, of classical Christianity, and of a more prophetic Christian approach.

I will show how the cult of the ancestors might make a contribution of an exclusively medical nature, and how there might also be a broader meaning of salvation from the perspective of the ancestor cult. I will show how the cult might be a source of both consolation and desolation (in the classical Ignatian sense, which I will explain at that point) for people whose lives are affected by HIV/AIDS.

In tracing the history of the theology of salvation in classical Christianity, from New Testament times to the present, I will rely largely on the work of two theologians: I will use

the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to outline the history of soteriology in the New Testament, patristic, medieval and modern periods, and to consider theories of salvation such as solidarity and substitution. When I begin to look at more modern anthropologically-inspired models of salvation, I will rely heavily on the work of Antoine Vergote to consider soteriological schemes such as sacrifice and initiation.

When I examine the response to the AIDS crisis from the perspective of a prophetic theology, I will use a simple analysis of prophecy as annunciation, denunciation and prophetic action. At the annunciation phase of prophetic theology, it becomes clear that Christian ministry can and should be combined with the insights of ritual and healing in the ancestral cult. What has to be denounced are those factors which lead to the proliferation of HIV infection as well as those which exacerbate the suffering of those already affected by the virus, notably stigma and government inefficiency. Finally, in terms of prophetic action, I examine the activities of one secular organisation, and how Christian prophetic action assures the credibility of the previously stated annunciation and denunciation.

## **(2) The Meanings of Salvation in the Context of AIDS**

In South Africa, AIDS is still a terminal illness.<sup>1</sup> Even though government hospitals began routinely dispensing antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in April 2004, and though these drugs have been available to private medical patients who have been able to afford them for years, it is unlikely that the medication will reach all the people who need them.<sup>2</sup> The

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1. In many countries of the developed world, it is considered a chronic manageable condition.

2. On 1 December 2003, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNAIDS announced their "Treat 3 Million by 2005" (3 by 5) initiative. The aim of the initiative is to provide ARV's to 3 million people worldwide by the end of 2005 (See <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2003/pr89/en/> viewed on 12 June 2004.) If this goal were achieved, that means that half of the estimated 6 million people whose lives could potentially be saved by ARV's would be receiving them. The WHO webpage (<http://www.who.int/3by5/en/coverage2003.jpg> viewed on 12 June 2004) shows that in 2003, fewer than 5% of the people who require ARV treatment in South Africa were receiving these medications.

first chapter of this work concluded with a discussion of the difficulties and tardiness of the “rollout” of ARV therapy in the state medical services. Logistics and training backlogs will mean that many people, particularly in rural areas some distance from the primary medical services, will not have access to these potentially life-prolonging drugs. In the light of this discussion, it is evident that AIDS will foreseeably be responsible for the premature deaths of millions of people.<sup>3</sup>

Not only is AIDS responsible for physical death, but it is responsible for the premature “social death” of many people who suffer from AIDS infections. Such are the stigma and fear associated with AIDS, that people suffering from AIDS are often marginalised, and shunned from society. In this sense, they are treated as though they were already dead, and this exclusion from ordinary society amounts to a social death. This is particularly acute among Africans whose traditional self-identity is social. “*Motho ke motho ka batho (ba bang)*” runs the proverb: “A person is a person through (other) people.” When one is cut off from these other people, one’s own sense of life, humanity and identity are deeply affected. This isolation is thus surprising and all the more painful in communities for whom human contact and interaction are so important.

Associated with the fear of one’s own death, is the apprehension of what might happen to one’s children. In poor communities, there is no institutional provision for orphans. Traditionally orphans are taken into the homes of members of the extended family and raised as a member of the family. But when these are already overextended, it is not unusual for children to be left to fend for themselves in child-headed households<sup>4</sup> or

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3. In what follows, I will assume that the provision of ARV’s has equal soteriological significance in terms of the ancestral cult, a classical Christian outlook, and a prophetic stance. They represent the “best possible scenario” for people already living with HIV infection. Despite the difficulties associated with the drugs - the complication of the regimes and the side effects, they do have the advantage of keeping people alive and often in prolonged good health. So I will not consider separately in each case (ancestral cult, classical Christianity and prophetic response) the provision of this medication.

4. See Deborah Ewing, “Welfare,” in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 79–93.

to make a living on the streets where they are vulnerable to many forms of exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, their education is often interrupted, both during the prolonged illness of a parent and after the death of that parent.<sup>6</sup> This added concern may lead to further despair.

Finally, for people suffering from AIDS who have no children of their own, the question arises of who will remember them when they have died. One of the chief dimensions of the 'untimeliness' of death from AIDS, is that it strikes younger people, often without children. As in many Western cultures, it is a value to "pass on the family name," so, in South African cultures, fecundity is also a value. Indeed, as I argued in chapter two of this work, there is widespread agreement that the key criterion for 'becoming' an ancestor is that one have offspring. Citing Obengo, IMBISA, Michalek, Kemdirim and Erasmus, I showed that this 'juridical criterion' (Michalek) amounts to a 'cosmological duty' (Erasmus). According to the worldview, not to have fulfilled this duty causes exclusion from the company of the ancestors and implies that one will not be venerated as an ancestor.

In the light of the concerns listed above - physical death, social death, apprehension for one's orphans, and possible exclusion from the ancestors - it is not a misplaced question to ask what the meanings or promises of salvation might be in such circumstances. The question may perhaps not be articulated in terms of theological discourse, but that does not mean that there is no theological response. At this stage I will make use of the structure of the *KD* to begin to present a contextual soteriology for this

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5. On the care of AIDS orphans in Pietermaritzburg, see Margie Pretorius, "Thandanani," in *Serving Humanity: A Sabbath Reflection: The Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa After Seven Years*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1996), 206–09.

6. See Peter Badcock-Walters, "Education," in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 95–110 and Catholic AIDS Action Conference Namibia Catholic Bishops, "Children, AIDS and Death," *Marfam Ties*, November 2001, 4 and Bronwen Dachs, "Children Forced to Parent in AIDS World," *The Prairie Messenger* 80 (6 November 2002): 20. These are a few of the growing number of studies on the effects of AIDS on the children of Africa.

crisis. I will compare responses coming from the perspectives of the ancestor cult, a mainstream church theology, and finally, a more "prophetic" theological response.

### **(3) Responses to the Questions of Salvation**

#### **Section One: Perspective of the Ancestor Cult**

The first type of response that the *Kairos Document* critiques is what it calls "state theology." This is a "theological justification for the status quo."<sup>7</sup> It was appropriate to examine the theology of the state during the years of apartheid, because there was such an explicit theology, based on an interpretation of the Exodus story in favour of the Afrikaner nation. There is no such explicit theology of the present government. I consider it justified in this case to redefine the parameters of the *KD* in order to examine the theology implicit in the cult of the ancestors, another powerfully conservative force in South African society.<sup>8</sup> This does not imply a rejection of the cult of the ancestors.

The question I will consider in this section is how the cult of the ancestors can help people with AIDS to live and to overcome any of the death-dealing aspects of the syndrome. Or in other words, how we can speak of the cult in terms of "salvation." Firstly I will consider the strictly medical contribution of the cult of the ancestors. Secondly I will consider at greater length those dimensions of the cult that may be considered salvific for the "whole" person. Finally I will consider whether the cult of the ancestors can be considered salvific in the Ignatian sense of bringing consolation or desolation to people affected by HIV/AIDS.

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7. See The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985), 17.

8. I regard the cult of the ancestors as "conservative" because of the reinforcement it lends to social structures such as patrilineal inheritance, and patrilocal familial residence. Authors like Tutu and Obengo show how ancestral discourse is used to influence the morality of members of kinship groups. See Desmond Mpilo Tutu, "The Ancestor Cult and Its Influence on Ethical Issues," *Ministry* 9, no. 3 (July 1969): 99–104 and Tom Obengo, "The Role of Ancestors as Guardians of Morality in African Traditional Religions," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* (1991).

### (1) Medical Contribution

Traditional healers in South African society receive their healing vocation in a call from the ancestors. Whether they specialise in divination or become traditional herbalists,<sup>9</sup> their apprenticeship involves the acquisition of a traditional knowledge system. The ancestors may inspire them to develop some of their own remedies and rituals, but the bulk of their healing technique is handed on from the ancestors during their apprenticeship. Some of these traditional remedies may be used in the alleviation of various symptoms of AIDS, such as pain, intestinal infections, lesions, delirium, etc.

Medical anthropologist Edward Green writes of collaborative programmes between Western and traditional African healers in Swaziland, Liberia, Mozambique and South Africa. These have mostly worked in the direction of traditional healers eager to learn some aspects of Western medicine, and in particular in relation to the prevention and treatment of AIDS. Judging by traditional healers' theories and treatment of locally recognised STDs, Green considers this is not the area in which they can make their most significant contribution.<sup>10</sup> He sees the traditional healers as potential (secondary) allies of the 'orthodox' medical practitioners in treating AIDS, by

(1) referring STD cases or - with proper biomedical collaboration - treating cases themselves; (2) identifying, locating, and accessing the sexual partners of clients infected with STDs for the purpose of treatment or referral; (3) preventing the emergence of new STDs through the promotion of "barrier" birth control devices as well as spermicides; (4) influencing sexual behaviour in the direction of faithful, single-partner relationships; (5) influencing people to adopt safe, non-penetrative sexual practices, such as thigh sex, as an alternative to penetrative sex; (6) providing appropriate counselling and otherwise assisting in meeting the psychosocial needs of clients with HIV or AIDS as well as their family, friends and

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9. "Medical anthropologists typically divide healers into two main categories: herbalists and diviner mediums." says Matthew Steinglass, "It Takes a Village Healer: Anthropologists Believe Traditional Medicine Can Remedy Africa's AIDS Crisis. Are They Right?" *Lingua Franca*, April 2001, 32. As always, it is important not to regard these Western distinctions as describing either accurately or exhaustively the categories in which African people think. For example, some diviners may also practice as traditional herbalists.

10. See Edward C. Green, *AIDS and STDs in Africa: Bridging the Gap Between Traditional Healing and Modern Medicine* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994) (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 236.

local community; and (possibly) persuading African men to become circumcised in hospitals. . .<sup>11</sup>

I believe that if traditional healers are to have this kind of influence in the prevention and treatment of AIDS, and still be recognised as 'traditional' healers, then they will be obliged to articulate what they are doing in terms of traditional discourse. I give two such examples from the work of Laurenti Magesa in Tanzania:

Magesa recognises that Tanzanian Christians who take seriously their ancestral traditions are caught between three competing discourses in terms of the prevention of HIV/AIDS.<sup>12</sup> In the biomedical discourse, they are told to use condoms and change their sexual behaviour. In the Christian missionary discourse, they are told not to use condoms, but to abstain from sexual intercourse if it is not with one's spouse. But the third discourse - the traditional African - values sexual intercourse in terms of the kinship relationships it expresses, and of the consequent birth of children to bond the visible and invisible worlds.<sup>13</sup> Magesa says that in order to be more successful, messages about the prevention of the transmission of HIV/AIDS should be expressed in terms appropriate to traditional discourse. He begins to formulate such a message as follows:

a) The traditional Tanzanian worldview requires a personal aetiology for misfortune and disease, which is expressed in terms of witchcraft. Magesa believes that it is essential to take seriously this idea of witchcraft and to use it in a manner to prevent the spread of AIDS. He proposes the identity of sexual promiscuity with suicide, because one is killing oneself through one's own (mis)behaviour. Victims of suicide are regarded as witches in Luo society, in evidence of which, they are often denied proper burial. Thus, it would be helpful to propagate in the culture the notion that breaking traditional sexual taboos be seen as equivalent to suicide and tantamount to witchcraft. He says: "The

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11. Green, *AIDS and STDs in Africa*, 245.

12. Laurenti Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion in Tanzania," in *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, edited by James F. Keenan (New York, London: Continuum, 2000), 80.

13. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 80.

strategy here is not to deny witchcraft or to deride it as 'primitive,' but to take it seriously and use its ethical demands in the struggle against HIV/AIDS."<sup>14</sup>

b) Magesa<sup>15</sup> cites with approval, Bujo's contention that HIV transmission would be reduced if more emphasis were placed on the traditional understanding of sexuality as enhancing the life force of the community of the living, the dead and the yet to be born. Rituals of levirate marriage and assertive male sexuality would more easily be changed, says Bujo, if they were shown to be advancing death, rather than promoting life for the community. He says that concentrating on the communal dimension of sexuality would be more effective in prevention of transmission than concentrating on the promotion of condoms which manifest an individualised notion of sexuality. "A new approach to fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa is needed 'whereby [each] sexual encounter has to be viewed in its communal dimension instead of stressing a one-dimensional and individual oriented self-realization as the highest value'."<sup>16</sup>

While it is true that many African Christians are caught between the three discourses, as listed by Magesa, I would be surprised if expressing a message against the spread of AIDS in terms of the ancestral worldview would have dramatic results. In traditional societies taboos already exist about the role and purpose of sexual intercourse. Magesa is proposing a stronger expression of these taboos. If the taboos are already being broken, it seems to me that they do not carry the authority they may once have had.

Certainly in the case of South Africa, much sexual behaviour is governed not by African tradition, but by what is perceived as Western morality, to which many young

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14. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 82.

15. See Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 82f.

16. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 83 quoting Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimensions of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 187.

people aspire. Living at the interface of the Western (scientific) and the African (traditional) cultures, young South Africans are negotiating a new culture in which to live their lives. In the process, they will select among the benefits of both cultures.<sup>17</sup> The suggestion that they do not understand the biomedical explanation of disease transmission would underestimate their grasp of the disease. They are just as likely to turn to the Western medical paradigm for advice on the prevention of HIV transmission as to the African worldview. Opting to believe in the use of condoms, is certainly the path of least resistance, compared with adopting traditional mores.

Also, I believe it is a romanticisation of African tradition to try to retrieve a communal dimension of sexuality, whatever this may mean. Is it likely to be accepted by young South Africans, for whom sexual behaviour is about "self-realization?"

In conclusion, it is probably not very fruitful to look for signs of salvation from AIDS in term of traditional African healers' role in categories normally understood by the biomedical model of healing.<sup>18</sup> It is probably more promising to look to the ancestral tradition of care for and treatment of the sick and dying for an insight into the meaning of salvation in this context.

## (2) More Holistic View of Salvation

In chapter two I showed that, depending on the degree to which the cult has been christianised, the ancestors either have power of their own right, or are operating as agents of God. In the latter case, appeal to the ancestors is conceived as asking them to intercede to the almighty God on behalf of the suppliant. Whether or not their power is perceived as coming from God, the ancestors are believed to be responsible for the

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17. Quoting Bishop Joseph Blomjous, "Development in Mission Thinking and Practice 1959–1980: Inculturation and Interculturation," *AFER* 22, no. 6 (1980): 393–98, Aylward Shorter calls this dynamic "interculturation." See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 13–16.

18. This does not discount the possibility of the discovery of a wonder medication that might act as a vaccine against the HIV.

wellbeing of their descendants. It is they who remove illness or misfortune and restore blessing. They are thus the agents of "salvation" in the sense of restoring health and harmony to the family.

In the discourse on the ancestors, the word "salvation" is not normally used. However, Maimela believes that there are "signs of salvific activity in the African Traditional Religions."<sup>19</sup> He writes that the religions have designed a variety of protective rites and rituals to "help save people from anxieties that are experienced due to life's contingencies. . . ." This seems to be a largely psychological understanding of salvation. Setiloane has a broader understanding of salvation. For him, "*Salvation*, therefore, is when peace, order and happiness are maintained in the community. This way all live and let others live."<sup>20</sup> Salvation has to do with the present life of a community, and is not focussed on a future life. I believe this broader understanding of salvation is appropriate within the cult of the ancestors, in the context of AIDS.

As I showed in the second chapter, the ancestors are frequently appealed to in times of crisis. They are perceived to have power to protect (and punish) their descendants. It is they who cause misfortune when they feel there has been a violation of taboo and traditional prescriptions for right behaviour. In the case of an ill person, for example, the affected people consult a diviner who confers with the ancestors to establish the source of the problem. When the cause of a malady has been ritually diagnosed, a further ritual is prescribed. During the performance of this salutary ritual, the ancestors come to the aid of the pleading family. The purpose of the ritual is often to restore right relationships with the ancestors, with God, and among the neighbours and relatives of the

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19. See Simon Maimela, "Traditional African Anthropology and Christian Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 76 Special Issue: Theological Anthropology in South Africa (September 1991): 7.

20. Gabriel Setiloane, "Salvation and the Secular," in *Hammering Swords Into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Mpilo Desmond Tutu*, edited by Buti Tlhagale and Itumeleng Mosala (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 77.

ill person. It is thus important for everyone concerned with the ill person to attend the ritual.

Ncube shows how the traditional Zulu divination and healing ritual processes might be core ingredients in the treatment of a person with AIDS.<sup>21</sup> He establishes to his satisfaction that the Zulu epistemological tools of *ukubhula* (divination) *nokuthakatha* (witchcraft) are compatible with Christian thought.<sup>22</sup> *Ukubhula* is a culturally appropriate

tool to listen to complaints of the people in sorrow and pain. It is the way people communicate their tension, anger and other frustrations health-wise, financial-wise, family-wise, etc. Thus it is the means to cope with misfortune and anxiety.<sup>23</sup>

As *ukubhula* helps in identifying the reason and the causes of illness or misfortune symbolically, so *ukuthakatha* is a code that signifies a breakdown in human relations.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the divination ritual enables people to express their frustration with sufferings, both physical and social, while the language of witchcraft is a manner of speaking of the need to restore social relations.<sup>25</sup>

Ncube maintains that since AIDS is incurable by traditional means,<sup>26</sup> it profoundly

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21. Vitus Siphon Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo* (Sickness unto Death and Rest in Peace) in Times of HIV-AIDS with a Special Reference to Zulu Concepts of *ukubhula* (Divination) *nokuthakatha* (Witchcraft)," dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (School of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, supervised by Dr Stuart C. Bate, 2002), 45–53.

22. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 45.

23. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 42.

24. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 52.

25. However, it is important to remember that there is another dimension to the code of witchcraft that has the potential of being very destructive. This is the practice of seeking out the witch or sorcerer in order to punish him or her. J.D. Kriel, "Noord-Sotho-beskouinge oor Medemense as siekteveroorsakende agente," *South African Journal of Ethnology* 19, no. 4 (1996): 14 says that the person thus identified is dealt with in an "appropriate manner" [paslike wyse]. Unfortunately the "appropriate" punishment inflicted is not infrequently death. This practice can neither be condoned in healing rituals associated with AIDS, nor with other situations.

Kgatla says that witchcraft discourse should be eliminated by its replacement with alternative myths, idioms, songs and riddles. See S.T. Kgatla, "'Moloi Ga a Na Mmala' [A Witch Has no Colour]: Witchcraft Accusations in South Africa," *Missionalia* 32, no. 1 (April 2004): 98f.

26. Opportunistic "prophets" have emerged in this desperate situation who claim to be able to cure AIDS, by means of faith or traditional remedies. Many of these "prophets" turn out to be charlatans, to the distress of the people who put their hope in them. For example Prophet Mahambi made headline news by claiming to have cured popular radio personality Bruce Sosibo of AIDS. The falsity of this claim was sadly established by Sosibo's death. See Felix Mgudlwa, "Bruce Sosibo Died Denying He Still Had AIDS," *Bona*, October 1996, 22,24.

challenges the traditional Zulu symbolic system of *ukubhula nokwelashwa* (divination and treatment), and consequently the notions of the ancestors and the Creator God.<sup>27</sup> As the desired remedy cannot be effected in the physiological dimension, it is thus to be effected in the social area of the patient's life. The prescribed ritual is a family affair and thus reaffirms the belonging and thus personhood of the ill person.<sup>28</sup> The name of this ritual, *inhlambuluko yegceke*, describes the desired effect of reconciliation within the family. In the case of AIDS, the ritual helps to remove misunderstandings and accusations regarding the cause of the disease. AIDS is thus fought in the spirit of the "African family of God" emphasised by John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Africa*: "care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust."<sup>29</sup>

In other aspects of the traditional Zulu care for the sick, Ncube finds dimensions of the cult of the ancestors that would be important in a Christian pastoral response.<sup>30</sup> It is important for a person to die at home, if at all possible, in order to be among the ancestors, and thus upon death not to become a wandering spirit. *Ukwenza izaba* involves observation and treatment of, and a presence to the patient, and not leaving him or her alone during the home-based terminal care. Even though people know that AIDS is incurable, there remains an *ukuthembela kowelaphayo* (trust in the traditional healer) - not for some miracle cure, but rather as a communal involvement in the care of the ill person. Finally, Ncube reports a particular ritual slaughtering as a means of preparing for death. Historically, elderly people, feeling the approach of death, would ask for a beast to be slaughtered in their honour, and the only part of the meat that they would consume would be the liver. Having done this, they were prepared for death, and everyone would be

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27. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 48. Ncube's thinking here appears to be that ancestors and Creator God are necessary components of a theodicy. The wrath of the ancestors is an explanation for misfortune or illness. If the misfortune cannot be revoked by appeasing the ancestors, then this challenges the theodicy and the necessity of the ancestors.

28. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 46.

29. John Paul II, "Ecclesia in Africa," *Origins* 25, no. 16 (5 October 1995): 63.

30. See Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 60–63.

satisfied that the death was anticipated and religiously prepared for. AIDS, says Ncube, usually allows one to make similar preparations and to come to a similar acceptance of impending death.

I will now attempt to balance ways in which the cult of the ancestors might be a source of consolation and desolation to a person facing death from AIDS. I use the terms "consolation" and "desolation" not merely to describe a person's feelings of peace and happiness or despair and depression, respectively. Rather, I use them to include the technical sense proposed by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*. They describe a person's movement towards or away from God which, in this situation, I associate with the task at hand of preparing for death.<sup>31</sup>

It is tautologous to describe salvation in terms of consolation, since what Ignatius means by "consolation" includes what "invites and attracts . . . to the salvation of one's soul. . ." Thus, without reducing salvation to emotional wellbeing, I would say that a consolation that helps a person to come to terms with the finitude of his or her life, offers an increase in peace, faith, hope or love, is a movement towards God and is "salvific."

### {3} The Cult as a Source of Desolation

Firstly, there is potentially a source of great distress for people confronted with the prospect of dying with no direct progeny of their own. In the third section of the second chapter of this thesis, I considered "Who becomes an ancestor?" All of the authors

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31. Ignatius writes:

Finally, I call consolation every increase in faith, hope and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

and

I call desolation [ . . . ] a darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord.

See Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Louis J. Puhl (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1951), points 316f.

consulted agreed on one juridical criterion, namely that an ancestor is a person who has died leaving descendants of his or her own. Under the heading of "juridical criteria," I cited the article by Kemdirim demonstrating the distress suffered by childless couples. There hangs over the demise of childless people the shame of "cosmological insignificance" (as I termed it) and of no future in the next life.<sup>32</sup>

Performance of the rituals of healing and receiving care from one's family as prescribed in ancestral tradition, may help to reconcile one to one's not having produced

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32. However, this distress may be more potential than actual, as the following conversations have revealed: In conversation with Archbishop Tlhagale on 16 May 2003, he was quite clear that people dying of AIDS without any direct descendants are not considered as ancestors. He says that they will be remembered for their youth and contribution to society as such. He pointed to all the young people who have died over the years in the struggle for liberation of South Africa. Those who are remembered on June 16, (national Youth Day, commemoration of the Soweto massacre of 16 June 1976) are acknowledged for the contribution they made to liberation of the country. Thus, for Tlhagale, it is not a disaster not to be remembered as an ancestor.

However, in conversation with some religious friends, (Xaba and Morare, both of mixed Zulu/Tswana background, August 2002) they believed that although they die childless, they will be remembered as ancestors because of the wisdom and care they have exercised during their ministry. Morare said that through a ritual process he will become an ancestor "by adoption" and considered such in his family. Both were in agreement that a deceased priest of our acquaintance is regarded as an ancestor by his (Xhosa) family.

Another religious friend, (Hlobo, of Sotho background, May 2002) in discussing the death of a common friend in her late twenties (of Pedi background), without any children, said that although she had died childless, her nieces and nephews, or the children of her cousins may consider her among their ancestors. As an elder relative to them, she would have assumed the responsibilities of a parent (feeding, clothing, educating, etc.) if their actual parents had died when they still needed help. They would have looked up to her, and she would have brought them birthday and Christmas presents, etc. So she is an ancestor to them.

The same friend recalls one particular rite when his family had to bury an uncle who died childless at the age of 22. When the coffin was being carried out of the house, members of the family went through the ritual of saying "Greet x, y, and z for us.... Take our greetings to so-and-so." My conversant associated this ritual action with the ancestor cult, and says he regards this uncle as an ancestor, even though he had no children of his own.

Now it may well be argued that these latter conversationists (Xaba, Morare and Hlobo) "are detribalised, Westernised, do not know their culture, etc." It is true that they are urban, Christian, members of a religious order and certainly do not live their "pure" culture as it was lived by members of their parents' and grandparents' generations.

But what these conversations do show is that cultures are not static. These young men have reflected on the problem of premature death, and have come up with the solutions they suggested. Their responses indicate that the formal criterion of having one's own children, in order to be regarded as an ancestor, is not as absolute as indicated by the authors I quoted in Chapter Two. Under the influence of Christianity, democratisation, and the notion of "God's universal salvific will" these men have departed from a strict interpretation of what it is to be an ancestor. They appear to be merging an uncritical understanding of heaven (regarded as a state of felicity to which good souls go after death) with their concept of the village of the ancestors.

descendants. It is common for a person of one generation to call a younger member of the family, "ngoan 'aka" or "my child." Thus the presence of nephews or nieces at the bedside of a person with AIDS may provide an opportunity to pass on wisdom and the lessons that the person had learnt during his or her short life. But the hard reality is, that this remains a potential source of great sadness, turmoil and disturbance - what Ignatius would have considered desolation.

Secondly, the cult of the ancestors carries with it a weight of moral implications. Ancestral tradition in South Africa dictated morality concerning sexuality and relationships between members of the opposite gender.<sup>33</sup> If the majority of cases of HIV transmission are sexual, rather than perinatal and parenteral,<sup>34</sup> then these ancestral traditions have clearly fallen into desuetude. Certainly, there is an alarming rate of rape of women, young girls and infants, as we saw in the first chapter of this work. According to tradition, men do not have right to sexual intercourse when it suits them, as they appear to presume nowadays. Young dating couples were to have intercrural sex, if they were to have sexual relations at all. If a young woman had a child outside of marriage, it was considered a shame, and the man responsible had to compensate the family of the young woman. This appears no longer to be the case.<sup>35</sup>

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33. For discussions of the ancestor cult and morality, see Letta Mosue, "Ancestors and HIV/AIDS," *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (August 2001): 28–33 and Obengo, "The Role of Ancestors," 44–63 44–63. Mosue, in particular, makes the connection between deviation from the ancestral moral prescriptions and the AIDS pandemic.

34. *pace* Gisselquist et al. See David Gisselquist, John J. Potterat, Stuart Brody, and François Vachon, "Let It Be Sexual: How Health Care Transmission of AIDS in Africa Was Ignored," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 148–61.

35. There are numerous possible reasons for this deviation from traditional ancestral morality. I would rate as primary among them the 'emasculatation' of African men over generations of colonialism and apartheid. When men have had to take a servile and submissive role in an oppressive society, sexual relationships are one avenue for reasserting their wounded masculinity. Secondly, due to the migrant labour system splitting up families, many young people have grown up without functioning parental figures on whom to model the formation of their relationships. Thirdly, there was a change in inter-generational relations in South Africa in 1976. When young people were tired of waiting for their parents to make changes to the system of apartheid, they took the initiative with mass protests against the educational system. There was a wholesale rejection of the leadership and example of an older generation, accompanied by attempts to re-invent ethics and morality, as the need arose. This has had a prolonged effect on South African society.

Usually misfortune and suffering are interpreted as punishment from the ancestors for the breach of some taboo or the failure to perform some activity prescribed in their regard. It is likely that in these circumstances one would interpret the deviation from traditional morality as a cause for one's illness. When a person is suffering from an incurable, often protracted and debilitating illness, like those associated with AIDS, then there is plenty of time to consider what may have displeased the ancestors. Instead of having the sense that there is a strong protective power on one's side, one feels that they have withdrawn their protection as punishment for some infraction. This can lead to alienation and anger towards the ancestors and possibly despair about one's future. Again, in Ignatian terms, this is desolation.

#### (4) The Cult as a Source of Consolation

From Ncube's work, we can see that the following dimensions of the cult of the ancestors might indeed be considered consolation:

Firstly, the ritual actions of the cult locate the person suffering with AIDS at the centre of a caring, concerned social circle. This forestalls the feared social death of isolation and stigma associated with the disease. For a person whose primary sense of self is as a social being, one's identity is saved if one is not cut off by one's kin.

Secondly, the ritual actions are aimed at restoring harmony between a person, the ancestors, the family, and possibly God. The person at the centre of the ritual is regarded as effecting reconciliation in what is often a fractious situation of recrimination and tension. This implies that the death has been prepared for, and is in that sense a "good" death.

Thirdly, in offering something to trust in - in this case, the efficacy of the traditional healing methods, however limited or illusory - the cult allows people affected by AIDS to escape from despair. It is repeatedly said that *hope* is an essential ingredient in living with

AIDS.<sup>36</sup> Armed with such hope, the quality of life of a person with AIDS is likely to be better.

Fourthly, the very fact of the cult of the ancestors represents an implicit belief that life on earth is not final. It denotes that there is a transcendent dimension with some promise of fulfillment, in which one is remembered by one's family who remain alive, and in which one is reunited with members of one's family who have predeceased one. This eschaotological outlook gives a framework within which one can become engaged in one's future, and make and effect plans in bringing about the desired outcome.

Finally, in providing a ritual way of preparing for death, the cult allows the affected people to come to terms with the approaching end, and not be left with a sense of meaninglessness and futility. This search for meaning and purpose might be particularly acute for a person who is childless. The cult therefore, while confounding a person and being responsible for one source of anxiety, also provides a framework within which to work out the meaning of one's life. One can come to an understanding of the significance of one's life to one's kin and acquaintances.

For the above reasons, it is evident that the cult of the ancestors is not an unmitigated source of desolation, and that in fact it does allow people to approach death, often in very tragic circumstances, in a peaceful, reconciled manner. Achieving this "peace and quiet" of which Ignatius writes, constitutes a movement towards God or 'consolation,' and by Ignatius' definition, salvation.

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36. The San Francisco AIDS Foundation has operated since 1982, and is now considered among the leaders in the fight against AIDS: its webpage on a "Broad Spectrum Healing Program" stresses the need to accentuate the positive factors in one's life when living with HIV/AIDS. These highlight the importance of "psychoimmunity, positive thinking, hope" (emphasis mine.) This hope might be directed towards a possible cure, towards a future state of rest or towards being united with one's ancestors, etc. See <http://www.sfaf.org/aids101/treatment.html> viewed on 23 June 2004. For the experience of a hospital chaplain of the necessity to live with hope in the face of AIDS, see Denis Ledogar, *Face au SIDA: Le courage d'espérer* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1995).

## Section Two: Classical Christian Response

The second type of response in the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies proposed by the *Kairos Document* is "Church theology." This theology uses a variety of classical Christian theological constructs. Theologians and pastors have imported from other situations responses to the questions of previous generations, applying these, ostensibly in fidelity to the tradition, to the problem at hand. Thus, for example, the Kairos theologians cite the promotion of a theology of non-violence and co-operation with civil authorities as the appropriate response to apartheid repression. Theologians promoting such a response were missing the challenge that apartheid presented.

I believe that similar responses to the AIDS pandemic, claiming fidelity to the tradition, have completely missed the kairos of AIDS and may inadvertently have failed to prevent the deaths of so many young people. I maintain that this approach is misguided and unsatisfactory. I do not go as far as the Kairos theologians in condemning the Church theology of their time.

In South Africa, in the second half of the 20th Century, when I was growing up, and I dare say even today, salvation was a personal, spiritual affair. In the (white) Catholic Church we would pray with the rosary: "Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of your mercy." In Protestant circles, I was often confronted with the question: "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?" Thus the discourse around salvation had to do with conversion from sin and living a personal relationship with God, in order for one's soul to be spared the punishment of hell.

While this may seem a caricature, it is not. There was no sense that salvation might have a political, civic or social dimension. While some statements of the hierarchy of many English-speaking churches decried the evils of apartheid,<sup>37</sup> it was not evident that

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<sup>37</sup>. See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

this had any link to “salvation.” This privatisation of salvation is not new or unique, and it prevails as the classical or received “spiritual” discourse. It belongs to a tradition which focuses more on mechanisms of salvation than on the social implications. In this section on the classical Christian notion of salvation, I will show how it has developed down the past 2000 years.

In the Christian context, “salvation” refers to God’s intervention in the affairs of the world through the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, we speak of salvation “in Christ.” The guiding question is *how* Christ can be said to have overcome evil in the world, of which AIDS is a very real manifestation. For Jesus’ Jewish forebears, salvation was exclusively the activity of God. God is the agent of salvation in the Old Testament.

#### (1) History of Christian Soteriology

In this section on salvation in the classical Christian sense, it is neither possible nor necessary to summarise the entire history of soteriology. It is, however, necessary to give an overview of the important aspects in the history of this central tenet of Christian theology. In order to do this, I will refer extensively to the *Theodramatik* of Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>38</sup> This is not because von Balthasar’s presentation is in any sense the best, or the most comprehensive. In fact, as Peelman notes, because von Balthasar’s soteriology “from above,” is very Christocentric and ecclesiocentric, it engages with difficulty the needs and challenges of contemporary multicultural Christianity engaged in dialogue with other religions.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it is a matter of convenience, because in some 90 pages von Balthasar summarises many of the essentials of this historical development.

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38. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Vol IV: The Action*, (Volume III in the German original), translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 240ff.

39. See Achiel Peelman, *Le salut comme drame trinitaire: La Theodramatik de Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Brèches théologiques (Montreal, Paris: Médiaspaul, 2002), blurb.

In *Theodramatik*, von Balthasar presents the history of salvation as experienced by the Trinity itself.<sup>40</sup> This is an atemporal, transcendent approach to salvation history, which does not invoke the context of the people who are engaged in the theological enterprise.<sup>41</sup> Von Balthasar's contribution is the way in which he presents salvation history as a dramatic interplay of human and divine - finite and infinite - freedoms.<sup>42</sup> Although this aspect of the work is novel, I have chosen to use the soteriology of *Theodramatik* as representative of a classical Christian approach to salvation.

However, before considering von Balthasar's writing, I would like to present one tension that must be borne in mind as we proceed in our soteriology. This is the tension between the universal and the exclusive, the general and the particular, the beneficiaries and the executor of salvation. The tension has its roots in the earliest New Testament witness to the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. These two axioms must be kept in dynamic tension:

(i) The universal: God desires the salvation of all people - the universal salvific will of God. (cf. 1 Tim 2:4 "God wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth.") Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection have universal significance, whether or not people acknowledge Jesus as saviour.<sup>43</sup>

(ii) The particular: Jesus is confessed as the saviour. He is the unique Son of God and is uniquely salvific. Salvation in Christ is definitive. Peter announces to the

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40. In itself, this is not a unique insight. For example in *The Spiritual Exercises*, the person making the Exercises meditates on the Holy Trinity looking down on the world and resolving to "work the redemption of the human race." See: Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 101-09.

41. See Peelman, *Le salut comme drame trinitaire*, 11.

42. *Theodramatik* (1985-1987) is built on his seven-volume *Herrlichkeit* (1961-1969), a theological aesthetics, the first work in his trilogy. It is followed by the three-volume, *Theologik* (1985-1987) in which he "unpacks" the aesthetic and dramatic dimensions of theology.

43. I am aware that there is controversy over the questions of whether there is anyone in hell, or even whether hell exists. Much ink has been spilt in response to von Balthasar's *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986) in which he considers hoping for the possibility that hell may in fact be empty because of the irresistible mercy of God and the superabundance of grace (cf. Rom 5:20). For a resumé of the arguments, see Avery Dulles, "The Population of Hell," *First Things*, no. 133 (May 2003): 36-41, <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0305/articles/dulles.html> viewed on 9 August 2004.

Sanhedrin when he is being interrogated about the cure of a lame man.<sup>44</sup> There is no other name by which one can be saved.<sup>45</sup> Not only is he the unique saviour, but his act of salvation cannot be repeated, as is asserted by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews: "once and for all . . . single sacrifice for sins."<sup>46</sup>

#### (a) Five Aspects of the New Testament Witness

Von Balthasar presents five "main features of atonement in the New Testament,"<sup>47</sup> all of which are closely interrelated and add to the whole understanding of salvation as drama, yet do not form a "system." No Christian theory of salvation is satisfactory without including all of these aspects. These five main aspects of the biblical witness are:

(i) "The reconciliation with the world achieved by God presupposes that God's 'only Son' has 'given himself up for us all', so that, as a result, he 'gives us all things' (Rom 8:32)."<sup>48</sup> This 'giving up' (*Dahingabe*) has an active and a passive sense. Jesus gives active and deliberate consent (Jn 10:17f.: I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from me), but he also foretells that he will be "handed over to the chief priests and scribes" (Mt 20:18 and parallels.) Hebrews has Jesus as both the "supreme high priest" (4:14) and the victim

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44. See Acts 3:1-10.

45. See Acts 4:10-12: ". . . you must know . . . that it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene . . . and by no other name . . . that this man stands before you cured. . . . Only in him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved." It is noteworthy that Peter moves from the language of curing to that of salvation.

46. See Heb 10:10, 12, 14. The writer is using a narrative of Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin, which supersedes all other sin offerings. The point is that it is a single unrepeatable event. On the appropriateness of sacrificial language in talking about the salvific death of Christ, see Antoine Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ à la lumière de l'anthropologie," in *Mort pour nos péchés: Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour, Antoine Vergote, René Bureau, and Joseph Moingt (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976), 45-83.

47. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 240-43. The translation of the original "Versöhnung" has been technically rendered "atonement" but in ordinary parlance carries the weight of "reconciliation."

48. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 240f.

of sacrifice "who offered himself, blameless as he was, to God through the eternal Spirit" (9:14).

This sacrifice was not notional, but real, because Jesus gave up his life (Jn 10:17). Using different metaphors, each with its semantic field, this has been variously interpreted as "expiation"<sup>49</sup> (Rom 3:25), "justification" (Rom 5:9), "cleansing" (1Jn 1:7). It is essential to remember this giving up was "for us" (*pro nobis*) - a recurrent term in von Balthasar's treatment.

(ii) The notion of substitution (*Platztausch*) is also present in the witness. Christ takes or assumes our place. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake." (Gal 3:13) "For our sake he made the sinless one sin (or a victim for sin), so that we might become the uprightness of God." (2 Cor 5:21)

(iii) In a negative sense, this reconciliation with God can be understood as a liberation (*Freisetzung*), from slavery to sin (Rom 7), the Devil (1Jn 3:8), the Law (Rom 7:6), etc. The language of liberation evokes the language of redemption and ransoming of the Old Testament (*go'el* and *ga'al*), where it was applied to Israel and to individuals.

(iv) In a totally positive sense, this liberation is also a drawing into the divine life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit calling out in us "Abba, Father!" assures us of our status with Christ as fellow children and heirs of the Father (Gal 4:7). God's purpose is to enable us to share in Christ's sonship<sup>50</sup> and knowledge of this mystery (Eph 1:5,9). We become members of God's body (Eph 4, etc.). Any other freedom apart from that given by the Holy Spirit is illusory.

(v) "Whereas, in connection with man's desperate plight, there are many references to 'God's anger' ([ . . . ]), the entire reconciliation process is attributed to God's

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49. ἱλαστήριον refers to the propitiatory, on which the blood was sprinkled on the day of expiation. By extension, Christ is the propitiation.

50. I do not here or in any other part of this paper wish to attribute gender to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, or to any member of the Trinity. However, during the earthly incarnation, the Second Person assumed male gender, which meant he was a *Son* of God. It is in this relationship of being a child of God that we are to share.

merciful love [*die erbarmende Liebe Gottes*].<sup>51</sup> The primary source of this reconciliation is God's gracious love, rather than a covenant "righteousness." God takes the initiative "for God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whosoever believes in him might not die, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

In the subsequent discussion,<sup>52</sup> von Balthasar says that none of the aspects may dominate the others, thereby reducing their significance. Together, or individually, they cannot be replaced by a more contemporary assertion which appears to be their equivalent. Nor should any tension which exists between them be lessened in the interests of an apparent synthesis. This is not an attempt to present a "biblical theology"<sup>53</sup> of salvation, but it begins with the New Testament witness and then proceeds to consider the subsequent tradition.

It should be noted here that this historical outline begins with the New Testament witness, and does not consider the Old Testament. I will return to this point later, as I think it is of significance for my consideration of soteriology in the context of AIDS.

After stating and discussing the five aspects taken from the New Testament, von Balthasar continues his historical outline of soteriology by considering the major theological constructions in the Patristic, the Medieval and the Modern periods. He believes that in each attempt to construct the theology of redemption, tension was not kept between the five aspects, and the attempt thus foundered.

#### **(b) The Patristic Model**

The Patristic Period was one of defining the nature, rather than the action of Christ. Thus any soteriology was implicit in the development of Christology, rather than an

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51. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 243 I have attempted to be as gender-neutral as possible throughout this paper, and apologise for where direct citations require that I use terms like "man" to represent the entire human race.

52. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 243f.

53. For an example of "biblical theology" of Salvation, refer to Colomban Lesquivit and Pierre Grelot, "Salvation," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour (London:

explicitly worked out system. There is a variety of theologies of redemption during the patristic period, but, according to von Balthasar's analysis, they are all based on the common notion of "exchange:" God became human in order that humans might be taken up to God's place. This *commercium* construct uses all five of the aspects of New Testament soteriology, but the *Platztausch* (aspect 2) is the dominant idea of the construct, combined with human participation in the inner Trinitarian life (aspect 4.) This *commercium* construct arose in the context of the need to define Christ as simultaneously divine and human, in order that his redemption might incorporate the whole human: "What was not assumed was not redeemed."<sup>54</sup>

The Fathers are not so clear on precisely *how* the Logos effects the exchange, how he makes us present in himself. For example, the Logos only takes on the consequences of sin and the punishment due to sin, but not sinful nature itself. This limit of the model of *admirabile commercium* is unconscious because it is taken for granted, says von Balthasar.<sup>55</sup> However, the Fathers want to hold on to the whole realism of the Gospel, and especially to the "*pro nobis*" dimension of Christ's taking the place of the sinner before God. This is a problematic that persists in the whole of the history of theology of Christian salvation, and the Fathers cannot be expected to have solved the entire mystery.

### (c) Medieval Models

#### (i) Anselm

In this second period in his divisions of the history of soteriology, von Balthasar give primacy to Anselm's satisfaction construction and considers Thomas's christological

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Chapman, 1973), 457-61.

54. The formula of Gregory Nazianzen in response to the Apollinarians who, in the process of establishing the divinity of the incarnated Logos, maintained that Jn 1:14 meant that the Logos only became flesh and didn't take the whole human conditions of will, passions and personality, i.e. Jesus was Logos-sarx and not Logos-anthropos.

55. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 253f.

development of this model.<sup>56</sup> Von Balthasar says that Anselm was the first theologian “to develop a systematic soteriology, endeavouring to bring together motifs inherited from Scripture and the Fathers, and to integrate them.”<sup>57</sup> He says that Anselm’s satisfaction model developed in *Cur Deus homo* favours aspect 3 of the New Testament, namely, salvation is a “ransom.” The construct neglects neither God’s love as the primary motivator (aspect 5), nor aspect 1, the handing-over of the Son. The substitution (aspect 2) refers more to the fruits of Christ’s death than to the person of Christ himself. However, aspect 4 - the initiation of humans into the divine life of the Trinity - remains implicit and undeveloped. Nor does the construct deal expressly with the Holy Spirit or the Resurrection.

The driving idea behind the satisfaction construct is that God’s “external” honour, offended by the sin of humanity in disrupting the covenant between God and people, can neither be restored merely by remorse on the part of the sinner, nor merely by God’s forgiveness of the sin. Some great sacrifice is required to restore God’s honour. (All the while, God’s “internal” honour remains unassailed.)<sup>58</sup> In keeping with the necessity imposed on creation by God’s absolute truth, justice, goodness and mercy, God’s honour is restored by the nevertheless free action of the suffering human life and particularly the death of Jesus. The reality of the world imposes a life of suffering and is of no merit in itself. But, because he was sinless, Jesus did not have to suffer the punishment of death. Thus the death of Christ is an act of supererogation. Being God, Jesus cannot directly profit from this act of supererogation, so the merits of his death are applied to sinful people, thereby satisfying God’s requirement of justice, and permitting the restoration of order to creation.

Von Balthasar believes that Anselm saw the death of Christ as “exemplary” rather

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56. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 255–61 and 262–66.

57. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 255.

58. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 256.

than substitution in the ordinary sense, since no intrinsic connection is made between Jesus and the sins of the rest of humanity. On the contrary,

. . . the Innocent One who suffers death must not come into contact with the sins of the others if his work is to be effective. Christ's death is placed on one side of the scales and the sins of the world on the other; the death overbalances the world's sins because of the free-will nature and divine value of the former.<sup>59</sup>

My own problem with this construct is precisely that it is too "contextual" to have meaning for contemporary South Africa. The categories of justice, honour, offence and satisfaction, which still reflect their medieval provenance, find no natural resonance in the mentality of present-day South Africa. While a legal framework, *per se*, is not inimical to soteriology, this particular framework does not correspond to any known in our context. Further, the idea of God *requiring* punishment by death of those who have offended divine dignity, is repugnant to a nation which has long suffered the arbitrary imposition of the death penalty on people who have offended a minority political elite. This satisfaction model is therefore not useful in our consideration of the meaning of Christian hope for salvation in our context of AIDS. However, the notion of having to appease the *ancestors* for some infringement of ritual or moral taboo is not alien, and so the notion of 'satisfaction' might find echoes in the mechanism of salvation in the cult of the ancestors. But here, the ancestors are satisfied with the blood of a sacrificial animal, and do not require a human victim.

(ii) Thomas

According to von Balthasar, in the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas uses the model of Anselm, but resists "the idea . . . of a ransom-price to be paid to the 'powers' or of punitive action to appease the divine anger."<sup>60</sup> In addition, Thomas lays greater stress than Anselm on the fourth aspect of New Testament atonement, namely the participation

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59. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 260.

60. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 262.

of the saved in the divine Trinitarian life. Thomas is also more successful, in von Balthasar's opinion, at incorporating the glorification of Jesus into the scheme of the reconciliation. But, again according to von Balthasar, Thomas displays the same inability as Anselm to incorporate any inner connection between Jesus and the reality of human sin.<sup>61</sup> For Thomas, the connection between Christ and humans is that of unique Mediator, and as Head of the Body, the Church. Christ's sufferings, for Thomas, *do* have some value as satisfaction. Von Balthasar lists the value of Christ's sufferings as: i) demonstrating God's love, ii) exemplary of virtues, iii) meriting justification, iv) reminding people to keep away from sin, and finally, v) triumphing over the devil.<sup>62</sup> Thomas and Anselm both consider the interplay between Christ's freedom to accept the suffering and the 'necessity' of God arranging this satisfaction.

#### **(d) Contemporary Models**

By the contemporary period, von Balthasar means from the Reformation onwards. Models of salvation from this period concentrate either on solidarity in favour of obsolete concepts such as sacrifice, ransom and satisfaction, or on a renewed understanding of the Patristic idea of substitution that bridges the gap introduced by Anselm between Jesus and the rest of humanity. Von Balthasar suggests a synthesis of these two approaches would accord due weight to all five aspects of the New Testament witness.<sup>63</sup> However, at first glance such a synthesis does not seem possible, because the solidarity model looks primarily at Jesus' humanity and ministry, while the renewed *commercium* model concentrates on the Godhead of Jesus on the cross.

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61. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 263.

62. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 264.

63. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 266.

(i) Solidarity<sup>64</sup>

Although the term itself arrived late on the theological scene, the notion of the solidarity of God with sinful humans, in the person of the Son, has deep roots. Barth distinguishes between 'pro-existence' as being there "for" others and as being there "with" others. Human beings are *with* others. In their being for others, there is an element of reciprocity, which is not the case for Jesus: "But only the humanity of Jesus can be absolutely exhaustively and exclusively described as a being for man."<sup>65</sup> Jesus is both "man for God" and "man for man, for other men, His fellows."<sup>66</sup> Jesus' solidarity with humans lies in the very nature of God. It arises out of God being faithful to Godself:

And the fact that from all eternity God pitied and received man, the grounding of the fellow-humanity of Jesus in the eternal covenant executed in time in His being for man, rests on the freedom of God in which there is nothing arbitrary or accidental but in which God is true to Himself. God for man, participating in and making Himself responsible for him, securing for him fellowship with Himself and therefore His saving help - this whole mystery of the man Jesus is rooted in the mystery of God Himself, . . .<sup>67</sup>

Von Balthasar is concerned that some theologians, such as Küng, Kessler, Schillebeeckx, Moingt, liberation theologians, etc., see the solidarity of Jesus as no more than a "social" solidarity with the poor, his "paradigmatic fellowship with sinners" and the marginalised, of which the cross is the ultimate consequence.<sup>68</sup> Von Balthasar's concern here is that this soteriology has ramifications in Christology. Ultimately, von Balthasar fears, we have to say with Schillebeeckx, on the basis of his exegesis, that Jesus understood his death as a consequence of his life and ministry of "tendering salvation." "Jesus' whole life is the hermeneusis of his death. The very substance of salvation is sufficiently present in it, which could be and was in fact articulated later on in various ways

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64. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 267-73.

65. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, translated by Harold Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, and R.H. Fuller (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 2,243.

66. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, 2,208. Italics mine.

67. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, 2,218.

68. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 268f.

through faith in him."<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, it is neither necessary to articulate a higher Christology than this, nor to posit that Jesus had some greater knowledge of the cosmic significance of his death.

Von Balthasar sees Moingt<sup>70</sup> felicitously steering a middle course between a maximalist claim - that Jesus offers himself to God as "sacrifice" for all, and a minimalist claim - that Jesus saw his death simply as his last ministry to humanity.<sup>71</sup> He falls on the side of a solidarity Christology, barely avoiding a substitution Christology. However, von Balthasar believes all these Christologies based on solidarity are trying to do justice to the *commercium* of the Fathers, no longer on the ontological plane, but rather on the level of psychology and society.<sup>72</sup>

#### (ii) Substitution<sup>73</sup>

Von Balthasar finds renewed and reinforced expression of substitutionary theory in the writing of Luther.<sup>74</sup> It is not, however, the exchange of humanity and divinity of which the Fathers wrote, but rather, an exchange between the sinner and Christ. According to von Balthasar, Luther takes literally 2 Cor 5:21, that God made the sinless one into sin for our sake. And not into just any sin, but Christ becomes the entire sin of the world. The Patristic image is used of Christ, made into the sin of the entire world, as a bait to hook and overpower the Leviathan, in order to release humankind from its evil powers.<sup>75</sup> In Christ is a clash of incompatible opposites, which result from his taking on the radically

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69. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, translated by Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 311.

70. in Joseph Moingt, "La révélation du salut dans la mort du Christ: Esquisse d'une théologie systématique de la rédemption," in *Mort pour nos péchés: Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour, Antoine Vergote, René Bureau, and Joseph Moigt (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976), 117-72.

71. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 272.

72. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 273.

73. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 284-316.

74. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 284-90.

75. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 286f.

sinful human nature. The two natures appear to sit very uneasily with each other in the *communicatio idiomatum*.

On the other side of the *commercium*, von Balthasar detects a great flaw of Luther's system. The *sola fidei* expresses "the absolute priority of Christ's work for man over any synchronous action on man's part."<sup>76</sup> However, von Balthasar sees the synchronicity as between Christ's becoming sin and the objective change of status of sinful humanity. The *sola fide* is thus not synchronous between the act of faith and Christ's work for people. This synchronicity is made even more unlikely, von Balthasar believes, because Luther has a system of "double righteousness" and "double sin."<sup>77</sup>

**Vicarious punishment:** Other Reformers used the idea of vicarious punishment. This had made its appearance among the early Fathers, such as Origen, Victorinus Afer, Gregory of Elvira, John Chrysostom, etc. Calvin and Luther write of Christ diverting the wrath of God that was due to us, to himself. Modern Protestant systematicians like Barth, Pannenberg and Moltmann continue this theme of vicarious suffering in their writings of Christ's personal sufferings. Barth writes: ". . . He fulfils this judgement by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves."<sup>78</sup> Pannenberg considers three theories of the "saving significance of Jesus' death." (i) Jesus' death as ransom for sin and the devil, (ii) the satisfaction theory and (iii) the penal suffering of Christ.<sup>79</sup> He says that he is in accord with Luther that the latter probably comes closest to expressing the significance of Christ's death.<sup>80</sup> In the dereliction of Christ on the cross,<sup>81</sup> Moltmann

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76. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 288.

77. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 289f.

78. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 1,253.

79. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), 274-80.

80. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, 278.

81. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974).

understands God to have brought into the inner life of the Trinity the entire alienation, suffering and punishment due to humanity. This theory is a timely challenge to the Greek notion of an impassible God after the ravages of the Second World War. Its value seems to me to lie as much in its contribution to the idea of God entering into *solidarity* with a suffering world as its contribution to the idea of Christ suffering vicarious punishment on behalf of humankind.

Among the modern Catholic theologians whom von Balthasar believes to subscribe to the theory of penal substitution, he cites M.-J. Lagrange, Prat, Huby and Cornely. As those who have some modified notion of Christ suffering punishment, von Balthasar cites Daniélou, Martelet and Blondel. In conclusion of his considerations of vicarious punishment, von Balthasar agrees with Galot's assertion that the biblical record is most faithfully served by a merger of the theories of solidarity and substitution: "*Il y a solidarité, mais une solidarité qui va jusqu'à la substitution: le Christ se fait solidaire avec nous de manière à faire retomber sur lui-même, en se substituant à nous, tout le poids des fautes humaines.*"<sup>82</sup> Thus there is no necessary contradiction between these two theories of salvation. They can be understood as different aspects of the same act of salvation. Indeed, as it is becoming clear, no single understanding of salvation is uniquely capable of conveying the entire sense of the mystery.

**An anthropological theory: The scapegoat.** Having considered the soteriological theories of solidarity and substitution, which come together in the notion of vicarious punishment, von Balthasar proceeds to examine René Girard's theory of the scapegoat as a vehicle of reconciliation.<sup>83</sup> He considers this a more appropriate way to try

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82. Jean Galot, *La rédemption, mystère d'Alliance* (Paris / Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 268.

83. This theory is articulated in two works: René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) and René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde: Recherches avec J.-M. Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Grasset, 1978).

The theory results from Girard's multidisciplinary approach to psychoanalysis, ethnology and literature. The scapegoat apparently embodies a mechanism that operates in all cultures and

to understand salvation, than the ancient theories and practice of sacrifice and expiation which are alien to the modern mind.<sup>84</sup> In general I am in favour of trying to express the mystery of salvation in terms of profound anthropological mechanisms, and I see this as a step forward from the *a priori* methodology of classical theology. The task remains, however, of finding the most appropriate anthropological theory.

In essence, according to the scapegoat theory, Christ plays the cathartic role of scapegoat, diffusing the violence between God and sinners. But more than merely *being* this scapegoat, Christ's salvific role consists in his *exposing* the mechanism which necessarily remains secret in order for it to work. In revealing "the things hidden since the foundation of the world," (Mt 13:35) Jesus completely unveils this truth of human society.

Sacrifice is a rehearsal of the scapegoat mechanism - allowing people ritually to benefit from the peace which follows the sacrifice. The cross is not a sacrifice, in the normal sense because in love Jesus embraces the ignominy of the cross, thereby overturning its scandal. Williams maintains that Girard argues that even if the language of sacrifice is retained to explain the derived positive connotations of Christ's willingness to give himself for the sake of another, sacrifice should be redefined

on the basis of faith in a God of love who does not make a secret pact with his Son ~~that calls~~ for his murder in order to satisfy God's wrath. The suffering and death of the Son, the Word, are inevitable because of the inability of the world to receive God or his Son, not because God's justice demands violence of the Son relishes the prospect of a horrible execution.<sup>85</sup>

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religions. It is a method societies use to relieve the violence of rivalries between two or more groups. (According to Girard's mimetic theory, desires come from mimesis - copying - and result in rivalry.) A victim (the 'scapegoat') is agreed upon by the groups concerned, and this victim is then lynched, giving the groups an opportunity to vent their violence. Thus it operates as a safety valve for passions which might otherwise result in more overt violence. Apparently this mechanism is fundamental to all societies, and works to the extent that it is kept secret. Hence the title: "things hidden since the foundation of the world" recalling Ps 78:2 in which the psalmist considers God's mighty interventions in the (often violent) history of Israel.

84. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 297-313 Although von Balthasar decides not to treat sacrifice as model, this work would be incomplete without some attention being paid to the practice, which pervades the cult of the ancestors. I shall therefore deal with it presently.

85. James G. Williams, "Commentary on Chapter 11: The Nonsacrificial Death of Christ," in *The Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 177f.

As we see repeatedly in South Africa, the mechanism of scapegoating individuals or communities brings neither lasting peace nor resolution to the ills of society.<sup>86</sup> The scapegoat only effects an uneasy truce between antagonistic parties. Diffusing the violence is not the same as eradicating it altogether. The reconciliation effected by Christ between God and sinners is much more profound and radical, and exceeds what can be expressed by the scapegoat mechanism.

In introducing the model of the scapegoat, von Balthasar moved away from a purely biblical consideration of soteriology. Using the work of Girard, he introduced a multidisciplinary dimension to his work. The theory drew on the sciences of ethnology, psychoanalysis and literature. This accords with the synthetic model of contextual theology which I have been using throughout this thesis, an approach that uses the insights of various cultures, anthropology, political theory, literary theory, etc. to express the Christian life.

At this point I depart from von Balthasar's history of New Testament soteriology. I shall consider here two other anthropological mechanisms which are as familiar to people of Southern Africa as the scapegoat mechanism. The themes of *sacrifice* and *initiation* in relation to Christian salvation are extensively considered by Antoine Vergote. In the following, I shall rely heavily on his work, which, although dated, is not superseded in relation to the cult of ancestors in South Africa.

### **(e) Two Further Anthropological Models of Salvation**

In his essay on the meaning of the death of Christ from an anthropological viewpoint,<sup>87</sup> Vergote considers two schemes that are in common usage in South Africa, in

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86. For a discussion of the discourse surrounding witchcraft accusations, see Kgatla, "*Moloi Ga a Na Mmala*."

87. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*."

the traditions of which the ancestor cult is a formative element. He says that the death of Christ can be understood from the points of view of (i) sacrifice and of (ii) ritual initiation.

Vergote begins with a consideration of the redemptive work of Jesus represented in terms of the scapegoat mechanism, and is quick to dismiss this representation. The scapegoat, says Vergote, is a product of group pathology, a symbolic object onto which the paranoia of a group is projected, and which is subsequently lynched. Vergote maintains that Christ raised the ire of his people by opposing this institution as it was expressed in the Jewish sacrificial system, and offering a new ethic of forgiveness. But the significance of Christ's death is deeper than that of an ethical teacher opposing temple ritual. Thus, "in designating the death of Christ as a sacrifice, the Christian tradition accords it much greater meaning."<sup>88</sup> Also, the schema of scapegoat does not do justice to the significance of Christ's death.<sup>89</sup>

#### (f) Substitutionary Expiatory Sacrifice

Vergote notes that this schema has dominated Western catechesis and preaching on the death of Christ and on the Eucharist. However our contemporaries are "profoundly allergic" to it.<sup>90</sup> He believes that the theological doctrine of a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins is unacceptable given its underlying anthropological significance. He analyses the concept in terms of its being (i) expiatory and (ii) substitutionary, two concepts which function differently.

**Expiation.** An expiation is a gift offered to appease the wrath of an offended deity or deities. The idea in the Old Testament is *not* that the gift is a substitute for the sinner. Rather, it is symbolic and accompanies and expresses contrition for the offence. It is an

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88. "Mais il est manifeste qu'en designant la mort du Christ comme un sacrifice, la tradition chrétienne lui a reconnu plus de signification." Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 51.

89. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 52.

90. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 53.

agreeable gift to God and a sign of reconciliation.<sup>91</sup>

Among other cultures, the sacrifice is offered for faults against taboos of which the spirits are guardians. According to Vergote, the clan or family, fields or livestock are automatically polluted by the breach of taboos, which have to do with the principles of life which governs the group. The effects are not only in the biological, but also in the spiritual realm, because of the extent to which the spiritual is diffused through life.<sup>92</sup> The sacrifice is necessary to satisfy the vengeance of the spirits and to restore equilibrium to the moral and natural order.

Vergote believes that much theology has been written in the light of the theory of expiation, not of broken taboos, but projecting the breach onto personal relationships with God. However, sacrifice thus understood is at the heart of neither Old Testament nor Christian reconciliation. God is not appeased with a sacrifice, but rather pardons sin in the light of the conversion and contrition of the sinner.<sup>93</sup>

**Substitution.** In the light of anthropological theory, Vergote believes that the Anselmian notion of substitutionary sacrifice makes no sense. It is never the case that the one to whom the sacrifice is being offered makes himself the sacrificial victim. If Jesus is understood to be overturning the system of sacrifice, would this not include the Roman and German legal frameworks which rest on it?

Similarly in theological terms, the image of God in this construct is of an offended feudal lord, contradictory to the image of a God of forgiveness. Vergote believes it is totally opposed to Jesus' attitude towards sinners, which is to offer them divine

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91. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 54. In his analysis of sacrifice in the Old Testament, Vergote is indebted to R. de Vaux *Les sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964).

92. Vergote's analysis of sacrifice in other ("primitive") religious systems is taken from the seminal anthropological classic by Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

93. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 56.

forgiveness if they repent, believe in him and accept the Kingdom of God.<sup>94</sup> He adds, further, that the construct tends to individualise salvation as personal and moral. I would say that this is not a shortcoming only of the substitutionary sacrifice model, but that the communal and societal dimension of our need for reconciliation has only been rediscovered with the development of theologies of liberation.

On the psychological level, Vergote also believes that the Anselmian construct is not true to the nature of God. According to psychoanalysis, we are haunted by the idea of a threatening superego god, a jealous father-figure who demands the sacrifice of our own lives as the price for his love. This is evident in the God of the Old Testament who punishes sin (Gen 3:14-19), demands the life of the first born (Gen 22 and Ex 13:2, 12-15), and requires the ritual castration of circumcision (Gen 17:9-14), which is symbolic of death. This God has the power to give and to take back life (Job 1:21), over which he asserts absolute mastery.<sup>95</sup> This is far from the loving "Abba" of Jesus of Nazareth.

Vergote says that this archaic notion of God remains despite any attempt to spiritualise or modify the notion of substitutionary sacrifice. He lists psychologists like Jung, Freud, Sauty and Lacan as regarding the notion as primitive, barbaric, and an oedipal projection. The notion also evokes Hegel's slave-master dialectic. Vergote goes along with these views that substitutionary sacrifice is not an adequate notion to represent the saving events it is being used to explain.

**Sacrifice as metaphor.** Next, Vergote considers sacrifice as such, as the essential rite of religion. The Bible recognises two such types of sacrifice: (i) communion sacrifice and (ii) holocaust.

(i) Communion sacrifice: Generalising from his particular studies of Hindu and Hebrew sacrifice, and wider association with the writing of other anthropologists on

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94. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 57.

95. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 59f.

sacrifice, Mauss maintains that the object of sacrifice is for the victim to establish communication between the sacred and the profane worlds.<sup>96</sup> In sacrifice, the offering creates a ritual space, the object of which, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, is “to establish a relation, not of resemblance but of contiguity, by means of a series of successive identifications,”<sup>97</sup> which can operate in either direction. In the first stage, says Lévi-Strauss, the sacralisation of the offering makes a connection between the divinity and humans. In the second stage, the irreversible destruction of the victim breaks this connection, which the divinity then comes to fill with its equally irreversible grace. According to Vergote, the consumption of the sacrifice anticipates the people’s sharing in the divinity - which is the divine gift, since there is no natural connection between the two orders.<sup>98</sup>

This notion of communion sacrifice is interesting from our point of view. However it should not be taken as a religious universal. For example, it corresponds closely to the kind of intimate relationship that Zulus ordinarily have with the shades of their ancestors and which they celebrate on occasions of “ritual killing.”<sup>99</sup> As I showed in the second chapter of this thesis, the everyday relationship between the living and the dead is based on sharing, interdependence and mutual understanding. Thus it is not a case of the victim

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96. Marcel Mauss, “*Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (1899),” in *Oeuvres, Vol 1*. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), 302. He writes: “*Ce procédé consiste à établir une communication entre le monde sacré et le monde profane par l’intermédiaire d’une victime, c’est à dire d’une chose détruite au cours de la cérémonie.*”

97. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 225. Lévi-Strauss opposes this to totemism, which “is based on a postulation of homology between two parallel series . . . whose respective terms . . . do not resemble each other in pairs.” (p.224)

98. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 63f.

99. See Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976). Berglund’s authoritative insider-description work uses the terms “ritual killing” and “ritual beer-drinking” for these celebrations of communion, precisely because he wants to avoid the baggage of the term “sacrifice.” Ngubane prefers to use the term “sacrifice” for some ritual killing. Other ritual killings, such as during the stages of negotiating with a marriage, are not intentionally sacrificial, but do also constitutes moments of sharing with the ancestors. See Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine* (New York, 1977). These two works are discussed in part three of Bertrand Masquelier, “*Offrande mise à la mort et langage rituel: Puzzle africaniste*,” in *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, Directed by Marcel Neusch (Paris: UER de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Institut Catholique de Paris, 1994), 21–39.

opening communication between the living and the dead, as suggested by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, because this communication exists all the time. Certain ritual killings are, however, an opportunity for the Zulus to celebrate moments of intimacy with their ancestors.

(ii) Holocaust: According to Vergote, holocaust was the Old Testament act of homage to God.<sup>100</sup> It was neither for propitiation nor for communion. The victim was burnt whole, (except for the skin which was given to the priest). The blood was spread at the base of the altar. This became the central cult of Jerusalem and was the model of the perfect sacrifice. It had two important dimensions, gratuity and, because of its taking place in the temple, globality.

Vergote groups holocaust and communion sacrifice together and compares them with sacrifice of expiation. The advantage of communion sacrifice is that it acknowledges fundamental ontological indebtedness of the creature to the creator, and is not based on the idea repairing a fault. Humans benefit from this re-effecting and intensification of the surplus of divine grace. Expiatory sacrifice is based on the notion of conversion and contrition, and its purpose is to restore the broken relationship between humanity and the divinity.<sup>101</sup> Neither of these notions is adequate, so Vergote dismisses them.

Finally,<sup>102</sup> he asks whether it is legitimate to ascribe *any* sacrificial understanding to Christ's death for the salvation of the world, apart from as an ethical example for others to follow. In response to this question, he says that the scriptures indicate that Jesus neither practiced nor taught sacrifice, nor gave his followers a sacrificial rite. Only on the eve of his death did he celebrate a final meal, which his disciples instituted as their sacrifice. On the contrary, Vergote says, Jesus' words apply the meaning of the sacrifice to himself and by his actions he substitutes himself for the sacrifice. He eminently

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100. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 65.

101. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 65–67.

102. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 67–69.

achieves what sacrifice is designed to effect in other religions, namely, bridging the divide between God and humans.

Vergote says that it was not the *death* of Jesus which replaced sacrifice, but his *life*.<sup>103</sup> By a life totally offered and dedicated to God, Jesus was also open to the divine gifts. Thus he bridged the divide in his person, which action was realised most intensely in his death. So in the sense that it was the ultimate expression of this life, his death was also a sacrifice. But as soon as we say this, we have to qualify, that it was not sacrifice with its former meaning.<sup>104</sup> It is better to say that *he is* what the sacrifice meant to effect. As the Holy One of God, he did not need to be sacrificed (*sacrum + facere* = to be made holy). Rather, he made sacrifice redundant and forever changed the religious order. Therefore, if we use sacrificial language of Jesus at all, it must be so qualified that it is clear that the dissimilarities outweigh the similarities.

Vergote says that if sacrificial language has any virtue at all, it is in at least raising the notion, in order for it to be quashed, of an angry God demanding the death of a Son.<sup>105</sup> That is, if one does not believe that God already quashed this notion by refusing the death of the son of Abraham.<sup>106</sup>

I believe that in our South African context the language of sacrifice should be used in relation to Christ only in order to deny in the strongest possible terms that God requires sacrifice as the ancestors do. The point must be made in no uncertain terms that God does not derive pleasure from the destruction or suffering of any creature - animal, plant,

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103. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 68.

104. See Heb 10:8-10: "First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). *Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.'* He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (NIV)

I acknowledge that the entire argument of this chapter of Hebrews describes the salvific effect of the death of Jesus in specifically sacrificial language. But verse 9 (in italics above) makes it clear that the sacrifice of blood has been replaced by a sacrifice of obedience to the will of God. That is, a sacrifice of death is superseded by a sacrifice of life, which is of a completely different nature.

105. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 68f.

106. See Gen 22.

or least of all, human. Using sacrificial language in relation to Jesus has great potential for causing confusion, because of the currency of sacrificial practice towards the ancestors. As Vergote has shown, Christ made sacrifice redundant, so in a context where it has a live set of connotations, it is better to keep any sacrifice out of the Christian sphere. It is profoundly confused thinking to suggest that the Eucharist is a "sacrifice" akin to that offered to the ancestors.<sup>107</sup>

(ii) Initiation

Vergote uses a second anthropological scheme to describe the redemptive death of Jesus Christ, namely, ritual initiation. Ritual initiation is a familiar action in the coming of age process of several (not all) of the ethnic groups in South Africa. This makes Vergote's scheme more accessible, and therefore more helpful, to people searching for the meaning of salvation from the scourge of AIDS.

As a general principle, Vergote maintains that Jesus' death has salvific meaning only because it has human meaning, and this is to be found in the anthropological scheme of initiation.<sup>108</sup> The human Jesus was bound to die, since only God is immortal. In Jesus' death there is the same spiritual finality which is in every human death. Vergote sees Jesus' death as a paradigm for an ascent towards a transformed existence which is expanded and regenerated by accepting the negativity of suffering and self-abandonment. This scheme is familiar to societies which have rites of initiation, such as Christian baptismal rituals. Vergote proceeds by bringing together his reflections on mysteries of initiation, the meaning of life and death in psychoanalysis, the cross as a liberating

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<sup>107</sup>. See, for example, Rebecca Sexton, "Animal Sacrifice to Become Part of Roman Mass?" (2002), [Http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/2594/paganism.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/2594/paganism.htm) viewed on 2 December 2002. This article reports that Archbishop Tihagale sees a place for ancestral sacrifices to take place at a Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. I believe this is not a useful avenue for inculturation, because it can only be retrogressive for Christianity, which exults in the fact that Christ has abolished the old covenant with its cultic baggage.

<sup>108</sup>. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 70.

paradigm, and finally, death to sin.<sup>109</sup>

**Mysteries of initiation.** In this section, Vergote uses the work of Mircea Eliade<sup>110</sup> to present a generalised description of ritual initiation. Many ancient cultures have rites of initiation which lead members from childhood into adulthood. In these rites the members are introduced to what constitutes full humanity. One of the mysteries imparted is that life is only fruitful through death. Beings must die in order to regenerate and pursue life. The initiates are made to experience this mystery in some way, by undergoing an ordeal of some sort in which they die to their former selves, in order to be reborn as adults worthy of belonging to humanity.<sup>111</sup> Neophytes are initiated into the mythology of the society and named as living members of the community with the right to participate in its religious mysteries.

This scheme is well represented in the gospels which record Jesus teaching that his death will be the introduction of the fullness of life.<sup>112</sup> In the Christian tradition, this death on the cross has been iconicised as the tree of life planted in the centre of the world, representing life mediated through death.

**Life and death in psychoanalysis.** Next,<sup>113</sup> Vergote considers the psychoanalytic

109. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 71–73, 73–75, 75–76, 76–80, respectively.

110. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, translated by Philip Mairet (London: Harvill Press, 1960). He uses Chapter VIII in particular, on "Mysteries and Spiritual Regeneration."

Eliade writes: (p.208f.) "At different levels and in various contexts we find the same initiatory schema comprising ordeals, tortures, ritual putting-to-death, and symbolic resurrection. . . . [T]he mystery of spiritual regeneration consists of an archetypal process which is realised on different planes in many ways; it is effected whenever the need is to surpass one mode of being and to enter upon another, higher mode; or, more precisely, whenever it is a question of spiritual transmutation."

I am very wary of the wholesale inclusion of such psychoanalytic reasoning into anthropology and from there into theology. However, at this stage my purpose is merely to record Vergote's argumentation.

111. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 71.

112. See Jn 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

113. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 73–75.

symbolism that he considers to be the foundation of many cultures. He believes that psychoanalysis is rediscovering the scheme of life and death in the initiation scheme. For example, when a child is being separated or weaned from its mother, it undergoes a certain kind of death to a previous life, which is necessary for its personal survival. According to psychoanalysis, this traumatic experience becomes the matrix for all subsequent painful experiences.<sup>114</sup> Every transformation involves loss and suffering. It is necessary to give up ideas of omnipotence and immortality in order to develop mutual relationships. This is formulated in the evangelical counsel: "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, will save it."<sup>115</sup> Freud makes of it an adage: "*Si vis vitam, para mortem*" ("If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death.")<sup>116</sup>

The importance of psychoanalysis is that it can prepare one to face death in a culture in which it is so removed from the centre of life. More important than the *how* of Jesus' death is the fact *that* he died. Psychoanalysis helps us to concentrate less on the violent nature of the death of Jesus, which removes it to a certain extent from daily experience, and more on his death as the moment of destiny of the human Jesus. Jesus confidently assented to a human death with its uncertainty, in order to be reborn as a source of life for all people.

Vergote sees the value of psychoanalysis in articulating this "nodal truth of human existence"<sup>117</sup> not only of ancient cultures. It can give us a way of understanding the cross,

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114. For example, see M.D. Faber, *New Age Thinking: A Psychoanalytic Critique* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1996). In the movements he analyses, Faber traces back all New Age thinking to the battle of a child to negotiate the traumatic separation from its mother.

115. See Mt 16:25 and parallels.

116. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death: (II) Our Attitude Towards Death (1915)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957), 14:300.

Freud states this as a variation of the adage: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.

117. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 75: "la vérité nodale de l'existence humaine."

that is neither triumphalist nor intellectualist, taking suffering and death seriously, but not as the ultimate defeat.

I am very wary of the assumptions of symbolic universalism, stating that what applies in Western psychoanalysis can be imported wholesale into the analysis of vastly different cultures. I consider this one of the methodological shortcomings of Vergote's present work. I think psychoanalysis is an extremely subjective 'science' and it is highly context-specific. Vergote does not seem to take this into account in finding in psychoanalysis some universal truths.

**The cross as a liberating paradigm.** Vergote says<sup>118</sup> that many people who have undergone ordeals during rites of initiation, speak of a new life.<sup>119</sup> This language bears a natural affinity to the language of the cross, which has become the Christian paradigm of new life. Of course, this defies logic and normal experience, but rings true with the insight that it is necessary to work through the negative in order to come to a new plane of existence.

We must beware, says Vergote,<sup>120</sup> not to believe that the living Jesus had foreknowledge or certitude that there would be a positive outcome to his death. He had worked through any illusions of immortality, so the ordeal of the cross was a real, and not some pseudo-trial. His attachment to the will of God did not render him invulnerable to ordinary human death.

Vergote concludes this section saying that as a symbol of Jesus, the cross remains enigmatic, representing the contradictions of death and exaltation:

**The cross is a liberating paradigm, because, on it the paradigmatic person of Jesus manifests human and religious truth. As a sign of contradiction, the cross**

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118. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 75f.

119. Eliade says, for example, "Initiatory death is thus a recommencement, never an end." See Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, 224.

120. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 76.

which does not mask the exaltation, tears us from our mystifications; our contradictory illusions are broken on it.<sup>121</sup>

**Death to sin.** Jesus integrated the law of death into his life, trusting that God would give him an abundance of divine life.<sup>122</sup> He did not give in to the sin of trying to make himself equal to God.<sup>123</sup> He was "the sinless one," and "dead to sin."<sup>124</sup> He knew that his mission as herald of the Kingdom of God would displease the religious authorities and lead to his eventual execution. He accepted this consequence of his submission to the will of God. "He did not seek to elude this death, trusting, even in the darkest moments, that the Father would remain faithful to him and save him from failure, despite appearances."<sup>125</sup> He did not trust in some symbolic general human truth about life coming from death, but rather trusted in God's power to renew his life.

At this point theology goes beyond any anthropological scheme of renewal of life in rites of initiation. Christians claim that God did something unprecedented in raising Christ from the dead. Not even Jesus expected such a turn of events. Christ became the exemplar of new life for a community, a new life that bears witness to the power of God and faithfulness to the vision of the Kingdom of God. This vision has God at the centre and in Jesus' life, the vision not subject to blurring by the distortions of sin. That is, Jesus did not break his relationship with God by seeking a position which was not his due.<sup>126</sup>

Vergote understands<sup>127</sup> that according to the scheme of initiation, new life requires

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121. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 76:

*"La croix est paradigme libérateur parce que, homme paradigmatique, Jésus y manifeste la vérité humaine et religieuse. Signe de contradiction, la croix ne masque pas après coup l'exaltation, nous arrache à nos mystifications; nos illusions contradictoires se brisent sur elle."*

122. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 76f.

123. See Phil 2:6.

124. See 2 Cor 5:21 and Rom 6:10.

125. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 77.

126. According to Vergote, sin effects a rupture of one's covenant with God. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 78.

127. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 78f.

detachment. But sin is attachment to what is ultimately illusory. As long as we remain attached to the illusions and their consequences in any area of our life, we are not free to embrace the new life.

The scheme of life and death in rites of initiation is taken up by Paul when he describes the effects of Christian baptism. In going into the water, the initiate dies with Christ to sin, and emerges from the water "dead to sin, but alive for God in Christ Jesus."<sup>128</sup> Thus, what in anthropological terms is explained with a scheme of life and death in rites of initiation, has become in Christian thinking, a scheme of sharing new life with Christ. As Christ is considered to have life of a different order, so those who share this life are considered to have a similar life. The cross is the symbol of this new life, because it represents the unending task of freeing oneself from one's illusions, in order to share more deeply in the life of Christ.

Thus, for Vergote, the scheme of initiation is the best scheme with which to understand the redemptive death of Christ. Drawing on deep-seated anthropological and psychological ideas, it represents the necessity of consenting to die in order to be born to a deeper humanity. It does not depend on a perverse image of God who derives satisfaction from the destruction of any creature, as the sacrificial scheme does. Nor does it rely on the myth of an uneasy truce in the hostilities between God and humans, as the scapegoat scheme does.

Vergote also notes<sup>129</sup> that the absence of a single system to explain the mystery of salvation does not detract from the mystery itself. There is an overarching order to the many models, which all claim Jesus Christ as the unique mediator of that salvation. Vergote continues that Jesus' death is only one aspect of the redemptive mystery. This mystery can also be approached in terms of Jesus' life as representing the *rapprochement*

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128. Rom 6:11.

129. See Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 80–83.

between God and humanity, a life which replaces the sacrificial scheme of the former religion.

#### **(f) Conclusion of History of Soteriology**

In the previous pages, I have considered the meanings of salvation as they have been expressed in classical Christianity. I have used von Balthasar's *Theodramatik* as a basic text for the history of soteriology. The reason for this choice of text was that the *Kairos Document* articulates what its authors call "church theology," that is, relatively widely accepted and uncontroversial mainstream theology. Using von Balthasar's text, I expressed five aspects of the New Testament witness that ought to be in any Christian soteriology. I then traced the history of soteriology through the patristic, medieval and modern periods, concentrating on the dominant models of each.

Having outlined this history, I used the work of Antoine Vergote to illustrate two schemes of salvation which have anthropological bases. The first, the sacrificial scheme, was shown to be quite unsuitable for the modern mentality, and particularly for the situation of AIDS in South Africa. The second, the scheme of death and rebirth in rites of initiation, was seen as more fitting for a society which is familiar with celebrations of rites of passage. Christian theology applies this scheme to a new dimension of death and rebirth "in Christ" and thus to sharing in his life - a reality given the name salvation. These models are fairly uncontroversial, although not "classical" in the sense that they date from after the Second Vatican Council and might thus be considered a "contemporary" approach to soteriology. They use "classical" or pre-critical anthropological schemes, which have certainly been superseded.

Having shown that there are numerous approaches to Christian soteriology, I will now demonstrate that no single satisfactory notion encompasses what is meant by salvation in Christ. In particular, I will argue, that it is not sufficient to reduce salvation to a

'spiritual' state which bears no concrete relationship to specific circumstances of the lives of the 'saved.' I will do this in what I am calling a "lemma," or proposition that I take as self-evident before I consider some 'real-life' meanings of salvation in the context of AIDS in South Africa.

## (2) Lemma: Salvation Is Not a Single-dimensional Spiritual State

In its *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith expresses the concern that liberation theology appears to be reductionist. The CDF notes that some theologians of liberation appear to reduce salvation to a political process, namely the struggle for justice and freedom.

To some it even seems that the necessary struggle for human justice and freedom in the economic and political sense constitutes the whole essence of salvation. For them, the Gospel is reduced to a purely earthly gospel.<sup>130</sup>

In the next paragraph, this tendency is identified as "the temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel." The concern of the Congregation is thus to retain the "spiritual" dimension of the Gospel. Christ is our liberator in so far as he "has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind."<sup>131</sup> Thus, for example, the Exodus, the seminal liberating action of God in the Old Testament, was not primarily the freeing of a people from slavery. Rather, its significance lies in the fact that it was God's action of choosing a people with whom to establish a covenant and cultic relationship.<sup>132</sup>

I believe it is important to transcend this false dichotomy between the "secular" and the "spiritual" realms. One must realise that each pervades the other and that a situation of poverty, humiliation, rejection and oppression is not conducive to spiritual wellbeing.

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130. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City, 1984), IV.4.

131. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *"Theology of Liberation,"* IV.2.

132. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *"Theology of Liberation,"* IV.3.

On the other hand, it is the task of Christians to infuse the "secular world" with a "spiritual" dimension, more in line with a vision of the Kingdom of God.

It is important not to think of salvation as coterminous with or equivalent to liberation. But in a context of repression, it is difficult to make sense of salvation if it does not include the reality of liberation. Conversely, salvation is not equivalent to being cured of AIDS. But in the context of enormous suffering wrought by HIV/AIDS, it makes little sense to speak of the saving activity of God without some notion of being saved from the threat of impending death.

As important as it is not to reduce salvation to earthly liberation, it is equally important not to reduce salvation to some transcendent event of the immortal soul surviving death, or of the resurrection of the dead at some eschatological moment. I think the AIDS pandemic presses us to recover some of the early Old Testament language of salvation.<sup>133</sup> This language expresses less developed ideas about salvation than the idea

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133. Ramón Martínez-de-Pisón Liébanas, *L'au-delà* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1993), 37–60, usefully traces for us the Old Testament development of the idea of personal retribution. I will follow in this footnote, what Martínez de Pisón writes in Chapter II, entitled "*Héritiers d'une grande promesse*." Initially members of the Jewish nation identified with the nation. Having life meant being a member of the people who were in communion with the liberating God they had experienced in the Exodus. Losing one's life prematurely, not leaving offspring, or not being buried with one's ancestors was considered a curse, which would confine one to Sheol.

According to Martínez de Pisón, there was an almost mathematical relationship between sin and punishment. The God of justice rewards the good and punishes the evil, as was evident in so many Old Testament events. This recompense was often tied up with the fortune of the whole nation. **Individuals would share the punishment or reward of their parents or ancestors, and perhaps not immediately.**

Some had the insight that the whole people should not suffer for the sins of one or a few individuals, such as David in 2 Sam 24:17. ("It is I who have sinned, I who have committed a fault. But what has this flock done? Let your hand be on me and my family.") So gradually, the fates of the individual and the nation were separated from each other.

There was often a delay in the expected retribution, which led Prophets like Jeremiah to promise that God's retribution would be "in a short time." This hope for divine retribution was projected into the future onto a messiah figure.

By the epoch of the Wisdom writers, it was evident that the equation of retribution did not always apply. The book of Job is a meditation on the problem of the suffering of an innocent person. Qoheleth displays a cynicism with the idea of divine justice, because the just seem to suffer and the evil rewarded. So he says that in Sheol, the evil people will not be able to continue their ways. Daniel, 2 Macc. and Wisdom convey the notion that the expected divine retribution is postponed until a resurrection from the dead.

By the time of Jesus, this faith in the resurrection of the dead was commonplace, and was the

of an immortal soul receiving post-mortem retribution. It articulates the hope that God will 'save' the petitioners from much more immediate concerns than the perdition of their eternal soul.

Some examples from the Old Testament may show what I mean here: God is called upon to deliver Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib, which God duly promises to do through the mouth of Isaiah.<sup>134</sup> In a similar vein, by the hand of his servant David, God saves Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.<sup>135</sup> Chapter 10 of the book of Wisdom describes how the wisdom of God directed history from the creation up till the Exodus, saving Lot's wife (10:6), Noah (10:4), God's servants (10:9), Jacob (10:10-12), Joseph, (10:13f.), etc. A brief perusal of the book of psalms shows that they are peppered with the pleas of people in various situations of peril. There are pleas for God to "Save us" (12:1), to judge in favour of the poor (9,10), to protect the innocent person from enemies (17, 18, 22, 25, etc.), to preserve the petitioner from fear (27), to save the oppressed (31). There are laments of individuals (69, 70) and of the nation (79, 85). There are also psalms of thanksgiving for the salvation that God has rendered (30), of praise for God's being a refuge in all dangers (107), etc.

Clearly these passages in the Old Testament are the reflections of believers who had experienced God's powerful intervention in their lives, and hoped to experience it again. They considered these interventions to be God's acts of salvation. Reflection on similar experience of God's saving action should be recovered in our context of reflection on AIDS. It is this kind of reflection that I propose to do in this context.

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subject of disagreement and debate. For example, he is asked to settle the question of to which of the seven brothers the widow will be married at the resurrection. Thus, by the time of Jesus, God's action is seen as operating on the individual, and God's definitive judgement is a post-mortem experience. Salvation is thus removed from the everyday and projected into the future.

134. See 2 Ki 18:30-35, 19:34 and 20:6.

135. See 2 Sam 3:18.

### (3) Examples of Salvation from AIDS

In Christian tradition the saving activity of God, achieved through the resurrection of Christ, has been expressed in many different metaphors. No single narrative has received privileged status as the preferred way of speaking of salvation. As Schüssler Fiorenza writes, redemption "cannot be reduced to a single notion", and this surfeit of narratives represents a richness, rather than a difficulty. It is the task of theology of redemption to "underscore the diversity of these symbols, images and categories[.]"<sup>136</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, to examine whether among this richness anything specific can be said about salvation in the context of AIDS.

Examples that I consider are healing illness, raising the dead, engagement in community and a new spiritual life. It will be noted that not all of the examples cited are South African. Specifically, the examples of engagement in community and a new spiritual life are taken from the experiences of people living with AIDS in North America and Europe. I believe these areas are open to further reflection in South Africa. This is not because they are not lived experiences,<sup>137</sup> but rather because there is not much theological writing on them in the specific context of AIDS.

#### (a) Healing Illness

In an article<sup>138</sup> that deals principally with practice in the confessional about the use of condoms in spousal relationships, Bate follows Arthur Kleinman<sup>139</sup> in distinguishing between *disease* and *illness*. The former refers to "organic malfunction" and the latter to "the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease."<sup>140</sup> This distinction

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136. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Redemption," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 849.

137. On the contrary, community and spirituality are noted dimensions of life in South Africa.

138. Stuart Bate, "Differences in Confessional Advice in South Africa," in *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, edited by James F. Keenan (New York, London: Continuum, 2000), 212–21.

139. Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980).

140. Bate, Stuart, "Differences in Confessional Advice," 218.

allows Bate to distinguish further between “curing disease” and “healing illness.” The former applies to “the establishment of effective control of disordered biological and psychological processes” while the latter applies to “the provision of personal and social meaning for life problems created by sickness.” AIDS has aspects of both disease and illness, particularly the socially constructed stigma associated with the sickness. Bate says of this stigma that “people who contract HIV go through a process of cultural and social isolation which is in many ways more ‘sickening’ than the clinical symptoms themselves.”<sup>141</sup>

For a number of reasons, the most obvious of which I believe is the simple question of competence, Bate sees it as the task and vocation of Christians to concentrate more on healing than on curing people with AIDS. As “cultural and religious healing is fundamentally a question of care and prayer in an accepting human environment”<sup>142</sup> it is incumbent on Christians to establish this kind of environment. This, Bate says, can be done by setting up structures such as “counselling, group therapy for HIV positive people, and family-based care of people with AIDS.”<sup>143</sup> Such work is evangelisation because it helps people to live healthier lives confronting the culture of silence and fear associated with AIDS. I would relate this to another publication of Bate’s from the same year, which is not specifically about AIDS, but which lends meaning to the mandate to raise the dead.

### **(b) Raising the Dead**

Elsewhere Bate says it is important to interpret Jesus’ mandate to his disciples to raise the dead in a way that is intelligible for our present context.<sup>144</sup> In modern scientific

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141. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 218f.

142. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 219.

See also, the published version of Bate’s doctoral dissertation: Stuart C. Bate, *Inculturation and Healing: Coping-Healing in South African Christianity* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1995).

143. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 219.

144. Stuart Bate, “Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate for the Global Context,” in *To Cast Fire Upon the*

culture, the text would be interpreted with difficulty in a clinical sense. However, this is not what Jesus had in mind. He did not expect the apostles physically to give life to deceased people. "His mission is about saving, rescuing and restoring human life. This, then, is the sense in which the mission to raise the dead should be understood."<sup>145</sup> Bate says the life that Christians offer to our contemporaries is helping them to find restored identity and belonging in a world marked by the deadness of anomie, and in which they are increasingly alienated from village, family, tribe and community. Thus his understanding of the mandate is of restoring life to people suffering from what I call "social death" of stigma, isolation and indifference experienced by many people living with AIDS. We consider this in the following point:

### **(c) Engagement in Community**

Samson's thesis<sup>146</sup> is instructive in this regard. Samson shows that an essential ingredient in psychological adapting to life with HIV is through the development of a spiritual life.<sup>147</sup> The spirituality of which he is speaking is not a restricted focus on a private or personal relationship with God, but also includes relational intimacy and the search for meaning. In developing a spirituality of this kind, a person finds focus and is able to renegotiate his<sup>148</sup> or her priorities and expectations of life. This constitutes coming to terms with (and to a certain extent, overcoming) living with HIV. In developing this spirituality, a person with HIV:

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*Earth*, edited by Teresa Okure (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000), 42–56,

[Http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-](http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm)

[A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm](http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm) viewed on 17 June 2004.

145. Bate, Stuart, "Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate." No page number given in WWW text.

146. André Samson, "*L'expérience de la spiritualité dans le contexte de l'adaptation psychologique à la maladie chronique et potentiellement mortelle: Une étude phénoménologique de sujets homosexuels et vivant avec le VIH*," Ph.D. thesis (Faculty of Education Sciences: Laval University, 2001).

147. Samson, "*L'expérience de la spiritualité*," 34–45.

148. Samson was writing exclusively about homosexual men with HIV/AIDS.

(i) develops a belief which sustains an effort to adjust to his or her infection with HIV

(ii) modifies his or her perception of being infected with HIV and imprints a new dynamic on his or her existence

(iii) lives a fulfillment of his or her Being.<sup>149</sup>

We see thus, the value of being part of a caring community. The person with HIV does not want to curl up on his or her mat and wait to be overcome by inevitable death. Engagement in an active community, or a circle of activity, is important. The four subjects in Samson's study overcame the inclination to despair by engaging in charitable or volunteer work as a means of directing their energies outward and towards building up a supportive community.

Hardy's book<sup>150</sup> is based on interviews with partners of homosexual men who are living with or who have succumbed to AIDS. From these interviews, Hardy shows that communities are essential support structures for people living with AIDS, and those who are close to them. In his fifth chapter, "Communities of Support," he considers the roles of family, friends and religion in providing support. He concludes with a summary of the value of community:

We might not find a concrete answer to these questions [of suffering and death] other than that everything is to be lived as consciously as possible; and we can do that only if others are there with us in the process. Here is the very heart of community and what it means to live in the presence of the sacred.<sup>151</sup>

#### **(d) A New Spiritual Life**

Many people living with AIDS attest to how their condition has awoken in them the desire and resolution to live a more spiritual life. At the very least, living with AIDS

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149. Samson, "L'expérience de la spiritualité," 191–203.

150. Richard P. Hardy, *Loving Men: Gay Partners, Spirituality, and AIDS* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

151. Hardy, *Loving Men*, 128.

confronts a person, perhaps for the first time, with the reality of his or her mortality. That person may embark on a search for the meaning of life and death, and begin to live more consciously the meaning he or she has found.

Hardy also has a broad understanding of what is meant by spirituality.<sup>152</sup> It permits of no duality between an immaterial “spirit” and a physical body. In fact, a good spirituality affirms the body, life and human experience. It may be purely humanist or it may involve religious faith, which implies mutual relationships with God, others and creation.

The title of Thomas Montfort’s book<sup>153</sup> “*AIDS: the vaccination of truth*” shows that the illness confronts one with the truth of one’s being. In fact, Montfort goes further than simply being “vaccinated” against falsehood. He writes this book with some evangelical zeal, the purpose of which is to educate other young men not to accept the lies he perceives to have brought him to his current state. These include the normality of homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, the breakdown of the family, pedagogical neutrality, reliability of the condom etc. In his third chapter, “*Le SIDA: un chemin de résurrection*”<sup>154</sup> he shows three ways that might be considered salvific in the context of AIDS: (i) education in chaste love, (ii) a new political orientation and awakening and (iii) solidarity with people who have AIDS.

In a similar vein, we read how the diagnosis of AIDS brought Dominique Morin to a spiritual conversion.<sup>155</sup> From being an anarchist with terrorist potential, he begins a slow moral transformation to become a witness to the Gospel. In the first chapter of his conversations with Béatrice Caux he describes how his greatest journey was the movement from despair to hope.<sup>156</sup> AIDS also brought him to the ultimate questions of

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152. See chapter 1 of Hardy, *Loving Men* entitled “Spirituality: Journey of Embodied Life.”

153. Thomas Montfort, *SIDA: Le vaccin de la vérité* (Paris: F-X de Guibert, 1995).

154. Montfort, *SIDA: Le vaccin de la vérité*, 71–83.

155. See Dominique Morin and Béatrice Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin: Des ténèbres au Royaume* (Paris: F-X de Guibert, 1997).

156. Morin and Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin*, 15–29.

meaning, which he frames in terms of love, the title of his second chapter: "*Le sida au carrefour du sens: 'une invitation à réinventer l'amour'*".<sup>157</sup>

### Section Three: The Prophetic Response

The third type of response in the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies is what the *Kairos Document* calls a "prophetic theology". The *KD* says that it is not enough "to repeat the generalized Christian principles" and it calls for a prophetic response that "speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis."<sup>158</sup> It is important to note that the *KD* works toward a prophetic response. That means, that such a response is never final or definitive. It is a work in progress, responding to the exigencies of moment.

In this section, I will consider those aspects of the response to the AIDS crisis in South Africa that I regard as prophetic. I will examine the prophetic responses to the AIDS *kairos* under the three headings rendered by a simple analysis of the prophetic task as (i) annunciation, (ii) denunciation and (iii) prophetic action.

#### (1) Prophecy

At the outset of this section, it is important to state what prophecy is not. It is not predicting the future, as it is represented in some media and popular parlance. On the contrary, prophecy is very related to the present. In the Old Testament, prophets arose in times of crisis, when there were impediments or obstructions in the relationship between the people and God. The message of a prophet concerns the here and now, and

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157. Morin and Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin*, 31–84. Another example of a diagnosis of HIV infection bringing a person to a more spiritual approach to life was aired on the programme *3rd Degree* on e-tv in South Africa on 1 July 2003. One young man interviewed said his spiritual journey began when he learnt that he was HIV-infected.

158. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 37.

confronts people with the need for real choices they must make in their attitudes towards God and their fellow human beings. What is true, is that there was often an eschatological dimension to the message of the prophet, which might be interpreted as a foretelling of the future.<sup>159</sup>

Considering the ministry of some of the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, the prophetic task is accomplished through annunciation, denunciation and symbolic action. It is the mission of prophets to announce without compromise the message of God, to denounce what is unacceptable, and to deliver this message through symbolic actions. The prophet does not speak his or her own opinions, but is given the words of God.<sup>160</sup>

As the message of the prophet is not universally well received, this often makes the calling of a prophet a source of suffering. The Old Testament records instances of prophets reluctant to receive this mission,<sup>161</sup> but who discovered that God's charge is ineluctable.<sup>162</sup> They are compelled, driven to announce the message of God to their contemporaries. Jesus is aware that a prophet is not always welcome (or is even despised) in his home town.<sup>163</sup> More specifically, the message of the prophet is unwelcome, because it has the potential to challenge people and disturb their comfort. The graphic example of the fate of a prophet is the death of John the Baptist.

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159. For example, the visions of First Isaiah, are often expressed in the future tense. "It will happen in the final days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights." (Is 2:2).

160. See for example, Moses receives instructions from God for his mission: Ex 3:10, "I am sending you to Pharaoh, for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." and Ex 3:16, "Go, gather the elders of Israel together and tell them . . ."

Similarly Jeremiah receives his instructions from God: Jer 2:1, "The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, 'Go and shout this in Jerusalem's ears: . . .'" Thus it is not on his own whim that a true prophet embarks on the mission.

161. See, for example, Ex 4:10-17; Jer 1:4-10; Jonah 1, etc.: the reluctance of Moses, Jeremiah and Jonah to accept their prophetic calling.

162. See, for example, Jer 20:7-9. In this case the prophet is vindicated against those who would persecute him because of the message he bears. See Jer 20:10-18.

163. See Mt 13:58 and parallels.

In order to communicate the message of God with which they are entrusted, prophets may resort to the use of allegory,<sup>164</sup> symbolic action<sup>165</sup> and mime.<sup>166</sup> Ezekiel is the most obvious example of a prophet whose actions convey symbolically the message God had for the people. If a prophet is to be at all credible, there must be a congruency between his or her actions and the message he or she is conveying.

In the context of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, there is the need for prophetic voices to announce the Good News of salvation, to denounce the stigma of AIDS and failures in the provision of care for people affected by the disease, and to engage in symbolic action to show God's love and concern for these people. In this section I will consider some of these prophetic voices. I will review a recommendation that elements of ancestral tradition be incorporated into the Christian ministry of healing in order to enhance the efficacy of this ministry. I will also consider the need for stronger denunciations concerning many aspects of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Finally I will illustrate by means of one example the type of prophetic action that is called for in the present context.

## (2) Announcing the Good News

### (a) The Value of Ritual and the Sacrament of Healing

Indigenous rituals are founded on the accumulated experience, knowledge and wisdom of generations. These rituals have been designed to be effective - to work - to achieve the aim for which they have been devised. A community is likely to be affected by its local rituals, which are expressed in the idiom of the people who have devised them.

Often the aims of indigenous ritual differ from those of the Christian sacraments which have also been modified over generations to be more efficacious. Concerning what

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164. See Ezek 16 and 17.

165. See Ezek 37:15-28.

166. See Ezek 12:1-16.

is done in times of illness, the aims of the cult of the ancestors are expressed in terms of reconciliation between the individual, the family and the community of the living and the dead, and healing of the afflicted. The aims of the sacrament of anointing of the sick and the dying are expressed as follows:

Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and, under the pressure of temptation, perhaps weakened in their faith.

This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support.

The sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick: by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. Thus the sick person is not only able to bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it. A return to physical health may follow the reception of this sacrament if it will be beneficial to the sick person's salvation.<sup>167</sup>

The sacrament of anointing is often accompanied by that of reconciliation, and on occasions of grave illness, by simple absolution. The purpose of these is to effect reconciliation between the individual, God and the community - remarkably similar terms to those in which the aim of the ancestral rite is expressed.

Ncube's proposal (which I considered earlier in this chapter) for the treatment of people suffering with AIDS, insists on the efficacy of ancestral healing ritual through social and familial reconciliation. This is not clinical curing, but the healing of relationships with the family, God and the ancestors. It re-integrates a person in a circle of relationships which will sustain and accompany him or her for the final years, months or days of his or her life. As I showed when I was considering Ncube's description of the ritual of healing, the ancestral ritual considers the health of the person in his or her social context. It is essential for the family and near neighbours to participate in the ritual, in order that the afflicted person believe in their good disposition. The purpose is to restore social harmony between the living and the dead.

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167. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Roman Ritual: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), 21.

The Christian sacraments of the sick, which are the closest equivalent to the ritual of healing, when they are celebrated, are often performed perfunctorily, reading from books translated from a foreign tongue, occasionally with no deep appreciation of the context and culture in which they are being celebrated. Often, again, there are no representatives of the family present, and it is a very private affair, with the priest offering the ill person the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. The way the latter sacrament is celebrated is, again, very privatised. With the priest representing both God and the Church, or faith community, there is no need for the presence of other members of the family or community.

Since the traditional African celebration of the ritual of healing is more communitarian, and is celebrated in the presence of the people with whom harmony and reconciliation are being sought, it has the potential of being more salutary than the private sacrament. This is crucial because of the stigma associated with AIDS and the recrimination and denial that accompany a diagnosis of HIV infection. There is much "work" (= 'mosebetsi' = 'ritual') that needs to be achieved.

Ncube is not alone in calling for a more communitarian approach to the sacraments of healing. Moshoeshoe has also proposed a modification of the Roman Rite,<sup>168</sup> which calls on the whole congregation to lay hands on the sick person (or if there are too many people, to extend their hands over the sick person) and pray for him or her in silence. He also suggests that a sign of peace be exchanged, to wish the sick person recovery and good health. If this part of the ritual were performed "meaningfully," I believe it could initiate a reconciliation between the person with AIDS and the community to which he or she belongs.

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168. See Letsie Moshoeshoe, "Healing Rite," in *The Church and African Cultures: Conference Papers*, edited by Mohlomi Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 86–90.

### **(b) Naming the Affliction**

At a conference on responsibility in a time of AIDS, Ncube develops the work he did for his MA thesis. He takes what might be considered a "prophetic" stance in saying families should avoid the traditional ways of explaining this particular illness, and call AIDS what it is: a result of human error, and not of some mystical origin. Repeating the advice of Skhakhane<sup>169</sup> that communities should avoid "pseudo-diviners and faith healers," he says that it is better not to have recourse to the ministrations of a diviner if this will result in accusations of witchcraft and cause further division in an already fractious situation. Witchcraft accusations are a means of exculpation, whose purpose is to take the blame off the person suffering misfortune. However, the blame is then often unjustly projected onto a member of the family or near neighbours. This is not conducive to the overall harmony and reconciliation of a community.

However, HIV/AIDS results in [?from] a situation where there has been human ~~error~~, and there is nothing mystical in its causation. Thus the accusations and suspicions should not create such a scene, rather, the infected person should somehow own up and admit that there has been a damage that is irreparable and the affected community should give support to the person suffering.<sup>170</sup>

Further, Ncube suggests a more open forum for the sacrament of reconciliation, particularly where there have been accusations of witchcraft. At the least, the suspicion should be remedied in a public manner in order to put an end to speculation and accusations. This requires that the pastor be more involved in the life of the family, and that there be a greater openness than currently exists in private, individual celebrations of the sacrament of reconciliation. Such practice would imply a shift in the gravity of salvation celebrated in the sacrament. The focus is less on forgiveness of personal sins and more on reconciliation of a community with God, with itself, and with its ancestors.

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<sup>169</sup> Jerome Skhakhane, "Catholics and Southern African Traditional Healers," *Grace and Truth* 16, no. 1 (April 1999): 7f.

<sup>170</sup> Vitus Siphon Ncube, "Responsibility in Inculturation: The Healing Ministry in a Zulu Context," paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 103.

In his response to Ncube's paper, Sipuka advises that the practice of *inhlambuluko* (reconciliation) be developed at greater length to concentrate on the dimension of repentance.<sup>171</sup> He says that *inhlambuluko* would help "the infected to own up, . . . the families (*sic*) members to let go of their anger and prejudice against the infected, the one who infect (*sic*) others to repent."<sup>172</sup> This, also, would be useful in helping to overcome the stigma associated with AIDS, as it would require people to break the silence, and to name the illness for what it is.

Sipuka asks rhetorically: "Given the effects politics, economy and modernization have on society, is it realistic to appeal to values for which the environment is no longer conducive?"<sup>173</sup> He is clearly expecting the negative answer: No, we should not appeal to traditional values as the basis for *inhlambuluko*. Clearly the fear of breaking (sexual) taboos *per se* no longer commands the adherence it once did in more traditional society. *Inhlambuluko*, I therefore suggest, should focus on repentance for the harm one's action has brought to the community rather than on the brute fact of breaking a traditional taboo, looking rather at the *effect* of one's having contracted and possibly transmitted HIV/AIDS. This represents a shift from deontological to teleological (consequentialist) moral evaluation. Such a shift will be necessary for *inhlambuluko* to have contemporary relevance. I wonder whether a Catholic priest<sup>174</sup> arguing for a shift to a more teleological understanding might apply this same logic in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation: "I confess not to having broken the sixth commandment, but to having

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171. Sithembele Sipuka, "A Response to Vitus Ncube's Paper," response to paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 120.

172. In dealing with AIDS, Sipuka cautions against the use of traditional cultural categories which may be out of date due to cultural changes. But I believe that I have established satisfactorily in the second chapter of this work, that the cult of the ancestors is alive and well, and is a factor not to be overlooked in understanding and dealing with AIDS in South Africa.

173. Sipuka, "A Response to Vitus Ncube's Paper," 119.

174. Fr Sipuka is the rector of St John Vianney Seminary - the national seminary for the training of diocesan priests in South Africa.

exposed myself or another person to HIV/AIDS and consequently brought hardship on our respective families.”

### (3) Denunciation Where Necessary

The second prophetic task is to denounce unambiguously whatever adds to the suffering of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, as this is clearly against the will of God.<sup>175</sup> I divide these considerations in two: Firstly, to denounce the way in which so many people in South Africa are infected with HIV. Secondly, to denounce the exacerbation of their suffering because of official neglect and the stigma still associated with the infection.

#### (a) Means of Infection

Firstly, it is necessary to examine and denounce those conditions which make it so common that HIV is transmitted. The prophetic task is to denounce whatever avenues are due to human agency. I see this as relevant to soteriology, because it is a matter of prevention rather than cure of untold suffering. Much of the classical Christian soteriology I considered above focuses on therapeutic salvation in the sense that it understands Christ to have come to remedy a disordered situation. It could be summarised in the line from the Easter Proclamation of the *Exultet*: “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!” A prophetic soteriology would prefer to prevent the fault of Adam from occurring in the first place.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I examined the most common ways in which HIV is transmitted. These were sexual, parenteral and perinatal. After much prevarication, the

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175. As the chosen people returned from exile to the Promised Land, they were exhorted to “[c]hoose life, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him . . .” (Deut 30:19f.) This is surely the offer that God would be making to South Africans as they return from the exile of centuries of racist rule.

government has eventually proceeded with the administration of antiretroviral drugs to women who are giving birth in hospital. This will hopefully have the effect of cutting MTCT by one third. The recent work of Gisselquist et al.<sup>176</sup> has highlighted the necessity of added vigilance in the prevention of parenteral transmission of the virus. Notwithstanding their important work, the primary vector of HIV transmission remains sexual. It is in this area that there is need for a prophetic denunciation of those factors which endanger the lives of thousands of people every day.

(i) Issues of Gender

It is necessary to condemn in no uncertain terms gender-based violence which puts women at risk of contracting HIV. The need for this condemnation is made clear in studies like that of Dunkle et al.<sup>177</sup> They conclude their paper:

Overall, this study confirms that women who have experienced partner violence or who are currently involved with controlling male partners are at increased risk of HIV infection, even after their own risk behaviour is taken into account. We postulate that abusive men are more likely than non-abusers to be HIV positive or to be infected with transmissible cofactors such as HSV-2 which render women more vulnerable to HIV infection during subsequent exposure. . . Ultimately, addressing problems of gender-based violence and HIV will require broad community and societal level transformations that challenge entrenched cultures of violence and male-dominant norms of gender relations.<sup>178</sup>

This challenge must be heard and acted upon by members of churches who are in a position to effect changes in "male-dominant norms of gender relations." It should be taken to the heart of the churches as institutions whose voices and actions still wield much influence in South African society. The more visibly the dignity of women is recognised and valued in the churches, the more credible will be the witness of churches in many other areas of teaching of salvation.

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176. Gisselquist, Potterat, Brody, and Vachon, "Let It Be Sexual."

177. Kristin L. Dunkle, et al., "Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV Infection in Women Attending Antenatal Clinics in South Africa," *The Lancet* 363, no. 9419 (1 May 2004): 1415–21.

178. Dunkle, et al., "Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV," 1419f.

The cult of the ancestors also rests on assumptions of male supremacy, when for example, only male ancestors are regularly honoured and remembered.<sup>179</sup> In some cases, those ancestors who cause trouble, are considered to be on the female side of the family.<sup>180</sup> Thus there is a gender imbalance at the root of some cherished notions regarding the ancestors. It is indubitable that this imbalance (a) is the fruit of and (b) has effects on "male-dominant norms of gender relations." In this light there is an imperative to challenge certain assumptions of male supremacy inherent in some aspects of the cult in order to prevent the transmission of HIV.

It may be argued that this is interfering with a cherished dimension of traditional culture, or is an imposition of Western culture. I would argue in return that no dimension of culture is sacrosanct or above challenge, particularly when it affects the lives and health of millions of people.

At the very least, it is incumbent on churches and followers of the ancestor cult to denounce any gender-based violence as totally unacceptable in any form. The attitude of entitlement that some men have towards sexual relationships cannot be allowed to continue. The rape of women and children should not be tolerated under any circumstances.<sup>181</sup> It is not enough to pay lip-service to the denunciation of these two forms of violence. They should be severely sanctioned as a deterrent to others.

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179. See Nise Malange, "Discriminated Ancestors," *Agenda: A Journal About Women and Gender* 13 (1992). She writes: "in the Nguni or Xhosa culture women are not brought back home as ancestors. The custom is only for men (male) and the only thing done for women is the unveiling of a tombstone if it has been erected."

180. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, "The Aetiology of Spirit in Southern Africa," *African Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 159.

181. Oswald Hirmer, "Letter on HIV/AIDS to All the Faithful of the Diocese of Umtata, Easter 2001," in *Speak Out on HIV & AIDS: Our Prayer is Always Full of Hope*, written by Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar (Nairobi: Paulines, 2004), 71. Bishop Hirmer writes: "In the name of Jesus I call on such people and command them: 'Do not become an instrument of the devil by abusing innocent children.'"

## (ii) Distribution of Condoms

As I discussed in the first chapter, the strategy of the government against the spread of AIDS has been the A,B,C campaign to **Abstain, Be faithful, use a Condom**. The SACBC strongly affirms the first two pillars of this strategy: abstinence and faithfulness within marriage. But they have raised a prophetic voice denouncing the government's wholesale distribution of condoms as the third pillar to slow the spread of HIV infection.<sup>182</sup> Informed, obviously, by the deontological reasoning of *Humanae Vitae*<sup>183</sup> which affirms *Castii Connubii*,<sup>184</sup> the only normal legitimate sexual intercourse countenanced by the conference is between spouses and is open to the possibility of procreation.<sup>185</sup> Adding

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182. See SACBC, *A Message of Hope from the Catholic Bishops to the People of God in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland*, Message from the July Plenary Session (Pretoria: SACBC, 2001), [Http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm) viewed on 21 September 2001.

The message is strongly opposed to the belief that using condoms to prevent the spread of HIV makes sexual intercourse moral. In fact, "The promotion and distribution of condoms as a means of having so-called 'safe sex' contributes to the breaking down of the moral fiber of our nations because it gives a wrong message to people," which message the bishops proceed to analyse.

183. Paul VI, "*Humanae Vitae*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60, no. 9 (30 September 1968): # 11f.

teaches: "The Church . . . teaches as absolutely required that *in any use whatever of marriage* there must be no impairment of its natural capacity to procreate human life.

"This particular doctrine . . . is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act."

I use the translation in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1982), 397–416.

184. Pius XI, "*Casti Connubii*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 22, no. 13 (31 December 1930): # 54ff.

teaches: "Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

"[T]he Catholic Church . . . through Our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated of its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin."

I use the translation in *Five Great Encyclicals* (New York: Paulist Publications, 1939), 77–117.

185. However, the message allows that in the case of serodiscordant spouses:

"The Church accepts that everyone has the right to defend one's life against mortal danger. This would include using the appropriate means and course of action.

"Similarly where one spouse is infected with HIV/AIDS they must listen to their consciences. They are the only ones who can choose the appropriate means, in order to defend themselves against the infection. Decisions of such an intimate nature should be made by both husband and wife as equal and loving partners."

It appears that in this case the bishops concede the legitimate use of some barrier method of prevention of the transmission of the virus, even though this may render the conjugal act closed to the possibility of procreation. What is left unsaid is most revealing.

teleological reasoning to their deontological arguments, the conference also questioned the efficacy of the condom as a prophylaxis against HIV transmission. The devices may be faulty or wrongly used, and thereby lead to the spread of AIDS.

I am neither qualified nor competent in the area of moral theology, and have not studied sufficiently the details of the traditional teaching of contraception. Furthermore, this vexed question warrants a thesis in itself. However, from what practice I have had in the sacrament of reconciliation, it seems that the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* has not been "received" in the sense of accepted by the majority of Catholics. I don't believe I have ever had a penitent confess to the use of artificial means of birth control. Accordingly, I wonder how advised the conference is to try to promote in South Africa a teaching that is almost universally regarded as outdated, and if not frankly wrong, then at least "too heavy a burden to bear."<sup>186</sup> The fact is that the virus is continuing to spread through sexual intercourse, between spouses and otherwise, and the condom, while not 100 percent efficacious as a barrier, at least offers a large measure of protection, according to mainstream medical opinion.<sup>187</sup>

#### **(b) Exacerbation of Suffering**

There are various aspects of the pandemic in the country that make it worse than necessary for the people who are already infected with HIV or suffering from full-blown AIDS. These aspects, too, should be unambiguously denounced.

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<sup>186</sup>. See Mt 23:4 and parallels.

<sup>187</sup>. I would note here that there is no unanimity among medical practitioners about the efficacy of condoms as a barrier protection against the spread of HIV. I believe the arguments are not always entirely objective, and are often fuelled by ideology. However, consensus appears to indicate that when the devices are properly used, they prevent the transmission of the virus in at least 90% of cases.

**(i) Government Inefficiency**

In a similarly prophetic vein, the SACBC has denounced the delays in making ARV treatment available, and says that it would be tragic if so many people suffered because of delays caused by red tape and political point-scoring. Money earmarked for the treatment of people with AIDS is not reaching the intended projects. Orphans and sick people are not receiving their due grants because of bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference.<sup>188</sup> The bishops also note here that “[s]econd only to the State, the Catholic Church is the largest provider of home based care for the sick, of palliative care for the dying, and of care and support for AIDS orphans.” So, while they denounce governmental tardiness and indifference, they also commit themselves to continue to work as partners of the same state agencies.

**(ii) Stigma**

An enormous amount of suffering from AIDS is due not to the symptoms of the illnesses associated with the syndrome, but to the social isolation of people who have the disease. As I mentioned repeatedly in the chapter on AIDS, there is great stigma attached to the disease.<sup>189</sup> There are many causes for this stigma: (i) its association with death; (ii) its association with sex; (iii) lack of knowledge.

These three factors are gradually becoming less significant. As a culturally-constructed reality, stigma changes with the cultures. As more and more information becomes available about HIV infection, and ordinary people have access to this information, some of their attitudes may change. For a start, as drugs slowly become available that are able to prolong life, the automatic and immediate association of AIDS

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188. See SACBC, “Catholic Leaders Call for Greater Cooperation Between State and Church in Assisting People with AIDS,” Press statement (2004), [Http://www.sacbc.org.za/2004aids.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/2004aids.htm) viewed on 28 July 2004.

189. See for example, Carol S. Goldin, “Stigmatization and AIDS: Critical Issues in Public Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 39, no. 9 (1994): 1359–66. The seminal work on stigma and AIDS was Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989).

and death may possibly diminish. The association of AIDS and sexual activity will and should remain, because, as the conversation between Brewer et al.<sup>190</sup> and the WHO/UNAIDS<sup>191</sup> shows, AIDS is primarily a sexually-transmitted disease. The disease is forcing society to examine its attitudes towards sexuality, and to confront some of the taboos associated with talking about sexual activity. The churches are involved in all three of these areas: medical treatment and care for the dying; discussing relationships and teaching life skills;<sup>192</sup> passing on of knowledge.<sup>193</sup>

But there is a fourth factor contributing to the stigma of AIDS, and this falls directly within the purview of the churches and those who are associated with the cult of the ancestors. This is the association of AIDS with punishment from God or the ancestors for behaviour that has deviated from the traditional prescriptions.<sup>194</sup>

It is not clear that the cult of the ancestors can easily break this association of AIDS with the punishment of the ancestors, since compliance with the prescriptions of the cult seems to be linked with fear of the wrath of the ancestors. It will be necessary to portray the ancestors in a more loving, caring light (as indeed some do,<sup>195</sup>) in order to say that the ancestors do not punish deviant behaviour by bringing death on those who do not

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190. Devon D. Brewer, et al., "Mounting Anomalies in the Epidemiology of HIV in Africa: Cry the Beloved Paradigm," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 144–47, [Http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf](http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf) viewed on 2 April 2003.

191. WHO / UNAIDS, *Expert Group Stresses That Unsafe Sex Is the Primary Mode of HIV Infection in Africa* (Geneva, 2003, 14 March), [Http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html](http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html) viewed on 9 April 2003.

192. For example, the SACBC sponsors "groups such as 'Youth Alive' which promote 'Education for Life' through workshops and programs inspired by the mottoes 'True Love Waits' and 'Choose Life'." See SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

193. For example, the chaplaincy of Catholic tertiary students in Johannesburg was involved in going around to schools in the mid-1990's with students talking about AIDS and its prevention and consequences.

194. See Stuart C. Bate, "Good News in a World of AIDS," *Trefoil* No. 264 (2002): 40 and Stuart C. Bate, "Good News for AIDS Myths," *Missionalia* 30, no. 1 (April 2002): 96.

195. For example, Aylward Shorter, "Conflicting Attitudes to Ancestor Veneration in Africa," *AFER* XI, no. 1 (January 1969): 29, indicates that the relationship people have to their ancestors is one of piety (or filial devotion). Quoting an example from Uganda, Shorter writes that despite their ability to send mortal sickness "the lineage spirits are seen as essentially loving relatives, good and exemplary people, who are irrevocably committed to the well-being of their lineage and its continuance."

comply with the prescriptions. Also, as more people begin to understand the disease as caused by a virus that attacks the immune system, making them vulnerable to other infections, then perhaps the association of AIDS with the punishment of the ancestors will be diminished.

Similarly, Christians should emphatically denounce the notion that God is punishing the person with AIDS for some sin. In a letter to his diocese, Hugh Slattery of Tzaneen wrote: "The people themselves and not God are responsible for their actions therefore for getting AIDS. We shouldn't blame God for allowing people to misuse their freedom and get hurt as a result."<sup>196</sup>

The idea of God punishing a person runs contrary to the Gospels. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him that "God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved."<sup>197</sup> Thus it is not God's plan to condemn or judge people. Nor should it be the task of the followers of Jesus to pronounce judgement on the behaviour of others. Jesus was very clear on this. He said "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."<sup>198</sup> He also told those who were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery that the one who was guiltless should be the first to throw a stone.<sup>199</sup> But he told the woman to go and sin no more. Thus, he distinguishes between the sin and the sinner, and does not condemn the sinner, but instructs him or her to change his or her lifestyle.

The teaching of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, among others, has denounced the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. For example the SACBC encourages people living with "this killer disease":

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196. Hugh Slattery, "HIV/AIDS: A Call to Action: Responding as Christians," in *Speak Out on HIV & AIDS: Our Prayer is Always Full of Hope*, written by Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar (Nairobi: Paulines, 2004), 58.

197. See Jn 3:17.

198. See Lk 6:37.

199. See Jn 8:8.

We encourage your families and communities to accept you with love and to stand by you. We urge them not to abandon you but to continue Christ's mission of mercy, compassion and love. The Church loves you, welcomes you and reaches out to you in many ways.<sup>200</sup>

In the final analysis, the prophetic task of announcing and denouncing is given credibility in action. There has to be a congruence between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, or between the words and actions of a prophet. It is to this final aspect of a prophetic soteriology that I now turn.

#### (4) Prophetic action

##### **(a) TAC: The Treatment Action Campaign**

Before considering specifically Christian ways of engaging in prophetic action, I offer one example of an organisation that has been involved in civic action on behalf of people with AIDS in South Africa.

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is a civic organisation founded in Cape Town in 1998 by Adurrazack (Zackie) Achmat and others. The campaign has initiated and led many protests against the government inactivity on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS. It has lobbied for the importation and sale of cheaper generic ARV's. Members have imported at their own expense consignments of generic ARV drugs from Brazil, in contravention of South African trade regulations.

In a widely publicised move, Achmat announced that he would stop taking his ARV treatment until the government undertook to provide the same medication to everyone suffering from AIDS and who would benefit. His 'martyr' action won him wide respect from many within and outside the campaign, particularly when it became evident that his health was declining dramatically. He ended his "drugs strike" in August 2003, and the government announced its plan to begin the five-year rollout of affordable ARV's for

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<sup>200</sup>. SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

everyone in November of that year. While not the sole reason for the government's decision to provide the medication, Achmat's strike was certainly one element that helped to mobilise public pressure for the drugs, and perhaps to shame the government into being more proactive.

In a campaign to combat the stigma of HIV infection, members wear T-shirts emblazoned with the motto "I am HIV positive." On occasion Presidents Mandela and Mbeki have also worn these T-shirts, against their better sartorial judgment. The idea is that when respected leaders as well as ordinary people are not ashamed to associate themselves with the disease, it loses some of the stigma attached to it, making life more liveable for those with the virus.

The TAC is not a faith-based organisation, and is ecumenical (in a secular sense) in its approach.<sup>201</sup> Although begun by homosexual men living with HIV, it is open to anyone affected by the pandemic. This is reminiscent of the coalitions formed during the struggle for political emancipation, which saw alliances of civic, religious and political organisations.

### **(b) Christian Prophetic Action**

Although the writers of the *KD* were all members of churches, they encouraged their followers to participate in broad-based civic anti-apartheid campaigns, so that the churches did not become a "Third Force" acting in parallel to the mass democratic movement. Likewise in the AIDS crisis, church leaders "call on small Christian communities, prayer-groups, sodalities, priests, religious and pastoral workers, to join hands with all people who are engaged in the struggle against AIDS."<sup>202</sup> I believe it is pointless to establish independent parallel ecclesiastical structures, if ultimately the bulk of the funding for these structures will have to come from state coffers.

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201. Achmat is a Muslim, for example.

202. SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

The churches have a particular contribution to make in the present crisis, just as they did during the struggle for liberation. Then they had to retain an independent voice in order to criticise, for example, the violence of the uprising, and the lynching of those accused of being government collaborators. In the present *kairos* the churches need to retain a critical distance from the government and the activist campaigns, in order to decry the perception of the provision of condoms as an adequate line of salvation in the crisis. The bishops' *Message of Hope* expresses this in the terms of St Paul: remaining unspoil like bright stars offering the Word of life to a corrupt people.<sup>203</sup>

But while the churches remain critical in their stance, they also provide untold support to people suffering from the consequences of the pandemic. In their hospitals, hospices, clinics, counselling services, orphanages, schools, home visiting, and ministry to the dying and the families of the deceased, they bring "Christ's healing ministry to the most neglected and forgotten."<sup>204</sup> It is this engaged action that renders credible the denunciation and annunciation of the Christian prophetic message. If Christians were not involved at the heart of the crisis, their voice from the sidelines would be unheeded and not worthy of attention.

The question remains whether the churches can or should do more in combatting the AIDS crisis, given the enormity of the problem. The danger exists that AIDS might become the single preoccupation of churches. During the time of apartheid, the struggle for freedom and democracy took an enormous toll on the spiritual and psychic energy of members of the churches. While this struggle was a preoccupation and exclusive focus of so many people, it cannot be said that churches focussed on this struggle to the complete detriment of its other ministries. Similarly, while the struggle against AIDS is compelling the churches to redirect resources both spiritual and material from other ministries, it

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203. Phil 2:15f.

204. See SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

should not force the churches to neglect their services of Christian education, pastoral care, the formation of community, sacramental ministry, etc.

On the contrary, the battle against apartheid elicited great energy and creativity from so many lay Christians, and saw them exercise roles of great responsibility and leadership. May the same be true of the battle against AIDS. Such action may lead to renewal of the life of the churches and the way we celebrate the paschal mysteries of life and death, the seed falling in the ground and dying in order to produce new life.

The Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus state:

The service of faith and the promotion of justice constitute one and the same mission of the Society. They cannot, therefore, be separated one from the other, in our purpose, our action, our life; nor can they be considered simply as one ministry among others, but rather as that ministry whereby all our ministries are brought together in a unified whole.<sup>205</sup>

I believe that this mission statement is not exclusive to the Society of Jesus, but is a worthy manifesto for the entire Church of Christ. In South Africa, the mandate to promote justice did not expire with the attainment of democracy. But to this mandate, we should now add "the battle against AIDS." Thus, prophetic action with regard to AIDS is not just related to the other ministries of the church, but can be a uniting, motive force. The battle against AIDS takes place in our evangelising, our teaching, our health care, our formation of communities, our sacramental life, our care of refugees and orphans, etc. And yet, the apostolate of the Church should not be so closely identified with the battle against AIDS, that when it is won, we are left wondering what the Church is to do.

#### (4) Conclusion to Chapter

In this chapter I have shown that salvation has particular meanings in the context of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa. It does not refer only to the provision of ARV

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205. Society of Jesus, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 61. This is a reflection on 30 years of experience of Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society, which, in 1975, first made the integral connection between the service of the faith and the promotion of justice.

medication, although this is an important facet of what salvation could mean. People suffering from AIDS also need to be “saved” from the social death of isolation, and from the worry of what is going to happen to their orphans if they succumb to the disease. Finally, they need some reassurance that there will be some memory of them, even if they do not fulfil the normal criteria of being counted among the ancestors.

I used the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies exemplified in the *Kairos Document* to compare the soteriology implicit in the ancestor cult, the explicit soteriology of the classical Christian approach in this crisis, and a more focussed prophetic approach to salvation in the same context.

Thinking of salvation in terms of the ancestor cult, one is immediately aware of the culturally appropriate methods of caring for and treating people suffering from infection. This approach includes the use of local medicines and remedies. It sees persons in their entire social context and does not focus only on the treatment of physical symptoms. The ritual processes developed over generations aim to reconcile an ill person with the family, the ancestors, close friends and neighbours, in order to achieve the *summum bonum* of social harmony. I examined the ways in which the cult might foster greater peace and acceptance of one’s condition, and therefore, in terms of Ignatian spirituality, consolation or salvation. I also looked at how the cult could be responsible for the converse, but concluded that overall, the cult is an aid toward salvation.

When I considered the classical Christian approach to salvation in South Africa, it was evident that this is not particularly context-reflective. People who use this approach try to apply understandings of salvation gleaned from previous generations of Christian theology, which seldom offer solutions to questions raised by the precise questions of salvation in the context of AIDS.

Using the *Theodramatik* of Hans Urs von Balthasar, I traced the history of soteriology from biblical times through the patristic, medieval and modern periods. I then

considered a pair of anthropological models of salvation which can now be regarded as classical post-Vatican II soteriology. None of these really brought us a fuller understanding of the meaning of salvation in the local context.

Finally, I began to develop a more prophetic approach to the question of what might be involved in salvation in the particular situation. I affirmed a closer harmonisation of the Christian rites of pastoral care of the sick and the ritual performance of the cult of the ancestors. This would require the Christian pastoral care worker to have a more intimate knowledge of the suffering family.

Secondly, the prophetic approach relies on an analysis of what spreads the pandemic, and how suffering is exacerbated. The message of salvation considered avoidance of the spread of the virus, through greater respect for the status of women and their say in reproductive rights. In this context it was also necessary to consider the vexed question of the distribution of condoms as one approach to curtail the spread of the virus. A prophetic theology involves the denunciation of an attitude of entitlement to sexual intercourse, of the rape of children, of the tardiness of the state's response to the pandemic, and of the stigma attached to AIDS.

In a final, more positive light, I considered that activity which lends credibility to the Christian proclamation of salvation. The churches express God's love and healing care in concrete terms, as a core component of all our ministries. This prophetic action lends legitimacy to the churches' prophetic voice, denouncing those factors which add to human misery and suffering and announcing the saving activity of God.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have begun a systematic reflection on the topic of Christian salvation in the context of a pandemic of calamitous proportion in South Africa. AIDS struck the country in the final stages of South Africa's emergence from a political system that had oppressed the majority of the people since the early colonial period. While it has been recovering from the effects of political colonialism, the "New" South Africa has had to face another grave threat to the hoped-for prosperity and normality. The purpose of this thesis has been to identify what local spiritual resources are available that might be crucial in dealing with the pandemic.

### **(1) Contents of the Thesis**

In the *first chapter* of the work, I considered the proportions of the AIDS crisis, and showed that the pandemic has not yet slowed down. With more than 5 million people infected with HIV, and the numbers of infections growing daily, the death rate has not yet overtaken the rate of new infections, as it has in other African countries where the pandemic is more advanced. Actuarial projections estimate that 6 million people will have died of AIDS by 2010, and there will be 1 million sick people in the country. (These are without the intervention of ARV medication, whose effect will only be felt slowly.) This number of deaths will have social and economic effects unlike any seen during the worst days of apartheid. There will be millions of orphans, fewer professional people like teachers, nurses and doctors. Many homes will be headed by children, and many others will have grandparents caring for an entire generation of their grandchildren, as the middle generation is lost to AIDS.

I showed that HIV is transmitted mainly by sexual contact, although the incidence of parenteral transmission is probably vastly underrated. I showed that there are social factors that make the transmission of HIV so common. These include the proclivity for

'dry sex,' the fact that some parts of South African are non-circumcising, the re-use of blades in various traditional settings, the legacy of a poor baseline health, the migrant labour system, etc.

The high rate of sexual transmission takes place in a society in which the contribution and importance of women is insufficiently appreciated. One thing the pandemic has done, is to compel society to begin to question its assumptions and attitudes towards women. But until women have a stronger position in gender politics, and can negotiate obvious things like the use of condoms, they will remain very vulnerable to infection. Similarly, children will continue to be victims of exploitation, although the majority of HIV-positive children are infected perinatally.

I showed how the recent, but gradual distribution of ART in hospitals will make a difference to the prognosis of people with HIV, and is already cutting the rate of transmission of the virus from mother to child. Much hope has been invested in this medical breakthrough.

But AIDS does not only present medical and social problems. It provokes much reflection among theologians, pastors and ordinary members of the churches. Mentioning some of these reflections, I divided them rather arbitrarily under the three headings of systematic, ethical and pastoral theological questions. It must be remembered that they are all related, and that no solution to the problems can be taken in isolation. With that caveat, this work considered one of these questions in a more extended way, namely the question of salvation within the context of the pandemic and cult of the ancestors.

The *second chapter* of this work introduced one of the deeper dimensions of South African society. The cult of the ancestors cannot be overlooked as a source of profound religious experience and is inextricably bound to the identity of so many South Africans. With the aid of a number of contemporary authors, I demonstrated that many people, including Christians, relate to their ancestors in a religious way that goes beyond grasping at any straw that may be available in a time of crisis.

The cult of the ancestors cannot be reduced to a definition, but this did not prevent me from using the definition of Fortes as a framework on which to build a description of the cult. This was more from the perspective of an outsider than of someone who practices the cult.

I showed that there are traditional understandings of who does and does not become an ancestor. But as cultures change in interaction with others, these criteria of membership are not hard and fast. In particular, there are some people who consider that the cult may "soften" to admit to the world of the ancestors, people who have suffered untimely death, without children of their own.

I showed that the cult of the ancestors is an integral part of a worldview which is essentially social. The world is populated by persons, by God, the ancestors, and for some groups, spirits. It is these personal agents, rather than invisible forces or microbes which cause misfortune and blessing. Thus, it is of supreme importance to maintain harmony between all members of this extended causal society. Upsetting social harmony is regarded as the ultimate fault. From time to time, the ancestors are compelled to punish a person for the breach of a taboo or the neglect of social obligations. In cases like this, the ancestors need to be appeased by some sacrifice or offering.

Of course, being exposed to Western scientific method and "modern" reasoning, many South Africans do not subscribe to the entire worldview of which the ancestors form part. But that does prevent them from performing some of the requirements of the cult.

In the *third chapter*, I examined the history of the relationship between the cult of the ancestors and western Christian missionary expansion in Southern Africa. I used the Basotho as a case study, because Sesotho is a language and culture with which I am familiar. The purpose of this work is to locate the present status of the cult in its historical background, and to show how the cult is enjoying something of a revival, even among Christians. It is therefore an important element of any contextual theology. The chapter began with the observation that it is impossible to offer a description of the cult before the

advent of the missionaries.

The history was divided into two distinct phases. From the earliest days, there was an all-out effort to suppress the cult of the ancestors among African Christians. It was perceived as unchristian and evil. African Christians were forbidden, under pain of excommunication, to participate in the consumption of beer, traditional dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage and healing rites. These were seen as endangering the salvation of the Christians, but were also the social occasions on which the ancestors were venerated. In the Catholic Church, catechisms associated the cult of the ancestors with devils and the veneration of the ancestors as breach of the first commandment. Christians were rather to have recourse to the cult of the saints. It is evident that the missionaries were products of their times, and had a benevolent attitude towards the Basotho, but were in no doubt that African tradition was inferior to Western, and that it was inherently savage and evil.

In a second phase of the history, I noted a change of attitude in official documents concerning African traditional religion. Shortly before the Second World War, the cult of the ancestors was permitted in China, Japan, and importantly for our study, Congo. In the latter half of the twentieth Century, there was a succession of papal documents, culminating in *Ecclesia in Africa*, recognising the value of the cult as a force of social cohesion and moral injunction. Again, reflecting their time, these documents appeared within the context of changing attitudes towards Africa, and the gradual political (although not economic) decolonisation of the continent. The Second Vatican Council recognised the value of indigenous cultures as potential vehicles for evangelization, and the council fathers also realised the shift in demography of the Roman Catholic Church towards the younger church.

This changing in the official attitude towards the cult has been enthusiastically taken up by Christians in South Africa. In the name of inculturation, there have been more or less enlightened attempts to incorporate the cult into liturgical celebrations. There has

also been an explosion of reflection and writing on the place of the cult in Christian life. This work contributes to that explosion by examining how the cult of the ancestors can be helpful as an aid toward salvation in the face of AIDS.

Having considered at some length in the previous three chapters, the context of South Africa and the crisis posed by AIDS, and the cult of the ancestors and its historical survival of the onslaught of missionaries, it was necessary to demonstrate how these two realities might be related to one another. The *fourth chapter* served as a methodological bridge. I introduced the *Kairos Document* as template or pattern on which I shaped reflections of the cult and the AIDS crisis. I noted that the *KD* has strong associations with liberation theology, witnessing an introduction of critical thinking into theology, and focussing on concerns that are immediate to the lives of the people involved. A *kairos* is a time of crisis, of testing and of opportunity, for society in general, but also for the churches.

The *KD* critically juxtaposed three types of theology which were used in South Africa during the period of apartheid. These are state theology, Church theology and prophetic theology. The first two were seen as failing to respond to the needs of ordinary people in the apartheid crisis. State theology served the interest of maintaining the racist, totalitarian, capitalist status quo with theological arguments. Church theology, principally of the English-speaking churches was cautiously critical of the state and reproduced tried, safe theological formulae from other contexts to engage in questions of non-violence, reconciliation and justice. Prophetic theology, on the other hand, was at the service of liberation, and helped people to find relief from their current oppression, using the Scriptures to find signs of hope and using tools of social analysis to denounce the tyranny.

Having introduced the structure of tripartite juxtaposition in the fourth chapter, I applied it in the *fifth chapter* to the current context. I showed how the notion of *kairos* is appropriate for the present situation, and how the situation challenges the churches to renew their pastoral care and ministry. In pursuit of an understanding of what "salvation"

might mean in the AIDS crisis, I tried to find the meaning of this notion in each of the three theologies.

In place of "state theology," of the tripartite juxtaposition, I considered the implicit soteriology of the cult of the ancestors. If by the Christian notion of salvation, we mean having a felicitous afterlife, then this would be the equivalent of becoming a member of the ancestors, in the cult. But the notion of salvation also has more immediate relevance, in the quality of care the cult of the ancestors offers to people who are ill. The ultimate good of maintaining social harmony requires that people affected by AIDS be reconciled with their family, neighbours, ancestors and God. This puts them at the centre of a ritual process which requires that the condition be named for what it is. The practice of the cult can thus bring about a greater sense of peace and reconciliation to one's circumstances.

The second theology in the juxtaposition is what I called the "classical Christian" approach of the mainline churches. There are several such understandings of salvation, all of which naturally centre on the death and resurrection of Christ. Tracing the history of the development of Christian soteriology, I focussed on a few of these traditions of salvation. They were found to be concerned primarily with the mechanism by which the life, death and resurrection of Christ implicate the life of a follower in a salvific way. My estimation was that while these were more or less good theories, using the worldviews of the eras in which they arose, they were rather remote from the experience of the present.

I introduced a lemma by which I showed that just as salvation cannot be reduced to political salvation, nor can it be reduced to a hope for eschatological fulfillment. So the Christian notion of salvation must have some reference to the here and now. Western Christians with AIDS have reported more immediate experiences of salvation by applying to their lives the classical themes of healing illness, raising the dead, life in community, and coming to a deeper spiritual awareness. I believe that these would be other good avenues to explore in the development of a South African theology of AIDS.

The final theology in the juxtaposition, is what I called the "prophetic approach."

The core of this is an understanding of prophecy as announcing Good News, denouncing whatever causes suffering, and engagement in action that speaks of the love of God. I showed how the cult of the ancestors challenges those who are celebrating the Christian sacraments of healing and reconciliation to do so in a manner that involves more directly the community for whom the sacraments are being celebrated. The need for salvation should be approached in a holistic manner, and not directed merely at restoring right relationship between an individual and God.

I showed that it is part of the prophetic task to denounce factors which cause the disease to spread, and factors which exacerbate the suffering of those already infected with HIV. In particular, patriarchal assumptions need to be challenged, and, where it exists, the recourse to the condom as the first line of defence against AIDS should be challenged. It has its place once the options of abstinence and fidelity within marriage have been excluded. It is also necessary to denounce the tardiness of the government to provide effective, directed medical care and leadership. But fortunately this is being dealt with.

The final aspect which exacerbates suffering is the stigma attached to AIDS. Christians should never use the language of God punishing people with AIDS. The stigma is best defeated by the example of compassionate and dedicated care of people who are suffering from AIDS. When people affected by AIDS receive such care and know that their orphans will not be neglected, they are enabled to die in peace as members of a social unit. This prophetic action speaks louder than words.

During the writing of the thesis, it became apparent that I could equally have followed the approach of Bevans's Praxis model of contextual theology. In particular, using the *Kairos Document*, with its roots in the struggle for political liberation, I have become aware of the systemic nature of HIV/AIDS as a disease of the poor. It mostly affects the poorest in any society, including in affluent countries. Once they are infected, their poverty is exacerbated by the inaccessibility of sound medical treatment, the loss of

employment, their social isolation, the need to receive care from children or aged relatives, and a host of other factors. My enquiry into salvation in the South African context has made it obvious that political liberation is not the equivalent of salvation. Indeed, there is still a road ahead before all citizens share the benefits of the "New" South Africa.

## **(2) Future Challenges**

HIV is spreading more rapidly now in Asia than in Africa. We read about India, China, Thailand, Russia, etc. as the next frontiers of AIDS, while the pandemic in Africa is out of control. In all of these regions of the world, people have ancient religions, wisdom and healing traditions, all of which are resources that can and should be harnessed to cope with the crisis of AIDS. In each culture, the roots of hope and reconciliation must be found if Christian ministry is to communicate a message of salvation which has any bearing on the lives of the people involved.

Without wishing to be grandiose, I believe that this present work might serve as an example of how it is essential for Christians to take cognisance of the spiritual traditions of people in regions affected by the pandemic. In other contexts, people have different traditional approaches to illness, death, and the formation of community. It is important to regard these traditions in a historical light without passing judgement on whether they are good or evil. The fact is that they represent generations of accumulated wisdom, and are engraved more or less deeply on the soul of different people.

I have been aware during the writing of this thesis that it is being conducted by an individual who does not share the religious practice he is trying to account for, and who is presently at two continents' remove from the disastrous situation. This distance lends some perspective and hopefully objectivity to the work. It has certainly enabled me to proceed with maximal dispatch and minimal interruption.

But by its nature, contextual theology requires some degree of insertion in a

community. It was clear that *KD* was the work of theologians and pastors in collaboration and consultation with a receiving faith community. As for this present study, I have tried to be faithful to the people for whom my concern had me begin this study in the first place.

I believe that I am answerable both to an academic community, and to a wider community of believers, and hope that validation of this work will come from both of these constituencies. Validation from the academic community would consist in the judgement of my peers that this work makes a contribution to knowledge, is original and is publishable. Validation from a community of faith would be the affirmation that it speaks some of the truth of their experience, and that it helps them to find some signs of hope in a loving God in their situation.

## APPENDIX: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TEXTS

1. A. Gaughran, *Katekisisima ea lekhottla le leng* (Bloemfontein: Express, 1888), 45.

P. Libe tse fapanang le religione ke life na?

K. Libe tse fapanang le religione ke superstisione, idolatria le sacrilegium.

P. Idolatria keng na?

K. Idolatria ke ho sebeletsa sebopuo se seng ka hlonpho e tsuanelang

Molimo a inotsi.

P. Ba etsang sebe sa Idolatria ke ba fe na?

K. Ba etsang sebe sa Idolatria ke bahetene bao, ba reng ba habo ba shueleng ke balimo.

...

P. Superstisione keng na?

K. Superstisione ke ho kholoa hobane mathla a teng ho libopuo, le ho liketso, le ho mantsue a mang, e mpa mathla ao a sa ka a behoa ke Molimo.

P. Libe tsa superstisione ke li fe na?

K. Libe tsa superstisione ke ho hlatsua ka nyoko, le ho bôlla, le ho upella, le hu [sic] phatsa ho hong, le ho laola, le roala lithatho, le tse ling tse ngata tse etsoang ke bahetene.

2. Ferdinand Krüger, "Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana-Gruppe der Bantu in Südafrika," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, Dritte Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien* 38 (1935), edited by Diedrich Westermann (Berlin), 98f.

Der Sotho kennt einen Schöpfergott, dem er keinen Eigennamen gegeben hat. Er, der Schöpfer des "Unten" und des "Oben", ist auch die letzte Ursache des Todes. Weil er deshalb zu fürchten ist, scheut sich der Sotho, seinen Namen auszusprechen. Das Formen seines Namens würde ihn, den unendlich Fernen, gegenständlich machen und den Tod dessen, der Gott rief, herbeiführen. So gibt es nur sehr wenig Gebete aus alter Zeit, in denen dieser Schöpfergott bei gewissen Gelegenheiten angerufen wird. Im religiösen Leben des Volkes spielt er keine Rolle.

...

Die wichtigsten Vertreter des Geisterreiches sind für den Sotho aber die Ahnengeister. Sie sind die Götter, von denen in der Hauptsache sein Wohl und Wehe abhängig ist. Angebetet werden die bedeutendsten verstorbenen Häuptlinge, insonderheit der letztverstorbenen, die in den heiligen Hainen, in denen sie beerdigt sind, wohnen. Außerdem verehrt jede Familie die Familienahnen, die im Rinderkraal beigesetzt sind.

3. Bernard Mohlali, *Tseleng ea Leholimo, Tumelo e Katholike, Katekisisima 3* (Maseru: Archdiocese of Maseru, 1991), 259f., 264f.

479\* - *Motho o nehela lintho tse bopiloeng hlompho kapa tšebeletso e tšoanelang Molimo a inotši ha a etsa joang?*

Motho o nehela lintho tse bopiloeng hlompho kapa tšebeletso e tšoanelang Molimo a inotši:

1. Ha a khumamela ntho tse bopiloeng kapa litšoantšo tsa tsona: ke sebe sa idolatria;

2. Ha a batla ho tseba tse patiloeng kapa tse lahlehileng ka mokhoa o sa tšoanelang, joaloka ho laola: ke sebe sa bonohe;

3. Ha a tšepa, kapa a tšaba lintho kapa mekhhoa e itseng, ho feta tekanyo, joaloka hoja e e-na le matla a ho mo thusa kapa a ho mo hlahisetsa kotsi athe ha e na 'ona: ke libe tsa tumela-masaoana (superstisione).

480\* - *Ea susumeletsang batho ho etsa sebe sa idolatria; bonohe le tumela-masaoana ke mang?*

Ea susumeletsang batho ho etsa sebe sa idolatria, bonohe le tumela-masaoana ke Satane, eo e leng sera sa meea ea rona, ea ipatileng ka tlas'a mekhhoa, meetlo le iihlare tse na tseo e thetsang batho ka tsona, ka ha "o leshano, 'me ke ra-leshano." (Jo. 8:44).

481\* - *Liketso tsa tumela-masaoana tseo Satane a atisang ho thetsa batho ka tsona ke life?*

Liketso tsa tumela-masaoana tseo Satane a atisang ho thetsa batho ka tsona ke: bothuela, boloi, lebollo, liretlo, litaola, meupello, lithakhisa, ho phatsa, ho thaleha ngoana moroalo, lithato le tse ling tse ngata. (Deuteronomy. 18:9-16)

482\*\*\* - *Lithuso tsa 'mele le tsa moea tseo mokriste a li hlokang o tla li fumana joang?*

Lithuso tsa 'mele le tsa moea tseo mokriste a li hlokang, o tla li fumana ho Morena Molimo ka Lisakramente, lisakramente, lithapelo le likeletso tsa batsamaisi ba meea.

...

487\* - *U hlompha 'me u rapela Mangeloi le Bahalaleli ka baka la'ng?*

Ke hlompha 'me ke rapela Mangeloi le Bahalaleli hobane ke metsoalle ea Morena Molimo, basireletsi le barapelli ba ka.

488\*\*\* - *Na u tšoanetse ho hlompha Masalla a Bahalaleli na?*

E, ke tšoanetse ho hlompha Masalla a Bahalaleli, hobane ba se ba le leholimong, 'me 'mele ea bona e ne e le tempele tsa Molimo.

489\*\* - *Na u tšoanetse ho hlompha litšoantšo tsa Morena Jesu Kriste, tsa Maria Moringo le tsa Bahalaleli?*

E, ke tšoanetse ho hlompha litšoantšo tseo hobane li nkhopotsa Morena Jesu Kriste, Maria Movirigo le Bahalaleli.

4. Bernard Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre, 1975), 19f.

**\*88 - Na re ka khumamela Maria Movirigo, Mangelo le Bahalaleli na?**

Che, e ka ba sebe ho ba khumamela, hobane ha ho nehoe libopuo a hlompho e lokelang Molimo feela.

**\*89 - Na re tšoanetse ho ba hlonepa na?**

E, re tšoanetse ho ba hlonepa, haholo Maria Movirigo, e leng 'M'a Molimo le 'M'a rona.

**90 - Na re tšoanetse ho ba rapela na?**

E, re tšoanetse ho ba rapela, hobane ba nehlooe matla a ho re thusa.

**91 - Na re tšoanetse ho rapela litšoantšo tsa bona na?**

Che, ha rea tšoanela ho rapela litšoantšo, hobane ha li utloe.

**92 - Na re tšoanetse ho li hlonepa na?**

E, re tšoanetse ho li hlonepa, hobane hlompho ea rona e isoa ho Jesu Kriste le ho Bahalaleli ba tšoantšitsoeng ho tsona.

**\*93 - Libe tse fapaneng le molao oa pele ke life na?**

Libe tse fapaneng le molao oa pele ke ho khumamela melimo ea litšoantšo, ho hlompholla lintho tse halalelang, le tumelo-masaoana.

**94 - Ho hlompholla lintho tse halalelang ke'ng?**

Ho hlompholla lintho tse halalelang ke ho tlotlolla Molimo kapa lintho tse halalelang, kapa batho ba inehetseng Molimo.

**\* 95 - Libe tsa tumelo-masaoana ke life na?**

Libe tsa tumelo-masaoana, ke mekhoha ea bohedene, joaloka lebollo, litaola, meupello, hlatsuo ea nyooko, lithakhisa, ho phatsa le e meng e mengata.

5. Pius XII, "Allocutio ac officialibus Pontificiarum Operum Missionalium," *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 36, no. 7 (28 July 1944): 210.

Il Missionario è Apostolo di Gesù Cristo. Egli no ha l'ufficio di trapiantare la civiltà specificamente europea nelle terre di missione, sibbene di rendere quei popoli, che vantano talora culture millenarie, pronti ed atti ad accogliere e ad assimilarsi gli elementi di vita e di costumanza cristiana, che facilmente e naturalmente si accordano con ogni sana civiltà e conferiscono a questa la piena capacità e forza di assicurare e garantire la dignità e la felicità humana.

**ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS**

<b>ACAPSM</b>	<b>African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement</b>
<b>AIC</b>	<b>African Independent Church, or African Initiated Church, or African Indigenous Church</b>
<b>AIDS</b>	<b>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</b>
<b>ART</b>	<b>Antiretroviral Therapy</b>
<b>CAR</b>	<b>Centre for Actuarial Research</b>
<b>CDF</b>	<b>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith</b>
<b>CI</b>	<b>Christian Institute (of South Africa)</b>
<b>CPHA</b>	<b>Canadian Public Health Association</b>
<b>HAART</b>	<b>Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy</b>
<b>HIV</b>	<b>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>Institute of Contextual Theology (Johannesburg)</b>
<b>IDU</b>	<b>Intravenous Drug User</b>
<b>IMBISA</b>	<b>Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa, (includes the episcopal conferences of Angola; São Tomé e Príncipe; Botswana; South Africa; Swaziland; Lesotho; Mozambique; Namibia and Zimbabwe)</b>
<b>KD</b>	<b><i>The Kairos Document</i></b>
<b>MRC</b>	<b>Medical Research Council</b>
<b>MTCT</b>	<b>Mother-to-Child Transmission</b>
<b>OMI</b>	<b>Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate</b>
<b>PEMS</b>	<b>Paris Evangelical Mission Society (<i>Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris</i>)</b>
<b>PMS</b>	<b>Pontifical Missionary Society</b>
<b>SA</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>SACBC</b>	<b>Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, (includes the bishops of South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland)</b>

<b>SANBS</b>	<b>South African National Blood Service</b>
<b>STD</b>	<b>Sexually Transmitted Disease</b>
<b>STI</b>	<b>Sexually Transmitted Infection</b>
<b>TAC</b>	<b>Treatment Action Campaign</b>
<b>UNAIDS</b>	<b>Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, based in Geneva, Switzerland</b>
<b>VTC</b>	<b>Voluntary Testing and Counselling</b>
<b>WHO</b>	<b>World Health Organisation</b>

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