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For further information, please contact:

St Augustine College of South Africa
P O Box 436
Bedfordview
2008

Telephone: (011) 487 0301
Fax: (011) 648 1877
Email: cusa@global.co.za
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Introduction

July 1999 saw the solemn inauguration of St Augustine College of South Africa, the first Catholic university in the country, and this new private higher education institution opened its doors to the first intake of Masters students in the fields of applied ethics, philosophy and theology. Many internationally renowned scholars took part in the celebration and some of them started lecturing to the first students.

In this context the College arranged a series of public lectures to coincide with the inauguration ceremonies in July 1999, dealing with topical and relevant issues with the aim of starting an intellectual debate in the wider community. As a Catholic university in Africa for Africa, the College does not shy away from contentious topics and the ongoing search for answers to thorny issues. On the contrary, as these lectures show, the local and visiting scholars at St Augustine College want to make contributions to the dilemmas of African philosophy wedged between Western and African paradigms (Dr. Emmanuel Katongole, Uganda); to inculturation as a hotly debated process of bringing African culture into the Church (Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, South Africa); to the place of Christ and his values in inter-religious dialogue (Bishop Walter Kasper, Vatican); to controversial bi-ethical dilemmas concerning abortion and euthanasia (Professor Paul van Tongeren, The Netherlands); and to political and legal reflections on human rights in constitutional matters (Professor Heinz Vogelsang, Germany).

This publication marks the start of the St Augustine Papers, which will be continued on a regular basis, to reflect the teaching and research done at the College, and the wide spread of international scholars who will be part of the academic network of St Augustine College. In the striving to develop values-based leadership in the sub-continent of Africa, such publications will hopefully form an integral part of the dynamic academic life of the new Catholic university.

The College is named after and dedicated to St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), one of the first and greatest Christian scholars of Africa. In future lectures and publications his spiritual legacy and his relevance to Africa in the 21st century will be explored. In this way the St Augustine Papers will reflect an ongoing research into Augustinian thought, philosophy and theology.

I wish to extend a special word of thanks to the speakers and their permission to have their papers published; and to Ms Annamaria Carusi who helped to prepare the papers for publication.

Professor Edith H. Raidt
Vice-Chancellor

Feast of St Augustine
28 August 2000
THE ‘FACES’ OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: ON BEING ‘PLACED’ BY WESTERN PARADIGMS AND/OR MISREPRESENTATIONS

Emmanuel Katongole

Most of the writing in the field of African philosophy has either been a response to, or occasioned by, the debate concerning the possibility and nature of African philosophy itself. Accordingly, most undergraduate and graduate programmes in African Philosophy are dominated by the discussion of the possibility and/or nature of African philosophy itself. In this debate, two schools are usually pitted against each other. On the one hand, there is the “Africanist” school, which affirms the presence of an African philosophy which is distinct from its Western counterpart both in scope and form. The members of this school claim that their case is supported by a long tradition of oral evidence, as well as by a respectable literary tradition, which spans back to Placide Tempels’ historic Bantoue Philosophie. In this work a distinctive African philosophy or ontology, which is at the basis of various cultural practices, myths, roles, and proverbs of the African peoples is affirmed and defended.

There are a number of other African thinkers, however, who look upon this Africanist claim for a distinctive African philosophy as nothing more than a distracting ideology, which moreover does not measure up to the standards of philosophy as a universal achievement. This is the rationalist school, whose goal it has been to pattern African philosophy after the requirements of Western philosophy (a rational, scientific, and systematic discipline of recorded texts about perennial questions concerning reality (ontology), the mind (knowledge), and man (ethics)). This trend – associated with such names as Alexis Kagame, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Peter Bodunrin, Paulin Hountodji and others – has accordingly been keen to emphasize that it is these same ‘eternal verities’ or philosophical problems that have occupied the African mind all along.

And so forth, and so on..... ‘Is there, or is there not an African philosophy?’

There is no need to revive the debate here. In fact, given the way the parameters of the debate are generally set, it is not only misleading, but also a distracting debate, whose purpose, it seems to me, is to entertain (in the etymological sense of inter-tener: hold in between) and thus keep one from critically and intellectually engaging the various historical forces that impinge on the African man and woman. That is why a critical look at the debate discovers that the two sides actually agree more than they disagree, for both sides in the debate engage in the same form of mystifying and unhistorical discourse about Africa. While the Africanist school seeks to recover an unhistorical African past, the rationalist school takes a flight from history by trading in abstract and universalistic notional ‘problems’.

If African philosophy is to remain a meaningful and interesting subject, it must not only learn to set aside the debate, it must locate itself within the various historical discourses that shape the African reality. After all, contrary to popular misconception, philosophy is not some esoteric discipline for a few gifted elite in the secluded world of the academia. It is a form of social engagement - a way, just another way, of relating to, or managing our historical existence from a critical and intellectual point of view. Accordingly, philosophy cannot be done in isolation from all other aspects of historical existence, the social, political, material, spiritual aspects. African philosophy should not, and cannot therefore, be conceived as a philosophia perennia, which is always there, to be discovered and/or defended as a distinct ‘Bantu mentality’ which can then be compared to a ‘Western or European mentality’.
conception would only prolong the legacy of an outdated metaphysics of fixed essences and identities, whose practical effect for Africa was the legitimation of social reality according to an ontology and hierarchy of races.

If one learns to put aside this out-dated metaphysics, then one begins to appreciate that the challenge of African philosophy is not so much one of discovering a more or less permanent African worldview, or an African mentality. Rather, African philosophy is constantly being written as the critical response to the various demands of historical existence within Africa. Accordingly, the central question of African philosophy is not the metaphysical question: ‘Is there or is there not an African philosophy?’ but the historical question: ‘What form has philosophy taken in Africa?’ Understood in this historical context, African philosophy would take a keen interest in the various ‘texts’ which have been produced in, on or about Africa at various historical moments. It would similarly concern itself with the sort of social reality that such ‘texts’ have structured or sought to structure, as well as with the response that such ‘texts’ have evoked within Africa.

It is important to stress this dialectical nature of African philosophy, first because philosophy, all philosophy, does not arise as the effervescent overflow of a critical and self-questioning cogito, locked away in a self-imprisoned isolation, thinking its own thought. Philosophical processes are historical processes. That is, they are occasioned by, and are responses to, non-philosophical historical crises and events. Secondly, it is important to stress the dialectical moment in African philosophy, because from as far back as the late 15th century, Africa and Africans generally have found themselves in the historical crisis of being successively ‘placed’, ‘named’, ‘positioned’ or surrounded by the all-powerful intellectual and social-cultural practices of European civilization. This is a point which has been well adumbrated by V.Y. Mudimbe. In his The Invention of Africa, as well as in its sequel, The Idea of Africa, Mudimbe clearly outlines the various historical, social, political and discursive practices through which European conceptions and patterns of ‘rationality’ and ‘civilization’ were in need of, and succeeded in ‘inventing’ its other, i.e. a barbaric and primitive Africa. What Mudimbe’s work helps us to see is that the ‘invention’ not only entailed a great deal of cultural, religious, political, social and ideological misrepresentations of the African continent, but that the same (mis)representations are associated with, and continue to shape the image and idea of Africa not only by the West, but also by a great many Africans themselves. Nevertheless, one must be willing to admit that Africa’s critical response to these various (mis)representations, whether successful or unsuccessful, continues to represent rich ‘texts’ of African philosophy.

Notice that I speak of ‘texts’ (in quotations) for one must be careful not to limit African philosophy to those literary contributions that have claimed to be expressly ‘philosophical’. This is the mistake that the critics of African philosophy intentionally commit in order to deny philosophy to Africans. They expect to find versions of Descartes’ First Meditations or Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, and failing to find any, readily conclude that there is no philosophy in Africa. The African proponents of the rationalist school easily get caught in the trap when they try (too hard) to show that there is something like a Cartesian moment within African philosophy. I do not think we in Africa need to be apologetic about the absence of Cartesian processes or texts in African thought. Descartes was responding to a different set of historical circumstances, which we need not, and in any case cannot re-create for Africa. In fact, what must be given up completely is the standard conception and myth of philosophy as a distinct discipline (of thought thinking itself) isolated from theology, politics or literature. Once such a myth (legacy of the enlightenment) is given up, then one begins to appreciate the fact that the greatest ‘texts’ of African philosophy might as well be those so often neglected forms of literature, e.g. the African novel and poetry.
This should in no way be taken as an excuse for settling for a ‘soft’ approach to African philosophy. Rather, it is to take seriously the fact that because Africa always finds herself ‘placed’ by the far more powerful discourses and practices engineered in Europe and America, African philosophy by necessity becomes what one may call, following the French literary theorist/philosopher Michel de Certeau, a ‘tactical’ discipline. The latter makes an interesting distinction between tactics and strategies. By strategy de Certeau means any calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as a subject that will empower (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. As in management, every ‘strategic’ rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its ‘own place,’ that is, the place of its own power and will, from an ‘environment.’

A Cartesian attitude, if you wish: it is an effort to delimit one’s own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics and military strategy.

In sharp contrast to a strategy, a tactic, according to de Certeau is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delineation of exteriority, then, provides it with the conditions necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other, thus it must play on and with the terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.

In other words, ‘tactic’ does not have power to plan a general strategy or to view the adversary as a whole. It must operate in isolated actions taking advantage of opportunities without a base where it can build up stockpiles for the next battle. It has mobility, but it gains mobility only by being willing to take advantage of the possibilities that offer themselves at given moments. As de Certeau notes, the tactic is the art of the weak, as assumed for example, in guerrilla warfare.

...[I]t operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its position, and then plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep... It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary [sic strategic] powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them, it can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.

I find de Certeau’s distinction between ‘tactic’ and ‘strategy’ highly significant for it makes clear the strategic ambitions underlying a great part of Western philosophy. But also it helps us to see that since Africa and Africans in general find themselves already surrounded, ‘placed’ if you like, by the powerful and strategic discourses of the West, there is no place which African thought can properly call its own. On the contrary it must assume the tactics of the weak: piecemeal or ad hoc defenses and responses, employing what in guerrilla warfare would be hit and run methods; operating as de Certeau suggested ‘in isolated actions, blow by blow’ by learning to take advantage of ‘opportunities’ as they offer themselves. Similarly it must learn to make do with any means or resources available, which resources can be theological, literary, poetic or standard academic texts, depending on what is available as well as on the nature of the engagement. This is one reason why I have suggested that we need to pay special attention to African literature, particularly the novel as a text of African philosophy.

This tactical nature of African philosophy also means that there is very little space and occasion left for it to produce, even if she could, such systematic and ‘strategic’ texts as Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit. Rather, it means
on the contrary, that African philosophy will assume different styles and forms as the nature of engagement at a particular time calls for. Perhaps the point I am making can be best illustrated by focusing on the various ‘faces’ African philosophy has assumed as it has shaped itself in response to the various paradigms and/or ideological mis-representations of Africa by the West. We can do this by making reference to the work of Bernard McGrane. In Beyond Anthropology, McGrane notes that four ‘general paradigms’ have successively been used by Europeans and ‘Westerners’ to ‘interpret’ and ‘explain’ non-European cultures and peoples. These are: a theological, an Enlightenment, a sociological, and a cultural paradigm respectively.

(i) Up to and including the sixteenth century, McGrane points out that the dominant cosmography represented the non-European ‘other’ in terms of a theological horizon.

It was Christianity which fundamentally came between the European and non-European other. Demonology was the characteristic discursive mode used to articulate the differences between Europeans/Christians and non-Europeans/non-Christians... It was in relation to the Fall and to the influence of Sin and Satan that the other took on his historically specific meaning. The other was this because, as a manifestation of the ‘infernal’, (s)he could never be anything but a ‘pagan’, and hence (s)he inhabited a ‘space’ that was necessarily the inversion of the only real ‘space’ - the Christian ‘space’, the ‘space’ of divine salvation. Christianity is the only religion, and those who did not profess it simply had no religion.⁸

It was not just that they had no religion, but as Mudimbe shows, they had no right to own or transfer ownership; or to an autonomous political existence. They lived in a terra nullius, which accordingly, could be appropriated or domesticated, ‘forcibly’ if need be, by the European/Christian monarchs.⁹

It was this theological paradigm and its corresponding demonology of non-Western cultures that shaped to a great extent early missionary activity. The very rhetoric of ‘conversion’ which was at the centre, and the goal of missionary preaching for example, often assumed that there was nothing of value within African [sic, pagan] culture, but that the latter had to be overcome or ‘left behind’ in order to assume the Christian way of life. The convert was accordingly portrayed as a heroic individual who had both totally rejected and succeeded in ‘dressing out’ of his old ‘pagan’, ‘satanic’ or African way of life.¹⁰

In due course, the African response to this theological misrepresentation came through different ‘texts’ which called for a positive re-assessment of African culture. Thus, one can and should read the historic contribution of Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent and the whole movement of inculturation it inspired not merely as theological contributions, but as serious philosophical texts, in fact, tactical forms of philosophical literature meant to resist the dominant (Western) theological paradigm. Accordingly, one of the greatest contributions of inculturation theology in Africa has been its resistance to the demonization and paganization of African culture. As the texts of inculturation would come to insist, African culture is not only good (and is accordingly a necessary ‘preparatorium evangelium’), it is, in some respects, closer to the Biblical tradition than its Western counterpart.¹¹

(ii) In the Enlightenment, as McGrane’s scheme shows, the theological paradigm was largely supplanted by an epistemological one. ‘Such categories as “ignorance”, “error”, “untruth”, and “superstition” were used to articulate the differences between the European and non-European “other”. The other was this precisely because (s)he belonged to a society that was “unenlightened”.¹²

Here one is particularly but painfully reminded of Hegel’s chilling description of Africa as the ‘land of childhood which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history,’ is devoid of any
positive manifestation of history, culture of the Spirit, but remains tragically 'enveloped in the dark mantle of the night.' This explains why the Negro according to Hegel exhibits not only the 'natural man in his completely wild and untamed state,' but is characterized by the 'most reckless inhumanity and disgusting barbarism.'

Hegel's aim in these lectures is clear: to trace the movement of History (which for him is the development of the geist (Thought) as it affirms, denies and gathers itself (aufhebung) in various epochs and civilization before finally coming to a climax in European culture and philosophy. Africa does and cannot (according to Hegel) belong to this history. For, 'what we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.'

The debate on the possibility of African philosophy must itself be placed against the background of the enlightenment elevation of philosophy as the product, and highest achievement of a European 'enlightened' mind. Within this Enlightenment episteme it becomes impossible to admit 'philosophy' or any other genuine cultural achievement to Africa without contradicting the exclusion of Africa from the sphere of civilization. Accordingly whatever is good in or about Africa must be traced back to some 'outside' (generally European) influence.

As Hegel would put it:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World. It has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it - that is in its northern part - belong to the Asiatic or European World.

Or as Mudimbe notes (quoting in part from Davidson, and from Desmond Clark and Brandt):

Since Africans could produce nothing of value; the technique of Yoruba statuary must have come from Egyptians; Benin art must be a Portuguese creation; the architectural achievement of Zimbabwe was due to Arab technicians; and Hausa and Buganda statecraft were inventions of white invaders... and today "by far the most popular view of the origins of cereal-crop agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is that it was the product of human migration or some form of culture diffusion or stimulus deriving from south-west Asia."

It is not difficult to see why against such misrepresentation and denial it would be just a matter of time before African scholars would feel constrained to show that Africa was not the land of perpetual darkness (that Hegel portrayed it to be), but that its peoples were not only capable of ethical and religious sensitivity, but even of philosophy of itself. Mention must be made here of Tempels' original, even though ambivalent contribution, which would soon inspire a tradition of African scholars determined to show how, underlying the various cultural, religious and political practices of the African peoples, lies a unified ontological system. Others - the rationalist school - would even go further and seek to show that the sense of philosophy in Africa goes beyond the mere ascription of a weltanschauung, but that philosophy in Africa can be shown to have been occupied all along with the same or similar 'problems' of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics as are found in Western philosophy.

This is what makes both sides of the debate more like cousins than antagonists. For, although they disagree as to what constitutes African 'philosophy', both sides are committed to the same enlightenment elevation of philosophy as the differentiating element of rationality. Thus, by attributing 'philosophy' to Africans they seek to nullify and abolish the separation between the Europeans and Africans. What makes the debate particularly sterile is that both sides address themselves to the same audience - not to Africans, but 'to the administrators and missionaries, to the foreign experts, to the ethnological institutes, or to the schools of colonial administrators... ' They only differ in the sort
of ‘persuasive apology’ they adopt to achieve this objective. What the ‘ethnophilosopher’ seeks to achieve by a certain descriptive appeal, the rationalist seeks to do by mimicking the abstract (and jargon-laden) language of the master. It is particularly in this attempt that they come to grief. For, even when they succeed in doing ‘philosophy’ according to the Western ideal, they only produce bad copies of the latter, a result which only confirms the suspicion that they really have nothing original to say or contribute. Moreover, caught in this ‘ever recurring and ever-unsatisfying and unsatisfactory task of imitating imitators’ he can never turn philosophy to the dialect of his own needs, to the exigencies of his historical existence.

This critical note not only exposes the sort of historiography that makes the debate possible in the first place, such historiography also offers a chance to see that we, in fact, need to move beyond the idea of African philosophy which takes as its starting point or point of reference the Enlightenment idea of philosophy. One must nevertheless recognize, and give due credit to the numerous texts of ‘African philosophy’ that have been generated or continue to be written around the debate, particularly as they have had as their aim either to dispel or maintain the Enlightenment conception of philosophy and of Africa and Africans in general as a people incapable of such a discipline.

(iii) In the nineteenth century, McGrane argues, there was another paradigm shift as the preceding Enlightenment paradigm gave way to an evolutionary paradigm, in which time constitutes the difference between European and non-European ‘other’; ‘there was a vast haemorrhage in time: geological time, developmental time lodged itself between the European and the non-European other’. Anthropology, as practised by, for example, E. B. Taylor, became the discipline which ‘organized and administered the comparison between past and present, between different “stages of development”, between the prehistorically fossilized “primitive” and evolutionary advancement of modern western science and civilization.

It is at this stage that the notion of ‘development’ becomes crucial. And here, one is reminded of the different theories of ‘development’ that have been successively invoked and tried out in an effort to transport the homo Afric anus from the pre-logical stage (where Levy-Bruhl and his sociological cronies had cast him) to the advantages of the Positive, modern and Scientific stage of Western Europe.

Négritude and the underlying philosophy of authenticity must be regarded as the most formidable response, in terms of African philosophy, to the above evolutionary paradigm of an inevitable lineal uniform trajectory of development. To be sure, the development of négritude owes a great deal to the Harlem Renaissance, a movement through which the young generation of black Americans in the early 1900s sought to re-affirm themselves against the ideology of race and the psychological scars of slavery which threatened to destroy any sense of confidence or self-worth. The intellectual roots of this movement go back to Wilmot Blyden – born in 1832 in the West Indies, but later emigrated to Liberia in the being denied education in America – who, in a number of his writings encouraged fellow blacks to honour and love their race, because it was the basis for their personality and individuality. Blyden did of course accept the notion of race as basis of identity, but his aim was to counteract the existing ideology of the hierarchy of races, by showing that the races were not only equal but each race had a distinct role to play in the history of humanity. Accordingly, Blyden was convinced that the path to the development of the Negroes in America lay not in their imitation of, and/or integration within, the dominant white community and values, but by a ‘return’ to their African roots and the values within their ‘African personality’. It is impossible to underestimate the effect such a ‘re-invention’ of Black personality would have on a generation of young black Americans in the early twenties even in terms of psychological autonomy alone. No text expresses this optimistic self-affirmation better than the celebrated words of Langston Hughes:
We, the creators of the new black generation,
want to express our black personality
without shame or fear.
If this will please the whites, much the better
If not, it does not matter.
We know ourselves to be beautiful
And also ugly
The drums cry
The drums laugh
if this will please the whites, so much the better
If not, it does not matter
It is for tomorrow that we are building our temples
Solid temples as we will ourselves know
how to construct them.
And we will keep ourselves straight
On top of the mountain
Free in our selves

African intellectuals in the fifties and sixties, particularly Léopold Senghor and the Martinican Aimé Césaire, would come to interpret this call in terms of the need for authenticity, and a ‘return’ to mystical and emotive roots of the African way of life, which is at the basis of the philosophy of négritude. It is this call for authenticity which, if not explicitly evoked, served as the organizing principle of the social and political thinking of a great many of the African leaders at Independence. As a result, many of them sought to defy, with the spirit of confidence from négritude and black personality, the standard Western paradigm of evolutionary development. They instead insisted that African nations need not imitate the western pattern of social political development, but that they were capable of generating their own unique and authentically African political forms, which as it turned out, involved a mitigated and Africanized Marxism. You may disagree with the basic tenets of Shenghor’s African socialism, Nkurumah’s Conscientism; Nyerere’s Ujaama; Kawunda’s African Humanism etc; you may even dismiss the practical force of their convictions. It would however be out of non-philosophical considerations to dismiss as non-philosophical all these original contributions to what has come to pass as a genre of ‘African socialism’. As texts of African philosophy their critical force lies primarily in the response to, and the form of resistance they have marshaled against, the standard evolutionary paradigm of uniform social political development.

(iv) Finally, McGrane argues that in the early twentieth century, the dominant paradigm for representing the difference between the European and non-European changed again:

…now it was “culture” which accounted for this difference... “We think under the hegemony of the ethnocultural response to the alienness of the Other; we are today, contained within an anthropological concept of the Other. Anthropology has become our modern way of seeing the Other as, fundamentally and merely, culturally different”.

One can point to a number of factors responsible for this, among which are the spiritual and moral uncertainties arising from the holocaust and the second World War. As a result, a certain cosmopolitanism is engendered by which the West begins to realize that perhaps we really are not different from those hitherto ‘undeveloped’ peoples. Perhaps we are really the same, with culture as the only difference, which after all, is not a very serious difference. The differences are merely cultural, or superficial differences. This cultural paradigm, it seems, has been given a tremendous boost by trends within postmodern philosophy and culture, which has led not only to the ‘celebration of difference’, but also to a renewed interest in such topics as inculturation and ‘ubuntu’. One also notices an overall interest in African culture, which ranges from tourist attraction to the popularity of programmes of African studies at universities and colleges.

It still has to be seen whether this interest is liberating on the part of many Africans, or whether it is just another sophisticated attempt to mask the deep illusions and forms of despair that the
new forces of a global market are institutionalizing. In other words, should we in Africa celebrate this new paradigm as an ‘African renaissance’ or should we resist it as but another way of being ‘placed’ by Western discursive and economic practices? I see that this is the question that has already placed itself on the agenda of philosophical inquiry in Africa. I suspect however, most of the texts of ‘African philosophy’ will be directed to questioning the practices and systems of power and marginalization which the postmodern realities (especially the global market and electronic media) are institutionalizing, even as they ‘celebrate’ Africa’s cultural difference. You can be sure that such texts, far from being the sort of systematic and comprehensive treatises as Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, will be piecemeal, tentative, and polemical.

The scheme I have developed of the faces of philosophy in Africa is certainly limited in that it is an overview (an even simplistic overview) which does not take into account the histories of particular countries in Africa. It does not for instance, mention the various texts which helped to structure, justify and sustain the system of apartheid in South Africa, and the numerous and varied responses that such practice evoked in terms of discursive practices and texts. These should be read not just as texts of history, politics or mere literature, but as genuine contributions to the rich and ever growing collection of texts in African philosophy. The point of the presentation this evening was to dismiss the popular but uncritical assumption that philosophy in Africa can exist as the neat, independent and clearly isolated theoretical practice or discipline. It is this assumption that gives rise to and sustains what I take to be the uninspiring debate concerning the possibility of philosophy in Africa. I have argued not only that such debate should be put aside, but that we need to come to terms with African philosophy as a tactical discipline. As a tactical discipline it remains both a socially and historical engaged form of discourse; a critical response to the various social and discursive practices by which the African reality is shaped and managed. This historical conception does not only give rise to many ‘faces’ of philosophy in Africa, it makes the philosophical landscape in Africa extremely messy. But perhaps this should not be surprising. For, so also is life generally, and even more so on the African continent.

**Notes**

1. The Kenyan Odera Oruka, for example, makes a case for oral philosophy. See his *Sage Philosophy* (Nairobi, African Centre for Technology Studies Press, 1999).


6. Ibid., 37.


9. As Mudimbe notes, ‘The bulls of Nicholas V – *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) – had indeed already given the kings of Portugal the right to invade, conquer, expel, and fight... Muslims, pagans, and other enemies of Christ... wherever they may be. Christian kings, following the Pope’s decisions, would occupy pagan kingdoms, principalities, lordships, possessions... and dispossess them of their personal property, land, and whatever they might have... The king and his successors have the power and right to put these peoples into perpetual slavery.’ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 45. Also, ‘non-Christians have no rights to possess or negotiate any dominion in the then-existing international context, and thus their land is objectively a *terra nullius* (no man’s-land) that may be occupied and seized by Christians in order to exploit the richness meant by God to be shared by all human-kind. Thus these colonizing Christians will be helping the inferior “brethren” to insert themselves in the real and true history of salvation.’ Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 30-37.
10. The transition was at times only symbolically marked for instance by the giving of a new (Western) name as well as the putting on of a white garment. In some places the convert was required to move (literally) from his home to a Christian settlement called Salem in the case of Presbyterians in Ghana, or Tepo in the case of the Roman Catholic Church in Yorubaland in Nigeria. See J. S. Pobe, Toward an African Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 62.

11. Mbiti particularly makes this point in relation to the African concept of time. The latter Mbiti argues is two dimensional, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. This conception of time according to Mbiti is in line with the Biblical eschatological vision which portrays God's intervention in history and his offer of salvation as happening 'here and now.' In other words, Mbiti is arguing that it is not the African concept of time that is pagan, but the Christian eschatology as taught by Western missionaries, who, given the Western linear (and three-dimensional) conception of time, tended to cast the Christian moment of salvation in a 'far distant future'. See, John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 15-28. See also his New Testament Eschatology in an African Background (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).


13. The citations are from Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of History (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 91-93. It is also within this Enlightenment space that 'anthropology' emerges as a discursive practice whose systematic and administrative function is to maintain belief in the existence of the exotic and alien worlds. In this respect, McGane rightly refers to anthropology as a form of terrestrial 'science fiction' (McGane, Beyond, 3), which deals with terrestrial aliens, just as science fiction ordinarily deals with extraterrestrial aliens.


16. Mudimbe, Invention, 13. Notice also how in the early 20th century, European colonialsits, anthropologists, historians and scientists were keen to 'explain' the Tutsi of East and central Africa as either descendants of the Ancient Egyptians, or as coming from either Melanesia or Asia Minor — in any case, unAfrican in origin. This explains 'their intelligent and delicate appearance, their love of money, their capacity to adapt to any situation — all seem to indicate a Semitic origin.' Gerard Prunier, The Rwandan Crisis, 7-8.

17. Among such texts (of what has been dubbed 'ethnophicology' by the rationalist critics) one can mention the work of Mbiti, Marcel Griaule, and others.

18. In La Philosophie Bantu-rwandaise de l'être (1956) Alexis Kagame for instance uses an Aristotelian model in order to show that contrary to anthropologists' and missionaries' accepted opinion, his people had always had a well-organized and systematic 'philosophy'. Other scholars would soon follow in the same vein.


20. Mudimbe, Invention, 122.

21. Eboussi Boulaga is right to note: 'It is not enough for Muntu to decree that he is doing philosophy, that he has the intention of looking only for the "reasonable and the true". Muntu will never be able, in silence or in a verbal coup d'état to take his right place within the "philosophical" tradition without first questioning himself about the significance, the why of his entering philosophy, and without making the interrogation of his historical situation his start in philosophy or the beginning of his own philosophy.' See Eboussi Boulaga, La crise du Muntu, Authentité et philosophie africaine (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1977), 23. Cited at Masolo, African Philosophy, 159.

22. McGane, Beyond, x.

23. Ibid., Surin, A Certain Politics, 73.

24. Among his works see, Vindication of the Negro Race (1857); Liberia's Offering (1862); Liberia: Past, Present and Future (1869); The Negro in Ancient History (1869); Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race ((1888); Africa and the Africans (1903). For a very interesting discussion of Bylden's legacy see Mudimbe, Invention, 98ff.

25. 'There is no absolute or essential superiority on the one side, nor absolute or essential inferiority on the other side. It is a question of difference of endowment and difference of destiny... The two races are not moving in the same groove with an immeasurable distance between them, but on parallel lines. They will never meet in the plane of their activities so as to coincide in capacity or performance. They are not identical, as some think, but unequal; they are distinct but equal.' (CINR, 227). See Mudimbe, Invention, 118.

26. Bylden characterized the 'return' greatly in physical terms. In this way he saw the American Negroes playing a key civilizing mission, with Liberia and other settlements serving as springboards for spreading civilization to the rest of Africa. It was Bylden's contemporary, Aureliu Garvey, however who sought to translate this 'return' into a reality when in 1920 in New York, he declared himself the first President of the African Empire, the United States of Africa.

27. Langston Hughes in the New Nation 23 June, 1926; See Masolo, African Philosophy, 3

28. Thus, Senghor's famous, 'Emotion is black as much as reason is Greek'. Or Aimé Césaire's rapturous praise for 'those who invented neither powder nor the campus, but who ecstatically leave themselves to be carried away toward the essence of everything...' (Cahier d'un retour au pays natal)


INCULTURATION: BRINGING THE AFRICAN CULTURE INTO THE CHURCH

Buti Tlhagale

Inculturation in the context of (Christian) religion denotes the use of African Culture as a medium of communicating the gospel message. Inculturation thereby also seeks to give a purified meaning, in conformity with Christian truths, to African cultural practices.

It is easy on hindsight to speak of the African culture meeting with the Western and Christian cultures in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and in search of those common elements that reinforce the values embedded in each culture. This has not always been the case. Colonialism did not create space for the African culture. The dominant group did not recognize that African culture had its own wisdom, insights and values that informed the lives of Africans. African culture appeared to have had an arrested growth. At any rate, the aspiration of the dominant group was to civilize the Africans or to assimilate them into their culture. At times, the intention was to keep them at bay.

This was the case under the apartheid system. It was the refusal to recognize Africans as equals, the refusal to recognize their own world view and its inherent values, that resulted in the emergence of exclusively African churches. It was also this denial that compelled Africans to accept Christianity while still clinging to their own culture. The upshot was that African culture in many ways remained closed and challenged in part by the new dominant culture, or aspects of it withered away under pressure from both Western and Christian cultures.

The initial discourse on inculturation presupposed a culturally hostile environment. Culture was then understood normatively: ‘It was a matter of acquiring and assimilating the tastes and skills, the ideals, virtues and ideas’ of the dominant groups.’ Discourse on inculturation began when the Universalist and classicist views of culture began to give way to the pluralist way of conceiving culture. Inculturation became a plea from the African heart for recognition.

This plea for cultural recognition went hand-in-hand with the demand for political recognition. The recognition of cultural pluralism has not always been a given. It is only when the diversity of cultures is recognized that one can speak of the meeting of cultures. Even then, there is no doubt that the dominant culture accepts this grudgingly.

The issuing of norms for inculturation suggests that there is a perceived need to control the process of inculturation. Unexpected surprises are kept at bay. Inculturation does not presume that faith can be preached outside the medium of a given culture. Faith in South Africa has been brought through the medium of Western/Christian culture – comprising of the messenger, steeped in a foreign culture, language, written texts, symbols, liturgy, rituals, utensils, gestures, hymns, vestments, a belief system, a world view, concept of persons and community, etc.

Inculturation recognizes that faith has its own life. It is not like a spirit imprisoned in a bottle or in a particular culture, though it is always expressed in one or other cultural form. Inculturation argues that faith can find a home in an African culture and indeed open up its new home to new challenges. Faith, because it has its own life, its own norms, will necessarily transform the host culture so that it becomes part of that culture and yet not of that culture. In this situation, there obtains what Ratzinger describes as a fruitful tension, a tension that ‘renews faith and heals culture.’ Faith creates a new culture. a new meaning, even though this new culture may use distinctive features of the
host culture. Faith is the lever that unshackles
the African culture from its own self-imprison-
ment, from the limitations inherent in the
African world view.

Western culture, hand-in-hand with Christian-
ity, has also had a critical impact on African
culture. Both these cultural forces exposed the
African culture to the influence of progress,
self-cleansing, and a deeper understanding of
the culture itself.

The following represent some of the ideas or
beliefs that have either been critically chal-
lenged or whose meaning has been purified by
the merging of cultures.

ANCESTRAL VENERATION, SAINTS,
AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR OF THE
DEAD

Ancestor veneration, or at least the belief and
acknowledgement of the intervention of the
ancestors in human affairs, continues to be a
common practice among Africans in Southern
Africa. Ancestor veneration is an African way
of confronting life experiences fraught with
vexing human problems and with natural and
unnatural happenings. It is a ritual performed to
strengthen human progress and to reverse
human decline. It is performed to tighten the
bonds of community and to dispel destructive
tendencies. It is the African way of confronting
and living with the mystery of evil and suffers-
ing. It is how Africans celebrate and communi-
cate with the mystery of the sacred in their
midst. It is a ritual performed to revitalize
nature, to celebrate new life or to absorb the
pain of the dissolution of life. Finally, it is a rit-
ual recognition of the existence of spiritual real-
ity. It is an acknowledgment that the intensity of
power lies beyond nature. Tradition is, however,
less eloquent on whether or not this power
exclusively resides in the ancestors. While the
ancestors are not put before their descendants
as models of virtue, they do play a pivotal role
in the maintenance of the moral fabric of the
kinship group.

The temptation to compare them with the saints
in the Catholic Church tradition is irresistible,
especially in the light of the growing public
interest in the subject of inculturation. It is
important to consider this analogy more closely,
because some African Catholics appear to
entertain the belief that the saints are 'just like
our ancestors.' Is it as simple as all that?

The veneration of ancestors stems from the
belief that while the human body decomposes
after death, the spirit becomes separated from
the body. This spirit ends up in the world of the
spirits, imagined to be somewhere in the under-
ground, hence the Zulu expression: abaphansi
(those located in the underground).

The belief in life after death goes hand in hand
with the belief in the continued existence of the
ancestors. Ancestors are always spoken of as a
group, balimo or imadlozi, and never as individ-
uals. The role of ancestors is restricted to the
lives of their descendants. They are believed to
have nothing to do with the lives of people from
other clans. The ancestors are believed to 'have
found enlargement of power through release
from the restraints of the body....'

It is also generally believed that, traditionally,
Africans did not have a highly developed con-
cept of a Supreme Being; that is, if he was
believed to exist at all. The Bapedi tribe for
example, did not have a well-conceived myth
of creation. There are no myths of creation among
the Pedi and neither among the other groups.
Monica Hunter writes that 'There is no proof
that the Pondo, before contact with Europeans,
believed in the existence of any supreme being
or beings other than amathongo (ancestors).'
Comaroff tells us that the indigenous Tswana
 cosmos was 'populated by a panoply of beings,'
including the 'residual supreme being,' Molimo
(God), who is located in the 'far distance'
behind the 'inconceivable fringes of the world.' About the Zulu uNKulunkulu (God),
Schapera tells us that 'he is not worshiped, for he
is said to have died so long ago that no one
knows his praises, and he has left no progeny,
no one can worship him.' There are no services
rendered to the African God, no rituals, no prayers, no shrines, and no belief-system linked to him. For a people so conscious and so fearful of the world of the spirits, for a people who perform elaborate rituals in order to have direct access to the source of power, a people so suspicious of the power of witches and sorcerers, a people that sing praises to the noble spirits of the living-dead and to their cattle and yet ignore the chief-Spirit, this can only lead to one inescapable conclusion that if God existed at all, he was beyond the indigenous cosmos of the African people.

The origin of names ranging from Molimo (Tswana, Sotho, Pedi) Tilo, Hosí (Tsonga) uThixo, Qamato (Xhosa), Raluhimba (Venda), Mwari (Shona), through to uNkulunkulu, uMvelingani (Zulu), is yet be explained more meaningfully within the context of the African religious system prior to the extent of the missionaries. While it had been difficult to win Africans over to Christianity at the turn of the last century, it was eventually possible to do so, not because the Africans had a residual idea of God but rather because their spiritual disposition was amenable to the idea of yet another spiritual Being introduced into their world view.\(^8\) Clearly, this new spiritual Being was quite foreign to the African world but not incompatible with or hostile to the African belief system. Hitherto, African spirituality – the origin, purpose and meaning of life – derived from the intimate relationship with the ancestors. The introduction or invitation to believe in the existence of God was destined to disrupt the indigenous worldview radically, even though it did not at first sight appear to be fundamentally incompatible.

Consequently, there was no connection between God and the ancestors.\(^9\) The ancestors, traditionally, function independently of God. Reference to God does not appear at all in the rituals performed for the ancestors or in the sacrifices offered to the ancestors. In the absence of God, it can be said that the veneration of the ancestors constituted the cornerstone of the African popular religion.

Mention must be made of the fact that not everybody who dies becomes an ancestor. It is only those who played a significant role in the lives of their descendants while they were alive. Women and children are also generally excluded. This view is, needless to say, consistent with the mentality of a patriarchial society.

In the African worldview, death is a transformative process that confers a supernatural status on the deceased. Appropriate funeral rituals ensure that the deceased become ancestors. Ancestors are believed to possess supernatural power in their own right – without reference to God. Supernatural intervention is attributed to the ancestors and not to God. The ancestors are not prisoners in their graves. They are alive and active in the affairs of their own descendants.

How, then, does this belief-structure in ancestral intervention relate to the role of deceased persons sanctified by the Roman Catholic Church?

The saints considered here are the saints as understood by pious Christians during the late Roman period and early Middle Ages. The supernatural powers possessed by the saints were believed to derive from their close communion with God. They intervened on behalf of the living because they were believed to have direct access to God. They also intervened in human affairs because they understood the conditions of the living. After all, they themselves lived on earth and had similar experiences as the living. They had similar desires and aspirations. It is for this reason that the living were confident that the saints would be sympathetic and therefore intervene on their behalf as intermediaries. Like the ancestors who took a personal interest in the affairs of their descendants, the saints were, according to Dennis Nineham, seen as 'vassals of the Lord of heaven who stood in his presence and enjoyed his favour, and so were in a position to act as friends at the court.'\(^10\) Christians, continues Nineham, saw themselves as clients of a saintly patron.

The model was that of a personal mediator, while in the African context the model was that
of a family. The living appealed to the ancestors because of family ties. Ancestors were expected to heed the cries of their descendants because they were family. The saints, on the other hand, were open and receptive to prayers from any Christian who devoted him or herself to them. Saints qualify to be saints. Not everybody becomes a saint after death. Martyrs for example, were declared saints on account of their suffering for the faith. Saints were those who performed miracles during their lives on earth and after their death. The miracles they performed resembled those recorded in the Bible, in other words, ‘sameness was the proof of authenticity.’ Ancestors, on the other hand, are mystical agents by virtue of death and not on account of suffering or miracles performed during their lifetime on earth. There are no hard and fast rules about who acquires the mystical powers after death, except that women and children and the depraved were excluded.

Faith in God as the all powerful Father, as the all merciful Mother, as the creator and foundation of all being, has dethroned the ancestors from their human-made pedestal. The belief in the power of ancestors to inflict pain or to enhance life, the belief that they can control the destiny of human beings, has been radically adjusted. Their godlike status as superhuman beings has been reduced to the status of deceased human beings. Indeed, they no longer are ordinary human beings, for they now belong to the world of the spirit. They have increasingly ceased to be the cornerstone of the African’s religious consciousness, though they remain an essential part of it. Faith in God has progressively become the determining factor of religious consciousness. It is the spirit of God that brings about enlightenment and freedom. Fear of the capriciousness of the ancestors has gradually given way to the gospel of freedom and hope. It is no longer necessary to indulge in elaborate rituals, which serve to pacify the malevolent spirits. It is Christ who brings freedom: freedom from the fear of the dead.

It was the advent of Christianity that taught Africans to pray in a more elaborate and spon-
taneous form. While sacrifices were common, these were not necessarily accompanied by prayers. Even today, the slaughtering of sacrificial animals is generally performed without prayers. Fred Ellenberger, in his History of the Basotho, Ancient and Modern (1912) writes that ‘there is no trace whatever of any prayers, sacrifice, etc., for the dead, all these being to the dead on behalf of the living.’ He further writes that the living-dead ‘were not believed to suffer any remorse, or indeed any punishment for evil committed on earth.’ Christianity, on the other hand, has brought about a new understanding. The living have to pray for the dead, for they too need to be saved. Prayers continue to be directed to the dead, but above all to God on behalf of the living and the dead.

The state of the dead is not a repetition of their earthly life. They have been transformed into an entirely different state of being. According to Eugene Casalis, the generally held view was that they ‘wander about in silent calm, experiencing neither joy nor sorrow.’ St Augustine taught that our souls will not rest until they rest in God. Christianity breaks this state of luke-warmness and instills a message of hope and promise of eternal joy.

It was also argued that longevity was a reward for the sacrifices offered to the ancestors. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that long life on earth is the result of adhering to the gospel values.

Traditional healers (mathuela, izangoma) – not herbalists - claim that ‘they receive instruction regarding herbs directly from the ancestors.’ Such claims defy reason. They attribute to ancestors what ordinarily appears preposterous. The dead neither inflict sickness nor prescribe a cure. Healers have arrogated on to themselves the role of interpreting the dictates of the dead. It is plausible, however, that a social order that gives rise to specific illness is also capable of ritually addressing these ritual illnesses.

Ancestors (madlozi, badimo) are always referred to in the plural. They are a collective.
Once the proper burial rites or rites of incorporation (ukubuyisa) have been performed, the deceased become members of the collective. They are never singled out for veneration. This belief is at odds with the Christian belief that maintains the subjective identities of individuals after death. Each man and each woman is expected to give an account of his/her stewardship.

FREEDOM FROM THE YOKE OF MAGIC, DIVINATION AND WITCHCRAFT

Both the process of inculturation, the deepening of faith and the ever-increasing influence of education, have an effect of subverting the belief in magic, witchcraft and divination. It is important not to underestimate the depth of the belief in the African world view. While this world view is in the process of transformation, of opening itself up to the influences of other cultural forces, it nonetheless continues to have a firm grip on the minds of many Africans. Many Christian believers have an ambivalent attitude to the practices of magic, witchcraft and divination.

1. Magic

The belief that human beings can control their social and physical environment to their advantage is still pervasive. The desire to have prior knowledge of events still persists, and so the practice of magic continues. It is this desire to manipulate impersonal powers by means of ritual that is challenged by Christianity and by education. Magic blames human beings for the misfortunes incurred by them, or for whatever natural calamity that might befall them. The practitioners of magic believe that they can produce an effect by a simple art of imitation, or that they can affect a person by simply acting on an object with which that person has been in contact. Magic posits a belief in an 'impulse' or a 'secret sympathy' which connects two separate objects. Virtues of certain materials or substances have been understood literally to possess extraordinary qualities. In the case of ritual murder, parts of the human body (the heart or sexual organs) are used to concoct medicine which is expected to achieve the desired affect. Mutilation of the body or corpse of a strong person is intended for medicine which is supposed to transmit the strength or skill of the person whose body has been mutilated. Powder medicine made out of the skin of the snake, thorns, lion's claw, hair from a lion's mane, or from a bull etc. is believed to possess the same qualities as the animals or plants from which it has been made. James Frazer gives an example of Batswana warriors who wear the hair of a hornless ox because hornless ox is hard to catch, or they wear the skin of a frog on their mantles because it is slippery. Magic, he writes, 'is a mistaken association of ideas.' Such beliefs are being challenged through education by breaking the false association of ideas.

There is a clear danger that the belief in magic is likely to be transferred to Christian belief and practices. Blessed items, such as holy water, blessed oil, candles, Easter palm branches, incense, scapula, medals etc., are thought to possess magical power that can affect an immediate cure or offer protection from evil spirits, just like amulets from a traditional healer. Under such circumstances, the boundary between magic and faith becomes very tenuous.

2. Divination

In the introduction to an article by James Frazer, *Sympathetic Magic*, Lessa and Vogt define divination as ‘the art or practice of foreseeing future events or discovering hidden knowledge through supernatural means.’

Animal bones are used in the practice of divination. Before throwing the bones, the diviner (selaoloi) or the patient blows upon the bones, thus imbuing them symbolically 'with the spirit of the person seeking the answer they should reveal.' Divining bones are associated with ‘visionary power.’ Do they actually have any visionary power? Can they reveal the cause of sickness or misfortune? Gellner has this to say about judging traditional beliefs as being absurd: 'It may be that the absurdity is located not in the original belief itself but in its transla-
tion, inspired by the failure to understand the original context.” It was Omar Moore who likened the art of divination to the games of strategy, and he also argued that “it is possible that through a long process of creative trial and error some societies have arrived at some approximate solutions for recurring problems.” Today, diviners use the method of questioning their patients, encouraging them to agree (vuma) with him or her in deciphering the cause of illness.

Credulous people continue to be duped by individuals who claim to possess skills of ‘reading’ the divining bones, or who claim to possess secret knowledge. Circumstances may compel suffering people to seek information about their situation with the hope of finding solutions to their problems or to their state of misfortune. Blaming it on one’s neighbor or jealous relative, as the diviner invariably suggests, only heightens tension and intensifies fear.

It is the truth about the conditions of human beings that should be sought. Ignorance and credulousness must give way to knowledge and freedom. Under such circumstances, the formation of a good conscience becomes imperative so that people may be able to seek the truth rather than be subjected to the machinations of diviners who prey on the ignorant and the gullible.

3. Witchcraft

Feelings of envy and jealousy, of strong disagreements and cutthroat competition, need not all be blamed on individuals whom the community regards as sinister and evil. Traditionally, witches were regarded, and continue to be regarded, as the embodiment of evil. They are a convenient scapegoat for the problems of the community. They are an irrational explanation of the ills of the community. They are said to possess mystical powers that can harm people. Such people are generally harassed by members of the community. This stubborn belief persists even today. Some people find it difficult to accept that objective conditions may militate against their success or well being, or that their condition of illness or misfortune has nothing to do with the next person. There is a clear reluctance to accept personal accountability for certain situations. Chance-events are excluded, hence the need for scapegoats.

Faith education, on the other hand, brings along with it a morality of discernment, a critique of the local culture. Faith in Jesus Christ and his message of love challenges the indiscriminate attacks on so-called witches. They are after all neighbours. Witches can only be evil if their actions have evil consequences and not simply because people attribute evil intentions to them. It is also known today that there is no evidence that some people have mystical powers that enable them to change their own shape or to become invisible so as to harm others. Both faith and education act as a yeast within the African culture, thus bringing about a purification of culture. Individual consciences are gradually awakened. Personal responsibility is promoted. The belief that mystical powers are possessed by certain individuals is increasingly shown to be hollow. The explanation of evil is shifted from witchcraft and relocated in the human heart (Proverbs 6:14, Ecclesiastes 8:11). Evil is simply personified as Satan, or captured in the symbol of darkness.

HEALING OF THE SICK

According to African perceptions, a status of dignity (isithunzi) is achieved through self construction, through one’s ability to create social value, to maintain or enhance one’s livelihood, to create a family, and to establish a network of relationships. A person who has achieved these virtues is described as being alive (oa khona, oa phela). But it is also possible for a person to be overcome by the power of evil spirits, by misfortune, or by the machinations of one’s fellow beings. Such a person is described as being in a state of ‘sehihi’ (unnyama, ishwa) or darkness. The Comaroffs describe the status of thus being eclipsed by negative forces as ‘social death.” The reversal of this condition is effected through ritual healing that aims at restoring self-confidence and balanced relationships.
The healing ritual is performed by a sangoma, the traditional healer or diviner. Generally, women constitute the majority of healers. A sangoma is said to be called by an ancestor of her descent group. The sangoma becomes the receptacle of the ancestral spirit. She is possessed (thwasa) by the ancestral spirit. The ritual act of possession and the accompanying training give her the power to heal. This then sets her apart from others. A sangoma is seen as the physical abode of supernatural power.

The continued presence of, and reliance on, the healing powers of, the diviners suggest that the belief in demons or evil spirits, and in the intervention of ancestors, is still prevalent in the African community. This belief system has been carried over into some of the African Instituted Churches, seen by some as "the modern movement of witch-finders." The Zionist prophet, a modern version of the traditional diviner, is said to be called by an ancestor and/or the Holy Spirit. Healing is done in the name of the Holy Spirit and not Jesus Christ, because the Holy Spirit more closely resembles the African image of the ancestors. The upshot is a mélange of the African traditional beliefs and some elements from Christianity. Needless to say, the two traditions do not sit comfortably together. While it is true that the Zionist Churches have taken the traditional African world view seriously, assisted communities to cope with their trying conditions, enabled women to play a meaningful role etc., they have on the other hand perpetuated the superstitious beliefs of the African community instead of challenging them in light of the new faith experienced.

What, then, is the role of isangoma as a healer? The diviner is a specialist in African diseases (ukufa kwaBantu), which fall within the African world view. Disease is perceived as a spirit. This spirit may be embodied in a substance, such as in the case of sejeso idliso (African poison), or the disease may remain in a form of the spirit and can be directed against other persons. Witches may cause a disease by bewitching some article that belongs to the victim. Sorcerers may cause a disease by applying medicines. Ancestors may cause sickness. Jealousy, hatred or bad luck may cause a disease in as much as the jealous person may engage the services of the witch to cause a disease. Among the Nguni-speaking people, diagnosis of the cause of illness is made by the spirit medium (diviner), who is the spoksperson of the responsible ancestor. Among the Sotho, divination is used to diagnose the cause of the disease. Healing aims at restoring both harmony with the sick person and within the family or the community. It is a holistic approach aimed at "the social and psychological reintegration of patient and community." Herbalists provide a cure for the body, while the diviners aim at the psychological, spiritual condition of the patient.

Disease, therefore, is at the heart of a belief-system encompassing ancestors, witches and sorcerers on the one hand, and feelings of hatred and jealousy emanating from the human heart on the other. Disease unravels itself in the web of bruised relationships among the living themselves, or between the living and the ancestors. The phobia of evil spirits lurking around intensifies the experience of the disease. In a society where human presence is strongly valued and acknowledged, suspicions also flourish when inexplicable situations set in or unfortunate events take place. This peculiar understanding of disease is deeply etched in the African psyche.

Medicine, like disease itself, is understood as 'mysterious power.' Thus, sacrifices are offered to appease angry ancestral spirits. Evil spirits are exorcized by symbolically hitting the victim. They are also driven out of the body by drinking water mixed with salt or ash in order to vomit. Medicine is inserted under the skin (ukungcaba) in order to protect the victim from evil. Protective amulets are worn on the body in order to confront the power of evil spirits. Medicine for strength is made out of parts of the human body, hair of a wild animal, the skin of a snake etc. The disease and the cure, while they play themselves out in the human body,
both belong to the same spiritual realm. There is a fine line between the symbolic meaning and the physical effect of the medicine used: what might start as a symbolic gesture ends up by being taken literally.

Isangoma (diviners) respond to diseases by unleashing a counter-force. Healing within the African traditional context has always been seen as a result of a supernatural intervention. Sickness is attributed to witchcraft or to the displeasure of the ancestors. When a serious offence has been committed, both the ancestors and the living are affected. The ancestors are affected because of the close relationships with the living. Sickness, or any other misfortune, is interpreted as a manifestation of the anger of the ancestors, hence the need for a ritual killing in order to appease them. If sickness was not caused by the ancestors, the purpose of the ritual slaughtering is not to appease them but to request their intervention for the restoration of good health. During the ritual (umsebenzi, tirelo, umkhosi), the officiator would enquire why a sickness or misfortune has befallen them. In a case of conflict, it is necessary for reconciliation to take place before a sacrifice can be made to ancestors. A child may be sick because of the punishment meted out against parents who are at loggerheads with each other. Healing can only be granted once reconciliation has taken place. When ritual killing is done on behalf of a sick person, the ancestors are invoked in the presence of the sick person. The names of the ancestors are recalled. The responsible ancestor is always called by name. The circumstances that led to the ritual killing are always explained so that the purpose of the sacrifice is clearly understood by all the participants.

Details of the ritual are meticulously observed if the desired cure is to be granted at all. During the ritual, meat is burned symbolizing communion with the ancestors. Ritual killing involves the participation of members of the family. Dance and music are an integral part of ritual healing. The drum is also used as a means of calling upon the ancestors. The symbolic sharing of the meat with the ancestors restores good relationships between the ancestors and the living and also restores health in the case of sickness. The sangoma uses emetics for expelling evil spirits from the body, salt water for ritual cleansing, steaming for warding off evil, etc. The physical and mental involvement of the patient is the key if any healing is to take place at all. The horn (lenaka) is perceived to be a symbol of medicine. The Basotho used a horn to store their medicine and it thus became known as a medicine container. It eventually became the substitute word for medicine. (In thinking about artefacts such as a container for holy oils, a horn would have an aesthetic appeal within the local cultures). In the early Christian tradition, the anointing with oil and the drinking of water was used in the healing ritual. These elements were given the power to heal, in the name of Jesus Christ, 'so that every fever, every devil and every sickness may disappear by this drink and this anointing'. Thus, within the Christian tradition, healing is done, not in the name of ancestors but in the name of Jesus.
Christ and by the power of Jesus Christ. Healing in the Christian tradition further involves the faith of the victim/patients and the forgiveness of sins. It is faith that enables the victim to acknowledge and share in the redeeming power of Christ. It is faith that brings about reconciliation, not only with the community and the ancestors but also with God and the Church.

The healing power of the saints, which is also deeply embedded in the Catholic tradition is said to have been demonstrated in the exorcising of the evil spirits from the possessed. The possessed invariably visited the tombs of the saints, where the ‘clean power’ of the saints was pitted against the power of the demons who occupied the bodies of the possessed persons. The reigning in of the evil spirit was seen as evidence of the powerful presence of the saint. Those who were freed from the possession by demons were reincorporated into their community as healed persons. They were members of the family of the saints. They were now friends of the invisible patron and were no longer bound to their earthly masters. God’s healing power was experienced through the interpersonal relations with the saints. The saints were God’s vehicle for healing. Relics worn as charms were said to neutralise poison, control storms, rain, thunder and floods, and give victory when carried in battle. They were used to overcome robbers and stop fires and plagues, and carried through the field to put an end to drought and ensure fertility. This belief was rampant in societies in which little was known about the workings of nature and in which it was easy to attribute what happened to supernatural intervention.

This observation equally applies to African traditional society. Apart from the ignorance of the workings of nature, there was also the ignorance of the workings of the human body and modern medicine, hence the strong emphasis on the belief that serious illnesses are intentionally caused.

What is being challenged here is the superhuman role of the ancestors and the authenticity of healers who claim that they can induce the presence of the ancestral spirits and effect a cure. Ashton once wrote that women became healers (mathuella) because they were simply bored, and not because there was any real value or authenticity in the healing practice. Sickness attributed to ancestral displeasures also raise a host of questions about the fertile imaginations of those who claim to receive promptings from ancestral spirits.

**SYMBOLS, RITES AND RITUALS**

Symbols, rites and various kinds of rituals are deeply embedded in African culture. The following examples have been selected to illustrate cross-cultural symbiosis through processes of inculturation.

**I. Symbols**

In the past, the tearing of the skin of the drum was a symbol of conversion to Christianity. This was based on the belief that the drum was a medium of communication between the traditional healer and the ancestors. The sound of the drum is believed to arouse ancestral spirits. It is believed that through the sound of the drum, together with the accompanying rhythmic dancing and the clapping of hands, the traditional healer can bring about the presence of the ancestral spirits. It is believed that in the context of a healing ritual, dancing soothes the pain. It restores lost equilibrium. It is therefore seen as a physiological therapy. Wells records that many healers said that they would often beat the drum before sleeping in order to request the ancestors to communicate with them through dreams.

The use of drums as a means of communication with the ancestral spirits remains valid at a symbolic level. It is an intentional invitation to the spirits to heed the requests of the suppliants. It also has the effect of summoning the applicants to be attentive. It is for this reason that in some African cultures drums are being used during consecration, not only to create an appropriate spiritual disposition but also to acknowledge the divine presence after the consecration words have been pronounced.
because he is totally other, is also apprehended in Christianity by means of symbols. These symbols are at times challenged because of their inadequacy. The symbols are changed from time to time in order to bring about new meanings: for example, the patriarchal or paternallistic image of God is challenged in the feminist interpretations of the Bible; the Old Testament God who sees, who takes, who speaks, who rests, who gets angry, makes some people uncomfortable, and so he came to be conceived as oneness, as goodness, as truth and as mystery. Lonergan points out that 'such rethinking of God the Father entails a rethinking of his Son, and the rethinking of the Son generates tension between the Son as rethought and the Son as depicted in the New Testament.'

This process can fruitfully be applied to the understanding of the idea of the ancestors in African culture and with a view to countering the regime of superstition and magic that surrounds the rituals of ancestor veneration. The anthropomorphic speech about ancestors creates, and at times compounds, the problems concerning their role. According to tradition, they are closely involved in the affairs of the living. Schapera says that this can be better understood ‘if we remember how greatly respect for seniority dominates all social relations of Bantu life, and how effectively the members of a family are subordinated to its headman. This pattern is carried over even beyond death.’

Ancestors are seen as being capricious or benevolent toward their descendants. They cause drought, pestilence, sickness and even death. They speak through mediums. Just as the Biblical God who stands and sits is not taken literally, there is absolutely no need to take the activities of the ancestors literally. It is the literal interpretation of their role that accounts for superstition and magic. They should rather be seen as part of mystery and not arbitrarily and literally as though they were indeed mingling with the living and making demands on the living to offer them sacrifices or to perpetuate their memory by insisting that their offspring be named after them. It also no longer makes sense to insist that ancestors literally appear in the form of non-poisonous snakes or animals.

Inculturation invites thought to rediscover the original symbolic meanings that have become distorted, or simply lost, as local cultures became exposed to the full glare of Western culture and the secularization process. It is also plausible that the living, in order to avoid resistance to customary ways of doing or naming, invoked the authority of the ancestors to ensure compliance. Failure to comply would have equally called for the application of sanctions, with the approval of the ancestors, at least according to those who seek to uphold customs and tradition. Thus, ancestors are accorded the same authority they enjoyed while they were on earth, except for the fact that they have now been accorded more power and authority because of their superhuman status.

2. Rites
African culture is rich in all kinds of rites, such as the rite of renewal or purification, and rites of reconciliation.

(a) The rite of renewal/purification
This is the ritual of the first fruits. While it is difficult to envisage such a ritual in the urban areas where vegetables are available throughout the year from supermarkets, it does still make sense in rural communities. The first fruits were ceremonially consumed at the chief’s place. The pulp of the leaves was rubbed onto the body. A new fire was kindled. Jean Comaroff writes that ‘this ritual served to tie the maturation of the crops to the recreation of the social community.’ The rubbing of parts of the body with pulp from the leaves of the first fruits suggests an intimacy with nature as it renews itself. In their symbolic interaction, human beings participate in the process of revitalization. The kindling of a new fire symbolizes purification and the release of new personal and social energy.

Purification by fire occurs when someone has desecrated a grave. Today people walk over
graves without even thinking twice. In the past, walking over a grave was a source of defilement. Purification was achieved by the ritual of setting the feet of the ritually defiled person in a flame. This symbolism lends itself to being applied in similar cases of ritual defilement.  

(b) Rites of Reconciliation

Rites of reconciliation include the following:
(i) Ukuhelelani amanzi (to pour over water): Berglund recorded the following account of the traditional Zulu ritual of reconciliation. When kinsmen are at loggerheads, a third party is called in to mediate. He or she invites them to cool the heat of anger or hatred. The divided two would be seated opposite each other. Water mixed with ash and medicine would be given to each person to wash their hands. Each would then be given a chance to air their complaints or concerns. The mediator summarizes the statements of each person and asks them whether they are willing to forgive and forget. Each then takes a mouthful of water mixed with ash and spits it over his or her left shoulder. Thereafter the two drink beer from the same calabash. This is the communion of purification. Meat or beer is used. Such ritual can be adapted and limited to the washing of hands. The symbolic cooling effect of water points to a spiritual disposition of reconciliation.

(ii) Clasping hands with chyme (mosoang): Two enemies claspe hands with chyme as a sign of reconciliation. Chyme is used because it has the same cooling effect as water. After this ceremony of reconciliation, all eat together, including the witnesses. This is once more the communion of purification and reconciliation. It is not always possible to kill an animal for the purpose of a reconciliation ceremony, and a substitute with the same cooling properties as chyme may be used (water, ash, urine etc.) If these rites were to be adapted, appropriate prayers that allude to the qualities of the symbols used would have to be composed.

(iii) The rite of ‘tsu’: Hammond-Tooke tells us about a Tsonga reconciliation rite, which had been recorded by the Swiss-born missionary, Dr. Henry Junod (translator of the Bible into Shangaan). In preparing for the rite, a herb called mudahomu (grass eaten by cattle) is poured into a broken shell of a fruit (salu). This shell is also used for drinking water. The divided brothers sit on the bare ground in the Village Square. The offender sips the medicine and spits it out, making the sound of ‘tsu’ and saying: ‘This is our imprecation. We have pronounced it because our hearts were sore. Today it must come to an end. It is right that we make peace.’ The other repeats the same rite and says: ‘I was angry but let us make peace and eat from the same pot and drink out of the same pot and be friends again.’ He breaks the shell and they then drink beer together. This reconciliation has taken place under the auspices of the ancestors. It certainly can take place before God, the Merciful Father and Mother. Junod writes that such a ritual has no effect if it is done with a stranger (whose ancestor does not belong to the same clan).

The process of inculturation challenges this restrictive interpretation of symbols. These symbols are given a meaning beyond the clan. The process of adaptation will uproot them, indeed free them, from the narrow interpretation in order to relocate them within a broader cultural context where the object of application is ultimately God and not only the ancestors. This stems from the realization that in offending against the neighbour, one sins against God, and hence the need to be reconciled to God and to the neighbour. Indeed, one has also offended against the ancestral spirits, for they too are part of the community that has an interest in the well-being of its members.

The above-mentioned rites are social in their character and in their effects. They are not a private affair. The community bears witness to the act of reconciliation. This reconciliation has an impact on both the individuals and the community. This dimension appears to be lost in current church practice. Within the context of evangelisation, the rite would assume a new meaning. Not only is the rite social but it would be ecclesiastical. Sin offends God and ‘wounds'
the Church. God's forgiving love is received through the act of being reconciled to the Church. The rite of reconciliation in the Church is also an act of community worship. The family or community mediator is replaced by a priest, though a case can and should be made for lay people to act as mediators in a non-sacramental ceremony. These new theological and liturgical dimensions would then enrich and deepen the meaning of a rite taken from the local culture.

For the purpose of the present survey, it will suffice simply to list examples of rites that are open to change while retaining their essential meaning. These rites, once they are purified, are capable of transmitting the Christian message. There is a need to look at the idiomatic expressions of the local languages as we seek to translate words and concepts. An example that comes to mind is spirit possession. Within the Zulu culture, when an individual is about to become a diviner (isangoma), he/she is first possessed by an ancestral spirit. This is an indication that that person must undergo initiation. This kind of spirit possession is technically referred to as ukuthwa.

While the use of such a concept would have been associated with pagan rites, we contend that the same concept can be used to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit among Christians. The ancestral spirit is said to give light, knowledge of appropriate medicines, and indeed effect a cure. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, endows Christians with the spirit of discernment, wisdom, courage, knowledge etc. The new meaning given to the term ‘ukuthwa’ builds on the original meaning of the word. Its new meaning derives from a new context, the Christian context. It also assumes that there is a radically different understanding of who the ancestors are and what their role is. It also presupposes an informed belief in God and in the Holy Spirit. It should therefore not be seen as introducing religious syncretism. The meaning of the word would have changed radically because of its application to the role of the Holy Spirit.

Inculturation is thus a process that identifies, purifies and translates concepts of African culture that are best suited to communicate the Christian experience.

3. Rituals

Sacrifice to the ancestors continues to be a very common practice among Africans. The slaughtering of an animal (a cow or a sheep) takes place whenever there is a funeral or a marriage feast. This also takes place on numerous other occasions: when there is illness, unemployment, family feuds, birth of a child etc. Because sacrifices to ancestors continue to take place on such occasions of deep sorrow or great joy, there is an obvious need to look at them in the context of inculturation.

The occasions on which sacrifices are made to ancestors tells us something about how Africans react to their limit-situations. Sacrifices to ancestors also tell us about the belief system of Africans, their attitude toward the sacred, their belief in life after death, and the perennial need for communal reconciliation and well-being.

Even among practising Christians, the ritual of slaughtering a sacrificial animal on specific occasions is a common occurrence. These rituals are always made by the family at home after the Christian celebration of the Sacrament, be it baptism, marriage or a funeral. This suggests in many ways that Christian practices are not that different from African religious practices.

There are, however, some concerns about the interpretation of sacrifices to ancestors within the context of inculturation. First it is pointed out that people tend to speak about clan ancestors and not all the living-dead. Each descendent group looks to its own ancestors for favours or to appease, and not to an undifferentiated collectivity. While this viewpoint would have been nurtured by the rural context where clans are separated from one another, it does not become a major issue where different ethnic groups live together in urban areas. We would further suggest that togetherness among the living
would also indicate a togetherness in the world of spirits. The suggestion that people communicate with the ancestors of their clan only is clearly influenced or determined by the social order in which they find themselves. Once that social order collapses, the perception also shifts to relation to the new social order. Such a narrow and traditional perspective is also challenged by Christianity that advocates an all-inclusive approach. Somehow there is, however, a need to balance the two approaches. The ancestors of a clan are called by name. This personalizes the relationship between the living and the dead. Admittedly, the longer the line of descent, the less recognizable the ancestors become.

Secondly, it is also argued that the slaughtering of an animal on the occasion of death or marriage has become a non-religious act, that prayers are no longer recited on such occasions, and that the ancestors are hardly invoked. What remains, then, is the festive character of the occasion, the sharing of the communal meal, and the offering of spiritual support to the bereaved or the sharing of joy with the family in the event of marriage or the birth of a new child. The response to this line of thought would be that while some aspects of religious behaviour have been abandoned, the essential religious values are maintained and reinforced, such as the value of community and sharing, and indeed the uniqueness of the individual person and family ties.

Our argument is that the ritual of slaughtering a sacrificial animal and the language of ancestors is deeply ingrained in the local African cultures. Ancestors are very close to the living. They are family. They are the doorway to the spiritual world. Because of them, the world of spirit is real. To speak of the reality of God is therefore not entirely foreign within that cultural setting. The classical way of communicating with the ancestors is through sacrifice, i.e. by slaughtering an animal and by its blood-flow into the ground, or by pouring beer on a shrine. While blood-letting might appear to be bizarre in a culture that depends on abattoirs, it is not so in a culture where sacrificial animals are slaught-tered as a matter of course. Communication with the ancestors is effected by means of blood, because blood is the symbol of life, ‘it represents the most precious gift one could offer. Blood symbolizes in its fullest extent the life of the individual.’ The blood offered to the ancestors brings them back to life. How, then, should inculturation be applied to this ritual?

We are not suggesting that, in the process of inculturation, we should go back to the Old Testament times when blood was sprinkled before the altar or poured at the base of the altar (Lev. 4: 6-7). We do, however, propose that a more visible religious aspect of the ceremony receive emphasis. The sprinkling or pouring of blood on the shrine itself should be visible. The invocation of the ancestors should be heard. This should be linked to the word of the Gospel so that the ceremony clearly bears a Christian stamp. In this sense, therefore, Christianity would enhance the existing meaning, or better still, give a new meaning to the ritual. After all, part of inculturation is to change African culture. Culture is not static.

On the other hand, if the sacrifice of the Mass were to be made in the home of the deceased, for example, should the libation ceremony take place outside the celebration of the Mass or should it be integrated into the Mass? It seems to make sense to do the libation before the offertory. The reason for this suggestion is that the offering of blood is a gift to the ancestors. The goal may be expiation, propitiation, thanksgiving, or reconciliation.

This raises a second set of questions: Is this not going to create confusion between the blood of Christ and the blood of the sacrificial victim intended for the ancestors? We know from our Christian faith that the blood of Christ by far excels that of the animals (Heb. 9-12). Christ’s blood atones for the sins of humanity (Eph. 1: 17). We are redeemed through His blood and brought closer to God (Eph. 1: 13). Christ, by His own blood, has effected eternal redemption. He is the innocent lamb that purifies humankind from sin.
In using the symbolism of blood offered to the ancestors, are we not likely to attribute to it the same redeeming effect achieved by Christ once and for all? Or alternatively, are we not being anachronistic, returning to the symbol of a time already superseded by the event of Christ? After all, Christ Himself is the 'only worthy propitiation' that can be offered to make satisfaction to God for sin.

Apart from the sacrifice of the Cross there is the sacrifice of the Eucharist. The Council of Trent, in its teaching, ensured that both the sacrifice of the Cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist should not be conceived as two distinct sacrifices. Mass is sacramentally related to the sacrament of the Cross. The Eucharist is the sacramental memorial of the redemption of Christ.7

An attempt at the following distinctions, borrowed from David Power, might help us clarify the place or role of the ancestors.8 The sacrifice to the ancestors could be looked at as sacrifice not in its true proper sense but in a metaphorical sense. In other words, sacrifice in this context is prayer for a special request (health, well-being, peace, reconciliation, favour etc.). The sacrifice in its true and proper sense would then be reserved for the redemptive work of Christ. This would be the sacrifice made for the propitiation of sin. The sacrifice of Christ is made for the forgiveness of sins committed by humankind. The sacrifice to ancestors is not made for the forgiveness of humankind: it is essentially a kinship affair, no more and no less. The sacrifice of Christ takes place on a universal plane, affecting humankind. Another distinct feature of the sacrifice of the Cross and of the Mass is that it is offered for both the living and the dead. The sacrifice of the ancestors is intended for the ancestors (and not God).

Some people may want to argue differently, namely that the sacrifice is for the benefit of the living relatives. It is indeed a recognition of the role of the ancestors. The sacrifice of the Cross is intended for all, including ancestors. They too, are in need of salvation. We therefore need to be careful that we do not afford a universal place to the sacrifice of the ancestors. But, in as much as we invoke the saints, it is certainly not a contradiction of our faith to invoke the ancestors. They, too, have a special place in the scheme of things. For too long we have kept them out of the Church of God. The word 'Mbalazi/Badimo' does not appear anywhere in our liturgical texts, and yet they are celebrated in almost all African families. It is time we lift the banning order and welcome them openly into the Christian family of the living and the dead.

The ritual of making an offering to the ancestors, as far as we can ascertain, is a worthy candidate for baptism into the Catholic Church. This ritual has survived cultural change. It is therefore not a figment of our imagination. It is practised by almost each and every household. It is rich in symbolism. It is at the heart of an African religious experience. It represents communion with the world of the Spirit. It is a symbolic encounter with the living-dead. It brings the participants closer to God. It is a celebration of what people remember about the subject in question, about the family, about the ancestors of the family. It is an occasion for exchanging stories. The narrative keeps the memory alive. This celebration is akin to the celebration of the sacramental memorial of the Paschal event. It constitutes a radical opening to, and a deep appreciation of the memorial of Christ. It is an occasion of sharing out feelings of sadness or joy. It is an occasion for renewing the bonds of friendship and community. It is a feast where the meal is shared, thus reinforcing the feelings of togetherness. It is not an eschatological banquet like the meal of the Eucharist, but it reinforces the meaning of the anticipated banquet. It is a sacrifice, albeit in a metaphoric sense. It lends support to our understanding of the sacrifice of the Cross and of the Eucharist, which is the proper sacrifice. Its catechetical value is unquestionable. The ritual of offering to the ancestors is at the heart of the African tradition.

CONCLUSION

In being overly concerned about the authority (power) of the ancestors, the evil of witchcraft
and sorcery, and the dictatorship of the demons (or, alternatively, about purification, elevation, and renewal of local culture), it must be remembered that these powers are an integral part of the African religious experience and therefore the basis of an African spirituality. In seeking to eliminate the mythical, the superstitious, one must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water. One can ill afford arriving too early. The hierarchy of powers and the rituals that accompany them, offer (within the African context) traditionally acceptable explanations of the human condition. They address the question of the sacred, and determine the path to it. They circumscribe areas of do's and don't's in the spheres of both moral and practical domains. They address the baffling issue of evil and human fallibility, of health and sickness, of luck and ill-luck, of human advancement and decline, of disasters in nature and their relationships to human beings, of community building and its dissolution and finally, of life and death.

The mind as conditioned by culture will defy a wholesale demythologization process. New sets of truths cannot simply be juxtaposed next to 'old truths' which supposedly have been rendered redundant or inadequate because of the encounter with Christianity. The new truth has to arrange the old truth in its limitedness, or otherwise the African soul will have been ripped off its heart and rendered incapable of accepting a new heart. The new truth has to be articulated in such a way that human experience is not deprived of its own culturally determined ways of self-expression, and yet at the same time it should allow for the transformation (purification) of the old truth brought about by the life-giving power of the Gospel.

If today there is still a perception of tension between culture and faith in the African community, the intensity of tension and open conflict between the missionaries and the indigenous people must have been a sobering experience. There was a fierce resistance on the part of the indigenous people to the missionary efforts to impose their religion and their way of life. Conversion took place after a long and arduous struggle and within the broad context of other forms of exchange. Literacy was the 'door to the church'. But so, too, was labour and the exchange of goods.

The Comaroffs are graphic in their descriptions: regrettably we hear the clear voices of the missionaries and only the dying laughter of the Africans. The missionaries were undeterred by the 'forces of darkness,' by the 'savagery of the land and its inhabitants,' and by the desolate land 'bereft of human marks.' For the missionaries the choice to be made was clear: 'heathenism or Christianity.' It did not dawn on them to use the resources of the local culture to communicate the Christian message in a creative and effective manner. For the indigenous people, the significance of conversion 'cannot be assumed to conform to European preconceptions.' It is for this reason that the Comaroffs question the concept of conversion as an analytical tool: 'How well does it grasp the highly variable, usually gradual, often implicit, and demonstrably "syncretic" manner in which the social identities, cultural styles, and ritual practices of African peoples were transformed by the evangelical encounter?'

The teaching and meaning of Christianity has been proclaimed for over 2000 years. Christianity in Southern Africa is about 350 years old. The contexts are different. Changes in cultural appearances, language, technical knowledge, etc. do not necessarily reflect a radical change in mode of thought and spiritual disposition. They certainly do not suggest the imminent collapse of the indigenous cosmos. The 'subversive' impact of Christianity is more appropriately likened to a smouldering fire rather than to an all-consuming fire. Clearly for the African communities, the Pauline model of conversion is an exception rather than the rule. Conversion is not an exclusive, highly individualized or personal event. It is an individual event in so far as the individual person(s) accept(s) faith within a community in the throes of conversion. The community is consciously and defensively rooted in some of its own indigenous beliefs, and yet open to the invitation of the Gospel message. The acceptance of
faith and the selective clinging to the tenets of local culture is not necessarily seen as a contradictory position. The retention of some beliefs and practices, and the letting go of others, attest to the dynamic engagement of Western culture and the Christian message by the local cultures. A culture that is alive and open to challenges equally bears witness to the growing spirit of freedom from superstitious beliefs that hold the mind under their sway.

In spite of the difficult encounter between the indigenous people and the missionaries, the former eventually yielded to the ‘subversive’ impact of the Christian message. They too heard the Gospel intended for the ‘whole creation’ (Mk. 16:15). They shared in the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit and experienced the flames of Pentecost. Their hearts caught fire as they were being repeatedly pounded with God’s Word. Jesus Christ was proclaimed as the ‘way the truth and the life’, the ‘true light that enlightens everyone’ (John 1:9), including the African people. This new truth began to upset the conventional wisdom about people’s origin and their destiny. The place and role of the ancestors was to be affected profoundly. Members of a clan were descendants of their ancestors, but both the living and the dead were made in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). The ultimate object of loyalty and adoration was to be God and no longer the ancestors.

This position is acceptable in theory: in practice, the role, the influence, and the impact of the ancestors among the living appear to have been slightly dented. The turnover has not been as radical as one would have wanted.

The process of inculuration is at a stage when different elements of the local culture are being identified and discussed with a view to their transformation. The not so easy process of discernment has begun. The patrimony of the Church’s teaching and tradition will increasingly play a critical role in recasting the original rites of the local culture. The goal of this process is to allow the Christian message as received and as experienced to express itself in the local culture. There is no doubt that the African world view as it was known, will never be the same again.

Notes
7. Schapera, *Bantu-Speaking Tribes*, 263.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
I. The complex situation in a world that is in the process of becoming one

The present world situation is characterized by two opposing features. On the one hand we are facing the phenomenon of globalization. The world has, so to say, become a global village. It is not only the financial currents that are daily going around the globe electronically in their millions, but through modern means of communication we also have access to information world-wide. Modern means of transport take people and goods from one end of the globe to the other within hours.

Unfortunately through this the world has not become more peaceful. Globalization creates new dependencies and injustices and creates new forms of domination by the strong and powerful. Over and above this there are counter movements to globalization. When people of different cultures move closely together this gives rise to fears which can cause problems leading even to hatred and violence. In this way the particular interests of various groups and ethnic and cultural conflicts are increasing. Some people are predicting a clash of civilizations, and in fact, in many places of the world this is already happening in a bloody way. We only have to think of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the Sudan, Bosnia and Kosovo.

In the so-called developed societies we find an increasing decline of common values and basic convictions. In our century pluralism has exploded in all areas of life and thinking. An ever increasing differentiation can be noticed in forms and areas of living, in models of thinking and systems of orientation, of world views and forms of action. Often development goes so far that even the validity of human rights which should encompass peoples and cultures, is being questioned, and this is not only the case in states with an authoritarian regime like China, but it is partly also the case with thinkers of the West. According to them the claim of general human rights is a form of neocolonial Eurocentric thinking.

This pluralism also affects the personal identity of the individual. The majority of people have to live in the most diverse worlds. The domain of the family, of work and recreation, the private and the public domain, the world of economics, of politics and of culture are often far removed from each other. This often leads to a 'patch-work identity' of the individual, to a 'rag-rag' and syncretism of settings from the most diverse religious and cultural traditions, where no attempt is made to achieve cognitive clarification. Therefore many things overlap and seams and fragments in one's own life remain unresolved next to the other.

In this vast diversity the attempt to find a unifying bond which would hold everything together seems to become more and more hopeless. Postmodern philosophy has drawn the consequences from this. It consciously dismisses the postulate of unity which until now had formed the whole of Western thinking. This means not just the acceptance and tolerance of plurality, but a fundamental option for plurality. In this a new qualitative pluralism has come about in postmodern thinking where universal values and norms no longer exist. Reason itself has become plural. Truth, humanity and justice only exist in the plural. Therefore there is no longer the one universal and finally valid religion.

2. The pluralism of religions as a theological challenge

This is a situation in which Christianity is questioned in its very foundations and in which the Churches are challenged in a totally new way.
The Catholic Church defined itself in the Second Vatican Council as a sign and instrument of unity and peace. As such she is challenged in an extreme way through the present world situation. From the very beginning the Church had a twofold message. She proclaimed and still proclaims emphatically that every human being, regardless of his or her colour or ethnic and cultural affiliation, is the image of God and that every individual has an absolute, unique dignity. The basic human rights are therefore universally valid. Since the Second Vatican Council and especially under the present Pontificate the Catholic Church, more than ever before, has engaged herself for the universal respect of human rights.

This universalism applies in a particular way to the redemptive mission of the Church. Jesus sent his disciples into the whole world to all peoples, to all human beings (Mt. 28:19; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:27; Acts 1:8). The mission of the Church is therefore universal and the Church in her very being is missionary (AG 2). She is not tied to a particular people, culture or language or to a particular political or economic system. The Church is, so to say, the oldest global player. According to Vatican II she understands herself as the universal sacrament of salvation and the sign and instrument of unity (LG 1). She transcends all ethnic, national and cultural differences and wants to unite all peoples, languages and cultures in praising the one God.

By mentioning the one God as the Father of all human beings we have already addressed a second essential element of the Church’s message. Next to this universality there is the unity, the uniqueness of the message of the Church. The Church proclaims the one and only God (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29), who is the Father of all human beings, of the good as well as the bad (Mt 5:45). She proclaims the one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:5). In no other name can salvation be found (Acts 4:12). He is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). He is the one high priest who redeemed us once and for all (Hebr 7:27). This message has been passed on to us once and for all (Jude 3).

Therefore there can only be the one and only true Church, the *sacrae catholicae et apostolicae ecclesiae*, as we call her in the creed. According to Catholic interpretation she is united in the one common confession of faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, in the celebration of the same sacraments, especially the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity, and in the one service of unity in the collegium of bishops with and under the successor of Peter (LG 13).

In the light of this strong emphasis on the unity and uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his Church on the one hand and the previously characterized pluralistic situation of the modern and postmodern world on the other, it is not surprising that in exactly this question it had to come to a wide and vehement discussion within and outside theology. For not only has cultural pluralism increased, but the pluralism of religions is becoming more evident to us today than was the case in the past.

More than in former times we know today how many centuries and millennia had passed before the coming of Christ into the world and we know how many millions of people even today, two thousand years after the birth of Christ, are still not aware of the Christian message and therefore live outside Christianity. Should they all be lost forever and how would this be compatible with the justice and mercy of God and his salvific will for all human beings?

The knowledge about the multiplicity of religions is certainly not new. What is new, however, is the fact that we have become far more conscious of the urgency of this phenomenon on account of globalization. In the global village of the world religions have come closer to one another. They are no longer separated from each other through national boundaries, and they no longer live in isolation but next to one another. Often they live in one and the same country next to one another and among one another. All of us live together with people belonging to different religions, people whom we appreciate as human beings.
Even though the world has always been pluralistic, today we experience this pluralism in a new way. More than before we are becoming conscious of it and we must ask ourselves how we must deal with it. In our global situation, tolerance, mutual respect and peace among the religions, has become an important prerequisite for peace in the world and an indispensable contribution towards peace among the peoples.

3. The thesis of religious pluralism

This is the context in which the more recent approaches in theology towards religious pluralism must be seen. I only want to mention the names Raimon Panikkar, John Hick, Paul F. Knitter.

The question as such is not new. We find it already in the Enlightenment, e.g. with J. E. Lessing, and we find it again in liberal theology, especially with E. Troeltsch, who accorded to Christianity a top validity but not an absolute validity. The relativism of the Enlightenment was opposed by thinkers of German idealism, especially Hegel. Due to him the claim to absoluteness of Christianity was common and still is. This is a misleading expression which is foreign to the New Testament. Today idealistic thinking is often made responsible for the totalitarian ideologies of our century. After the collapse of the totalitarian ideologies, this thinking is often criticized as being Eurocentric, imperialistic and totalitarian and claimed to disregard the undeniable diversity of reality and of cultures.

It is against this background that pluralistic theory of religion developed. According to this theory there is not only a multiplicity of religions but also of revelations which makes possible a multiplicity of human responses to forms of salvation. This theory, by necessity, must therefore recognize more than one mediator of salvation. It culminates in the discussion around the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the question whether Jesus Christ is the one and only and, at the same time, universal, mediator of salvation for all human beings. It is obvious that with this question a central and fundamen-

tal point of our Christian faith has been touched. This question concerns the identity of Christianity and of the Church.

In order to provide a philosophical foundation for their pluralistic theories, various theologians have chosen a new approach to the theory of knowledge and have thereby made use again of Kant's theory of knowledge. According to Kant only the 'phenomenon' of things is accessible to our knowledge, not the 'noumenon'. This means: we only recognize what things are for us not what they are in themselves. We only recognize what God means to us at any given time. Therefore we can never grasp the being of God as such. There are numerous pictures and images of God and it is impossible to question them for their objective truth. In the final analysis, for postmodern philosophy it is not the logical understanding of truth that is essential but an aesthetic understanding of truth. Often one speaks of a renewal of mythical thinking.

When the absolute in history does not exist, when there are only ideas, concepts, pictures and ideal figures which direct us towards the transcendent, without the transcendent ever appearing directly, then it is clear that a Christian claim to the absolute does not exist. Consequently Hick does not accept the identification of God with one single historical figure, with Jesus of Nazareth, but rejects this as a myth. Jesus Christ is reduced to a religious genius through whom human beings can acquire the awareness of their divine sonship.

The theory of religious pluralism thereby accepts the fundamental equality of all religions. Of course this does not mean that for the representatives of the theory of religious pluralism all religions are equal in value and that the differences are unimportant. They are far removed from such a superficial relativism. It is well known that in the various religions there are not only great and profound insights but also destructive elements such as superstition and inhumane practices.

The criterion for the discernment and evaluation for the representatives of the theory of reli-
igious pluralism is not a theoretical one but rather an ethical and a practical criterion. Decisive for the evaluation of religions is their capacity to integrate the human person and the various human areas of life in a process which moves from self-centredness to reality-centredness. That religion deserves priority which is more in keeping with the dignity of the human person and which better fosters humanity.

The question is whether this ethical, practical and humanistic criterion is adequate. It is obvious that in this way one can justify the preference of one religion to another, but one cannot determine the uniqueness of a particular religion, i.e. the Christian religion. With this criterion one can at the most define the highest validity but not the sole validity of a religion. Therefore there remains a fundamental pluralism and a competition of religions. We can put this question in a more fundamental way and ask whether there is an ethical criterion at all, which does not presuppose a theoretical criterion. For who tells me what is genuinely human? In order to give an answer to this question the ethical and practical criterion presupposes a theoretical reflection and a theoretical judgement. The practical judgement can be different depending on which image of the human being is presupposed. The question of truth can therefore not be avoided.

Where this question with regard to truth is no longer put, one comes to a purely aesthetic understanding of the world which evaluates the things according to their subjective experience-content and which decides in an eclectic way whatever agrees best with one's personal feeling of happiness. In the market of possibilities one chooses à la carte and allows contradictions simply to exist. The acceptance of plurality and tolerance threatens to turn into indifference and lack of interest. With a number of postmodern thinkers such a way of thinking has led to nihilism.

4. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council

These unexplained premises, the negative consequences and not least the contradiction to central and fundamental statements of Holy Scripture as well as of tradition, force us to study again the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Long before these new theological theories originated, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) took up the new problems in its own way. Based on this position, some Catholic authors are trying to offer new solutions.

In the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church virtually moved beyond the view which regarded non-Christian religions as heresy and superstition. In the document 'Nosstra Aetate' the Church clearly formulated that she does not reject anything that is true and holy in these religions. With genuine seriousness she is investigating those ways of acting and living, those prescriptions and teachings which deviate in certain ways from what she herself regards as true, but which often reflect a ray of truth which illuminates all men (NAe 2). In the 'Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity', the Council spoke in a similar way of truth and grace (AG 9) and of the seeds of the Word (AG 11) which were always found among the pagans in a hidden form of God's presence.

The Council even confirmed officially the theological teaching that God who is the salvation of all men (1 Tim 2:4) has ways of salvation for those who, without personal guilt, do not know Jesus Christ but who try to act according to their conscience under the influence of grace (LG 16; cf GS 22).

At the same time the Council in its own explanation proclaimed the principle of religious freedom and thereby rejected any kind of coercion and pressure to accept the Christian faith or any other religion. It also acknowledges the right of every human person to adhere to their own religion not only internally and in private but also to confess it publicly.

With these statements the Council uses the witness of the New Testament. According to the letter to the Colossians and the prologue to the gospel of St John everything was created in,
through and for Jesus Christ (Col 1:15-16). Everything has come into existence through the Word, which in Jesus Christ became a human being. This is the life and light which illuminates every human being (Jn 1:3-5.9). This teaching of the New Testament was taken up by the early Fathers of the Church. They said: in every reality, also in the non-Christian religions, there are fragments of the truth (logoi spermatikoi) which in Jesus Christ appeared in its fullness once and for all. From this follows: the salvation which non-Christians can obtain if they follow their conscience, is salvation in and through Jesus Christ. This inclusivist theory therefore respects consciously and decisively that, according to the witness of the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator of salvation.

The encyclical 'Redemptoris missio' develops the many statements of the Council and adds an important further aspect: the presence and activity of the Spirit of God is without the limits of space and time. It acts in the heart of every person who is orientated towards the truth and what is good, and who is genuinely seeking God. The Spirit gives light and strength to human beings to respond to their highest calling and offers to all the possibility ‘to come in touch with the paschal mystery in a way only God knows’. The Spirit therefore is at the origin of the existence and the question of faith in every human being who is open to the Spirit, not only in certain situations but through the structure of his being. This presence and this activity of the Spirit does not only concern the individual person ‘but also the society and history, the peoples, cultures and religions’ (no 28). There can be genuine saints outside the Church.

Whether one can speak of anonymous Christians, as does the great theologian Karl Rahner, is another question which I do not want to deal with here. What is decisive for our consideration is that the Spirit of God can be, and in fact is, active outside the visible Church in hidden and diverse ways.

With these positions the Council and the post-Conciliar teaching laid the foundation for dialogue and co-operation with members of other religions. The Council consciously encouraged such a dialogue. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have taken up this challenge and have since fostered inter-religious dialogue. Since the reform of the curia by Pope Paul VI there is even a particular department within the Roman curia, a Council for inter-religious dialogue.

Through the new relationship of dialogue the old exclusivistic practice was overcome which stated: Since Jesus Christ is the only mediator of salvation there is no salvation outside this confession, i.e. outside the Church. ‘Extra ecclesiam nulla salus’ was the famous axiom which was first formulated by Cyprian and which, via Augustine’s disciple Fulgentius of Ruspe, became part of theological teaching and the Fourth Lateran Council. It was often interpreted as meaning: all those who do not know and profess the Christian faith are lost forever. This is a thought which seems unacceptable for us today because it is not compatible with the justice and mercy of God and His universal will of salvation, nor does it seem compatible with the attitude of human solidarity.

Since the Council a change has taken place in Catholic theology. In the place of the old exclusive theory a largely inclusive theory has gained ground, although with certain modifications. It tries to interpret the unique event of salvation which happened in Jesus Christ once and for all and to see it so universally that it includes everything that is true and good in all the other religions. By now, this theory has practically become the opinio communis.

Of course, this raises the question: is this inclusive approach adequate? Does it do justice to the otherness of the other religions or is it a way of absorbing the other religions? Does it not make them, against their own self-concept, into anonymous Christian religions? Is it therefore a camouflaged imperialism?

5. New attempts at mediation
In an attempt to answer such questions several
theologians have tried to find solutions building on the Christo-centric and pneumatological approaches of the Council. Such attempts tend towards a tempered Catholic religious pluralism. In the older version, represented mainly by R. Panikkar, the point of departure was once again the Logos or Wisdom tradition of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. Their thesis was as follows: the one Logos, i.e. the one Wisdom of God, revealed itself in different ways in the history of religions. Jesus Christ is one, but simply one incarnation of the Logos, next to whom there are other incarnations. This view is more in agreement with Hinduism than with Christianity.

More recent authors differentiate more clearly between the Logos asarkos and the Logos ensarkos, the Logos before the incarnation and the incarnated Logos. They say: there is a salvific theory which emanates from the eternal Logos who proceeds from the Father and is equal to him in being. This is not the salvific activity of the incarnated and glorified Christ. This does not lead to two different orders of salvation, rather it is the interaction of the Logos asarkos and the incarnated Logos – they complement each other. Both should be differentiated but not separated. However, if one asks how this connection is to be interpreted one only gets a vague reply. The how of this interaction remains mysteriously uncertain. One attempt to understand it is by means of the famous comparison which is made by Irenaeus of Lyon who speaks of the two hands of God.

A similar interpretation is found with regard to the universal activity of the Holy Spirit. Naturally authors who support this view maintain that the Holy Spirit, according to the witness of the New Testament, is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but they say - the Spirit is an independent divine person and not merely a function of the risen Christ. Therefore the Spirit's activity goes beyond that of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is active even where Jesus Christ is not known. In this way these authors are trying in a clear and unambiguous way to adhere to the uniqueness of the salvific importance of Jesus Christ as well as to the uniqueness of the order of salvation, but they also try to uphold a relative independence of the non-Christian religions. Here they differ from the representatives of religious pluralism. These authors take up concepts of the Church's tradition and try to make them fruitful for these new questions. On closer inspection, however, one sees that while they are using traditional concepts they are not doing full justice to the decisive point of the Christian tradition and the Second Vatican Council.

The New Testament and the Wisdom or Logos Christology of the Fathers of the Church see in the incarnation of Christ not only the goal of salvation history in the narrower sense of the word but also that of world history and of the entire cosmos. According to the witness, especially in the letter to the Ephesians and in the letter to the Colossians, everything has been created for Jesus Christ (Col 1:16; cf 1 Cor 8:6) and everything should be brought together in him (Eph 1:10). The working of the Logos or of the Holy Spirit before the coming of Jesus Christ and outside of the visible order of salvation can therefore only be understood as a 'preparation for the good news' (LG 16; AG 9). Every salvation that is given to human beings who are open to God, before the incarnation, is given 'intuitu meritorum Christi' (cf DS 2803), in view of and as an anticipation of the salvation which Jesus Christ wrought once and for all in history by giving his life on the cross for all men.

Therefore Vatican II teaches, 'that the centre and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master' (GS 10). 'The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilizations, the centre of humanity, the joy of all hearts and the fulfilment of all longings' (GS 45).

Since in Jesus Christ and for Him everything has been created and since He is the eschatological goal of the entire history, He is also the yardstick against which all cultures are to be measured. Therefore in the 'Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity' the Council states that everything that is good and true in the reli-
gions of mankind finds its measure in Jesus Christ and has to be critically measured against Him, be purified by Him, in that way be brought to perfection (AG 9).

6. Unity in multiplicity – Christological and Trinitarian

Perhaps the position mentioned above sounds fundamentalistic and narrow-minded. Therefore, in a final process of argumentation we want to ask: what is the inner and deeper meaning of the insistence of Holy Scripture and the Church’s tradition on the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ in the history of salvation?

The answer to this question can be found if we take into account the meaning which the profession of the unity and uniqueness of God implies. The profession of one God unites Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and it distinguishes these three monotheistic religions from all other religions. This profession, of course, may not be understood in a simple quantitative meaning; it does not only mean that there is only one God and not e.g. two or three. According to the Bible this is a qualitative and an existential statement. In the confession of one God is contained a radical and total decision: one has to adhere to God with one’s whole heart, one’s whole soul and one’s whole mind (Mk 12:30 par.). One cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24). God claims us entirely with every fibre of our existence.

The theological tradition has taken up this thought and deepened it in a speculative way. It has shown that God according to His being is the all-embracing and all-surpassing reality. Because of this, God can only be one in His being. Whoever professes several gods has not understood what the word ‘God’ truly says and means. The Fathers of the Church expressed this thought in the formula: one God or no God.

This profession of one God is everything else but fundamental narrow-mindedness. It necessarily includes that the one God is both, the all-embracing God and the God of all human beings. While polytheism claims as absolute the multiplicity of reality, of peoples and cultures, the profession of one God is the sharpest contradiction to the fragmentation of reality and the highest claim to an ultimate unity of the world and of humanity. The profession of one God entails that all human beings form a single family under the one Father in heaven.

The profession of the one and only God includes the profession of the uniqueness of the Christian order of salvation. For according to our Christian profession this one and only God has revealed Himself totally in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God has communicated Himself entirely, definitively and without reserve. In Him the fullness of the Godhead dwells (Col 1:19; 2:9); from this fullness we have all received (Jn 1:16); from this, life in all its fullness (Jn 10:10). If God in Jesus Christ has communicated Himself totally, definitely and without reserve then this is the ‘id quo maius cogitari nequit’, beyond which nothing greater can be thought (St Anselm of Canterbury), and at the same time it is ‘id quo Deus maius operari nequit’, that beyond which even God cannot do anything greater.

Therefore from the essence of the Christ event there can be nothing which could go beyond this and which would complement it. Everything that is good and true in the other religions participates in what appeared in Jesus Christ in its fullness.

Yet this coming of the fullness of time is at the same time the realization of the eternal mystery of God (Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9; Col 1:26). No human being and no dogma of the Church can ever fathom this mystery. The Spirit of God has been promised to us in order to lead us again and again into this mystery (Jn 16:13). The Spirit of God can make use of our encounter with other religions in order to reveal to us more deeply certain aspects of the one mystery of Christ. An encounter with other religions can therefore always be an enrichment for us Christians. The inter-religious dialogue is not a one-way street; it is a real encounter. We as
Christians are not only the giving party but we are also the learners because in this way we will get a deeper and better grasp of the fullness of truth and grace which has already been given to us in Jesus Christ.

The deepest foundation for this understanding of unity and uniqueness as well as the universality of the Christian order of salvation lies in the Trinitarian confession, because the one and unique God is not a lonely God. He is the one God in three persons. He is unity in multiplicity; from all eternity He is the God who gives Himself in love: the Father to the Son and the Father and Son together in the Holy Spirit. God is love (1 Jn 4:8,16); He is the mystery of a love which is self-giving.

Since God in Himself is love He can give Himself away in history without giving Himself up. The self-communication of God in Jesus Christ has its last reason in the fact that God in Himself is giving love between Father, Son and Spirit. The omnipotence of love reveals itself in the fact that it does not have to assert itself but that it gives itself away while remaining love itself. In the same way the divinity of Jesus Christ shows itself by emptying itself (Phil 2:6). In the incarnation the Divinity of the Logos does not absorb and swallow humanity. According to the profession of the Church, divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ are not confused or merged; they remain undivided. Like in the Trinity, so also in Jesus Christ: unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

In this way we find - from a Trinitarian as well as Christological point of view - an understanding of unity and uniqueness, which is not totalitarian but which gives room to the other and makes the other free. It belongs essentially to genuine love that it unites most intimately, but in such a way that it neither absorbs nor tries to possess the other: rather it leads others to their own fulfilment.

What we have tried to present in a speculative way shows in a concrete way in the life of Jesus. The Gospels bear witness to Jesus Christ as the person for others. He, the Lord, did not come to dominate but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom ‘for many’ (Mk 10:45 par.). He emptied himself even unto death, that is why he was raised high to be the Lord of the universe (Phil 2:6-11). Through Jesus Christ, service which is self-consuming and self-sacrificing, has become the new law of the world.

It becomes clear: the statement that the Christian order of salvation is marked by unity and uniqueness is no imperialistic thesis, and it does not constitute nor allow an imperialistic understanding of mission; it has nothing to do with world conquest, even if, unfortunately, in the course of history, it was sometimes misunderstood and misused as such.

On the contrary, the thesis of the unity and uniqueness of the Christian order of salvation entails universal dimensions. Understood correctly, it establishes, in its own way, not only a relationship of tolerance and respect towards other religions but over and above this a relationship of dialogue and service. Just because it teaches that the one God in the one Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of all human beings, it contributes in its own way - rightly understood and rightly lived - towards understanding and peace in the world.

Abbreviations

AG = *Ad gentes divinitus*: The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (1965)
LG = *Lumen gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964)
GS = *Gaudium et spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965)
NAE = *Nostra aetate*: The Declaration on the Church’s Relations with non-Christian Religions
TWO DIFFICULT VIRTUES: TOLERANCE AND FORGIVENESS
Paul J.M. van Tongeren

Introduction

My approach or orientation in ethics is hermeneutical. I attempt to develop ethics or moral philosophy as a hermeneutics of moral experience. Although I cannot elaborate on the methodological aspects of this approach here, I do want to point out that despite the fact that my lectures here are announced under the rubric of ‘applied ethics’, and although I will talk about subjects that traditionally fall under that rubric, such as tolerance, euthanasia, quality management, and life extension, the approach I use is not that which is traditionally expected in applied ethics.

There is a special reason for me to look forward to your comments and questions with regard to the subject of tonight, tolerance and forgiveness. I think that South Africans probably more than anyone else, and certainly more than I, have a great deal of experience in this respect. It is therefore with great hesitation that I accepted to speak on this subject here and now. I hope you will not expect from me that I deal explicitly with the South African situation. I hardly know your situation. It is my first time here and I have no more than superficial newspaper knowledge of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and of the process you went through. Though I make hardly any reference to it. I do hope that you will be able to apply what I shall say to that experience, and that we will be able to discuss it.

I will speak about tolerance and justice, because I do think that these two belong together at least in some respects. A recent book by the Nigerian author Wole Soyinka is entitled: The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness. It contains three essays of which at least one is inspired by the South African Truth and Reconciliation process. The muse of forgiveness is expected to inspire the growth of a tolerant and pluralist society, after the long desired ending of the cruel apartheid-regime. But this is not the only way to relate forgiveness and tolerance. Forgiveness is more than only a temporary bridge on our way to a decent society; and tolerance is more than pluralism or the absence of discrimination and apartheid. In order to point out what else I mean by tolerance and forgiveness, and how they are related I will elaborate on three points: First, since I see tolerance and forgiveness as virtues, and therefore as related to norms and values, I shall speak about norms and values as virtues in general, and second about tolerance and forgiveness as particular virtues. Third, I shall try to explain why I consider tolerance and forgiveness as extremely difficult virtues. To some extent they seem to be intrinsically contradictory, or at least paradoxical. I will try to point out why they are so difficult, and how this difficulty might be diminished at least to some extent.

Norms, values and virtues
‘Norms-and-values’
I don’t know whether or not the same is true in your country, but in my country ‘norms-and-values’ is one of the most common expressions in all kinds of public debate. The expression crops up in discussions about the educational system (the youth is said to lack ‘norms-and-values’ and should be trained in them in school), in discussions about business (which should comply with ‘norms-and-values’ to be formulated in business-codes), in discussions about politics (the contribution of liberalism, socialism and Christian-democracy to the ‘norms-and-values’ of society), and even in
discussions about science (in debates about the extent to which it affects the ‘norms-and-values’ of a society, and the extent to which it can and should be controlled by the ‘norms-and-values’ of society). I spoke about ‘norms-and-values’ as an expression, because one often gets the impression that these two words are forged together, that one should link them with hyphens. ‘Norms-and-values’ seems to be the magic word for everything that has to do with morality. And although society as such is not obviously becoming more moral, there seems to be a moralization of the discussion about society. This growing attention to morality might gladden the ethicist, but also and even foremost, it should cause him or her to be suspicious. The suspicion increases as soon as one realises that the expression ‘norms-and-values’ connects two concepts with rather different meanings. Their apparently easy connection in one expression might possibly conceal the problem of their real relation. Let me try to explain what I mean.

Values

The concept of value, which has its origin in post-Kantian philosophy, is an intriguing one. What are values? What is a value? I mention three aspects, all very briefly:

A value is the representation of an ideal. It is something which is desired and desirable and is an effective force as such, that is, as desired; it is not yet realised, it is not given, it is longed for. A value is something that must or might be realised, but is not yet realised. It is something that will be actualized at the end, but is not yet actual, except as a causa finalis, as a force that works by attraction, an actio in distans.

As an ideal, a value is not only less, but also more than real. It is a maximum or an optimum. A place which is not the ideal place to be, may still be a fairly good place to be. A lecture which is not the ideal lecture, can still be an interesting lecture. A human being who does not realise the ideal of human existence, may still be a respectable person. One cannot reproach someone for not completely realizing the ideal. Not attaining the ideal is not reprehensible.

A value is the outcome of an evaluation and as such it presupposes an evaluating subject. The concept of value reflects the emancipation of subjectivity which characterizes modern philosophy. Because of this relation to the subject, values are susceptible to cultural, historical and even individual circumstances, and thus they are unavoidably changeable. On the other hand, however, the introduction of the concept of value was precisely an attempt at setting limits to the arbitrariness of relativism and subjectivism. Values are not arbitrarily chosen or construed, they are discovered, acknowledged; they present themselves to those who are perceptive and sensitive. But they can never be captured apart from this subjective perception and sensitivity. Values are therefore characterized by an inherent ambiguity: they necessarily claim to transcend the relative conditions to which they are unavoidably bound.

Norms

From this perspective, it will be clear that a norm is something quite different. Again three brief points of explanation:

A norm is not an end, but a beginning; it is a precondition. An argument that violates the norms of logic is actually no argument; it may seem to be an argument, but is not really an argument. A norm is, so to say, a constitutive rule: complying with the rules constitutes the relevant practice. Of course one can say that one who violates the norms of fair play, may still play the game, be it in an unfair way. But that is only true to some extent, or in a limited sense. More properly speaking one should say that such a person only pretends to play the game, and to follow the rules of the game, whereas in fact he is involved in a completely different practice (be it making money or something else). The least one should say is that complying with the norm is the normal situation.

A norm is therefore not a maximum, but rather a minimum: a condition that must be met, or at
least should be met. The violation of a norm is reprehensible. Compliance with the norms set for a certain practice (be it a game, a political debate, a scholarly discussion or living as a human being, human existence as a whole) is not just desired or striven for, it is demanded. One who violates the norms of a certain practice more or less permanently excludes himself from that practice, more or less permanently.

A norm also has a completely different relation to the subject; being imposed on the subject rather than dependent on its recognition by that subject. A norm has a certain objectivity which a value does not have. For example, it is impossible for one to say that friendship is a value if one does not oneself value friendship, and express it, for example, in a longing for friendship. But it certainly is possible to know the norms of a practice and at the same time try to evade them. Norms have an external existence independent of our compliance. A norm exists for example, in the sanctions through which it is guaranteed.

and

Norms and values turn out to be rather different matters. One even feels inclined to define them in contradistinction to each other. But if these two are so different, what then is the meaning of this apparently harmless conjunction 'and' in the expression 'norms and values'? On the one hand it is obvious that the two need each other. Norms, the rules we formulate and the sanctions we impose to maintain the rules, should be based on values, in that they should be oriented towards and conceived from an orientation towards values. A norm that is not inspired by a value, will die from pure exteriority. The external objective norm must be inspired by internal, subjectively felt values. Norms need values. And the opposite is true as well: values need norms. They need a translation into norms in order to become real, to descend from heaven and to take root in earth and bear fruit on earth. Values become real, they find their hands and their feet in norms. Norms need values and values need norms.

But - on the other hand - the fact that they need each other does not alter the fact that they are very different. The combination of their difference and their interdependence forces us to ask the question how they are connected: what is the cement between these two different but related materials, the cement that is hidden behind this harmless word 'and'? I would like to suggest that the name of this cement is 'virtue'. I will first explain the notion of virtue in general, and then illustrate it with regard to the virtues of tolerance and forgiveness.

**Virtue**

According to Aristotle, virtue is a median or mean between two vices. I think that it might also be a bridge between norms and values. There must be such a bridge because of the distance between the two. If there were (or maybe I should say if there is, or even, because there is) no bridging of that distance, norms would become (have become) ever more external. Such norms would need an increasing number of external sanctions to be maintained: more violence, more police, more prisons, more severe punishments. It is highly questionable whether such a development could be brought to a halt, and I suspect that we see this development around us these days. But also, values will suffer from such a development, or rather from being distanced and separated from norms. Values would become idealized and run the risk of becoming alienated from the real world in a moralistic or romantic isolation, a splendid isolation indeed. How can virtue be a bridge between the two?

Virtue is, I think, to be described as an internalized norm, or as the hands and feet of the ideal value. Aristotle points out that virtue is built through education. Initially there are external norms that are imposed on the child. Gradually these norms are internalized. The internalized norm has the form of an educated desire: an *hexis* or disposition. The form of desire itself is moulded by norms. This educated desire is the virtuous desire. Only then, when norms are not only obeyed, but have become the expression of the person's own will, only then will there be a
guarantee that the norm will be obeyed (think of Hegel's concept of law as the self-realization of freedom). True obedience cannot be based on obedience alone.

As you all know, Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of virtue: practical virtue (character-virtue, ethical virtue) and theoretical (intellectual, disnoetical) virtue. As you also know, the distinction is not a complete separation of the two, because one of the intellectual virtues, the virtue of prudence or phronesis is central to all practical virtues. This prudence is itself twofold: it is an understanding of the telos or goal, and it is an appropriate perception of the circumstances and conditions under which the telos has to be realised here and now. In this understanding of the telos, we may recognize the orientation towards value, whereas the appropriate perception of the circumstances refers to the way in which this orientation has to get hands and feet. The choice or prohaireasis (virtue being defined as an hesis prohaireitike, a disposition to choose) is the translation of the general orientation in terms of the concrete situation. This moment of choice is important, for, as you know, the median or mean is not the same for every person and for every situation. What is a virtue in one circumstance, can be a vice under different conditions or for other people, with different qualifications. What is cowardice for the strong, may be courage for the weak. It is in bridging the gap between telos and real situation, that the virtuous person determines the mean. Virtue is not only the internalization of the norm, it is also the 'externalization' or realization of the value. It is therefore, not only a mean between two extreme vices, but it is also a bridge between norms and values. Let us now attempt to repeat this in more concrete terms, with respect to tolerance and to forgiveness, in order to find out whether this has been more than only an intellectual or conceptual exercise; has it delivered something relevant for our practical, moral situation?

Tolerance and Forgiveness

Tolerance

Is tolerance a virtue? Can it be conceived of as a virtue? What would be gained if we do conceive of it as a virtue? Let us try carefully to find something like a virtue of tolerance, by starting from the values and norms to which this yet unknown virtue (if it is one) refers.

Tolerance seems to refer to the value of the ideal situation which we sometimes indicate as the kingdom of God; the situation in which the children of God all enjoy their freedom and complete equality. The situation which comes close to paradise, in which there hardly were any differences. There were no races, no cultures, no religions, there was no division between rich and poor, or between the powerful and the submitted. The only difference there was, the sexual difference between Adam and Eve, was hardly noticed: it was only after the fall that they realized they were naked. It is obvious that this ideal is far from real. In our everyday reality there are very many differences, and many of these differences are painfully felt. Or, to put it more precisely, many of these differences are interpreted in a discriminating way (either by discriminating people on the basis of irrelevant characteristics, of which Apartheid is the most infamous example, or by not helping people to overcome their natural innate or acquired weaknesses); and through these discriminating interpretations, differences are made painful for the so-called (and the so-created) underprivileged.

There are norms that formulate some restrictions to these discriminating procedures. Legal norms and moral norms that forbid discrimination on the basis of race, or sex or religion and that require that all human beings be treated as equals. The universal declaration of human rights, and the first few sections of the constitution of many countries are an illustration of these moral-legal norms. But as soon as these principles are translated into concrete practice, the problems show up. They have to be translated and interpreted, if they are to be meaningful in a world in which differences are all too powerfully present. But 'traduire, c'est trahir', every translation is a treachery, and every interpretation runs the risk of increasing the distance
from the interpreted principle. Even the principle of equality can be interpreted in a way that allows all kinds of inequality. Moreover, if on the one hand it is necessary that these principles be translated into concrete legal rules and that they be provided with sanctions, on the other hand it is obvious that every juridification of these norms will challenge people to find the loopholes in the law. And apart from these problems, the ban on discrimination on the basis of irrelevant characteristics does not tell us how we should deal with relevant differences between people. What about different conceptions of life? What about different opinions on the question which differences are relevant and which are not? Sexual differences between men and women do not justify any difference in civil rights or social and economic position. But what about the so-called different "sexual preferences"? And so on and so forth. How should we ensure that in these and similar questions, decisions are made in such a way that justice is done to the value of the kingdom of God on the one hand and to the reality of a world full of differences on the other as well?

It is not very original to suggest that tolerance is the attitude in which the two could be brought together. We see campaigns for tolerance, and efforts to educate the public to more tolerance in many countries. Of course I can only be in support of that; it seems to be a perfect illustration of virtue as a bridge between value and norm. But I do think that a reflection on the virtue-character of tolerance, on what it means to consider tolerance as a virtue, may be important to prevent a rather harmful interpretation of this tolerance; a harmful interpretation which is more or less prevalent in at least that part of the world that is often indicated as 'the West'. What is harmful, in my opinion, is the interpretation of tolerance as a kind of indifference. And that interpretation prevails if people are persuaded to be tolerant by persuading them that they should not attach importance to differences that do not really count, that do not trouble one. "Why attach importance to something that has no real importance? Why make differences more important than they are?" This is a denial of differences, and as such an education to indifference. I think this is dangerous, because it does not teach people how to deal with differences that do occur, and that are important (or at least are felt to be important). And I presume that this dangerous move has to do with the neglect of the distance between value (the elimination of all difference) and norm (the ban on discrimination), and with a misunderstanding of what it means to consider tolerance as a virtue.

Tolerance as a virtue cannot consist in neglect. A virtue is always an excellence or a strength. This is especially true of tolerance, which consists in the strength to bear or to endure. The Latin verb tolerare, or the related verb sustinere, and the Greek verb hypomonein all indicate this strength or capacity to bear or to endure. One can only bear, if there is something to bear, i.e. if there is a burden. If there is nothing to bear, there is no point in talking about tolerance. If campaigns for tolerance convince people by persuading them that the other does not cause any trouble, they contradict themselves: you cannot tolerate unless there is something which does trouble you. Indifference is the denial of difference, and thus of the eventual troublesome nature of difference. Tolerance, on the contrary, is not the removal of difference, it is not an attitude for a world in which there are no differences, for paradise, but rather one for a world in which there are differences which trouble people, rightly or wrongly. Another way of putting this is saying that tolerance is not the same as non-discrimination. Not discriminating against someone is not the same as tolerating him or her! In fact, on the contrary, if I say that I tolerate someone although she is of a different race or of a different sex, I am discriminating! I pretend that there would be a ground for distinction where there is none. Tolerance does not consist in forgetting about pretended or alleged differences, it is a strength to bear the burden of differences that do count. This burden can be of different kinds. It may consist in the existence of practices, opinions, convictions or preferences that I condemn or even abhor. It may consist in the legal protection of differences that
ideally should be removed. It may consist in the threat that other people are (or are thought to be) to my safety, my economic well-being or my peace of mind. But it may also consist in my inability to forget about unimportant differences, or about what other people have done before. Tolerance as a virtue is the strength that enables one to bear this burden. If a virtue is always, as it is according to Aristotle, a median or mean between two extremes, what would be the extremes here? The question is easy to answer: on the one hand there is the extreme of bearing too much for there are times when one should draw the line and refuse to bear and there are things that one should not tolerate. On the other hand there is the extreme of bearing too little, some people being inclined to consider every burden unbearable. But obviously there is no absolute median or mean between the two. There are differences in strength between people. Some are stronger than others. It is also obvious that even for the strongest, there are limits to what they can bear. But there is no absolute limit. The mean is not only different for different people, it is also a dynamic mean. One can grow in strength, become stronger and become able to bear more than one could before. A human being is stronger to the extent to which he or she can bear more - and the same is true of a society. Although it is possible to reproach people for being too weak, for bearing too little, it is not possible to determine a fixed measure that they should meet. Within certain limits (the norms!) it does not make sense to reproach people for not being stronger than they are; but that does not alter the fact that it is better to be stronger. The vocabulary of virtue is the vocabulary of continuous growth.

Forgiveness

I suggest that more-or-less the same can be said about forgiveness. Forgiveness refers - I think - to the value of reconciliation; reconciliation being the situation in which there is a restored community which is not troubled any longer by what happened before. It is paradise regained, or at least the restoration of the situation before the interruption caused by the evil act. Restoration not only in the sense that the damage is repaired, but in the much stronger sense that even the memory of the damage no longer weighs on those who were affected. I am not saying that there would be no memory in a situation of reconciliation, but it is not felt as a burden any longer. Reconciliation is a new beginning, which includes the awareness of the fact that it is a new, a second (or third) beginning, but which is nevertheless a real new beginning, which is not hampered by its previous history. It will be obvious that such a value of a restored community is an ideal, which is quite different from reality in which we are always pursued or even haunted by what happened before.

There are certain norms that should prevent the impossibility of any new beginning; norms that regulate the reparation of what has been destroyed or damaged. Forgiveness refers - on the other side - to these norms. These are the norms of reparation. Norms that indicate the criteria according to which debts can be paid off and accounts can be settled. They indicate not only how much one should pay, but also when one has paid enough. These norms prevent that we continue to accuse people of what they did, even after they have paid the penalties, the norms that replace revenge by reparation. I am referring to the legal institutions in general and to the norms of retributive and restorative justice in particular.

The South African experience with the process of Truth and Reconciliation is very interesting here. I am afraid that Wole Soyinka has rightfully criticised the fact that Reconciliation without Reparation is very problematic, and runs the risk of devaluing Truth. I hope to learn more from you about this experience. But for the moment I do not take this into consideration. I think that even where there is reparation according to the norms of justice, this does not automatically lead to reconciliation. The norms of reparation and the value of reconciliation remain at a distance from each other. This distance may be bridged by the virtue of forgiveness. The virtue of forgiveness could be described from its position between norm and
value: as the internalization of the norms of justice in such a way that restorative justice really is oriented towards a restoration of damaged relations; and as a realization of the ideal of reconciliation in terms of concrete reality and real history.

But I prefer now to describe the virtue of forgiveness in terms of the Aristotelian approach. Between which extremes is this virtue a mean? Forgiveness is a particular form of giving, and therefore has to be described in terms of giving and taking. It has a particular relation to the past, and has therefore to be described in terms of forgetting and remembering. Both, the giving and taking as well as the forgetting and remembering, can be excessive or deficient. It is possible that one remembers too much and too rigidly, and that one forgets too little; that one persists in retaining an unchanging memory of what the other has done. In this way the other is fixed in the position in which I remember him and he will never be permitted a change of mind or of heart. One can also forget too much and too easily and not have any memory whatsoever. It is difficult to imagine what would be the identity of a person like that, and indeed what would be the identity of other people for a person like that. This ability to forget may be—as Nietzsche suggests—a guarantee of a particular kind of happiness, but this will certainly not be a human form of happiness. (Nietzsche tells the story of a person who asked some cows how they managed to be so happy and satisfied all the time. One of the cows intended to answer that it is because they always immediately forget what has just happened, but—so he says—the animal forgot what it wanted to say before having said it, so that the person was left without an answer.) The person who forgets too easily what the other has done lives superficially, and is for that reason unable to forgive. Forgiveness seems to be the median or mean between resentment that cannot forget on the one hand and superficiality that cannot remember on the other. This median or mean is a form of memory in which the meaning of what has happened can be changed, a memory which is not the obsessive repetition of the same, but the retelling of a story from different perspectives (including that of the offender), fitting it into different frameworks and allowing it to develop further and to change its plot.

Forgiveness also has to do with giving and taking. It is possible (maybe not from a Christian framework, but certainly from an Aristotelian perspective) that one gives too much, too easily, too quickly. For example, the person who gives before the other is able to receive, gives too quickly. Such giving is a waste. This is another way in which the critique on the process of Truth and Reconciliation by Wole Soyinka can be interpreted: to forgive or to offer amnesty before the other shows repentance and before he has paid his debts, may run the risk of being a waste of his moral capital. But one can also give too little, or with too many conditions. If one can give only when there are no doubts left, in the certainty that the other will accept the gift in the way it is intended, if one can only give in a safe and secure way, one is not able to give. If one can only forgive those who have already paid their debts, one cannot forgive. Forgiveness seems to be a median or mean between giving too late and giving too early, between giving too much and giving too little. It is a gift to which the other is not entitled, but which he deserves nevertheless; a gift without a claim, but not without merit. The most difficult aspect of forgiveness may be to attain this mean of a free and unconditional giving, but without waste. Christians have a name for this: grace. But pouring out grace is first and foremost an act of God and it is far from easy for human beings to imitate Him in this.4

**Difficult Virtues**

This last remark refers to my last section, in which I would like to elaborate a little further on this specific difficulty, which is—I think—characteristic for both these virtues of tolerance and forgiveness.

**The paradox**

The problem with both tolerance and forgiveness is that they suggest that it could be virtuous to react to evil or at least to something
which is rightly condemned or refused, otherwise than by fighting it. If it is true that tolerance presupposes a burden to bear, than there is this burden which is something that I reject; it may be someone else’s way of living, or his or her convictions or opinions, or my own inability to accept what is nevertheless unavoidable. To put it differently: the burden may be something undesired, but it can also be, and will often be or at least contain, something which I consider as some sort of evil. And tolerance seems to demand that I accept what I don’t want to accept, that I do not attack what to my mind I have to attack. Why should I tolerate what deserves to be countered? It is almost as though tolerance is the opposite of courage, in that where courage does fight evil, tolerance seems to accept it. Can there be such tensions, or even contradictions in the domain of virtues? And the same can be said of forgiveness, if it is true that forgiveness is not a transaction whereby I give to the other what he deserves, viz. forgiveness to those who pay the penalties and are repentant, and punishment to those who don’t. Rather, forgiveness seems to have this character of being a free gift in the absence of calculation; but if so, does it not imply that I at least run the risk of maintaining evil instead of fighting it? Is it not a dangerous misunderstanding and underestimation of evil, if I forgive without the evil being repaired? This problem comes to the fore especially with respect to evil that cannot be repaired, for example, because the victims are dead, since the evil consists in having killed them. (I know of many examples in relation to war-crimes, and I imagine that there are many examples in your history as well.) How can forgiveness be a virtue if it runs the risk of protecting evil?

I think that this paradox explains the practical difficulty of these two virtues. There seems to be something irrational in them, in that they demand more than may be demanded from a reasonable person. Maybe that is the reason that we don’t find them as such in Aristotle? Although we do find something like tolerance in his ethics, and strangely enough, we find it especially in the framework of his treatment of courage! Tolerance (hypomone) is not opposed to courage, but is part of it, being the strength to bear the burden of the setbacks that the courageous will meet. And for Thomas Aquinas it is the virtue of the most courageous people, the martyrs. Forgiveness cannot be found in Aristotle (although epikeia or fairness might bear some relation to it). For Thomas Aquinas it is an act of charity, one of the theological virtues. So, there is no doubt that they are virtues according to these paradigms of virtue-ethics. But how do they solve the paradox? In my answer to this question I will refer especially to Thomas Aquinas, and more-or-less move from philosophy to theology.

Its solution

First and foremost it should be clear that Thomas does not misunderstand the extreme and therefore supererogatory nature of these virtues. As I said, tolerance is especially found in the martyrs, who are obviously exceptional. And forgiveness is most of all an act of God. At some place in the Summa he considers it to be a surpassing of justice (STh 1a, 21,3 ad 2m), which is the highest of the virtues according to Aristotle. But in order to understand why these supererogatory virtues are not an underestimation of evil, we should acknowledge that, for Thomas, forgiveness always refers us to what is called an offensa. Sin is an insult or affront to God. The one insulted shows his magnanimity, generosity, his more-than-justice when he forgives an insult done to him - that is to say, when he does not continue to hate, or even when he no longer demands restitution. We could perhaps say that, as far as the effect of the affront on the one affronted is concerned, forgiveness is possible through free generosity. And we can perhaps assume, that this generosity is paired with a strength to bear, the strength to tolerate the damage or pain of the affront. But that is only one aspect of the matter - the subjective aspect of the affronted person. I call this ‘subjective’, in connection with the offensa terminology always used by Thomas Aquinas in this context. Obviously, the distinction between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ is always a problem, but there is a difference between an objective
injury and a subjective affront. Certainly in the case of God, there can be no talk of an 'objective' injury on His part by our sin. Sin is the breaking of a bond that is offered in grace and love - thus an insult. It is a 'subjective' affront to the One who wished to enter that bond with us, but an 'objective' injury that harms us, rather than Him. Also, wherever Thomas speaks of inter-human forgiveness it is emphatically related to *offensa*. And it will be clear that, for the forgiving of an affront, a supererogatory offer of love is indeed primarily needed. But in addition to this aspect of affront, sin also has another objective aspect. I use the term 'objective' because sin consists in the disruption of an order, the breaking through or turning around of a certain orientation. The sinner has turned away from the good that is God, and thereby has caused a wrong orientation, a disrupted order, a disorder. As long as the wrong order continues to exist, the evil of the sin also continues to exist. This is probably an important element in the relationship between the two aspects which are necessary for forgiveness: penance and grace. Without remorseful repentance and restorative penance the objective disruption continues to exist. It seems as if we should say that in this aspect of sin forgiveness is not the issue, nor is tolerance. We must not forget that *tolerantia* is the virtue of bearing evil for the sake of a good. That means that a disruption in the orientation toward the good itself can never be tolerated. *Patientia* (another word in Thomas for *tolerantia*, or at least strongly related to it) cannot be related to insults to God or to damages of the good of the res publica. (2a2ae, 136, 4 ad3. Cf. also: 2a2ae 108,1 ad 2: 'quod mali tolerantur a bonis in hoc quod ab eis proprias injurias patienter sustinrent secundum quod oportet; non autem tolerant eos, ut sustineant injurias Dei et proximorum."

It is the subjective aspect of the *offensa* that we tolerate and forgive, but this tolerance and forgiveness does not prevent us from continuing to fight the objective aspect of the *offensa*. Legend has it that Voltaire once said to an opponent: ‘I abhor your conviction, but I will give my life for the protection of your right to have that conviction’. He could have added (and he will certainly have thought this as he said these words): ‘but, as long as I do not have to give my life, I will spend it in arguing against it.’

**In conclusion**

Conceiving of tolerance and forgiveness as virtues may help, first, to bridge the gap between the respective norms and values; and second to make the proper distinctions between what we should remember and fight against, on the one hand, and what we should try to forget, to forgive and to bear on the other.

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**Notes**

3. It is hard to understand this situation because it seems to me that there have to be differences in order to make this situation interesting enough for human beings to live in; but on the other hand these differences should be in no way discriminating in an evaluative sense; but I don’t go into that now.
4. I mention but cannot elaborate upon an interesting problem that is implied in the famous formula of *The Lord’s Prayer*: the problem that our human nature with its disposition towards forgiveness (which we know is weak) becomes a condition for divine forgiveness! Thomas Aquinas points out in this regard that speaking about ‘our’ disposition towards forgiveness does not necessarily condemn us to falsehood, because this can also refer to the forgiveness of the church as a whole (STh 2a2ae, 83.16.3 and 3m.)
EUTHANASIA AND AUTONOMY
Paul J.M. van Tongeren

Introduction

Modern medical technology

Modern medical technology imposes ethical questions on us in at least two respects:

1. Medical technology enables all kinds of interventions, of which we were not capable before. Because we can, we cannot but ask whether we should, or eventually whether we are allowed to do what we are able to.

2. Medical technology also disables us in that it makes us more and more unable to be passive in an appropriate way. As soon as we become able to control the conception and birth of new life, we become unable merely to let things happen, or more precisely letting things happen becomes much more active, since, though we can decide to let things happen, this has become our own decision, our own act. What is true with regard to the beginning of life is even more true with regard to the end of life: as soon as we have become able to extend life beyond formerly existing limits, the non-extension of life became an active decision. Whereas formerly death came, or even took us by surprise, now very often we have to decide when to allow death.

Euthanasia as example

Euthanasia therefore is not just a contemporary phenomenon, abhorred by some and welcomed by others; rather it is a symptom of modern medical technology and it shows something of the fatality of modern technology. Let me mention two points to illustrate this:

1. In antiquity the word ‘euthanasia’ was used to indicate a gentle and peaceful natural death whereas in the beginning of modernity (with Bacon) it was related to the task of the physician. Only in the 19th century does it become a question of deliberation and active interference. Thus it is that technology changes even the meaning of our words!

2. In 1995, 42% of all deaths in the Netherlands were preceded by some kind of medical decision, of which 3,4% were cases of euthanasia. I expect these figures will be about the same in all developed countries, this being the unavoidable effect of the growth of medical technology.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am more interested in the general framework than in solving the concrete problems that emerge, though this is not the usual method of applied ethics.

The central principles of bio-ethics

At least two of the principles of the Georgetown mantra, are central to the euthanasia debate: autonomy and benevolence. The euthanasia debate will allow us to make some critical remarks especially about the principle of autonomy. These critical remarks are not restricted to its use in the euthanasia debate; the same principle is salient in many other discussions.

Autonomy and benevolence, and the Kantian paradox

Autonomy and benevolence seem to refer to different ethical theories. Autonomy seems to refer to Kantian ethics, which is an ethics of freedom, reason and self-determination, whereas benevolence as well as beneficence refer instead to utilitarianism or eudaimonism, in which happiness and well-being are the central notions. Immanuel Kant contested this eudaimonism very strongly writing: ‘Jeder Eudämonismus in der Ethik ist Euthanasie der Moral’. (Every eudaimonism in ethics is the euthanasia of morality). It would appear that ‘eudaimonism’ means the same here as simply...
‘killing’ or even ‘murder’. It is obvious that for Kant ‘euthanasia’ has a clearly negative connotation, and therefore can be associated with ‘eudaimonism’, which is also very negative for Kant. It is paradoxical therefore that in our time, euthanasia is often defended by an appeal to this Kantian (or at least allegedly Kantian) principle of autonomy. This might be related to the fact that autonomy is conceived in our days less in a Kantian than in a utilitarian sense.

I. Euthanasia

I would like to begin by making some remarks about the terminology and the usual arguments in the discussion on euthanasia, for two reasons:

First, I am aware of the fact that my country, the Netherlands, has a remarkable name with regard to euthanasia. We are said to be the first nation where euthanasia was more or less legalized. But what we mean by the term might not be the same as what others mean thereby, and similarly for the term ‘legalization’. It might be to the credit of the discussion in the Netherlands that the terminology has been clarified by it. Since a clearly defined terminology is necessary for a fruitful discussion, I would like to begin with it.

Second I shall give a very brief overview of the most common arguments in the discussion, in order to defend my selection therefrom.

Clarification of the terminology
We must distinguish between three items: first, different kinds or definitions of euthanasia; second, the definition that we in the Netherlands agreed upon; and third, the conditions under which we (or some of us) think that euthanasia is permitted. The last item is especially important, since confusion arises when one fails to distinguish between the definition on the one hand and the conditions under which the defined matter is allowed or forbidden on the other.

Kinds of euthanasia
Euthanasia has been defined (explicitly or implicitly) in several ways. Some of these definitions were so broad, that distinctions could be made between different kinds of euthanasia; such as:

i. Active versus passive: active being by active interference on the part of the physician, and passive by non-interference, or non-treatment, or decisions to stop a treatment.

ii. Voluntary versus involuntary: voluntary being on request of the patient, and involuntary without such a request (but, for example, on request of the family, or because the family and the doctor decide that dying would be in the best interest of the particular patient in the situation).

iii. Direct versus indirect: where direct means approximately the same as intentional. Direct active euthanasia would only be the case if the physician not only performs the act through which the patient will die, but also intends this effect by his action. It is also possible that he intends to alleviate the suffering of the patient, but that death is the unintended side-effect of his palliative treatment; in that case it would be indirect, but still active, euthanasia.

The Dutch definition
Only active, voluntary and direct euthanasia is called euthanasia in the Dutch situation. The definition, given more fully, reads as follows and includes the following clauses:

Acting in such a way that the result is death, by someone other than the patient, performed intentionally, in the interest of the patient, and on his/her request.

It is with respect to the last two clauses that the conditions for an evaluation of the allowability of euthanasia come in.

Since 1993, the Dutch situation is as follows: euthanasia is still prohibited, and falls under penal law. A physician who commits euthanasia
is obliged to report it, but the procedure of reporting and of prosecution is highly standardised. The report must contain answers to certain well-defined questions, and the physician may be confident that he will not be prosecuted if (and only if) his commission of euthanasia meets the following criteria set out in the 'demands of due caution', described in the following section. Whether he meets the criteria is at the discretion of the public prosecutor.

'Demands of due caution'

The fulfillment of these demands leads to the discharge of the physician, that is, these demands, developed through jurisprudence, are the conditions under which Dutch society considers euthanasia to be permitted.

* The suffering of the patient is considered to be unbearable and hopeless;
* The euthanasia is voluntary, and performed in reaction to a well-considered and repeatedly expressed request on the part of the patient;
* The physician has consulted at least one colleague for a second opinion;
* The physician who performs the euthanasia does not give a statement of natural death (this guarantees that the public prosecutor could decide to prosecute at any stage);
* The physician presents a written report.

Common arguments

There has been and still is a lot of discussion on euthanasia in my country. Some people think that euthanasia should not fall under penal law at all; others think that the present situation is already much too permissive. There are some typical arguments that frequently emerge in the discussions. I shall present some of the main arguments for and against a more permissive attitude.

In favour of a more permissive attitude, people refer to:

(i) The wish of the patient: if the patient is capable freely to determine and express his or her wishes, the physician should carry out these wishes. Every human being is said to have the right to make decisions about his or her own life; this is in accordance with the principle of autonomy.

(ii) The interest of the patient: if the patient is not capable of expressing his or her own wish, the physician should act in the best interest of the patient. Often this means that the physician should act according to the wish the patient would have been expected to express. Although this argument is different from autonomy, the autonomy principle still works through it.

(iii) The responsibility of the physician: the medical profession should take responsibility for its growing power. It must do more because it can do more. Since it has won power over life and death, it must take responsibility for decisions about life and death.

Against the legalization of euthanasia, people refer to:

(i) Respect for life: life, or human life, should be respected, either on religious grounds or on other grounds.

(ii) The existence of alternatives: instead of fulfilling a wish to die, we should remove the causes of this wish through better palliative care.

(iii) The slippery slope argument: if we allow euthanasia under strict conditions, it will open the door to all other cases, including the killing of people without their volition, but because, for example, they do not meet certain criteria of fitness.

(iv) Effects on culture: euthanasia is said to be a symptom of the dangerous utopian dream of a society in which life can completely be construed and controlled by human beings.

The conclusion from this overview should be that the arguments in favour of euthanasia (or of
allowing euthanasia) are clearly centered around autonomy and benevolence, the first being more important and presupposed by the second. I believe, moreover, that the same is true for many other ethical discussions in many other areas, where reference to autonomy is often made as a last resort. For that reason I would like in the second half of this paper to concentrate on that particular argument, or rather, on the plausibility of the contemporary use of the concept of autonomy.

II. Autonomy

It seems that the principle of autonomy is accepted by most people today, and for good reasons. One of the great products of the Enlightenment is the discovery of the importance of the idea of personal autonomy and the political realisation of it, at least in some parts of the world. But nevertheless, there is a distinction between the political and the individual moral use of the concept, and there is a distinction between the negative and the positive use of it. Although it is obvious that all political bodies must respect the personal autonomy of each and every member of the population, it is not obvious what this same concept of autonomy requires one to do in order to respect it. For example, although it is obvious to all of us that emancipation from all kinds of slavery and submission is not only desired but even demanded, it is not as clear what the active use of my autonomy would imply. Or with respect to our topic: although it seems obvious that the physician does not have the right to determine what should happen to my body, let alone my life, it is not at all obvious that I therefore have the right to decide for myself. In my view, the acceptance of the concept of autonomy is therefore only partly justified. I will try briefly to elaborate on that.

As I have already indicated, I cannot here fully describe the methodological aspects of my approach to ethics. However, one of its characteristics is to pay tribute to history. I think that it is very important to make detours through the history of philosophy, even the history of culture, in order to reflect in an appropriate way on the current situation. For if we do not make that detour, we run the risk of repeating the conditions that caused the problem in our efforts to solve it. For this reason I now want to point to two moments in the history of the concept of autonomy (for even concepts, even those that are taken for granted by everyone, have their history).

The first occurrence of the concept in Western history

The first time the concept occurs (as far as I know) in the history of Western culture is in the 5th century BC when it was ascribed to city-states, indicating their political right to act independently from other city-states, and, more importantly for our purposes, to individual persons. This is the sense in which it occurs in Greek tragedy, more specifically in the Antigone by Sophocles. I presume that you know the story. The concept of autonomy occurs in one of the discussions between Antigone and her uncle and king, Kreon. He attempts to make clear to her that she has been violating the rules by burying her brother Polyneices. According to Kreon she should have obeyed the rule of the state. Antigone denies this, not because there is no duty to obey the law of the state, but because this duty can be overruled by a higher authority: the law of the gods. Over and above political justice, there is a higher justice. Antigone refers to her own obedience to this higher law by the term 'autonomy'. Autonomy is introduced in the history of Western culture as a concept which primarily has a negative connotation: 'You, Kreon, do not have the right, and you do not have the power to enforce a rule upon me, which conflicts with a higher law'. And the plausibility of this negative proposition is based on the elevation of the other, the higher law. Antigone's autonomy discharges her from the duty to obey the state, by virtue of another obedience. Her not having to obey the political authority is founded on the higher status of the authority she does obey. This means that Antigone’s autonomy is still a form of obedience.
Though this understanding of autonomy is remarkable, this is but the first appearance of the concept, which though certainly significant, does not necessarily determine the whole of its further development. Therefore I shall now skip over more than 20 centuries and move on to the heyday of the Enlightenment, to the unrivalled paradigm of the modern concept of autonomy, to the philosopher who without a doubt gave the strongest theoretical foundation to autonomy as a moral concept which applies to individuals, viz. Immanuel Kant.

The most important ethical foundation or clarification of the concept of autonomy

Kant is certainly the most serious enemy of every form of heteronomy in ethics. And since we found autonomy to be still a form of heteronomy in Antigone, we may be confident that Kant will radicalise the concept. But the more the concept is radicalised, the more difficult it becomes to point out its own basis of justification. The concept of autonomy may be the justification of my refusal to obey an authority, but this still leaves open the question of its own justification. In this matter, as in so many others, we may be confident that for Kant there is no self-evident principle of justification.

Even the concept of autonomy stands in need of justification. Sometimes we do not realise that even principles which are taken for granted are in need of justification. We do not realise this precisely because we do take it for granted; and we do take it for granted because everybody does so and nobody questions, ... until somebody suddenly does.

This is illustrated in an anecdote concerning Napoleon, who after having dismissed one of his officers during his disastrous Russian campaign, also, as a punishment, left the officer wounded in the snow, where he would certainly die. The officer begged the emperor for his life. In his plea, he referred to the most obvious principle he could think of: his right to live: 'Il faut que je vive!' (I must live). To which Napoleon apparently answered: 'Je ne vois pas la nécessité' (I don't see the necessity). We very often take something for granted which is far from self-evident. Therefore we must ask the question: what makes our autonomy necessary? What is the necessity of autonomy as a principle of ethical theory and argumentation?

A summary of the Kantian foundation of morals is needed. I am afraid that this is very difficult because a summary of his theory will easily be too simplified for those of you who know it already, and too complicated for those of you who do not. But let me give it a try:

First, it makes a difference; there is a duty, but what is that duty?

Kant's ethical theory starts with a particular kind of experience, for which he claims absolute universality. This is the experience of moral conscience in its most minimal form and is described as the experience of an unavoidable realisation that it makes a difference what we do, and how we choose to act. That is, even if we do not yet know what to do, even if we abstract from every possible concrete content of a moral duty, we know that there is some duty, and that we cannot believe that it does not make any difference what we do. It is the experience that is expressed in the question that we cannot but ask: 'What should I do?' ('Was soll ich tun?') This minimal starting point, that is indeed undeniable, is sufficient, according to Kant, to develop a concept of what we should do; it is the basis of Kant's ethical theory.

Second, ought implies can: duty implies freedom

The next step to take is to acknowledge that it would not make sense to say that we are required to act, to choose, to will in a certain way, if we were not capable of acting, of choosing, of willing; that is, if we were not capable of determining our acting, our willing. From the unmistakable fact that we should, we may conclude that we can: ought implies can, duty implies freedom. In Kant's technical language: 'du kannst, denn du sollst.'
Third, duty cannot oblige us to do what is contrary to freedom; what does it oblige us to do?

The next step is again an inference from this connection between duty and freedom. For, since freedom is the ground of duty, duty cannot oblige us to do what would be opposed to freedom. It is impossible that on the basis of our freedom we would be obliged to deny our freedom. Freedom is the same as autonomy. For autonomy means to rule oneself (autos = self; nomos = rule or law). Since autonomy is the basis of our duty, any duty that we have cannot but affirm our autonomy. Thus, Kant does indeed radicalize the role of autonomy, seeing it as the basis of all morality, and not just an ethical concept among others. But what could our moral duty oblige us to do, if this obligation is to be consistent with our autonomy? What could be the content of this moral duty?

Fourth, every object of our willing is a form of enslavement; therefore we cannot be obliged to will any particular thing.

Acting is willing: we act in such or such a way, because we will such or so. Therefore the question what we should do is the same as the question what we should will. As soon as we determine our will according to our needs or desires, we are, according to Kant, not really free or autonomous, because we follow our needs and desires. We do not determine our self, but allow ourselves to be determined by the objects that present themselves as desirable or attractive. In these cases we are not autonomous, but heteronomous, since the rule is set by the objects of our desire, or by this natural desire itself. We are in some sense or another enslaved. As soon as we will something (be it a particular satisfaction, or a long life, or a painless death, or anything else), the object of our will is in some way or another the object of our desire, and thus there is heteronomy.

Fifth, we can only be obliged to will freely, to determine our own will.

The implication of the previous point seems to be that we cannot will anything at all without betraying our freedom or autonomy. It looks like we can only stay free as long as we do not will anything at all! Is there a way out of this paradox? Yes there is: there is one thing we can will without betraying our freedom, and that is freedom itself. The only thing I can be obliged to will, without destroying my freedom, is my freedom or my free will itself. That must be the content of the duty we were looking for.

This ‘object’ of our will does not exclude other objects, but rather includes them. Let me try to explain this: The crucial question is what determines our will: the objects of the natural world, or our freedom itself? If we do will our freedom, we will other objects only to the extent to which they do not oppose our freedom, that is, insofar as they do not compel us to will them, and insofar as we freely choose them. Now, how can I make sure that I do indeed choose these objects myself (that is, that I am self-determining), and am not induced by these objects to choose them (that is, that they do not have a determinative effect upon me)?

Sixth, determining one’s own will is not being determined by the senses or by any natural forces

The possible objects of the will that threaten to enslave me, are objects of the senses, which (or the enjoyment of which) are expressed in terms of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling or a combination of these. I will only be free and autonomous if I am not driven by my senses. What else am I, apart from my senses, or, in Kant’s terms, apart from nature? The answer is: reason.

Seventh, the only other determining power is reason

Only if reason determines my will, am I determining myself instead of being determined by something else. To understand this you must realize that Kant presupposes this distinction between nature and reason. I may be characterized as a particular individual by all my natural attributes or features, but I will never identify myself as a person in this way. I might be identified by others because of the colour of my skin, the particularities of my tastes and talents,
but I will never identify myself with any of these. These are attributes or features that I have, but it is not who I am as a person, as a human being. I am only myself and autonomous in the strong sense of the word, if I act rationally.

Lastly, duty = freedom = obeying reason

There is much more to say about Kant's view of autonomy. For now this is sufficient to reach an initial conclusion. To be a moral being means to act or to will autonomously. To act autonomously means not to heed my senses, needs or desires, but only reason. That is, not to submit myself to the senses, but to submit myself to reason. The only submission which does not destroy my autonomy, but affirms it, is the submission to reason, according to Kant. This understanding of autonomy is quite different from 'doing as you like'! Rather it turns out once more that autonomy is obedience.

Conclusion

That is the quite unexpected conclusion we have come to, through our much too short detour through history: according to Sophocles as well as Kant, autonomy is a kind of obedience after all! And the justification of the obedience lies in the justification of the authority which we obey. Autonomy does liberate us from 'blind' obedience through a higher obedience to a higher authority. Autonomy is an obvious principle for moral action if and only if the authority which we obey is a self-evidently justified authority.

But should we not admit that this principle of authority instead of autonomy is highly questionable in a pluralist world? What is worthy of obedience to me, is - so it seems - not so to someone else. On the other hand, the notion of obedience is precisely what makes it impossible that we ourselves determine what is worthy of obedience. The question should therefore be reformulated as follows: is there something which imposes itself on us as obligatory, compulsory? It asks for an inquiry of our moral experience as the capability of understanding moral appeals rather than of making its own free choices.

What are the implications of this for our topic euthanasia? I think it does mean that the appeal to autonomy is far from sufficient to justify euthanasia. I am not saying that it would be impossible to ask for euthanasia, and to commit euthanasia in a rational way. But I am saying that it is not enough when this request refers to nothing besides our senses, particular feelings of despair, or fear, or disgust, or other things of this nature.

And what does it mean with regard to the Dutch situation? I am afraid that there is a tendency to attach ever more importance to the request of the patient, and that there is a general tendency to adjust our legal practice more and more to general opinion, that is to what people in general want or desire. There is a tendency in legal practice to obey common opinion, which is, I think, not a very impressive authority. I am not saying that euthanasia should be absolutely prohibited, but I do think that keeping euthanasia in the penal code, and maintaining a differentiated list of 'demands of due caution', is very important to at least remind us of the fact that in order to be moral we have to obey something or someone which or who has real authority.

Notes


2. See 'Tolerance & Forgiveness'.
BASIC VALUES IN THE BASIC RIGHTS OF THE GERMAN CONSTITUTION

Heinz Vogelsang

On the 23rd of May this year (1999) we celebrated a particular anniversary that was remembered at numerous events and lectures: 50 years ago the Fundamental Law came into force, the Constitution of Germany. This Constitution was stamped by the experiences with the national-socialist dictatorship that had overruled all moral values and had lasted until only four years before. The new Constitution came into being in a country and a people that were split. In the communist part of the country the characteristics of a totalitarian state repeated themselves. What counted in this part of Germany was what the constitutionalist Schröder expressed in the following words: ‘Without God, without any conscience and without any respect for the dignity of man’.

The new German Constitution for West Germany wanted to exclude for all times a relapse into inhuman regimes. Today we can say that this Constitution for Germany and the Germans was a piece of good luck: for 50 years Germany has been experiencing a time of peace and freedom, that could not be foreseen in 1949. Germany has found its place in the community of the democratic peoples of this world. We were even able to experience the reunification of our country nine years ago in peace and freedom. This was the most important objective of our Constitution. One reason for the reunification of Germany was the order of values of our Constitution that had conquered nihilism and contempt of basic rights and human rights. For this reason I would like to report on the values of this Constitution. I do not want to combine with this suggestion that you in South Africa should learn what democracy is from German history. Other countries offer better examples for this. But maybe it reveals that only the joint acknowledgment of basic values in a people can secure a free and democratic basic order and prevent the plunge into barbarism.

Along with the anniversary of our Constitution we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of basic rights. These basic rights are a firm component of our Constitution. They precede the organizational rules of the Constitution in Articles 1 to 19 and are intended to secure the rights of the individual human being with respect to the state.

The history of these basic rights is a history of success, since they have shaped the conception of legislation, jurisdiction and administration in Germany. After fifty years we ascertain that the basic rights have also been accepted by our society, and they have contributed in a very special way to an external and internal peace in the West of Germany, that we have never experienced before.

What are the reasons for this success? One reason is certainly that the basic rights are actually established law meaning that all state organs are obliged to respect them. This must be emphasised since basic rights are not established laws in all constitutions. Sometimes they are merely well-meaning declarations of intent. In the case of the German Constitution, basic rights are not only legal standards with which the state is obliged to comply, but each individual person also has the right to cite them. The individual is therefore not only an object of protection with respect to his basic rights, he can also put an end to any violation of his basic rights by way of action in court. For this purpose a special court was founded in Germany: the Federal Constitutional Court. It is the highest German court. In the last decades the Federal Constitutional Court has passed judgment in hundreds of action cases entered by citizens.

Which rights are considered to be basic rights? The first modern constitutions formulated the basic rights at the end of the 18th century and described them as ‘natural, inalienable and holy human rights’. They are supranational natural rights that the state guarantees its citizens and
that it must protect and observe. They include human dignity, the right to life and freedom from bodily harm, equal justice under the law, freedom of religion and thought, and parents’ right to bring up their children. This idea of freedom and equality changed political life drastically, but at the same time, in this age of enlightenment, common sense was overestimated. Numerous political demands were presented as a necessity of natural order, in order to put them through without any opposition. As a reaction to this development, the theory of law and jurisdiction turned away from the natural rights. The end of the 19th century was thus - particularly in Europe - dictated by positivism. According to this doctrine mankind has no hereditary rights. Rights are only what the state declares to be right. The frightful consequences of positivism became apparent in the totalitarian dominions of the 20th century. They are linked particularly with the names of Hitler and Stalin. It is understandable that after the end of the dictatorship in the Federal Republic of Germany, natural right was acknowledged once again but over the course of the years, positivistic considerations have been gaining more and more significance. So while we recognize that mankind has basic claims that the state must not ignore, and to which each individual has a right, regardless of nationality, at the same time it must be emphasized that there are only few rights that are obviously recognizable as non-governmental, natural rights. Any excessive reckoning on natural rights will lead to abuse. If natural right is employed carelessly to solve disputes in everyday life, the highest principles thereof would be endangered. The German Constitution thus now distinguishes between human rights that are born with mankind, and the civil rights that only Germans can cite. The most important rights are attributed to all human beings. On the other hand, only German citizens have certain other rights, such as the right to meet or form associations in peace and without permission.

Incidentally, recognition of natural right is restricted to democratic states. Totalitarian states do not recognize supranational rights. This does not apply only to Hitler and Stalin but also to the previous German Democratic Republic. The official commentary on the constitution of the GDR reads: ‘It is not the intention of the socialist concept of basic right to deduce basic right from supernatural dictates, from “non-positivistic” rights that are professed to mankind and human society, or from similar metaphysical reasoning’.

We can thus come to an “interim conclusion”.

1. Basic rights are not only objective rights. They are also subjective rights. Anyone can cite them and sue for them in court.

2. Basic rights are not only those rights created by the state; the most important basic rights are non-governmental and supranational rights that are linked with our concept of mankind; the state guarantees them but has not “invented” them itself.

Above all, basic rights are rights to freedom. They guarantee the individual person freedom from the state. This is apparent, for example, in general freedom of action, personal freedom, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of thought and freedom of the press, freedom of movement and freedom to choose a profession. Rights to freedom are the first human rights that were set down in constitutions after the French Revolution. Such rights to freedom are explicitly rejected in totalitarian states. The commentary on the constitution of the previous GDR reads: ‘Under socialist society conditions this concept [meaning freedom from the state guaranteed by the constitution] would be an anachronism. The socialist state is the power instrument of the workers. They need not be protected from the state power that they themselves have created and practise by way of revolution’.

Along with rights to freedom there are also the rights to be involved with the state, that is, the conscious structuring of political and state life as a fundamental right of the citizens in a republic. These are the real civil rights in a democracy. And finally there is the basic right to active assistance by the state if a person is in need. This principle of “freedom from need” is the basis of mod-
ern social order. It gives the individual the right to demand positive services from the state. Every person in Germany thus has a right to welfare, nourishment, a dwelling, and medical assistance. These social rights are only indirectly ruled in the Constitution, but they are set down in detail in the legislation. The reason is that even a poor state can respect the freedom of its citizens. But the state cannot give with empty hands. Moreover, a claim to social welfare cannot be defined in a few words; laws with hundreds of paragraphs are necessary and the Constitution does not offer the requisite space. As social rights convey a direct legal claim, they have to be described in great detail.

So far I have spoken about basic rights and human rights. But are these basic rights also basic values? This question is very important to substantiate these rights. Unfortunately, the word 'value' does not appear in the German Constitution. But are there such values nevertheless in the Constitution, and can they be defined?

All German scholars of Constitutional law agree on two points:

1. Basic rights are ideologically neutral. Germany is not a state that depends on one particular ideology. There is no 'state religion' that is binding for the citizens. That is actually excluded by the basic rights. Article 4 of the German Constitution says on this point: 'The freedom of religion, of conscience, and the freedom of religious and ideological creed are inviolable'. This guarantees a right to freedom that is recognized in all democratic states as a human right.

2. Basic rights are not of neutral value. This statement is problematic. The term 'basic rights' has admittedly been an established term for 200 years. Anybody can read it in the Constitution. In political discussion there has only been evidence of it since 1975. In addition, there is an endless number of basic values and they are difficult to define individually.

Nevertheless, the close link between basic values and basic rights is unmistakable when they are looked at closely. For this reason it is commonly accepted today that basic rights are closely related to basic values. This is in fact unmistakable: in whatever way we look at basic rights mankind and its dignity always belong there. But Article 1 of the German Constitution begins with these words: 'The dignity of man is unassailable. It is the obligation of all state power to respect and protect it'. Other values of the greatest significance are also named in the basic rights: life, freedom from bodily harm, freedom of person, equal rights, particular protection of marriage and family, and of possessions. All these values enjoy special protection as basic rights. Even if the German Constitution does not use the word 'values', the Federal Constitutional Court speaks constantly in its jurisdiction about the 'order of values of the basic rights'.

But if the German Constitution is ideologically neutral, where do the values in the Constitution come from? By ideology we understand the entire concept of the origin, value, meaning and objective of the world and of mankind. An ideologically neutral state therefore must not support or fight any ideology. For this reason the German Constitution did not want to formulate any concrete ideology. Instead of this we find in the German Constitution components of various ideologies. Some of these elements have a liberal origin, for example, the rights to freedom; other elements have a socialist origin, for example the possibility of socializing property, if this serves the public interest. Above all, there are elements of Christian faith in the Constitution particularly when a basic right is founded on natural rights. These principles have decisively stamped political culture in Germany for fifty years. The Constitution thus commences with an 'Advocatio Dei', an invocation to God: The first words read: 'Conscious of their responsibility to God and mankind... the German people... have resolved this Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany'. If the Constitution begins with an invocation to God, it can only be of significance if one believes in a God who exists as a person and who looks after the people. An atheist, or someone who only believes in a 'higher power' would not speak of his 'responsibility to God'.

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But also the following text of Article 1, that speaks of the inviolable dignity of man, gives expression to the fact that man never exists for the sake of the state, but the state for the sake of man. At the same time this dismisses any kind of misanthropy and totalitarianism. Article 2 of the constitution reads: ‘Everyone has the right to free development of personality, in so far as he does not violate the rights of others and does not contravene the constitutional or moral law’. With this a commitment is made to moral law. But a moral law can only be justified if one is convinced of values that are superior to the Constitution. The second paragraph of Article 2 protects the life and freedom of the person. These are also values that are derived from the Christian image of man. The Federal Constitutional Court says in a judicial ruling: ‘These basic values are based on the notion that man has his own independent value in the order of creation. For this reason the order of basic rights is an order that is bound to values. It is the opposite of the total state that lays claim to exclusive power and that thus rejects human dignity, freedom and equality’.

But even if we can establish that the German Constitution is founded on values, we must still ask: Where do these values come from? How can they be justified? When we look back into history we are surprised to find that as early as the time of the ancient Greeks, that is 2400 years ago, the basic rights of the people with respect to the state were given some thought. Through all the known history of mankind the same values were expressed in the feelings and thoughts of man, but just as today, these wishes were not the communal objective of all individuals and all peoples. Repeatedly, tyrants and despots were able to take over power and only a few people felt that the fate of the rightless slaves was an injustice. But these few people have been taking up the fights for basic rights to this day. It is impressive that as early as 2300 years ago the philosopher Alkidamos said: ‘God created all beings free. Nature has made nobody a slave’. Not until 2000 years later, in 1776, did the first modern basic rights declaration in Virginia begin with almost the same words: ‘That all men are by nature equally free and independent’. The great state philosophers Plato and Aristotle did not support the idea of non-governmental human rights to freedom. They believed that man was committed to the state and its laws. They demanded obedience for human laws even when they were inconsistent with the laws of nature. As you know, Socrates accepted death for this conviction after being unjustly condemned. Nevertheless, Socrates placed supranational values above the national laws. The words he said to his judges, that were to decide on his life or death, are a famous confession to the basic values: ‘You are dear to me, men of Athens. But I will obey God more than you, and as long as I still breathe and am able, I will never stop philosophizing and encouraging and teaching you’.

It took more than a thousand years before these first basic values came into circulation. It was the time of the Middle Ages in Europe that are often described as the Christian time of Occidental history. The Christian belief in the Roman confession stamped Occidental thinking. The culture of the ancient world was reawakened. The basis of this spiritual era was the Bible, although this had already been written in the ancient times. The time of its creation is less important than the time of optimal acceptance, and that was the Middle Ages.

The Christian tidings now determined spiritual, ethical life and what we call today ‘political culture’. Jesus himself carries out slave work by washing his disciples’ feet. Then he says: ‘I have given you an example so that you should do what I have done to you’. And Paul writes in his epistle to the Colossians (3:9-15): ‘... since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator ... Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these things put on love. That is the bond of perfection’.

Today these admonitions appear pious and idyllic to us. But at that time they were revolutionary and
shocking. At the same time Paul questions the existing social order. Whilst till then one said 'A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', now one was supposed to forgive 70 times 7 times a day. For Paul even the slave is no longer an outsider of society, he is just as welcome in the Christian community as any respected citizen. Saint Benedict takes over this principle in his monks' rule: 'Anyone born free may not be put higher than someone entering the monastery from slavery'.

So the definition of human dignity is simple for the Christian. For many hundreds of years up to the liturgy reform in 1970, the Catholic Christians prayed in the collect at mass: 'God, you created in a wonderful way the dignity of man and renewed it even more wonderfully. Let us have a part of the godliness of him who came down to take care of human nature, Jesus Christ'. Today this prayer is said on Christmas Day. Whoever is convinced that God became man in order to lead man to God, that all men are destined to eternal contemplation of God, regards the dignity of man as a self-evident truth.

But the German Constitution is not the Constitution of a Christian state, it is the Constitution of a pluralistic society. Therefore, it is not sufficient that the highest values of the Constitution are comprehensible for only part of the population. The Constitution applies to everyone and should be comprehensible to everyone. Even those people can succeed in comprehending the values of the Constitution who are far away from Christianity, like most people in the Eastern part of Germany, who, under communist power never experienced religion and Christianity. Only our personal experiences and those of our fellow-beings give us the firm conviction that along with the world that is accessible to natural science, which one can measure and describe, there is a wide range of spiritual values that can be experienced. Many distinguished natural scientists like the Nobel prize winner Werner Heisenberg, disapprove of natural science laying any claim to totalitarianism. Reality does not only live on scientific knowledge. Mankind as a person is as it was before nat-

ural science came into being, and in the future too, science alone will not be able to identify and solve all the secrets of mankind, in spite of the progress of the sciences.

The Bavarian Constitutional Court substantiates the dignity of man with the explanation that man is the bearer of the highest spiritual and moral values and has his own moral intrinsic value. This court thus follows the attitude of the philosopher Immanuel Kant who had said 200 years before that we must respect the dignity of man, because he has the ability of moral self-determination. Man is therefore 'an end in itself' and may not be used by any other man merely as a means to an end. This moral self-determination is the decisive characteristic of the dignity of man. Without this freedom of will there would be neither good nor bad in the world. The German poet Friederich Schiller emphasizes in an original way and with poetic licence man's freedom of will. He praises the first Fall of Man in Paradise as the 'most fortunate and greatest event in the history of mankind, as the first expression of his independence, as the beginning of his moral existence. Man brings moral evil into creation, but only with this does he make moral good possible. From this moment on we speak of his freedom'. Our image of human beings presupposes the mentally free human being, who can distinguish between 'good' and 'bad'. A human being without mental freedom is neither bad nor good. Words such as sin and crime, or virtue, honour, morality have no meaning to him. He only acts, as he has to act, like a highly developed animal. The philosopher Descartes therefore says: 'I only know one thing that gives us enough reason to respect ourselves: The use of free will. For we can only be justly praised or reprimanded for actions arising from free will'.

Of course we may ask how far our freedom goes. Genetic influences and the social environment play a role. Nevertheless, man is in a position to distinguish between value and non-value in important situations. Man gives important decisions long and careful thought. But this only makes sense if man does not regard himself as being 'programmed'. So we can say: Man has
dignity because he is the only living being that has a unique ability: He has intellect and will.

These philosophical deliberations have consequences for rights. If we establish that man is autonomous, we must ask ourselves if there is a right that is above the state, a natural right with which man is born. The concrete question is: Is the demand by theology and philosophy that human dignity must be respected and protected, also a judicial obligation, if it is not included in the Constitution? The answer to this question is of great topical significance since there are states that reject an obligation to respect human dignity and that regard any criticism as interference in their national affairs. This applies not only to China or to North Korea. In Germany, courts today have to pass judgment on soldiers of the previous German Democratic Republic who shot people at the border trying to flee to West Germany. These proceedings remind us of another proceeding that every law student in Germany knows: During the time of National Socialism there was the so-called People’s Court. This court condemned many thousands of people to death who had violated political laws or who were regarded as unreliable. One of the People’s Court judges was called Joachim Rehse. In 1967, 22 years after the end of the Hitler regime, he was charged with aiding and abetting murder. As a judge he had condemned a Jewish merchant to death for violation of the racial law. It was claimed that he had had sexual contact with a non-Jewish woman, which was strictly forbidden. There was no evidence against the accused, but even if the facts were true, the death sentence could not have been just. Rehse defended himself by pointing out the law in force at that time. He said it was not the duty of the judge to examine whether this law was in keeping with ethical dictates. At this, the chairman of the court asked: ‘If there had been a law that threatened all spectacle-wearers with death, what would you have done?’ To this Rehse said: ‘It would have been a fact. I would not have been able to do anything against it’.

This answer is an example of the judicial positivism that had many advocates among the jurists. It was the opinion that a judge must adhere to the law, even if it is inhuman and even if it contradicted his own personal convictions. At that time it was not known that several years later the wearing of spectacles would be punished with the death sentence by ‘Red Khmer’ because the wearing of spectacles indicated the ability to read. Yesterday it was the Jews in Germany, today it is the Albanians in Kosovo who are killed or tortured because of their confession or their membership of an ethnic group. One was always able to cite a law or a command.

We can learn from this that there are rights above the laws of the state, that are born with man and that are in accordance with the nature of man. These rights are oriented towards values that precede the state and which the state must respect and protect. But in a democracy we equally need the emancipated citizen who understands why human dignity is a value that must be protected, even if it is not provided for by the law, and if need be, even against the law. This requires a high measure of education for all citizens, particularly for those people who carry responsibility in the state.

What are the consequences for a university that educates the future holders of responsibility in the state and in trade and industry, in schools and courtrooms? I think it is not adequate to impart only positive knowledge of a high standard. Imparting and confessing ethical values is a duty of the universities. We must guide our students to see the meaning of their future work and to recognize values and realize them themselves. If the universities refuse to make a statement about the meaning of human life and moral values, it does not fulfil its duty to educate for a human and just world. The university should have the courage to confess its faith. The word ‘profiteri’ is derived from the Latin word ‘profiteri’ which means ‘confess’. We should remember the words of the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, with which I would like to end: ‘Whatever is experienced in the squares and on the roads tomorrow depends on what people think at the universities today’.
Notes on Contributors

Emmanuel Katongole (Born in Malube, Uganda), received the degrees BA Hons in Philosophy (1983) and BA Hons in Divinity (1987) from the Pontifical University Urbaniana, Rome, Diploma in Theology (1987) from Makerere University, Kampala, and the degrees MA in Philosophy (magna cum laude, 1993), MA Religious Studies (magna cum laude, 1995) and PhD in Philosophy (summa cum laude, 1996) from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

After his ordination as a priest in 1987 he lectured in Philosophy at the National Seminary Katigondo, Uganda (1988-1991), from 1997 onwards he was Senior Lecturer and Head of African Studies at the National Seminary Katigondo, Lecturer in African Thought at Uganda Martyrs University (1998 - date) and Visiting Lecturer (Philosophy) at Molloy College - New York (1999) and Scranton University PA (1999-2000).

He is the author of Beyond Universal Reason: Questioning the relation between ethics and religion (1999) and several papers published in journals in East Africa and South Africa.

Buti Tlhagale (*1947, Randfontein, South Africa) was parish priest in Dube, Soweto, in 1979, before moving to Emdeni and, later, Orlando East. He continued at Orlando East while Secretary General of the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference (1995-1999). In 2000 he was appointed Archbishop of Bloemfontein.

He holds a BA from the University of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland (1972), and a BTheology and Licentiate from the Gregorian University in Rome (1976). Archbishop Tlhagale is no stranger to the world of academia. He lectured in philosophy at St Peter's Catholic Seminary in Hammanskraal and served as visiting lecturer at St Joseph's Theological Institute from 1977 to 1981. He was also invited as a guest lecturer to the University of Notre Dame (USA).

He is the author and editor of a number of books, among them The Unquestionable Right to be Free and Hammering Swords into Ploughshares, the latter is a selection of essays in honour of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Walter Kasper (*1933) was ordained a priest for the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart in 1957. After receiving his doctorate in Catholic theology from the University of Tübingen in 1961 he was professor of systematic theology in Münster (1964-1970) and at the University of Tübingen (1970-1989), Germany and, as visiting professor, lectured extensively in the United States. He was a member of the Vatican's International Theological Commission, and was theological secretary for the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops is Rome (1985). He was bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart from 1989-1999 before taking up his appointment as secretary of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity in the Vatican. He will be elevated to Cardinal in 2001.

Paul J.M. van Tongeren (*1950, Deventer, The Netherlands) studied theology in Utrecht and philosophy in Louvain (Belgium). He got his Ph.D. also from the Superior Institute of Philosophy of the Catholic University in Louvain (1984). His doctoral dissertation was on Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality. He was assistant professor for moral philosophy at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) from 1978, was ‘special professor of philosophy’ at the State University of Leiden from 1985 till 1990, and is at the moment at the Catholic University of Nijmegen professor for moral philosophy (since 1987) and chairman of the Center of Ethics of the university, CEKUN (since 1993). From 1989 until 1994 he was dean of the faculty of philosophy. In 1995 he was fellow in residence of the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences, and visiting professor at the philosophy department of BYU (Provo, Utah, USA). In 1996 he was a member of the committee that evaluated the departments of philosophy of the Flemish universities.

His publications are on Nietzsche, on Aristotle, on the Stoics, and on some issues from the actual debate in ethics. Most of his publications are in the field of ethics and the history of philosophy; some in the field of philosophy of religion.

Heinz Vogelsang (*1935) studied law and political science at the Universities of Berlin and Bonn, and read psychology, history and education at Cologne. After gaining his doctorate in law from Cologne University (1963) he lectured at the universities of Cologne and Koblenz-Landau before becoming professor and later Director of the Institute for Political Science at the University of Koblenz-Landau where he also held other senior academic positions. From 1967-1971 he was Departmental Head in the office of the Minister of Education of the state Rhineland-Palatinate, supervising the six colleges of education. Since 1985 he has also been lecturer in educational law and school management at the University of Bamberg (Bavaria). That university conferred the "medal of honour" on him.

Professor Vogelsang has published some 90 articles on political theory, comparative systems analysis, the government system of the Federal Republic of Germany, especially educational politics and strategy, and school administration.
The idea of founding a Catholic university in South Africa was first mooted in 1993 by a group of academics, clergy and business people. It culminated in the establishment of St. Augustine College of South Africa in July 1999, when it was registered by the Minister of Education as a private higher education institution and started teaching students registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is situated on the historic site of the Observatory in Johannesburg and operates as a university offering values-based education to students of any faith or denomination, to develop leaders in Africa for Africa.

The name ‘St Augustine’ was chosen in order to indicate the African identity of the College since St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was one of the first great Christian scholars of Africa.

As a Catholic educational institution St Augustine College is committed to making moral values the foundation and inspiration for all its teaching and research. In this way it offers a new and unique contribution to education, much needed in our South African society.

It aims to be a community that studies and teaches disciplines that are necessary for the true human development and flourishing of individuals and society in South Africa. The College’s engagement with questions of value is in no sense sectarian or dogmatic but is both critical and creative. It will explore the African contribution to Christian thought and vice versa. Ethical values will underpin all its educational programmes in order to produce leaders who remain sensitive to current moral issues.

The College is committed to academic freedom, to uncompromisingly high standards and to ensuring that its graduates are recognized and valued anywhere in the world. Through the international network of Catholic universities and the rich tradition of Catholic tertiary education, St. Augustine College has access to a wide pool of eminent academics, both locally and abroad, and wishes to share these riches for the common good of South Africa.