

TITLE: MY COMMUNITY : MY CONSCIENCE AND GUIDE.

**Communal Influence on Individual Choices in Africa, with special
reference to Zulu Proverbs.**

BY

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SUMMARY:

Life is the common denominator for all beings. Unless individuals are taught to be careful about how they deal with it, great harm could be caused to the whole ontological order. Life therefore is a public property for which precepts had to be established to guard against any misuse. This guarantees that life and its processes are used to everyone's advantage.

The Community has put itself in position as the monitor of the processes of life. To it belongs the right to distribute, regulate and even withdraw life as different situations would warrant. The community is both the promulgator and the judge over vital matters.

The individuals are taught to be conscientious in dealing with life. In making choices the individuals have to be conscious of the historical experiences of the community and be disposed to being influenced by it. Hence the Community becomes the Conscience and Guide.

Title of dissertation:

MY COMMUNITY: MY CONSCIENCE AND GUIDE.

Communal Influence on Individual Choices in Africa, with special reference to Zulu Proverbs.

KEY TERMS:

Anthropocentricity; Authority; Actualisation; Conscience; Community; Communal vision; Eucharistic-community; Fundamental choice; Ubuntu (Humane-ness); Moral conscience; Personal freedom; Proto-ancestral Spirits; Socialisation; Salvation; Relationships.

GLOSSARY

This being a presentation about African themes is bound to be infested with African expressions. In view of the difficulty a none Zulu may find in trying to follow the points made here, I have provided a kind of reference. I have tried to give the nearest literal meaning to the terms, words and expressions as will be used herewith.

Word/ Phrase	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning	Source
1. NISAPHILA NA?	DO YOU STILL HAVE LIFE ?		NGUNI
2. IZWE LIYO THI NI?	WHAT WILL THE THE WORLD SAY		NGUNI
3. UHLEKWA YIZINYONI	BIRDS ARE LAUGHING AT HIM	HE HAS EMBARRASSED HIMSELF	ZULU
4. UMUNTU NGUMUNTU NGABANYE ABANTU	A PERSON IS A PERSON BECAUSE OF OTHER PERSONS	WHAT MAKES AN INDIVIDUAL A PERSON IS HIS/HER ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE WITH OTHERS	NGUNI
5. UKUTHWALA/ UKUGCAGCISA	MARRIAGE BY ABDUCTION.		BHACA XHOSA
6. INKWENKWE YINJA	A BOY IS A DOG	A YOUNG BOY IS AS UNTRUSTWORTHY AS IS A DOG.	XHOSA
7. IDLOZI LIMBHEKILE	THE ANCESTOR IS LOOKING TOWARDS HIM.	LUCK IS ON HIM	NGUNI
8. IDLOZI LIMFULATHELE.	OPPOSITE OF ABOVE		
9. UBUHLE BENODODA YIZINKOMO ZAYO	THE BEAUTY OF A MAN IS HIS CATTLE	ONE IS CONSIDERE ON THE BASIS OF WHAT HE HAS	NGUNI

10. UKUPHA UKUZIBEKELA	TO GIVE IS TO STORE FOR YOUR SELF	SOMEONE YOU HELP WILL HELP YOU IN FUTURE	NGUNI
11. UNYAWO ALUNAMPUMULO	THE FOOT HAS NO REST /NOSE	YOU WILL REQUIRE OTHERS TO HELP ONE DAY, BE KIND TO STRANGERS.	NGUNI
12. IHLONIPHA NALA INGAYU-KWEDELA KHONA	THE GIRL RESPECTS EVEN THOSE WHO ARE UNLIKELY TO BE HER IN-LAWS	EVERYONE MUST BE RESPECTED	NGUNI
13. ABANTWANA BOMUNTU BAHLE-PHULELANA NGISHO INHLO-KO YENYONI	CHILDREN OF ONE PARENTAGE SHARE EVEN A BIRD'S HEAD	SHARE WHATEVER YOU HAVE	NGUNI
14. IZANDLA ZIYAGEZANA	HANDS WASH EACH OTHER	TO BE HELPED YOU NEED TO HELP	NGUNI
15. IKHOTH'EYI-KHOTHAYO	THE COWS MUTUALLY CLEAN EACH OTHER	AS 14 ABOVE	NGUNI
16. IMVILAPHA IVUN'ISILONDA	THE GLAND REACTS TO TH SORE	AS 14 ABOVE	NGUNI
17. INGANE ENGA-KHALI IFELA EMBE-LEKWENI	THE SILENT CHILD DIES ON ITS MOTHER'S BACK	REPORT AND SHARE EVEN THE PAINS	NGUNI
18. SITHUNZI SERITI ISIDIMA	SHADOW	DIGNITY INTEGRITY CHARACTER WHICH SPELLS OUT ONE'S POSITION IN SOCIETY	ZULU SESOTHO XHOSA
19. ZIFA NGAMVUNYE	THE WHOLE FLOCK DIES BECAUSE OF ONE SHEEP'S FOOLISHNESS	ONE PERSON'S MISTAKE CAN CAUSE PAIN TO OTHERS	NGUNI

31. UKUZALA UKUZELULA	TO PROCREATE IS TO STRETCH ONESELF	THE BIGGER THE FAMILY THE BETTER ARE THE CHANCES TO COMMUNICATE	NGUNI
32. UKUVALA UMOYA OMUBI	TO BLOCK THE EVIL SPIRIT		NGUNI
33. INKOSI YINKOSI NGABA NTU BAYO	THE KING IA A BECAUSE OF HIS PEOPLE	EVEN THOSE IN POWER OUGHT TO LISTEN TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE	NGUNI
34. INDLOVU EDL'ABASO- NDEZELI	THE ELEPHANT THAT EATS ITS FEEDERS	THE AUTOCRAT WHO HAS NO ADVISORS	ZULU
35. INDLOVU KAYIPHIKISWA	THE ELEPHANT THAT IS NEVER CONTRADICTED	AS ABOVE	ZULU
36. UMLOMO ONGATHETHI MANGA	THE ONE WHOSE MOUTH NEVER LIES	AS ABOVE	NGUNI
37. IPHINGE ENDLUNKULU	THE DOG IS MATIN WITH THE ROYAL O E	THE ISSUE IS ROYALTY	ZULU
38. KUBAMB' EZINGELAYO	ONLY THE HUNTING DOG CATCHES THE GAME	EVEERY ONE MUST WORK	ZULU
39. AKUKHO NKWALI IPHA- NDELA ENYE		AS ABOVE	ZULU
40. ISIHLALI SIDLA AMAJ- JWABU	HE WHO DOES NOT GO TO TO THE FEOAST WILL GET LEAN OF MEAT	EARN YOUR LIVING	ZULU
41. IMBILA YASWEL'UMSI- LA NGOKUYA- LEZELA	THE ROCK RABBIT LACKS THE TAIL BECAUSE IT SENT FOR IT.	AS ABOVE	ZULU
42. ILIMA	COMMUNAL WORK IN THE FIELDS		NGUNI
43. ISISHONGO	COMMUNAL WOOD COLLECTING		NGUNI
44. INQINA	COMMUNAL HUNTING		NGUNI

45. AKUDLULWA NGENDLU YAKHIWA	DO NOT PASS BY WHEN PEOPLE ARE PUTTING UP A BUILDING	SHARE IN THE WORK OTHERS DO	ZULU
46. UYOWAKHA KANJANI UMUZI	HOW WILL YOU BUILD YOUR HOME		NGUNI
47. INDUKU AYIWAKH'UMUZI	A STICK DOESNOT BUILD A HOME	DONOT SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS BY VIOLENCE	NGUNI
48. UKULWA	TO FIGHT	TO BE ANIMAL LIKE	NGUNI
49. IMPI	WAR	SAME STEM AS IMBI (BAD)	NGUNI
50. IMFAZWE	UKUFA +KWEZWE DEATH OF THE WORLD		XHOSA
51. UNAGBOSI- INYELA ISI LAHLA	DONOT DIRTY THE THREE	DO NOT HARM WHAT MAY BE USEF FOR THE FUTURE	NGUNI
52. UKWANDA KWALIWA UMTHAKATHI	ONLY A WITCH IS AGAINST THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE	ONLY THE ANTI LIFE AGENTS DESTROYS	NGUNI
53. INYATHI IBUZWA KWABA- PHAMBILI	WHEN CHASING A BUFFALO ONE SHOULD ASK THOSE IN THE FORE FRONT ABOUT ITS WHERE ABOUTS	IT IS WISE TO ASK ESPECIALLY IF ONE DOES NOT KNOW, WHAT TO DO.	ZULU

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION.

There are two pillars on which the African cosmology stands. One concerns the centrality of life, another the centrality of community. When any two Africans meet the first thing each wants to know is whether or not life processes are going well in the community. A greeting is not complete if one does not enquire about life, or give a detailed account about it in its various forms. 'Nisaphila na?' (1) (do you still have life) is a Nguni expression concerning the first pillar, life. The plural form in 'NI' (2nd person plural) as in Nisa-phila (do you still have life) concerns the second pillar the community. These are the two themes, (LIFE and COMMUNITY) on which the issue of African ethics will be based in this presentation.

1. Parameters of Dissertation.

This dissertation is presented within the scope of what is known as religious studies. The common understanding and definition of the term 'Religion' is that it is humanity's response to what is Ultimate in human experience of existing. As a response religion is action. It represents a particular manner people employ in regulating their participation in the world's events.

"Religion represents man's belief in the transcendent power which by apprehending its nature and attributes through certain means, might be utilized for man's well being here and possibly in the after life" (Assimeng 1989:8).

It is the efforts that humans engage in as they realise their growth, and as such it forms part of their struggle for life. It helps people in adjusting their lives to the environment.

Religion points to God, or to a god. This God normally stands for that which brings forth and sustains life, or livelihood. Therefore, it would sound simplistic to say that a God, such as the one who created life, would at some point just have left it to the whims of creatures. Even within the theme of *Deus otiosus* (the distant God) the understanding should be, that though He does not mingle in human affairs unnecessarily, He still is concerned about it. The distance between God and humanity is not a physical one, but an intellectual one. He is far in terms of human comprehension.

Any person who is concerned with the problems of life and is led to the Supreme Being, cannot fall short of acknowledging that this Supreme Being is interested in the universe He created. African creation stories affirm that when God left, He assigned lesser deities to continue His work on earth. It is logical to assume that whatever deity is assigned to continue God's work, is not doing his/her thing, but the things of God. This is what will be stressed here. The logic will follow the line that the proto-ancestral spirits and deities are God's representatives.

The African ethic takes a triangular movement in its consideration of the life processes. God the author of life, gives life to the community (through its leaders, the prot-ancestral spirits and elders). These in turn share it with the individuals. The individuals utilise it for the community and eventually through the community for God.

2. Steps Leading to Dissertation.

I am working with young African children and it impresses me that they are very concerned about their mothers. Whenever there is an achievement the mother is the first to be told. If something bad has occurred she is the last to know. The theme 'What will Mother say?' (I thought) can be a very interesting point in ethical debates. The role mothers play in the formation of the child's character is very important. However, the mother as the individual biological person does not remain in the picture for long. Step by step she withdraws and gradually introduces the communal aspect to the child. The end product should be that the child appreciates the cultural values and tradition of the society into which and for which he/she has been born. Even if the term 'mother' remains and is used, for instance when the girl talks of her virginity, she refers to it as 'inkomo ka ma' (my mother's cow) it now stands for more than just the individual biological person. In the case where the girl's virginity is damaged, and the man responsible pays the 'inkomo' the biolo-

gical mother cannot keep it for herself. She is required by law to slaughter and enjoy it with all the womenfolk of the village. Thus 'inkomo ka ma' (53) becomes 'inkomo yamakhosikazi' (54) (the women's cow). This emphasises the communal aspect of the formation of children. No single mother, or father for that matter, forms the child's character for him/herself alone, but they do so for the larger community.

Consequent to this as one grows, his/her main concern in making fundamental choices, is the larger community. Its reactions to what one has done, or is about to do, becomes the worry. 'Izwe liyothini?' (2) (what will the world say). When one does something embarrassing, the Zulus say 'uhlekwa izinyoni' (3) (the birds are laughing at him/her). The birds here represent the observing world, the community.

3. Method of Research.

Since most African themes are as yet not committed to written forms, my research has mainly been based on oral tradition as it can be observed in the sayings and proverbs employed here. The wisdom sayings of any culture contain more of its practical beliefs, sometimes more than written scriptures do. A simple sentence like 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu' (4) (a person is a person because of other persons) can be loaded with a whole range of concepts and meanings of peoples' life experiences. One word as in the case of 'ubuntu' can express the whole of their self understanding.

Language is, in many instances, very significant as the expression of life and the enhancement of people's general and religious truths and spiritual insights. The use of African expressions in this dissertation, as the primary source of information, highlights the significant role language plays in theological expositions. This may be termed functional, or applied theology as it is found in the day to day use.

As it will be shown in this research, the culture of a people is better observed in words than in actions. Actions can be misunderstood, or even misinterpreted, words on the other hand explain actions and thus live them.

The use and analysis of Zulu proverbs in this research is a proof that language is a great asset in the study of cultural heritage. This becomes more so for societies that still depend on oral transmission. Needless to say, long before one can read, or write one learns the values of the society through language. Proverbs are not from books, but from and about real life. Scriptures contain in written form what oral tradition has long preserved. In researching this theme I am in a way helping to commit some of the Zulu oral tradition to writing. Once written, these cultural values will be shared with and appreciated by a wider range of people and possibly help transform their lives. Perhaps this is the only advantage of the scriptures, that they widen the range and help put under the spotlight what otherwise would be just local.

4. Specific Aims.

This being an ethical presentation it should specifically deal with relationships in so far as they involve fundamental moral interactions between the different agents in the world. It should therefore tackle the issue of behavioural attitudes, as these are vital in the formulation of fundamental choices.

One of the basic aims is to evaluate the truth of the African axiom that humanity realizes its full potential in its success, or failure to maintain the harmonious balance between itself and the other forces in the world. In other words this dissertation wishes to scrutinise the expression 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu' (a person is a person because of other persons). In this vein I would also wish to check whether it is coherent to come to the conclusion that, to be fully human necessarily means to be involved in stable relationships. If I conclude that it is, then I will have to show the source of this coherency.

Since our topic deals with human life and the course of actions followed in its pursuit, attempts will be made here to show what full human living means. It is in this regard that the themes of *ubuntu*, *communitarianism*, and of the *salvific nature of ethics*, will be considered as central to our discussion.

This research wishes also to probe the significance of what is called 'informed conscience'. To say that conscience is to a greater degree influenced by the community, is to allude that the responsibility for certain individual actions lies with the community that has influenced them. What if something is done to fulfill the wishes of the community?

Let us consider for example the custom of 'ukugcagcisa, or ukuthwala' (5) (taking a girl in marriage by force) which is an accepted procedure in the Bhaba and Xhosa communities for marriage. Elsewhere this is abduction, but for these communities it is accepted and sometimes encouraged. In this case to judge the individual could be to judge the community. This is a typical instance where the community is instrumental in the actions and the decisions the individual has to make. If this is the case, how can one be expected to act differently from what has been prescribed? Ruch (1984:144) says:

" To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, . . ."

CHAPTER TWO. DEFINITION AND ELABORATION OF KEY TERMS.

Since it is the purpose of this dissertation to discuss the particular theme of ethics in African understanding, certain words and terms which are central to the theme, warrant a definition and even to certain extent an elaboration. The terms **Community**, **Life** and **Conscience** would warrant this since their use in this dissertation may to some extent not be expressive of conventional understanding.

1. Community.

For the context of this dissertation, the term 'community' includes every possible being. So it must not be a surprise to find that God is discussed together with the ant, man together with a stone and so on. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, the title 'brother and sister' will be used even for those things that would normally be excluded from the genre man, or woman. The term 'Community' will be used to mean and expose the societal ambience in which the individuals are brought up to ensure their adequate introduction to the mores and ethos of the society from which they inherit their ideas and within which they achieve their ideals.

1.1. Community of relationships

What is said above presupposes that there is a constant mutual appreciation and recognition between the interacting agents. Further, it presupposes a mutual appreciation and recognition of the shared values. This mutual appreciation and recognition should not simply be materialistic, where the other is a commodity of manipulation, or of utility value. Instead the other should be seen as being of value in as much as he/she, or it, is an independent, selfactualising, creative and a valuable spiritualised being. The other should be able to stand out there as a challenge to, and open to be challenged by, others. In this way the relational processes should be seen to be both symbiotic and reciprocal, a real and meaningful exchange between equals.

Community in this context will be discussed as the indispensable value for the African. If the process of upholding relationships, mutual appreciation and recognition of the shared values are antecedent to the acceptance of the other as a member of the shared world, a colleague with whom to commune, then he/she, or it ought to have been *a priori* accepted and acknowledged as having the same needs.

This approach to life allows for nothing to be seen as solely created as means for satisfying and gratifying the needs of others. Even the so-called material world cannot

afford to stand there, merely as means to be tapped, but it should react with and respond to the advances made to it. It must directly or indirectly demand and command respect and caution from those other beings acting upon and with it. Our creatureliness in the same shared reality, the world calls us to the appreciation of our common heritage. It is as brothers and sisters, that we need to acknowledge our mutual responsibility towards the earth and to one another. Our survival pivots around this mutual and fraternal responsibility.

To contrast the Western and African thought patterns, let us take Rene Descartes' 'cogito ego sum' (I think therefore I am), and put it side by side with the African 'We are therefore I am'. The Western thought places the emphasis on the individual as the source of all activity while the African emphasises community. Descartes' saying in an African style would therefore be 'cogito sumus' (we are therefore I think). What I think is within the corporate thinking of the ontological group. I am because I share and cooperate with others.

With the title 'My Community: my conscience and Guide', the aim is to discuss the terms of mutual relatedness, responsibility, and participation between the members of the community. It is an effort to explain the African approach to the 'I' - 'Thou' theory, whose base is that individuals are destined to be a community of participating and sharing beings.

1.2. Structuring the Community.

The community as understood here, is not a mere juxtaposition of persons and things, but a corporate, ontological and participative relationship. It is conceived in terms of dependency where the other is a 'sine qua non', (something without which there is nothing). It is a finely knit structural unit, bonded in such a manner that were one part to be removed, life would be impossible, both for the one removed and the remaining rest. This is why it is called a corporate body.

The practical example of this is the death of a chief. His death, as it were makes all the women of his village widows and not just his wife. It does not just affect the status of the women of the village. The other aspects of life are touched as well. There could be no sign of joy and happiness, no marriages, no feasts in the village. Even the bright colours in the homesteads are to be shaded during the mourning period. As the father figure, the chief is as it were, the mythical head of all the families in his village.

This example echoes what is reported in the history of the Zulus. When Nandi the mother of Shaka died, a general fast was observed by the whole nation. Even babies were not to be breast fed. Who dares enjoy life when the mother of the nation has lost life? This is how community is experienced in Africa, all is shared equally. When a member of the community

is honoured or dishonoured, the whole group is honoured, or dishonoured. Such is the case with the community itself. Its joys and pains are the joys and pains of everyone within it.

"Nothing moves in this universe of force without influencing other forces by its movement . . . the life of the "muntu" is not limited to his own person, but that it extends to all ontologically subjected to him: . . . In the same way as every good office, every help and assistance count before all else as a support, an increase of life to him who is the beneficiary . . ." (Tempels 1969: 143).

1.3. The African Community Values.

1.3.1. The Individual's Life in Community.

After so much has been said about the African concept of community, the natural question that should follow is: What are its values and how do they affect the individuals? To answer these questions a few other values will be discussed as examples. Those values to be discussed, clearly pertain to the discussion of "UBUNTU" as the mother value. The ones that readily come to mind are: - Life, Hospitality, Respect and Generosity. It might help to begin by elaborating on the importance of 'ubuntu' (humane-ness) as the founding value and see how the other values fit in, with it.

1.3.2. 'UBUNTU': The African Super Value.

It has been mentioned already that, it is not enough that one is physically born. One is not a person by mere biological

features. To be human and to be fully alive, there are processes that one must have undergone and attitudes that he/she must have adopted. The whole process of the rites and rituals of initiation and sometimes of reintegration are done unto the individual to introduce him/her into full humanhood. When for some reason, these have not been done, the individual is said to do some un-human things such as bed-wetting even at an adult age, becoming insane and even turning criminal.

Ubuntu can be defined as a series of behavioral patterns which a person adopts and as actions into which one engages oneself and by which one is engaged by the community. It is the whole process of metamorphosis into full personhood. It is a process of socialisation - a process whereby the person is made to fit within the structures of a given society. It is a process of actualisation - a process by which the individual realizes in practice his or her latent potentialities. Thirdly ubuntu is a process of humanisation - a process by which one is taught and infused with the values and the joy of participation and sharing in the community.

It is a process whereby individuals are gradually led to the acknowledgment, appreciation and practical acceptance of the fact that the world belongs to all. It leads them to the important acknowledgment that, conquering the anti-life forces cannot be done in isolation. To be 'umuntu' (a person) is to partake in the creative and redemptive acts of God, and

thus preserving the world from returning to chaos. Understood in this way, the process of (ubuntusation) or humane-isation is the main tool in the story of humanity's self realisation. It designates the person as a fighter on God's and on the community's side against the anti-life forces. Through ubuntu one fights such evils as, oppression, discrimination and poverty. His/her targets are all the forces that are degrading to the integrity and dignity of men and women, and of the other created beings as well. In short it is the self realisation by humans as co-creators and co-redeemers with the Supreme Good.

"Among the Igbo of Nigeria, to be creative is to turn the power of evil, sin and suffering into the power of love"
(Oduyoye 1986:92).

1.4. The Three Steps of Humanisation.

1.4.1. Creation: - This is that stage when God practically forms the individual. Here the person is given the biological features and all the necessary attributes and potentials, but because these attributes and potentials have not as yet been actualized (through the ability to partake meaningfully) the person cannot be designated a fully developed person. He/she is as it were a closed book. This is the reason that a child in African view, cannot be held responsible for his/her actions. At this stage the child is not very much different from an animal. Hence the Xhosa expression 'inkwenkwe yinja'(8)

(a boy is a dog). Thus a child is called 'Umntwana' a demunitive of 'Umuntu' (a person). The 'ana' after any noun reduces it to something less. Less, not in terms of size, rather in terms of quality. For example the 'ana' added to the noun 'inkomo' (a cow) will be 'inkonyane' meaning a little cow. 'Ana' added to 'indoda' (a man) will be indodana, meaning a little man.

1.4.2. The actualising stage: - This marks the second stage in the process of ubuntu, by which the community, through its experiences, constantly and progressively assists the individual to unpack his/her God-given package and to realise and actualise his/her potentials. This is a stage when the child is helped to acknowledge his/her vocation and fully to take his/her rightful participative position in the community. It must be remembered that all positions in the African world view are for service and not for mere personal gratification. If there is to be any self-joy out of the service, then it is experienced within the context of having done well for the community.

1.4.3. The trans-physical stage: this is the third and final stage, when the individual, having been instructed about the issues of his/her corporealities, and observed to be carrying out the designated duties well, will now be led to the spiritual realities. Having achieved full humanhood, he/she is now to participate with God in the crea-

tive and salvific acts. In this stage the person can be a father or a mother and reproduce. He/she can be a soldier and defend, he/she can be a priest, diviner and dictate on life-giving procedures of the family, clan tribe and nation. He/she in this period, is in full partnership as a co-creator, and a co-saviour with God. This leads eventually to him/her being an ancestor, which is a participation on the level of divinity. This is why the older the person, the more respected he/she becomes. As the ancestors, the elders can efficaciously bless as well as curse. These are actions reserved only for those in the hierarchy who have a say with regard to life issues.

1.5. The Responsibilities of a Well Humanised Person.

It is in the light of what has been said above, that the person (thus created, empowered and transformed through the three stages) is expected to cherish certain things, while shunning others. It is in this connection that some of the other values, should be discussed. They are important as tools in the building of persons 'abantu' (persons) into living and significant blocks of the structure of community. They are the concrete realities that are infused into the individual in the processes of humanisation, actualisation and socialisation. Those things without which a person cannot be an 'umuntu' (a person) and can never achieve meaningful and real 'ubuntu' (humaneness). As already mentioned they are: - Life, Hospitality, Respect and Generosity.

2. Life.

To define life one needs to explain the process of what is known as the act of living. Living is the constant effort of adapting oneself to the environment. Adaptation means the establishment of friendly, or working relationships between two or more partners. It is one's ability to manage one's way through the maze of circumstances. This constitutes what is called the struggle for life, the maintenance of which every creature is said to be involved in. The contention of this dissertation is that this process of maintaining life is not individualistic, but that it is all inclusive. Within its scope it considers the person, his/her dependants and most of all the circumstances within which they live. The circumstances are said to be the most important because they provide the essentials for proper living. They are like water to the fish, for if the water is polluted the very life of the fish becomes polluted. In this issue, Tempels (1969:48) says:

"Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force: the worst misfortune and in every truth, the only misfortune, is, he thinks, the demunition of this power. Every illness, wound or disappointment, all suffering, or fatigue, every injustice and every failure: all these are held to be, and are spoken of by the Bantu as a demunition of vital force."

We can see here that the greatest worry is that somebody somewhere may be tampering with the life forces, either that of one personally, or that of his/her dependants. The whole

of one's struggle for life, his/her day to day activities, from birth to death and even through to reincarnation, the person celebrates life. His/her belief in God, the deities, spirits the ancestors, the mediums doctors, diviners witches, plants and animals, (in fact the whole cosmology) is held on the basis of the belief, that they all, for better or worse, partake in the processes of life. Even the inanimate objects are believed to share in life processes. In this way, their force can be manipulated to diminish or to enhance life.

Analyzing the Freudian theory of personality, Bellagamba (1989:69) says:

"In Freud's theory, then, the root of personality are two instincts: the instinct of life/death and the instinct of sex . . . The instinct of life/death not only requires the individual to live, but also to fulfill all the requirements for the fullness of life and to avoid all that renders life painful, less beautiful, and less fulfilling. The instinct of sex demands that life be shared and perpetuated through the exercise of the sexual powers created for that purpose."

This statement holds true for everybody. So does the instinct of life/ death and the instinct of sex hold true for all. It is in the nature of all creatures to propagate life. Even if one does not consent to do it, the biological make-up calls for it instinctively. Hence with regards to life, Africans are at one with humanity.

In fact life is at the center of most Eastern African people's world view. To live fully, to live with joy and happiness, to avoid with all natural, preter and supernatural means pain and suffering, is of great relevance to Africans. The instinct of sex for the transmission of life has an equal paramount importance to Africans. One of the worst curses in a person's life is sterility, impotence, or any other inability to reproduce life. And the greatest joy for Africans is the capability of perpetuating life." (Bellagamba 1989:72).

The greatest gift from God is life, and the noblest act is its preservation, while the greatest sin is its destruction. Happiness and blessings are viewed in the increase of one's possessions. To have accumulated wealth is to have gained an increase in vital force. It is to have been favoured by the gods to have had them look your way 'idlozi limbhekile' (7) (the ancestor has looked his/her way). This is what the Zulus say of one who has struck luck. On the other hand when one loses his/her prosperity then they say 'idlozi limfulathele' (8) (the ancestor has turned his back on him/her). Such a one, as having been cursed, is said to have lost his/her vital link with the source of force. So, his/her life (the vital force) has been diminished.

"The Bantu say, . . . that their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly, that they are to make stronger, or ensure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity. Used negatively, the same idea is expressed when the Bantu say: we act thus to be protected from misfortune, or from a diminution of life or of being, or in order to protect ourselves from those influences which annihilate or diminish us" (Tempels 1969:44-45).

Blessings and even curses are mostly observed in one's prosperity, as measured in terms of the number of wives, children and material goods, 'ubuhle bendoda yizinkomo zayo' (9) (the beauty of a man is his cattle). Since to possess these things also means to have control over their life forces, the person who has a lot of property is perceived as being in possession of greater vital force. The preservation of life, is the first in the series of what the community teaches its individuals. And rightly so, because without this training and ini-

tiation, the individual is likely to destroy his/her life and that of the community. It is like teaching someone to drive a car, where his blunder is tragic not to him alone, but to his instructor and the other road users as well.

So, this whole concern for successful life, is a preoccupation about saving its processes in their totality. In this process a lot of consultation must be done, especially to the proto-ancestral life powers, the model elders and the ancestors. This consultation is based on the assumption that the proto-ancestral life powers, have been involved in acts of salvation against the life enemies of their subjects.

2.1. Life is a Gift to be Shared.

Some of the values that go hand in hand with the preservation of life are Hospitality and Generosity. The very essence of life is that it be passed on. All living beings feel it in themselves that they need to procreate and propagate life. To withhold or hinder the processes of life (directly, by self inflicted celibacy, castration and the other anti birth devices and indirectly through natural barrenness and sterility) is the worst evil one can do, or be cursed with.

Propagation here does not mean only the biological birth-giving, but all forms of nurturing life. So, acts like generosity and hospitality fall under the same class as procrea-

tion. This clarifies the meaning of the phrase 'I am because I share, others are because they share and partake with me.' Through generosity and hospitality people take care of life. 'Ukupha kuwukuzibekela' (10) (to give something to someone is to store that thing for yourself).

In being kind to others, in allowing them to share one's life giving possessions (food and shelter) one is acting salvifically. For example in sheltering strangers for the night, one saves them from the dangers they might meet as they travel on in the night. Should something bad happen to a person after refusing to receive him/her, one could be held responsible for the evil that might befall him, or her.

" If a native thus stays overnight, another offers him a room to sleep and supplies him with food . . . if the traveller becomes ill on continuing his journey, the cause of illness may be put down as an inadequate reception of the guest, and perhaps lead to the punishment of the host" (Wessmann 1908: 74).

This is done in the consciousness that one will him/herself be a stranger and need hospitality from someone else as is contained in the Zulu expression 'unyawo alunampumulo' (11) (the foot has no rest, or it has no nose to sniff). One ought to be kind to strangers who may be one's potential hosts. 'Ihlonipha nalapho ingayukwendela khona' (12) (a girl respects even those who will never be her in-laws).

2.2. Unity Through Sharing.

Life as a shared reality demands first that there be mutual acceptance between people. They should recognise themselves as a eucharistic community 'abantwana bomuntu bahlephulelana ngisho inhloko yenyoni' (13) (children of a person share even the head of a bird). The other should be acknowledged as having the same needs as myself. Without this one may not be able to share meaningfully with the other. In this respect the catch phrase 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu' (a person is a person because of other persons) becomes a living reality. It means a face to face relationship, where one challenges and demands a place in the other's heart. Solidarity, Unity and Sharing are central as pillars of 'ubuntu' (humaneness).

By the saying 'izandla ziyagezana' (14) (hands wash each other) or 'ikhotha eyikhothayo' (15) (a cow licks the one that licks it in return) the Nguni people mean that it is in the nature of being human to help and to expect help. This denotes a kind of socialised principle of consciousness; a consciousness of the other as a reality that cannot simply be shelved. 'I am because we are'. In this regard also something of being in the presence of practical face to face relationship with the other, is experienced. As 'umuntu' (a person) one is carefully screened in terms of his/her ability to maintain the communal well-being, through sincere relationships

and meaningful sharing. In practice this means, that, one shares in the deep human experiences of the community. These Zulu expressions 'imvilapha ivuna isilonda' (16) (the gland supports the wound) or 'abantwana bomuntu bahlephulelana inso yenyoni' (the children of a person divide/share the kidney of a bird) are expressive of the solidarity and sharing which are so prevalent in African communities. Share what you have no matter how small, enjoyable or painful. 'Ingane engakhali ifela embelekweni' (17) (a baby that does not cry dies on its mother's back). A problem shared is a problem solved.

2.3. Practical Implications.

A lot has been said about the centrality of life and community. Since this is an ethical presentation, it is appropriate to show what the practical implications of this vitality and communitarianism are for the individual. It is also appropriate to show to what extent they influence his/her choices, decisions and actions.

2.3.1. The Ethical Implications of Life.

As it has been mentioned, the preservation of life, is central to this way of life. It is necessary to stress the fact that life is the immense corporate condition of being. It is a condition in which all is steeped, surrounded and infused. The primary implication of this is that, every

being should have a particular interest in the processes of life. Everyone coming into it through birth, or exiting it through death (if at all there is such a thing as exiting the life processes) is to be monitored by all. If not the scale tips off and harm is caused to the natural order. Life as a value is publicly owned. If it was to be left to irresponsible persons it could be manipulated at the expense of the public or community.

The natural order is as it were, governed by the choices people make, either for or against life. Life is the context within which humanity performs its creative and salvific acts, or their opposite. If for a particular reason one becomes anti-life, then he/she is answerable to the whole corporate body. All beings are therefore, evaluated in accordance to their attitude to life; either as enhancing or destroying it. This becomes the basis of morality, one's goodness or evil (as members of the community) is evaluated on what he/she was trained to be; a staunch guardian of life, an ardent member of the community and an enthusiastic protector of its values.

Even the ancestors are viewed in this respect. For example a dead person who seemed not to have cared about life, or was deemed unable to prolong it while on this earth (sterile or barren people and witches) cannot be raised or said to be eligible for the level of ancestry. The logic is, what do

they know about life to have any sincere interest in it?

To be termed a conscientious person therefore, one needs to have been pro-life in his/her attitude and practice while here on earth and after death. One needs to have had a respectful attitudes towards his/her life and that of others. This means to have been supportive to its prolongation by practical engagement in procreative acts and sympathetic in nurturing it once created. (Bujo 1990:77) says:

"If the ancestral communion of the living and the dead constitutes, a 'mystical body', it cannot be merely the dignitaries who have their obligations towards their subject, but the opposite must hold true. The vital force emanating from the head to the members is circulating also from the members back to the head . . . the good produced by any one member benefits the whole organism,. . . the wrong doing and evil committed by any one member diminishes the vital force of all, making it vulnerable and exposing it to death."

It is obvious therefore that the Community sees life and its processes as privately owned by itself as its sole custodian. The individual holds life in proxy for the community. To this effect the ancestors' interest in matters of life is not merely a metaphysical one, but it is real and biological.

The argument is: they did once share and partake (biologically) in life and its process, now that they are dead, they are responsible for its transmission. The implication of this is that, every one to whom the responsibility of life has been entrusted should be constantly checked by the ancestors and their constitutional representatives. The community leaders and elders who in their place transmit life to their respective communities ought to enforce the moral order.

The other obvious implication is that one cannot mess up the processes of life without sanctions being imposed on him/her. Sometimes the ancestors act directly, in imposing these sanctions. If this happens the whole community suffers. The community should guide the individual in his/her practices, or risk being sanctioned, should anything go wrong. In this sense then, the community becomes the Conscience and Guide.

3. Conscience.

Before elaborating on this topic it may be important to explain the meaning of the term 'conscience'.

" . . . The whole person's commitment to values and the judgement on must make in the light of that commitment, to apply those values, . . . Simply put, conscience is 'me coming to a decision'. It includes not only the cognitive and volitional aspects, but also affective, intuitive attitudinal and somatic aspects as well" (Gula 1989:131).

This as the standard modern way of presenting the meaning of conscience, is acceptable to the African, with the proviso that the decision is reaching further than just the "I", it also has a bearing on others. If one chooses life, or death for that matter, it is for ALL that he/she chooses.

" The Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual as a force existing by itself apart from the ontological relationships with other living beings and from its connection with the animal or inanimate forces around it. . . . The Bantu cannot be a lone being. . . He knows himself to be a vital force influencing some other forces and being influenced by them (Shutte 1993:55).

The whole of morality is based on the maintenance of the ontological balance. This checks against all forms of individualism and of collectivism as well. Before engaging in any action the first question one ought to ask is: 'how will the said action affect others?' This concern is a vital one in that in a symbiotic relationship the hosts have to strive to protect and preserve each other as a matter of course.

In this way the individual is put in a position of responsibility so that he/she is not parasitic to the community. The terms of relating are strictly symbiotic and reciprocal. This modifies the slogan 'WE ARE THEREFORE I AM' to 'I AM THEREFORE WE ARE'. This brings about self importance and integrity to the individual. The person is told to be careful about himself, or herself as well as about the community without which he, or she is not complete and vice versa.

The issue of morality comes into play as soon as one's vital force begins to participate, when one's 'isithunzi, seriti, or isidima' (18) (shadow) affects others. This is where the whole issue of caution and justice becomes important, that when one is ritually impure he/she must avoid contaminating others. When he/she is likely to diminish the life force of another he/she must avoid contact.

" The human person is like a live electric wire which ever exudes force in all directions. . . this is like an aura around the person, . . . It gives forth into the traffic or weltering pool of life in community the uniqueness of each person and each object" (Shutte 1993:54).

One's choice does not concern him, or her only. As it were the whole of the world depends on that choice. This makes conscience communitarian, so that to be conscientious should mean to be community conscious as well. The Zulus say 'zifa ngamvunye' (19) (one sheep's foolishness leads to the death of the whole flock). This is why Ruch (1984:134) says:

" To do wrong, means not merely to be individually in disharmony with the order of nature without effectively affecting the order itself. . . Breaking a taboo is seen as endangering the ontological equilibrium of the group."

After considering what has been presented up to now, the question is: is there any place for individual or personal existence and development in this concept? The answer is a definite yes, on conditions that, while one exists as an individual, he/she nevertheless owns his/her existence within and for the community. The actions that appear as his/ her own, are to a greater, or lesser degree predetermined by the community. Through the process of humanisation, actualisation and socialisation the mode of action has been described and prescribed. The code of conduct is not self motivated, but it has over a long period, been established and predestined by the community. We are what our communities want us to be. This is the whole issue contained in the expression, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu.'

Different cultures have various reasons for training their young. The most prominent reason is that of equipping the youth for self efficiency. In this training the phrase: 'it

is for your future' dominates the scene. It is as if parents are alluding to the time when they will not be there to guide the child, hence it must be able to stand up and fend for itself. In this approach, the basic question is 'how one feels as an individual'.

The view of this dissertation is that in African thought the individual realises him/herself in the context of others. One is trained for the community. His/her successes and failures are viewed together with the successes and failures of the corporate body to which he/she belongs. The future and the past are not his/her's personally. They form the corporate historical experience of the community. The directing question therefore is not about one and his/her feelings, but about the community and its feelings. 'Abantu bathini' (What do people say?) In other words, what is their historical experience.

3.1. Personal Freedom.

In the issue of God as conceived to be absolutely transcendent, remote and removed, one may think 'there is ample freedom to do anything one wants. 'Uchakide uhlolele imamba yeIukile' (20) (the mamba is away therefore the squirrel is in charge). It is this apparent absence of God and the consequential freedom that frightens both the individuals and societies, because it also bears responsibility for one's

decisions, actions and their consequences.

"The African society has taken steps to limit this human freedom to ensure social stability harmony and peace between the individuals, families, clans and tribes, hence safeguarding peace and general well-being within the whole community" (Twesigye 1987:97).

As a free person one can do what he/she wants, but to succeed he/she has to do it within the perimeters and conceptions of the corporate body in whose life one shares. Hence the expression 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu' (a person is a person because of other persons) is not just a wise advice, but a prerequisite for life. The Nguni expressions, 'inyoni yakhele nezinsiba zenye' (21) (a bird uses other birds' feathers to build its nest) and 'injobo enhle ithungelwa ebandla (22) (to ensure of the tassels of the Zulu dance attire, it must be prepared in the sight of a council) are expressive of the necessity of others in one's development. Ruch (1984: 14) supports this when he says:

" One could say that in traditional African society, man never does anything, receives or suffers anything alone. "

The phrase 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu' is not a mere biological affirmation. In fact one can lose *ubuntu* (his/her essence as a human being. That is why the Zulus talk of 'izinswela boya' (23) (those who lack the fur). This is said of people who are at their lowest on what it takes to make a full human being. What makes one a full human is the ability to participate and share meaningfully and humanely.

Children, are born into the community, their life by implication is the community's. If the child were to mess its life, it by inference would be messing up the community to which life publicly and privately belongs. It is important to stress that there is only one life in which everyone shares. In this one life God also participates with the created world. To mess it up, is deductively to mess up God himself and this is to declare war on life and the ontological order. Onwubiko (1991: 81) has this to say on the issue.

" Nor it is sufficient for the child to be physically born. He must also be born into the group, for it is within the group that he is fully man."

In the effort to evaluate the essence of being it is perhaps in order to examine the theory of "ntu". Ntu stands for the absolute Being and from it comes (muntu) a human person and (kintu) the other created things. Ntu is then the life in which we all share whether we are alive, or dead.

"From this perspective, life is a cyclic affair a coming and going from this visible human life to the ancestral life and then returning to this life as grand children. Life therefore is a shared reality, received from the ancestors, in this sense, every grand child is his or her grandparent" (Kirwen 1987 : 113).

3.2. My Community my God.

If it is palatable to say that we participate in the divine life, especially in alluding to the fact that God is part of the community, then this community must be enormously wide. It, in fact, shares in the attributes of God, such as infa-

llibility, wisdom, omnipotence, omnipresence and so forth. As one cannot be out of God, it can be said by inference that one cannot be out of the community.

"Omuntu participates in Ruhanga's divine intelligence and skills of creativity. . . God have mercifully and gratuitously given these qualities as gifts to the human beings (abantu) so that they would participate in His divine nature and become His intelligent and responsible representatives in the world. . ." (Twesigye 1969:107)

The community becomes the context within which one acts and he/she dares not act out of context. The African pride is in being a part of the corporate body. To be, is to belong and the more distinguished the group to which one belongs, the better.

This shows the importance of community, it further shows that, the biggest pain is experienced when one claims no patrimony, or when he/she is discriminated against. The Zulus talk of 'imihamb'ima' (24) (a person who has no destination who walks aimlessly) 'omintshing'ibethhwa ngubani' (25) (flutes that have no one to whistle on). These are the people who are not owned, or for whom nobody takes care and responsibility, the marginalised.

This perhaps explains the difficulty, orphans sometimes experience as they leave the orphanages. The search for their relations becomes so painful, that they may become psychopaths and social misfits. The community's interest in individual's choices and actions stems from the belief that

life is commonly shared. Left with the person who is irresponsible, it can be used at the detriment of the community.

To answer the original question as to whether, there is anything in the African world view, known as 'personal life, or freedom; whether there is such a thing as personal development? The answer is yes. One can in fact do whatever one wants and many times they do. This is when the Zulus say: 'uzenzile akakhalelwa kukhalelwa uzumekile' (nobody mourns for one who called pain on him/herself).

The community would allow one to pursue his/her freedom, but it warns him/her of the dangers involved. For example, he who wants to burn the grass can burn it as much as he wants, but the cattle must have something to eat. She who wants to cut grass on a summer's day, the community would say: 'Cut as you wish, but let no hail storm destroy our crop' and so forth. The Zulus say 'isala kutshenwa sibona ngomopho' (the one who disregards warnings cautions ends up hurting oneself). In order to live a normal life one ought to heed the the instructions and directives of those in authority.

The African knows and accepts that one's being is within the community. He/she knows and accepts that he/she has to act within his/her context. He/she knows and accepts that the content of his/her choices is to be found in the values that the community cherishes.

CHAPTER THREE. MY CONSCIENCE AND MY GUIDE.

This being the second part of this dissertation, the discussion ought to be steered towards the aspect of conscience. Because of what the topic is implying, the contention, that for the African, the community is indeed one's conscience, will have to be proven. Gula (1989:131) has described conscience as:

"The whole person's commitment to values and the judgements one must make in the light of that commitment to apply those values."

What is to be examined here, is what the process of the formulation and adoption of values involves. The aim is to know, whether these said values to which one must commit oneself and about which one must make judgements, are of one's own making. This dissertation wishes to examine and possibly prove whether the values come to one as already formulated and adopted by some other person or group of persons.

The argument about African communalism, has implied that, to be is to belong and that this belonging is not a mere clustering of persons into an unrelated collectivism, but to a group that is on a participatory and relational level.

"Participation is the element of connection, which unites the different beings as beings or substances, it is the pivot of relationships between members of the same community, the link that binds together the individuals and groups" (Shutte 1993:49).

Shutte puts conversation or dialogue as the ultimate purpose and typical activity of a community as understood in African

thought, since this is a cooperative activity that is achieved simply by presence of person to person rather than by them fulfilling any further function. This affirms what has been hinted to already, that the other is not accommodated only as a utility value, but he/she or it is present on his/her/its own cognizance. This is the reason why the aged, the sick and crippled are never considered as a burden in the African view and as such there is never a consideration for euthanasia or even for old age homes and chronic homes.

1. The Anthro-Ethical and the Social Aspects of UMUNTU.

'To be is to participate'! To participate in what? one may ask. It is obvious that one participates in the values cherished by the community to which one belongs. It is to be contended here that if conscience revolves around values and if these values are predetermined, then the one who commits him/herself to them, is in fact committing him/herself to whom so ever prescribed them. It is something like what Jesus says to his followers in the Gospel of John.

" If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we shall come to him and make our home with him." (Jn. 14:13).

In other words, Jesus asks them to commit themselves to him by keeping his commandments as what he prescribes. This becomes the condition for following him. This is what the disciples must commit themselves to. In a similar way, the African commits him/herself to the words which are his/her community

values. Conscience applies to human acts and it is not the person per se, who is evaluated but his/her actions. If this is acceptable, then it must also be agreed that personhood is determined by relationships which can only be observed in actions. "*Conscience is 'me coming a decision' in the light of my commitment to apply values*" (Gula 1989:131) and by implication, I call to mind all that is understood by the community in terms of those said values and then decide on how to apply them. Before one engages in the application of any value in practice, he/she ought to probe the feelings of all those who may be affected. This helps him/her to make the right and informed decision. The community is then, one's conscience and it is his/her guide in the process of informing the decisions he/she has to make.

" *one is concerned both with the peculiar interdependence of persons on others for the exercise, development and fulfillment of their powers that is recognised in African traditional thought and also in the understanding of what it is to be a person that underlines this*" (Shutte 1993:47).

In his elaboration of the term (conscience) (Gula 1989:131) distinguishes three stages. The first he terms **SYNDERESIS** and explains it as: "*the basic tendency, or capacity within us to know and to do good*". The second he, calls **MORAL CONSCIENCE** and describes it as: "*the process of discovering (and developing) the particular good which ought to be done or evil to be avoided*". The third, he calls **CONSCIENCE** and explains it as: "*the specific judgement of the good which 'I must do' in this particular situation.*"

These are not separate stages but they all form the one reality called conscience, they are innate in the one act of decision. While synderesis is innate to every person, moral conscience is practical in the sense that it is one's efforts to distinguish, sift and classify things according to the value involved. It is here that the outsiders are called in for consultation and convention as the Zulus say '*injobo ithungwe, inyathi ibuzwe* (the dancing gab, and the where abouts of the buffalo are enquired). Here the histories and experiences of the people are taken into consideration. The third one, the conscience is also praxis. Now that the issue of choice is at stake, classifications have been done and conventions have been reached. The individual has to commit him/herself by acting out his/her findings. This is what is meant by 'an informed decision'.

If the individual chooses something against the findings of stage two, he/she has to give an explanation why. Why act "B" when everything says "A"? When the community has proven through its historical experiences that, to act "B" is to call disaster upon itself, nobody should be allowed to call death on it. This is a question of justice, in the sense of allowing one to choose and yet protecting others from the gross effects of that choice.

Every choice is a matter of life and death not just for the individual, but for the community as a whole.

" . . . *The fathers have eaten unripe grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (Ezekiel 18:2).

In this scriptural saying the sin of the fathers affects their offsprings, so it is the fathers that ought to be cautious of their deeds. In African thought this is reversed, or even qualified in the sense that not only the leaders, but the whole corporate body is responsible. The sin of the child affects the father as well, hence the child and its actions should be monitored as well.

2. I AM because WE ARE and I ACT as WE ACT.

Choices involve community consciousness. The individual's perception of moral conscience engages a constant check and balance of his/her choices against those of the community. The values earmarked in the second stage (moral conscience) are seen as not personal property. As such one's choices, have always to consider the consequent result in terms of the shared values. One has to act as he/she has been formed, informed, transformed and educated. The goals of stage two, are to form right thinking, educate the individuals in correct seeing which means that conscience is formed in community and draws upon many sources of moral wisdom. Right thinking and correct seeing lead to transformed action. One must always do what one has been taught to be the right thing to do.

Christians would urge one to do what one believes to be what God is calling him/her to do. While agreeing with this in principle, this dissertation would add that, God is part of the community. He calls everyone to do the right thing in the community, which He called to participation long before the individual ever was. In African thinking there is no such a thing as belief in isolation, beliefs are communal. Even to believe in God is a communal action. Rituals are not performed privately; to do so would quickly be called witchcraft.

If the emphasis is on what one believes, the question is: what is it that one believes, what are the values by which one wants to abide? Are they not the historically proven experiences of those who have gone before him/ her? If one has to do what God wants him/her to do, does God not become part of those historically proven experiences?

3. African Ethic in its Historical Perspective .

The Tswanas say: 'lefatse kela beng balone' (26) (the land belongs to its owners). These owners are not the living individuals, but those who lived before them, and are now buried in it. Therefore when the living claim it, they need to be cautious, since they are not claiming it as their right, but as the right of those whose representatives they are. If they win it back, they are bound to act on it as the rightful owners would have acted on it.

This perception affirms that individuals live in a world created by God and shaped by the experiences and conventions of the community of elders. The choices are therefore made within this context. In all practical appearances, actions are perceived as made by the individual. However he/she chooses them from the many prescribed ones. In this choice, one is guided by the community which is at the very centre. The position that the community occupies in relation to individual action is logically right, in view of the fact that, what one may choose can cause suffering. This is not just a disheartened interest in the individuals' ability to make decisions and choices. It is rather a matter of life and death because all depend on that particular choice.

This is the basic reason for the community to claim rights and obligations for monitoring individual choices. The community says as it were, 'it is your freedom, but remember that your freedom is part of our corporate freedom'. This is true in view of the fact that, actions are seen and judged in accordance with their effects on the life processes. If and when this responsibility is given to irresponsible persons it can cause irreparable damage to the ontological order.

"Human society in its clan or political organisation, is in fact likewise ordered in accordance with the principle of living forces, of their growth, their interaction and their hierarchy. The social order may be founded only on the ontological order, and a political setup which conflicted with this principle could never be received as consonant with the Bantu mind" (Tempels 1969 : 123).

4. The Characteristics of African Ethics.

4.1. As the Formator of Character.

When it is said 'to be is to belong' it is in fact deductively implied that, who the individual is, determines what he/she does. One's character is spelled out by what he/she acts. (It must always be borne in mind that while one has received one's character from God who created it, its formation (either as a positive or a negative value) is in the hands of the community, which has the task of educating its individuals how to actualise and articulate this God-given character.

This is what prompts moralists to examine the individual's moral behaviour against the initial context, not just the content of the said behaviour. The directing question that is asked is: 'what kind of persons is the community aiming at producing, by putting forward these ethical values?'

"While making a reasoned choice is indeed an important interest in the moral life, it is not the whole of morality, . . . the two fold range of interest of moral theology includes not only making moral decisions but also forming moral character. . . the formation of conscience will involve more than simply answering the practical moral question 'what ought I do?' It must also address the prior moral question, 'what sort of person ought I become'" (Gula 1989 : 137)?

The worst sin one can commit, is to discredit one's society, here represented by his/her family. When one does something exceptionally good, or bad for that matter, people always say

'we wish to see his/her parents'. This poses great concerns to the person of whom this is said. Perhaps there is something wrong that he/she may have done and people want to assess it in terms of his/her mother, if not the family as a whole. One's character may have been so strange that it causes people to scrutinise his/her background. In this case the classical Latin phrase: 'agere sequitur esse' (27) (action follows being) becomes true.

"The underlying philosophical basis of value judgement being that HUMAN BEINGS ARE WHAT THEY DO,. . . The person with full 'OBUNTU' is consequently esteemed as the ideal, authentic, complete, blessed, good, loving, godly and 'perfect human being. Africans being action-oriented, tend to think that a person is what he/she does. . . As a result, the greatest compliment a person or the society can pay to an individual is to call him or her GOOD" (Twesigye1987:110)

It is because of who people are that they are expected to act such and such. Action follows being. One has first to establish his/her place in the community, and then act accordingly. This is one of the reasons for classifying actions and their consequences according to the position one holds in the hierarchy. The consequent results thereof are benevolent or malevolent to the community in accordance with the weight which that person exacts because of his/her position. The content of the action of a chief (though physically and empirically the same) is not to be interpreted as the same with that of a commoner, so are the consequent results.

When Gula (1989:131) says that: "*conscience is formed in consultation and dialogue with several moral wisdoms*", the

African accepts, but adds that these moral wisdoms are the communal values that have formed the character, through the processes of humanisation, actualisation and socialisation.

" Therefore, the community on behalf of the wider society, undertakes the duty of turning the infant into a viable, responsible, well-humanised individual. . . It also means the acquisition of humane normative principles for responsible decision making and action (Obuntu) in the context of the felt common good and the total community" (Twesigye 1987:111)

The individual is the personification of the community; he/she is contained in the community as it is contained in him/her. One lives the content of the community's historical experiences. As one holds life in trusteeship he/she cannot live it out of context. He/she is a microcosm of the community, which he/she represents always and everywhere.

What is happening to the individual has happened to the community before him, or her. 'Akwehlanga lungehlanga' (28) (what has fallen has already fallen before). Zulus use this phrase to console someone who is perturbed by the death of a loved one. Another phrase 'akuqali ngawe inhlala yenzeka' (29) (it is not the first time this happens, it has happened to someone before) used to encourage a person who has been disappointed, is actually saying 'do not kill yourself about it, it happens always and no one has died so far'.

4.2. MY Community sees through ME!

Gula (1989:138) maintains that:

"Moral choices are not made in a vacuum. They are made by people who see the world in a certain way because they have become particular sorts of people."

One may be called to make a decision and to act now. The warning here is that, one ought to be careful and consult others who may have been faced by the same problem. Consulting them has the advantage of not repeating their mistakes, or in the case where they succeeded, to follow the course they took. This is the practical meaning of 'inyathi ibuzwa kwaba phambili' (53) (the whereabouts of the buffalo you are chasing are known by those in the front). This is where the issue of dialogue and consultation comes in. One needs to consult in order to focus his/her manner of seeing things. No doubt the community's way of seeing becomes part of this focus. This is so true that one ends up saying, I see, rather not I, but my community sees through me. Vision is a community achievement and it is prior to choice in the moral life. One's vision must of necessity include the community in the choice, because the world that one sees and is about to decide and act upon, was neither created nor shaped by his/her experiences alone.

" . . . the vision we acquire is in part the result of internalising the beliefs and values, causes and loyalties of the community which make up our environment. Our vision is almost wholly dependent on our relationships, on the world in which we live, and on the commitment we have made" (Gula 1989:142).

Is the view of the community presented here, so sacrosanct in the formation of conscience and character? Does this not ignore or underscore the influence of the other world views that a person meets with? What about the case of inculturation and of the plurality of cultures with which people live?

Notwithstanding the truth of Africa's participation in and with her neighbouring nations and cultures, the community is there to practically guard its individuals against wrong influence and help them to moderate even the good ones to fit Africa's taste. It does so by imprinting at a very early age the code of conduct, which its youth has to consult in conflicting situations. Here comes in the significance of the question 'umphakathi uthini?' (what does the community say?) In conflicting situations this becomes the conscience and the guide, or point of reference.

Just as a matter of emphasis let us consider what Nyasani (1991:58) has to say in the issue of 'MY COMMUNITY *being* MY CONSCIENCE AND GUIDE'.

"... my ideas, my motives, in general all my actions, deeds and omissions are mine only when and as long as they are still inchoate. Their realisation however is invariably brought about by subjecting them to the community yardstick, . . . They become real and manifest only after undergoing thorough sifting and scrutiny through the general conscience, . . . (one) will always reason thus: what will the public say after my accomplishing such and such an action; and hardly what shall I say to myself after doing such and such a thing? "

4.3. The Anthropocentric Nature of African Ethics.

There has always been dissatisfaction about the fact that God is never a topic in Africa. He is neither the center of, nor is He the pinnacle of ritual activities. If things are taken for granted this dissertation may end up provoking the same dissatisfaction.

The reason for this 'seeming' disregard of God in African deliberations, comes from the general concepts of God as transcendent, in that, He does not mingle in human affairs unnecessarily. He has left everything to his representatives the ancestors and human leaders. If God is at all present in the world, He is so, through the life He generated and continues to generate through the elders the proto-ancestral spirits. It is this life of God immanent in everything that must be safeguarded. It is through this life that He constitutes the ontological order.

God as the Divine reality is experienced not as outside the self but as penetrating it. This is what is to be understood about the term 'omnipresent'. To allay any misunderstanding about the place of God in African ethics Bujo (1990:49) says:

"We consider today that Bantu ethics as long as they do not depart from belief in god, are fundamentally anthropocentric. Black Africans generally see evil as coming from humans and not from God, which causes morality to be seen horizontally, i.e. in a relationship between humans. . ."

God is the Holy and wholly other, and therefore His honour

and integrity must be safe guarded. Anything that one says about God always falls short of the whole truth. God is, ... plus. Nothing can be affirmed about Him since He does not appear in dreams as ancestors do. Berglund (1976:42) puts it thus:

"It would be bad manners to talk about Him as though He was one of our equals."

The anthropocentric nature of the African morality stems from it being praxis oriented. This praxis is tangibly experienced in the human interactions and relationships. The other person or thing is a necessity for common living, for sharing the joys and sorrows. It is in relating to others that one can be judged as to whether he/she is pro, or anti life. Thus it is within humanity that one can talk about things ethical, which is the reason for the said anthropocentricity in African ethics. Another central theme in the discourse of anthropocentricity is that of people's perception of themselves as being the center of all activity in the world. This perception comes as a result of the assertion that humans are the only ones in the known world who successfully engage in the reflective processes, and as such they are the only ones responsible for giving meaning, order and articulation to the realities upon and about which they reflect.

4.4. The Salvific Nature of African Morality.

As mentioned in the general introduction, the main preoccupation here, is the maintenance and salvaging of the life processes. All action is directed towards this goal. The morality and value of anything is measured against its relation to life. If anything is perceived as destructive to the life processes, salvific actions are quickly engaged into in order to counteract or even to minimise its consequential effects.

The deceased and elders are venerated because, they are the proper custodians of life. The living look to them as models, who can teach them the methods of how to master the tasks of life. They are the proto-ancestral life powers. Their preoccupation with life even as they lived here on earth, as parents and leaders was that of saving their subjects from the plight of the many enemies of the life processes. It is obvious that salvation proper belongs to them. The living can gain it by entreating them through rituals, prayers and actions particular to the help they require. The corporate wisdom of the ancestors and elders in this sense becomes the point of reference in the choices and decisions people have to make. Bujo (1990:81) maintains that the wisdom of the ancestors and elders acquires a sacramental meaning.

"Their wisdom turns into a veritable sacrament which helps us discover the meaning of our history, to the effect that the past, in which we are rooted, becomes a means of salvation in our present and future: so much so that we must rightly claim that our salvation has its roots and foundation in our past."

4.5. The Theological Nature of The African Ethics.

It has been repeatedly insisted in this deliberation, that human beings, in their efforts to maintain and preserve life, are fulfilling their divine role as co-creators and as co-redeemers with God.

"Omuntu participates in Ruhanga's divine intelligence and skill of creativity. . . God has mercifully and gratuitously given these qualities as gifts to human beings (Abantu) so that they would participate in His divine nature and become His intelligent and responsible representatives" (Twesisigye 1987 : 107).

In all that human beings do, there is a constant consciousness that it is in God's world and it is as God's creatures that they live and work. The discussion of the Nguni proverbs specifically put emphasis on the importance of consultation. The proto-ancestral spirits and elders are the objects of this consultation. God as the creator and sustainer of the created world knows everything about his creation. He is therefore the primary source of all the information. The ancestral spirits obviously give direction in God's name.

When one actualises oneself in the God-given world, he/she is, in all ways possible trying to fulfill, first and foremost God's wishes and desires. This is why, when the three stages of humanisation were discussed, the stage of creation was first in the chronological order. This is the stage where God creates and endows the individual with the necessary attributes and potentials. It is these attributes and potentials

that the individual (through the help of the community) identifies and develops as his/her vocation. The success, or failure to realise these attributes and potentials, is the basis on which the individual is to be judged as to whether he/she can be elevated to the level of proto-ancestral spirits. In this way he/she is appointed and accommodated as God's full partner, a co-creator and savior. In this way God is indeed present in all the stages of man and woman's development and fulfillment.

4.6. The Religious Nature of African Ethics.

In the African world view one cannot discuss any aspect of life without inevitably ending up with religious assumptions. This is so, because, the universe is a religious place and to be, is to be religious. Obiechina says:

"Whether in their folklore and mythology, in their symbolism and figures of language, in their religious and magical beliefs they (the African people) have a total view of the universe as a continuum and a perpetual flow of being and experience comprehending the visible and the invisible universe, the world of nature and the supernatural, and of the living the dead" (in Onwubiko 1991 : 4).

Religion is associated with society and its growth. It is a system through which people aim at adjusting their lives to the environment. It amounts to daily activities and thus it affects human behaviour. Religion is said to be pointing to man/woman's response to what is Ultimate. As a response it is actions and thus falls within the ambit of ethics.

Emphasis have been placed here on the importance of being born into a corporate body. It is within this corporate body, that religion as a phenomenon operates and the community inevitably does not operate outside religion. So, in this conception, one is born into a religion. One is born, lives, participates, dies and is reincarnated religiously.

5. Practical Applications.

Since it is the contention of this dissertation that conscience is community bound, the aim here is to examine and analyse this theme in concrete life. Four areas have been randomly earmarked for consideration. The proposal is to discuss briefly the ethical implications of marriage, authority, work and violence as study cases to support the contention.

5.1. Marriage.

In African societies, the process of earthly growth culminates in marriage as the institution which ensures the prolongation, nurturing and preservation of life. There are strict rules and norms which the community has put in place, to guard against any possibility of ritual pollution within this institution. When the young person announces his/her intentions to marry, the family sets out to check the social

status of the spouse and his/her family. Also the family elders check whether there is no possibility of consanguinity with the proposed spouse. They check also for scandals such as, witchcraft and allegation of sorcery on the part of the proposed spouse. It must be ascertained that there is nothing in this sacred fountain of life that will hinder life. Only after having scrutinised everything will the elders approve of the marriage.

5.1.1. Arranged Marriages: The Role played by the Community.

" In many cases marriages are arranged by the parents without consulting the wishes of the person actually entering into relationship of man and wife. The custom of so arranging marriages is known as 'ukwendisa'" (Marwick 1940:95).

The custom of 'ukwendisa' (giving in marriage) can be done for varied reasons. It can for example, be arranged by the father of the girl to obtain cattle so as to pay his debt. The girl may be promised in marriage to the creditor as satisfaction of the debt. The other instance of arranged marriages is that of establishing good relations between tribes, when a chief give his daughter in marriage to another chief. This concludes a peace pact between neighbouring chiefs.

Proper measures are to be followed in the process of integrating the two families, clans or tribes into marriage. It must be remembered that in the African world view, it is not individuals who engage in marital contracts, but families.

Matrimony is never a private or personal matter.

Marriage involves not just the marrying partners. Through the exchange of cattle (the property of the ancestors) the ritual killing especially of the 'indlakudla' (30) (a beast slaughtered in honour of the groom by the bride's people and vice-versa.) This symbolises that the two families have become one and as such they can share at table respectively.

The gall bladders of these slaughtered beasts are ritually sprinkled on the groom at the bride's home as on the bride at the groom's home. This symbolically shows the spiritual bond into which the two parties are entering. Pacts and agreements are made in other areas as well. For example the two clans or tribes that have intermarried should not wage war on each other. In the event of one chief being engaged in battle by another, the one who is in matrimonial contract with him is duty bound to assist him both militarily and otherwise. The two tribes (and not just the marrying couple) become one. Expounding on the issue of polygamy Kitembo et al (1977:71) say:

" We have already noticed that one of the characteristics of polygamy is to create multiple alliances with different families. In many African societies a special social bond is created between parents-in-law by the marriage of their children to one another and there are specific ways of referring to this relationship. Polygamy creates larger and more complex affinal network which have a stabilising effect on the institution of marriage."

5.1.2. The Ethical aspect of Matrimony.

The morality of marriage can be deduced from the part it plays in establishing peace through creating stable relationships. It forms a larger community between the groups that otherwise would be antagonistic. It also strengthens the chance to better participation, in line with the African saying : 'To be is to participate'. Ilogu (1974:29) says:

"Two families are linked together in a kind of brotherly relationship, when a boy and a girl from these two families get married. Because of the system of exogamy and polygamy large numbers of clans and lineages are in this way united for mutual assistance, defense and trade."

It is for this reason that, marriage is strictly guided and guarded by the community as one of its basic values.

5.1.3. Marriage as a Pro-life Institution.

Marriage is also founded on the principle of life in that Africans see it mostly as the custodian of all human life. Childless marriages are therefore lifeless. The one who dies before he/she procreates is really dead as far as the community and its building processes are concerned.

"Thus, a man who dies without progeny falls, in a way, into oblivion. In some traditions a piece of charcoal is put into his mouth to indicate that the fire of life had died out. Procreation is thus a question not only of individual survival, but also of community survival." (Bujo 1990 : 108).

If it is agreed that marriage is the normal locus for life, and that life is a communal value, then it must be deductively agreed also that such a locus for life, should also be seen as a communal property and enjoy its protection.

'Ukuzala ukuzelula' (31) (to procreate is to stretch yourself) so exclaims the Nguni parent when his/her child does something worth praising. Through one's daughters marrying into, and one's sons taking in marriage the daughters of, other families, clans and tribes, one's chances of relating are increased. Again, should one's children's marriage become fruitful, the life of one's community is prolonged and ensured for generations to come.

Inter-marriages strengthen the bond between families, clans and tribes in a deeper sense. Giving one's daughters and sons in whatever form, is tantamount to giving one's life. As his/her offsprings they contain the life he/she shared with them through propagation. So, the African families, clans and tribes mutually give their dear lives to each other in marriage. The bride's people give their life through their daughter as the groom's people through their son.

5.1.4. The Moral Implications on the Married Couples.

In this world view, there is no bigger shame than when the wife leaves her husband, or when the husband chases his wife away. In the case where the daughter does come home, her fa-

mily try their best to send her back. If they fail then the lobola cattle have to be returned back to the groom's people. To avoid divorce on account of barrenness on the part of the woman, her sister is given over as 'inhlanti' (a Swazi word for subsidiary wife) to the husband so as to raise children for her barren sister. This is also done if the wife dies without leaving children to the husband.

It is strongly believed that in contracting marriages the ancestors of the two families, clans and tribes, are united as witnesses of the new relationship entered into by their descendants. After all the ritual nitty-gritties have been done, neither the individual married person nor even the couple can ever decide on their own to break the bond.

Acknowledging the public nature of the ceremonies surrounding their marriage and fearing to dishonour their communities the couple strive to be stable in their marital status. If they were to disregard the wishes of the community, they know that they would incur the wrath of the ancestors on themselves as individuals and worst on the community at large. In this presentation the conclusion is obvious. If one depends on the opinion of his/her community in matters of marriage, then obviously the community sets the tone for what one chooses. This is even more the case where marriages are arranged. In the issues of marriage, then one's community is his/her conscience and guide.

5.2. Authority.

In the African understanding, positions are for service. Any person vested with authority, can hold the position as long as he/she is able to fulfill the duties pertaining to that position. The custom of 'killing the spirit' is a proof of this. Even in the spirit world, if one is perceived as not serving the interests of the community, or as having turned against it to the extent that, he/she has become anti-social, he/she should be destroyed. Onwubiko (1991: 85) reporting on this custom of killing the spirit says:

" This is done when the community is sure that the spirit has become so powerless in protecting them, or has become so obnoxious that it turns out to fight the community. In turn the people destroy such spirits."

We have the custom of 'ukuvala umoya omubi' (32) (to block the bad spirit) in South Africa for the same purpose as above. This stands to prove that when one fails to fulfill the duties of his/her position, or performs something opposed to it, then the community has the right to depose him/her. The Zulus have a saying to stress this, 'inkosi yinkosi ngabantu bayo' (33) (a king is such because of the will of the people). A king or chief who is no longer perceived as serving the will of his subjects, is de-posed or even assassinated. The responsibility that a person holds reveals the type of 'ubuntu' (humaneness) he/she is expected to manifest. A person in authority is expected to offer more by way of personal influence, power and example.

This ethic gives pride of place to duties rather than to rights. This does not mean that rights have no place in African ethics. On the contrary, the duties stressed are for the maintenance of the rights of members. Positions are for benevolent dictators but they check against any form of destructive dictatorship. The expression 'indlovu edl'abasondezeli' (34) (the elephant that eats its feeders) expresses that the leader may become engrossed in the power given to him/her and forgets the needs and rights of the people. In this way, he has become a tyrant and a dictator 'undlovu kayiphikiswa' (35) (the elephant whose authority is never questioned) or 'umlomo ungathethi'manga' (36) (the mouth that never lies). The people have ways to deal with this, since authority has its own moral code. The community is as prescriptive for the one in authority as it is for all the other members. When it notices that its leader has forgotten and does not live according to this code, the community tries to call him/her to order through the counselors and elders. This failing the leader is deposed or even assassinated.

The kings, chiefs, headmen and even the fathers as the *pater familias* are symbols of the corporate unity of the groups they lead. They are respectively central figures in the process of nation, tribe, village and family building. This centrality of the leader as the symbol of unity does not allow him/her therefore to choose, or affiliate to any one

particular way of life other than that acknowledged by his/her subjects. Such actions would divide his/her people. He/she has to embrace all the values that his/her people stand for, thus he/she avoids prejudicing anybody and being prejudiced by anybody. Authority, like all other values is held in proxy for the community. It is the community that dictates to whom authority has to be given, the terms of staying in power and processes of how power must be used. There are laws governing this, such as the laws governing heredity. One may be older according to chronological birth order, but he may not be eligible for the position of being the heir. This is evidenced by the Nguni custom, whereby the sons born of the other wives, cannot be heirs to the throne. In the case where the king or chief decides to marry a princess (even years after he married the other wives) her son takes precedence over the sons of the other wives, because she is of royal blood. The Zulu expression 'iphinge endlunkulu' (37) meaning that she being of royal descent, her issue is royalty and can never be commanded by commoners.

In conclusion it can be said that even those in authority are subject to the whims of the communities, whose rights they are installed to preserve. They have to be conscientiously conscious that they hold the power for the people. 'inkosi yinkosi ngabantu' (a king is a king because of the people). This goes well with the saying: 'UMUNTU NGUMUNTU NGABANYE ABANTU'. Whatever position one may hold others are necessary.

5.3. Work

The morality of work has, as all the other, to be seen in relation to the preservation of life. Its creativity is to be seen in the light of community building. Work is seen as the actualisation of one's potentials and attributes as a co-creator and a co-redeemer with God. The basic aim of work is the taming, transformation and in certain instances the recreation of the environment by labour. In this way humans make it a hospitable milieu for human life and for the other creatures that depend on humanity for survival. For this reason the community has to monitor the processes of work. No one person's work should lead to the destruction of the life processes of another. Theft and the destruction of another's property and of nature, constitute a serious offence.

There are many expressions about the importance of work in the process of growth and development. Examples of such expressions are 'kubamba ezingelayo' (38) (only a hunting dog catches its prey) figuratively meaning that, if one does not work he/she will starve, 'akukhonkwali ephandela enye' (39) no one must expect others to work for him/her, 'isihlali sidla amajwabu' (40) (the one who stays behind eats lean meat) or 'imbila yeswela umsila ngokuyalezela' (41) (the rock rabbit has no tail because it sent others). All these caution people to stand up and do things for themselves.

Though Africans are praised for their hospitality and generosity, it is all the same taken for granted that one should earn his/her livelihood through labour. Laziness is shameful, those who engage in it are ridiculed as 'amavila' (lazy people).

Every one wants to be associated with those who through their labour have achieved many material commodities. In choosing wives African men look for those girls who have been trained to maintain a home. Girls also look for men who can prove through their possessions that they are able to maintain a family, 'ubuhle bendoda yizinkomo zayo' (the man's beauty is his cattle). In marriage, people are more particular about the ability to work, than they are about physical appearance.

There is great emphasis on communal activity, which is expressed in such activities as the 'ilima' (42) (working in the fields together) 'isishongo' (43) (collecting fire wood together) 'inqina' (44) (hunting together) and many such actions, as to involve the community. There are also many rituals that emphasise the importance of community work, the umhlanga ceremony is one such ritual. Many of the works done in the royal house are communal. There is a Zulu expression that shows the importance of sharing the work, 'akudlulwa ngendlu yakhiwa' (45) (you must not just pass by when others are putting up a building). It is clear that work is directed by the community. At a very early age the youths are taught all the esse-

ntials of work, to ensure their creative participation and contribution to the well-being of the community. Girls are prepared for the tasks they will do as wives and mothers. The boys are prepared for their duties as husbands and fathers. 'uyowakha kanjani umuzi' (46) is the question asked to lazy daughters, or sons as an incentive to them to learn to work.

5.4. VIOLENCE.

Africans generally hate violence in all its forms. Against physical violence the Zulus have this proverb 'induku ayi-wakhi umuzi' (47) (the stick never builds a home). This is said by Zulus to one who constantly hits his wife and children. Even if violence is only verbal the people avoid it. A person who uses bad language is said to have a rotten mouth. For example if one says a bad word against another, he/she must be punished, because bad words can bring harm to another in the form of a curse and evil spells. Bad thoughts are also to be confessed because they diminish the integrity and the life of the one against whom they are directed.

The Nguni words for fighting 'ukulwa' (48) has the same stem as *isilwane* (a beast). The Sotho word is even more direct 'holwana' (to fight, to act like a beast). The Zulu word for war is 'impi' (49) from the same stem as 'imbi' a word describing a bad thing. The Xhosa word for war is 'imfazwe' (50) stemming from 'ukufa' (death) 'izwe' (nation).

Naturally no sensible person enjoys turning into an *isilwane* (a beast). No one likes to engage in a bad thing (*impi*) or in activities that are characterised as bringing death (*imfazwe*) upon the nation.

To prove that war and violence affects the character of the individuals 'ukulwa kubenza izilwani' (war turns people into beasts) one has to think of the ritual activities into which the nation engages in preparation for the contemplated war. The armies have to be ritually transformed through ritual medicine, into angry and ruthless animals. At the end of the war, the army has to be cleansed. If this is not done, they will carry on the fighting spirit to their homes, and there will be lots of in-fighting even among themselves as neighbours. Their animalistic behaviour will continue even within their village.

" Arrived in the camp (from the war expedition) the captain called upon all such (izingwazi, or izinxeleha that is those who had killed) forth with to fortify themselves (ukuqungqa) against all evil consequences. . . the whole procedure having the effect of cleansing them . . . The warriors were now adjudged sufficiently 'clean to re-don their girdles and penis covers and sufficiently safe to venture in the presence of his majesty. . ." (Bryant 1949 : 507).

It is surprising, that even when in principle, Africans hate violence, they seem to engage in it so easily. At the look of things it seems that they enjoy it. On the other hand, every thing would suggest that they do not. What father or mother enjoys the death of his/her son. It would seem that war and violence are acceptable only in the event of protecting the

community and its values. For this, everything even the self must be sacrificed. The African conceives him/herself as the property of the king, or the one in the lead. As a result of this he conceives himself as always at the service of his leader, the sole custodian of the community values. The example of this is the attitude of the Zulu nation some months before the elections of 1994 in South Africa. As long as the leaders, said no voting in Kwazulu/ Natal, there was to be no voting in the region. However when the leaders almost overnight decided that people should vote, it was agreed to by every body. Follow the leader is the rule.

CHAPTER FOUR. CONCLUSION.

This research has placed humanity at the center of the universe as co-creator and co-redeemer with God. Now it is appropriate, to consider the final and general implications this involves. It will also be the task of this thesis to show, how the African point of view can assist in rendering the world a safer place for humanity and its values.

All along, this research has presented the view that human nature is not a finished product. By saying that 'ubuntu' (humaneness) is a process of humanisation, socialisation and actualisation, it was implied that the process itself is continuous. This becomes so true when it is seen in the light of ubuntu (human beings) still being born and as such constantly being engaged in these 'ubuntu' (humaneness) processes. Human nature therefore is ever necessarily open to the future, regularly seeking ways of how better to actualise its possibilities.

This is an important assumption, based on the claim that humanity bears the image of God. It firstly alerts us to the dignity of human beings. It is a dignity which is rooted in them being the images of God the creator; a dignity that gives them the privilege of organising earthly life and making the planet habitable, by acknowledging fellow creatures as brothers and sisters. Secondly it teaches us that God as a

living being is essentially dynamic and therefore open to newer ways of articulating himself.

"Humanity is placed in the creation not only to be directed, but also to direct in their turn. . . Their position in the world is not one of 'achieved being', but one of a 'being constrained to and in process of 'self-achievement' To deny this characteristic would be the negation of the human creature's self-realisation" (Bujo 1990 : 19).

The foregoing excursion has explored the different pathways, which people take to highlight their participation in the divine nature. These pathways have been spelt out as the preservation of life and the maintenance of community through solidarity. It has been insisted that it is within these that morality can be discussed in an Afro-centric consideration.

By way of wrapping up, it may be necessary to revisit these pathways and to somewhat moderate and improve on them, thus making them usable in modern situations.

1. Respect and Preservation of Life.

Respect and preservation of life is indeed the super value in the African global consciousness and conscientiousness. Acknowledging that life is the common denominator, the African keeps all doors open for the rights and legitimate interests of his/her fellow beings. As a consequence to this, his/her conscience is never allowed to be egoistic. Since all creatures are believed to possess a life of their own, the African maintains a controlled policy of live and let live.

This attitude towards life, if well introduced in our modern societies, could dramatically help in restoring the dignity of human life especially against the exponents of abortion and euthanasia. It can also help in the effort to save the lives of lesser creatures that is so degraded and endangered in the wake of modern science and technology.

The triangular movement of life as presented by the African thought, calls for respect and care towards the other creatures with which humanity shares the world resources. This respect and care is not just a matter of courtesy and love. It is a must in the sense that were the other creatures to die humanity would also die. God has gratuitously shared his life with the community of all his creatures and He meant it to be shared equally. If humanity takes the lead in monitoring the life processes then it is as stewards that they do so.

The individuals who receive it ought to be instructed by the community as to how to utilise it constructively within the community for God. Vital issues affect the other creatures as well. As part of the life-sharing community the other creatures have a say. Though they do not verbalise their instructions as to how the life process should be dealt with, they nevertheless do so indirectly, in the sense that without them for example the ecosystem is not balanced.

Since life is a common denominator for all, it really does not matter where one disturbs it. The truth about it is that, if and when it is disturbed, all who depend on it suffer. When the ecologists plead for the salvation of the rain forests for example, they do so for better reasons than just the beauty of trees. They are registering their concern and that of a number of other creatures that depend on them for their lives. Life is like a bomb which if mishandled, may cause harm and even death to many. It is for this reason that great caution ought to be taken to monitor the life processes.

It must be remembered that the African does not attribute life only to the living organisms. Everything is alive and able to participate meaningfully in the processes of being. In African thought pattern not only human life is divine, but all life. What many people regard as totemism in Africa, is actually the African acknowledgment of the divine presence in the totality of life. This approach holds all life in high esteem and respect in such a way that ecology and nature conservation can easily be seen as religious activities. It is God's life that creatures share. In all its forms life as a divine gift must be cherished, respected and cared for.

This holistic outlook at life can be a great contribution to our modern society, because there can be no discrimination of one life by another. Unborn babies will be seen as assets for the maintenance of the community. They will be seen in terms

of prolonging and keeping the family name going. The aged also will be valued for their ability in directing and controlling the community and preserving national assets. This can help modern society to rediscover the value of human life.

The practical lesson to be learned in this, is that civilisation and modernity should go hand in hand with greater humanity. African politics also should be aimed at consolidating these human values. Mandela in one of his speeches is quoted as saying:

" . . . The African on the other side regards the universe as one composite whole an organic entity, progressively driving towards greater harmony and unity whose individual parts exist merely as interdependent aspects of one whole realising their fullest life in the corporate life, where communal contentment is the absolute measure of values." (IDAF 1986: 12).

Bujo (1990:52) a theologian maintains the same view when he says:

"Even in an Africa becoming rapidly industrialised and modern, we must not loose sight of the values of family, community and clan solidarity which cover all the material and moral needs of their members."

The presentation of the African view of humanity should however not be idolised to a point where people are blinded of the negative trends found in it. Stress on communitarianism, hospitality and generosity may for instance exhaust the goodness to be found in the obligation of charity and lead to exploitation and parasitism.

In their consideration for the value of life, especially human life (though Africans are protective) there are still problems. How does one reconcile the claim that, all life is divine when in practice some life ought to be destroyed? This is the case if murderers, thieves, sorcerers, deformed babies and twins are to be killed. This surely is a contradiction. If life is acclaimed as a sacred value and as a participation in God, then the community ought to defend it at all cost. To destroy it should be considered a direct attack on Him whose gift it is.

The whole area of fertility also needs to be re examined. Can it be a norm that people should be considered to be human, only when they can reproduce? The African will have to accept that fertility is not an absolute value. Again even in the case where marriages are fertile it is the very respect for life that scrutinises the ability of the parents to take care and nurture the life they bring forth. If '*ubuntu*' entails maturity and responsibility, then responsible parenthood ought to be in its agenda. It is important that marriages and women, should not be regarded as limitless child producing tools.

2. Community Through Solidarity.

The African consideration of the welfare of the community is something to be highlighted especially in view of the individualistic and egoistic attitudes of the modern times. With its absolutisation of privatisation, our times deny the responsibility of being their brothers's and sisters' keepers. The world where life is highly revered cannot fold hands when half of its community is enveloped in disgusting poverty.

" The African of today will on the contrary adhere to his/her anthropocentrism which requires that life be respected. Accordingly, everything which contributes to a fuller and to an increase of life, including material property, will have to be treated equally with respect" (Bujo 1990:57).

The African view on communitarianism is a very good insurance for the disadvantaged. If kings, or chiefs (now represented by governments) as the owners of all property, were sincerely and justly to monitor the accumulation and distribution of wealth, the weight of poverty and starvation would be minimised. The rate of crime that is now so high, would also drop drastically. However this view is also not to be over beatified. With its good points, this system in principle allows no one to own property, an issue that cannot be entertained in the new democratic dispensation. This custom would make the chief individually to possess the most powerful weapon by which to exploit the poor. It further scorns the importance of private ownership, which has been proven to be an important incentive for labour and for productivity.

Sometimes well-meaning leaders, if scrutinised with the modern understanding of democracy, can be guilty of misappropriating their powers. A typical example of this is the speech of the South African President, in the Province of Kwazulu/Natal, where he is quoted to have said, he will withdraw financial support from that region. This is very African in essence. As the leader all property and the power to dispose thereof belongs to him.

It is very interesting to note that the African people themselves did not take this as a matter of course as they would have done a century ago. This shows that they have learned from past experience that leaving all the power with a single person leads to untold abuse.

The public criticisms of the President's claims were proofs that people know their rights as citizens. They wish to be recognised as co-owners of the wealth that they have through their labour contributed to accumulate. The government as an institution has no power, no wealth and no law apart from that with which the people vested it.

3. The Community, The Conscience.

This dissertation initially sets out to prove that in vital issues, the community is the vanguard of the processes of life. In this line of thought, of the many African values to

be shared with the world, the idea of community monitoring individuals is very important. Individualism has destroyed our planet. Unless strong measures are taken to combat this, life will be annihilated. In the wake of nuclear weapons and chemical production, it can take one person to destroy all of humanity's creative and redemptive efforts. This should be reason enough for empowering the world community to monitor, shape and guide individual nations' actions .

Technology and science are indeed the greatest achievements that humanity as co-creators and co-redeemers with God has made. No doubt as a result thereof, our world is now a much better place for life. Be it as it may, who does not see the problems in the world, when these same technological and scientific achievements are left with egoistic individuals? As a community, humanity, needs to be in control of its vital destiny by making laws and enforcing them, even if those contravene individual autonomy.

This dissertation is in no way guilty of tarnishing the place, the integrity and the freedom of the individual. By over stressing the importance of the community, it helps the individual to rediscover the purpose of his/her creation by God and to reestablish his/her significant place in the community.

When a person is born he/she is given a name that spells him/her as an independent person. This name in most cases designates his/her responsibility in the community. It is when one lives in line with this designated responsibility that one is said to have realised oneself and is recognised by the community as an individual and thus does not become submerged in society.

"the name expresses something of the essence of the person. It characterises the bearer in his, or her ontological reality. . . ." (Bujo 1990:96).

The issue at stake here is that one must constantly check one's rights and freedom against the corporate rights and freedom of the community. The emphasis is on being with other members, not in a collectivistic, but in participative and sharing sense.

The community as the conscience of its individuals makes sure that they interiorise and act out the norms and the ethos. There could be no action on the part of the individual without these affecting it. Any choice is a matter of life or death, with this in mind the members of the community must be guided in their exercise of the right to choose. They ought to be constantly reminded that their decision for good or for evil, will affect others. For this reason the community claims the right to direct and monitor the processes thereof.

No one must be allowed to diminish the life of the community. The Nguni speaking people would summarise this by the phrase 'ungabosinyela isihlala' (50) (one must never leave dirt under a tree because one day he/she will need the same tree for shelter).

The whole aspect of participation and eschatological communion comes in here. This is true if it denotes being with others in a face to face relationship. To succeed in life one needs the participative presence of others. The more we are, the better our chance to develop. 'Ukwanda kwaliwa umthakathi' (51) (only a witch is against the increase of people). Dead or alive the desire is to be with the other. In the African thought, bliss and heaven equals the perfection of communication and relationships within the hierarchy of being. All modes of being are affirmed and realised in being participative. I am because I participate and allow others to be on this participative level with me.

Part of this participation of the others in me is that they be allowed to influence me in the core of my being. And their influence should be taken seriously. The best I can do is to open up to them for the sole aim of forming community with them without reservation. This implies transparency on my part to the extent that all I do is not hidden from them and at all times I do what they have approved. This is what is meant by: 'My Community being My Conscience and Guide'.

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