

Tradition:

Fixed and mobile essays in Honour of Rev Prof Rodney Moss

Editors

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We also owe a debt of gratitude to those who contributed the articles which make up this book, and to the reviewers who made our task easier.

We appreciate the contribution of Prof. Graham Duncan who has written the Preface to this volume.

Editors:

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Preface

Prof. Graham Duncan

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It is quite appropriate that the vocation of Rodney Moss be recognised in the year of his retirement. From his ordination to the priesthood within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Durban in 1974, his ministry has been reflected in a constant series of step-ups. In his first step up, Rodney became Judicial Vicar 1984-2001, then Vice-Rector of St. Peter's Seminary 1987-1991, a visiting lecturer at St. Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara 1991-1997, and then Head of Theology at St. Augustine College of South Africa in 2002. He was also a visiting lecturer at St. John Vianney Seminary, Pretoria from 2003-2006. His calling has clearly been worked out within the field of theological and spiritual formation.

Fr. Rodney is currently a Professor Emeritus at St. Augustine College of South Africa at which he has taught Systematic Theology, Church History and Canon Law for over 10 years, at both post-graduate and undergraduate levels. Until recently he was the Head of the School of Theology and Philosophy, as well as the Director of the Theology Programme at St. Augustine College. Currently, his teaching duties are limited to the post-graduate level.

His academic qualifications are testimony to his vocation in the field of theological education: Natal Senior Teachers Diploma, BA (UNISA), BD (Urbanianum, Rome), BCL (St. Paul), MTheol and DTheo (Durban-Westville) (AP). His doctorate in systematic theology is in the field of the science/religion dialogue. He has published widely in the areas of Catholic doctrine, church history, ecumenism, inter-faith dialogue, and canon law. He is currently involved with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He is a member of the Theological Advisory Commission of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, President of the Canon Law Society of Southern Africa, an executive member of the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa, and a member of the Church History Society of South Africa. He has over the years been involved in many radio and

television presentations. Currently, his research interests include the thought of Benedict XVI, Origen, and Christianity and secularism.

Rodney's consistent gentle and sensitive approach to scholarship has won him many friends and admirers within the sphere of theological education, and it is only fitting that this be recognised in a tangible manner.

Introduction

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All the articles published in this *estschrift* have been subjected to a rigorous peer review process according to the required academic standard for the purpose of subsidy.

The Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa was founded in 1982 under the auspices of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. It has a number of aims: to link and support Catholic theologians and those interested in theological dialogue; to stimulate research and reflection; to examine topics which are relevant to the Southern African context; to promote theological exchange through the print and electronic media; to foster inter-faith contact with other Christian groups and other religions on theological issues; to encourage multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary theological discourse; and to encourage the publication of theological articles and books. The members of the Society have now been engaged in this challenging activity for over 30 years through the production of a number of publications, but especially through the Annual Conference which has, as can be seen below, tackled a number of topics which are vital for the church's life in this country. They take their cue from the teaching of Vatican II in the document *Gaudium et Spes* (GS):¹

With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word. In

¹ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth in greater advantage (GS 44).

One of the theologians who has made a considerable contribution to the study of theology, both in South Africa and internationally, is the Reverend Professor Rodney Moss. He has now retired from his post as Head of the School of Theology at St. Augustine College in Linden, Johannesburg. (Despite 'retiring' he continues his contribution to theological research and publishing.) Through his many contributions to the theological enterprise he has opened many doors to further study in a number of subjects, especially in the area of tradition and the development of doctrine. Our intention here is not to repeat what has been written about our confrere by Prof. Graham Duncan and Fr. Brian Southward. Rather, we wish to call to mind our own experience of working with Rodney as a member of the Catholic Theological Society, of which he has been a member for many years. This *Festschrift* is our way of honouring and thanking him for his tireless interest in things theological. It is also our way of using this opportunity to continue his work by making a further contribution to theology, which has always been a necessary part of the church's tradition.

At our Executive Committee meetings we always looked forward to Rodney's contributions, especially when we were making preparations for our Annual Conference. While suggestions for themes and subjects for a future conference were being bandied about, he would sit there quietly and one could almost see on his face the wheels turning. While he was listening to the rest of us, he was putting these ideas together and then would eventually regurgitate them in a smart phrase which disciplined our chattering and moved us on constructively.

Rodney's contribution also helped us in the Society to follow the guidance of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Donum Veritatis* (DV).² This document was prepared by the then Cardinal Ratzinger and is an encouragement to all those who wish to seek to understand what they believe. 'Theology is indispensable for the church', the author writes, and even more important 'in times of great spiritual and cultural change' (DV 1) which we are certainly

² The Gift of Truth: On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian.

going through in South Africa. 'It is the task of the theologian to 'dutifully present the reasonableness of the faith to those who ask for an account of it' (1 Pet 3:15; DV 5). This, the Society's members have attempted to do throughout the Society's existence. In the last decade, for example, we have tackled subjects such as *HIV/AIDS* (2003), *Priesthood in the Catholic Church* (2004), *Sexuality* (2005), *Leadership within the Church* (2006), *The Church without the Eucharist?* (2007), *Our Catholic Heritage* (2008), *The Franciscan Theological Tradition* (2009), *'Eat the Scroll': Insights into Scripture* (2010), *Faith in the Face of Secularism* (2011), and *The Council's Legacy* (2012).³ The conferences in 2003 and 2011 were held in collaboration with St. Augustine College.⁴ The Society also participated in the ecumenical Joint Conference of Theological Societies in Stellenbosch in 2009 and in Pietermaritzburg in 2012. Sixteen theological Societies took part in these conferences and our Society was represented by a goodly number of Catholic theologians.

Through these conferences we have 'pursued in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired scriptures and handed on by the living tradition of the church' (DV 6). The many theologians who have addressed the delegates attending these meetings have searched the scriptures and dug into our tradition in order to relate our rich Catholic heritage to contemporary problems. The oft quoted opening words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* have been born anew as one existential issue after another has been dissected and analysed theologically in order to find meaning for people of today:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. ... That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (GS 1).

³ The proceedings of five of these conferences can be found in issues of *Grace and Truth*. See the References at the end of this Introduction.

⁴ A full list of presentations and their authors for the past ten years can be found at the back of this book.

To pursue such a vocation, which is essential if the church is to remain relevant to the people of our time, requires that we live and work in dialogue, that we understand and practise the art of communication (using the latest technology as far as possible), and that we never turn our backs on the issues which leave so many people in our nation impoverished and powerless to change their lives. If we are to tackle the immense social problems that face us it is essential that we find a *modus vivendi* within the church itself. What we proclaim to others we must be already practising among ourselves. Once again, Vatican II points the way:

Such a mission to [enlighten the whole world] requires us first of all to create in the church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one people of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful. For the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them: let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything (GS 92).

The latter words in the above paragraph come from Pope John XXIII who ushered in the first *pastoral* Ecumenical Council. He did not want any more *anathemas* (condemnations of those who err from the truth), nor – despite heavy pressure on him from certain quarters – condemnations of ideologies, even that of Communism which was at that time a scourge in Eastern Europe, depriving people of their basic human rights and persecuting those who opposed the regime the people suffered under. Despite huge pressure from certain Arab states – and even from bishops living in those countries – he wanted to scrub away the anti-Semitism of centuries of Christian prejudice. Under his inspiration the bishops at the Council accepted that the church ‘rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions’ (*Nostra Aetate* 2).⁵ In these and many other ways John XXIII, an expert in church history, kept to the tradition of the Catholic Church, and yet at the same time caused a rupture from certain traditions which smacked of discrimi-

⁵ Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

nation among and intolerance of the other. As can be seen in his chapter, *The Living Tradition of the Church Fixed and Mobile*, Rodney follows the pope's example by showing how

Tradition in the Catholic understanding is an ongoing event in which the living faith is 'handed down' from generation to generation. Thus what may seem like innovation may be understood rather as the explication or development of tradition.

That chapter is a fine example of how a theologian, like Pope John XXIII, can hold on to the traditional teaching of the church which has come down to us throughout the centuries, and at the same time can bring the church up to date by discovering new ways of explaining ancient truths. In this regard, in his speech by which he ushered in the Second Council of the Vatican, good Pope John (as he was often called) made an important distinction which is vital for the vocation of theologians today: *The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another* (1962:5; italics added). In these words the pontiff gave a kind of *carte blanche* to the theologians who advised their bishops at the Council (many of whom in the 1950s had been banned from teaching by the Vatican curia, yet were personally invited to the Council by the Pope) to research the tradition of the church, in the light of the scriptures, and come up with a description of our faith (not definitions or dogmas) which could be meaningful to contemporary people. As a result the document on the church (*Lumen Gentium*) has as its basic image, not the hierarchy but the equality of all the baptised who form the people of God. The constitution on the liturgy was not about ritual and rubrics but was concerned that in every celebration *all* the faithful should be actively involved. Theologians persuaded the bishops that members of other Christian Churches need to be seen as 'separated brethren'. And so the list goes on.

Theologically, Pope John XXIII was persuading the bishops, and their *periti* (expert theologians) to regard tradition as an on-going process. We have inherited a rich tradition from centuries of Christian faith which has been lived out in words and deeds. It is the duty of theologians to imbibe that tradition (*traditio* means to 'pass on') and develop it. In this way they pass it on, further enriched, to the next

generation. Pope John's call for *aggiornamento* was an invitation to theologians to pull us out of the mire in which we might be stuck and bring the church up to date. To be relevant it is essential to speak the language which can be understood by contemporary people.

There is a third element, though, in this essential task of *traditio*: the role of the laity. In his chapter Rodney Moss, turning to the rich writing of Blessed Cardinal Henry Newman, points out that prophetic tradition – which theologians may regard as their particular domain – pertains *par excellence* to the laity because faith is primarily lived and only later formulated. It was for this reason that Newman regarded it appropriate to consult those who hold such a spiritual treasure of discernment in their Christian lives. As Rodney points out, Newman saw the role of the laity as an indispensable part in voicing the infallible teaching of the church.

Theologians clearly have no easy task. They need to steer between the guidance of the Magisterium and the manifestly lived belief of the laity. Subsequently they express in fresh language the ancient beliefs of the church. They are required to be steeped in a prayerful relationship with Christ, immersed in the scriptures and knowledgeable of the church's tradition. They investigate the church's irreformable doctrines and struggle to give them comprehensibility in a world which is longing for meaning. Blessed Pope John XXIII has blazed the way forward for us. In the same speech by which he opened Vatican II he emphasised that the days of severity and condemnations are over. He said: 'Violence inflicted on others ... is of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict' people. 'Nowadays', he continued, the church prefers to 'make use of the medicine of mercy'. He stressed that the validity of the church's teaching will be accepted by others if it is demonstrated by the way we live. This is the nature of theology.

There is much discussion in the church today about the respective roles of theologians and the Magisterium. *Donum Veritatis* makes it clear that 'theology and the Magisterium are of diverse natures and missions and cannot be confused ... They fulfil two vital roles in the church which must interpenetrate and enrich each other for the service of the People of God' (DV 40). Theology is guided by the church's teaching authority, and the Magisterium is fed by theology. It is not the role of theology to present fixed solutions to contentious issues, but rather to investigate, stretch the boundaries, and suggest

both old (so often forgotten) and new ways of understanding the faith which has been handed down from Jesus and the apostles. Likewise, church authority needs to allow theologians the freedom to reflect and challenge, actions without which the verbal and written expressions of the faith would become stale, unattractive and even meaningless. Theologians 'have the responsibility to participate in the building up of Christ's Body in unity and truth. Their contribution is needed more than ever, for evangelization on a world scale requires the efforts of the whole People of God' (DV 40).

This has been the task of the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa for decades. It is a calling which Rodney Moss has pursued with intellectual honesty and scientific rigour. This *Festschrift* is one more step on that journey. Not only does this book honour one of South Africa's leading theologians, it also contains efforts by a few of his colleagues to further contribute to the study of 'the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith' and present it in contemporary language that may respond to the challenging issues of the day and thus contribute to the building up of the community of faith.

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Revd. Prof. Rodney Moss

Fr. Brian Southward

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Give Rodney a screw-driver and an electrical appliance which needs attention to the plug, and he will very quickly hand it back with a slightly hurt and somewhat bemused look on his face. 'I don't do such things', he would say scornfully. On the other hand, ask him to explain something related to science and religion, and he will literally quiver with excitement, and launch forth into a clear and concise description of the topic. At the same time he would make sure, like a good teacher, that you are following his argument.

Such is the man who grew up between 1942 and 1960 with two sisters and his parents, in a small village called Bellair, about 20kms south and west of Durban. In those days Bellair was a genteel place with large houses and gardens, tree-lined lanes and exciting places for a young boy to explore. A somewhat different place today!

There, Rodney attended the local primary school, and although he had been baptised in the Catholic Church, went at his father's insistence to the Methodist and later the Anglican Church. St Patrick's Catholic Church – a lovely late Victorian building served by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate – was the eventual scene of his First Holy Communion and Confirmation at the rather late age of fifteen years – after his father had relented from his insistence on a good Protestant upbringing.

Bellair was on what was known in those days as the old main line – a railway line running from Pinetown, and stopping at numerous other small stations all the way to central Durban. Rodney later caught that train everyday on his way to high school – DHS – a boys' only school on the Berea. Durban High School had a very good name for cricket, rugby, athletics and to a lesser degree, academics. It was a favourite school for the sons of north coast sugar farmers, who happily boarded there, and looked down upon day boys.

This was not Rodney's favourite time, being much more interested in academic subjects than sport. He never achieved a place in the 1st or 2nd or even 3rd rugby teams, but he was already showing

signs of excellence in class work, particularly English, History and Physical Science. Such were the seeds of his later academic career sown!

His re-entry into the Catholic Church at the age of fifteen was also the moment when he felt the first stirrings of a vocation to the priesthood. But this was to become manifest quite a number of years later. After completion of his Matric, parental pressure steered him away from service in the Church to another vocation – teaching. But this was not a decision to be decried, because as we know, Rodney is an excellent teacher. Not of Mathematics or Geography, but in the area of Theology. So, his ideas about serving God in the priesthood were for a while put on hold.

Rodney is often teased about his first appointment. It was to Weston Agricultural School in the Natal Midlands, a school for farming boys, and those interested in the outdoor life. Surprisingly, might I say, Rodney enjoyed his spell of three years there, even becoming coach of the water polo team and swimming! The lessons he learnt there I am sure, were patience, understanding, and a keen desire to help those struggling to cope in an atmosphere of high expectations.

A call to his Britishness resulted in a move to England, where he then taught at a Catholic School for two years. In his free time, Rodney became a rover, in that he travelled extensively up and down Britain in his little car, and one man tent. During these trips he visited ruined Abbeys, such as Tintern, cathedrals both Anglican and Catholic, and all the other places much loved by those with a cultural and religious bent. These he still remembers, and has in fact re-visited over the years many times.

The atmosphere of ancient Christianity, and an ever growing love for history, especially English and the Monarchy, rekindled his desire to become a priest. Would he enter the well established Catholic Church in England, or return to his native land?

Fortunately for us, he decided to return to Africa, spent one year at Prince Edward School in Zimbabwe, then to Weston Agricultural College for a further eighteen months, while he discerned his vocation. No doubt the pastoral scene that surrounded the College, with cattle and sheep grazing on green, lush pastures, was the impetus he needed to offer himself as a future shepherd – for God's people.

It was during this time that Rodney had ambitions as a Thespian, and he directed and took part in a number of plays, especially enjoying Shakespeare. The boys at the school, and later the young men at the Seminary, appreciated his efforts and supported him. A loss to the stage, but a gain for the Church!

So, at the age of twenty nine, mature and a well-educated man, he applied for admission to the National Seminary in Pretoria. Archbishop Denis Hurley must have rejoiced at the keenness, and suitability of such a candidate! His destiny was being determined, and his vocation was firmly established.

St John Vianney Seminary is the Major Seminary in South Africa, to which all aspiring Diocesan students are sent for Philosophical and Theological studies. At that time, the Franciscans were in charge with well-known and much loved characters such as Bonaventure Hinwood, Fergus Barrett, and Isidore Maher on the staff. Rodney took to this new environment and challenge with great enthusiasm, and soon established himself as both a character and a leader amongst staff and fellow students alike. The year was 1971, and much was happening in the political life of South Africa, and in the Church. Both of these had a profound effect on him, and were to add further to the person he has become. For some reason or other Rodney was never conscripted into service in the Army, but he was keenly aware of events unfolding in the final 20 years of apartheid. Archbishop Hurley's stance against social injustice is well-known, and Rodney fully supported his work for the oppressed in South Africa. He frequently visited the students at the Seminary, and encouraged these young men to look beyond their own relatively comfortable and well-off lives to the needs of the forgotten – those hidden from sight by the laws and customs of South Africa. The example of Archbishop Hurley touched Rodney as it has done for many others, and earned him the respect of all the students.

At that time too, the influence of the Second Vatican Council was reaching the local Church, and of course, the Seminary. Rodney took a keen interest in the events that were unfolding, but he has commented many times since, that post-Vatican II developments began to concern him; he felt then, and still does, that liturgical reforms that were introduced, were not necessarily in accord with the Council. He feels that they were implemented too quickly, with little reflection, and in that would agree with Pope Benedict XVI.

Already at that early stage of his priestly formation, his early Protestant upbringing and influence, prior to his re-entry into the Catholic Church, was leading him to feel that Catholicism was tending towards individualism, rather than the communitarian. In other words, he was already experiencing concern about a break in Catholic tradition. (Note, not traditionalism, with which he is not in agreement). This early concern of his is apparent in his later articles and research papers.

For example, he felt that the Church was not dealing sufficiently with core issues of faith, such as Trinity and Christology. There was a growing tendency to be concerned with immediate, present problems, rather than what was distinctively Catholic. This led him to explore the work of people such as De Lubac, Von Balthasar, Ratzinger and others interested in a more Patristic approach. Here we see once again the seeds of his later interest in Tradition, Patristics and Christology.

Also, in those post-Vatican II days, he became interested in Catholic Social Thought. This led to a concern about certain aspects of Liberation Theology in South America, feeling that it was deviating from its Catholic roots, and too much influenced by Marxism. On the other hand, Rodney felt that the Lutheran Theologian Moltmann was more inserted into Christian Tradition.

Rodney has always been concerned about what was distinctive about the Christian message – what it could give to the world that current thinking cannot do. He continues to this day to recognise that mere secular ideologies can never serve the world effectively.

His spiritual development in those days was based therefore on his interest in Patristics, which in turn led him to St. Augustine, the spiritual and theological love of his life. He found one who appreciated the secular (as he does) and yet saw its limitations. The Christian Gospel contained the embryonic fullness of truth which lies ahead in the eschaton. Yet, the possibility of truth is a yardstick to critically assess the present and contemporary.

So whilst at St John Vianney Seminary it is very clear that Rodney was developing a keen love of Theology and Church History. At the end of his studies in Pretoria, he was successful in writing the BD examination awarded by Urbaniana Pontifical University in Rome. He was well on his way to his academic career even before ordination to the priesthood.

Archbishop Denis Hurley ordained Rodney at Holy Trinity Parish on 6 December 1974, and the young ordinand remembers this day with clarity and great joy. He was subsequently appointed assistant priest at that parish, under the critical eye of Fr. Peter Paola. This was a three-year period during which there was all the excitement of implementing Vatican II. Rodney often refers to this time as one of experimentation, and has remarked that priests and laity alike were not sufficiently prepared for the subsequent changes which were introduced rather haphazardly. However, he was also able during this period to pursue his interest with the other Churches on the Berea, and developed a number of meaningful ecumenical relationships.

Having successfully proved himself, and after gathering many ardent admirers amongst the parishioners at Holy Trinity, he was appointed Parish Priest at Queensburgh and Bellair Parishes. He is well remembered and much loved by the people he served there for the next three years. It was his first time on his own in a parish, and in his usual calm but determined way built up a community which responded to his enthusiasm and drive. He did not however confine himself to pastoral matters, but studied privately at Westville University for a Masters Degree in Theology. His research project was: St Augustine's City of God and the German Theologian Moltmann. The title of the Research paper was *Eschatology and the Political Order: A Comparative Study of Moltmann and Augustine's City of God*. Before he could complete this however he was asked to go to St Paul's in Ottawa, Canada, to study Canon Law.

As usual, Rodney agreed immediately, and spent two years there, after which he gained a Licentiate in Canon Law with special emphasis on marriage. On his return he went back to his previous parish at Queensburgh for less than a year. He was needed to take over at St Joseph's Parish, Morningside, and moved in as Parish Priest in 1984. This was yet another very busy assignment for him, in a very large inner-city parish – but he once again tackled it with great vigour and enthusiasm. In the midst of all his pastoral work, he completed his Masters Degree and also was appointed Associate Judicial Vicar in the Marriage Tribunal under Fr. Charles Langlois.

Archbishop Hurley then asked him in 1987 to go to St Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, which he accepted readily. For the following few years he taught theological subjects to students for the priesthood, was appointed Vice-Rector, and Dean of Studies. His

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amazing capacity for work and study seemed to have no limits, because during this time he worked on a Doctorate, which he completed at the end of 1990. The title of his work was: *Truth as Anticipation; Moltmann and Popper on the Concept of Openness*. This important document dealt with the emerging dialogue between science and religion – a subject in which he remains passionate and up to date. It must be remembered that this was a time of crisis in South Africa. The political turmoil even resulted in the closure of the seminary for a period. However, Rodney continued in his faithful service to the Church and remained steadfast in his studies and lectures. This was also a time when he had to make monthly visits to Durban, to attend meetings of the Marriage Tribunal.

His extremely busy schedule at St. Peter's Seminary came to an end with his appointment in 1991 as Parish Priest of Holy Trinity, the place of his ordination! This was to be a ten-year period of continuing activity, not only in the very busy parish, where he gained many friends, but also as the newly appointed Judicial Vicar. Many, many cases of annulment went through his capable hands, and under his guidance. He also taught at St Joseph's, Cedara, with special emphasis on Canon Law. It is very clear that he became overworked, and was in need of a break.

This he took in the form of a Sabbatical Year, during which he travelled quite extensively to America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. On his return he continued reading and doing research into his beloved subjects of science and religion. In 1999 St Augustine's College of South Africa had opened its doors amidst great expectations and joy, so it was not surprising that at the end of his sabbatical, Rodney was approached to join the staff there. He accepted this, and was immediately appointed to organise the programme in Theology, which was on offer at the College.

His tenure at St. Augustine's, until May 2012 – a period of ten years – has seen him produce a prolific output of research papers. He has now returned to the Archdiocese of Durban, having retired from this full-time appointment. This has not left him though without any work as he continues to assist there on a part-time capacity.

He has remarked to me recently that he is as busy as ever! And I can vouch for that. People continue to beat a path to his door for his advice, his assistance in their post-graduate degrees, and to keep in touch with a man who has so much to offer. When will he slow down?

Where to next for Rodney? I have no doubt that he will continue to pursue his many and varied interests with great enthusiasm well into the future. I also have no doubt that the many people he has met and helped over the years will seek him out – for advice, to share a little bit of gossip, and mostly to enjoy a glass of wine with him. He certainly has much to give still and intends to continue what for him has been a fulfilling life, and what for the rest of us has been a life of generous service and commitment. I look forward to seeing that unfold.

Part 1

Tradition: Theological perspectives

**The living tradition of the church:
Fixed and mobile**

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Introduction

Tradition in the Catholic sense should not be understood as static but, rather, as fluid. Tradition is not the enemy of innovation. In this article I hope to establish that tradition in the understanding of *Dei Verbum* is dynamic in the sense that there is no absolutely clear boundary between tradition and innovation. Rather, tradition in the Catholic understanding is an ongoing event in which the living faith is handed down from generation to generation. Thus what may seem like innovation may be understood rather as the explication or development of tradition.

This article will begin with an analysis of the concept of tradition using as a springboard the Congarian sense of tradition as an act of transmission and development. Next the relationship between scripture and tradition will be explored in terms of *Dei Verbum*. They constitute a single reality. Scripture is the written witness to the wider tradition and at the same time the norm by which the true and living tradition is discerned. Conversely, tradition is the essential context for the interpretation of scripture. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) will provide valuable insights into how the Church and her living tradition is the privileged context for understanding scripture since according to *Dei Verbum* (#7) scripture and the Church are inextricably linked.

In the next section the patristic roots of the above relationship in Irenaeus of Lyon will illustrate an early source for the close relationship between tradition as the life of the Church and scripture. Irenaeus effectively refuses to separate the authority of scripture and the task of biblical interpretation from the community of the church.

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Next, Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* prepares the ground for Vatican II's treatment of tradition. On the one hand he provided a way of testing later doctrinal positions against their correspondence to the original deposit of Christian revelation and on the other hand he was open to development and unafraid of new ideas and priorities for he trusted the Spirit's infallible ability to enable the Church to eventually reach the truth.

Finally, I will consider the contribution of John Thiel's book *Senses of Tradition* to the contemporary debate on tradition. Beginning with the literal truth which represents the most basic and fundamental beliefs of the Catholic community, he moves next to development-in-continuity which recognises doctrinal development through history as not necessarily a simple rephrasing of the primordial apostolic deposit of faith but as a real growth in insight. Dramatic development is a sense of tradition that moves beyond the first and second stages outlined above to a more radical mutation and either fades away or changes significantly for it lacks durability. The fourth sense is incipient development which attempts to handle what may be termed the arrival of the new. This new development is not universally accepted.

The nature of tradition

Any contemporary understanding of Catholic tradition must start with tradition as a communicative practice. Indeed in Congar's definition of tradition it is first a process of the communication (of tradition) which he calls transmission. Tradition means, in itself, a transmission from person to person. ...Tradition is not primarily to be defined by a particular material object, but by the act of transmission, and its content is simply *id quod traditum est, id quod traditur* (1967:296). Yet Congar treats Tradition, too, as history and development.

This Tradition is development as well as transmission. It is impossible that the religious relationship of men with God should be perceived without its substance bearing fruit. That which was received and professed in baptism becomes in the context of Christian life, praise, service, witness, response and decision (Congar 1967:266).

Congar has noted that while Tradition is preservative, it is not something unproductive because as a deposit of faith it can be grasped only within a living communion whose richness can only be partially expressed at the level of explicit understanding (1967:318; cf. 319-321. 327). He insists that the development of doctrine is not mere historical or secular awareness or consciousness but a *sensus fidei*, a sense of the faithful a faculty of grasping the implications, not yet elucidated, of a reality which is already in its possession (:318; cf. 39-321. 327). Yet, far from being a reduction to the historical in Church life the development of doctrine is definitely not a mere repetition of the primitive fact or its statement (:366).

Indeed, historically then, tradition changes significantly. Tilley notes: Historical investigations have shown that there are marked shifts on the content of practice and beliefs we accept as 'given' on the basis of tradition (Tilley 2000:27). In fact, we could say that traditions mutate, sometimes radically as they are passed on. Tilley further observes that

Traditions are simply not found. They cannot be found because they are not content alone. *Traditio* is a communicative praxis. Its particular content may be the traditional material communicated, but the content is subject to the process of communication, including transmission and reception (Tilley 2000:36).

Historically, traditions can and do change significantly for there are marked shifts in the content of practices and beliefs that have been regarded as given on the basis of tradition. Tilley states that there are three distinct components involving the process of tradition – the agent who hands over, that which is handed over and the receiving agent of what is handed over (Tilley 2000:28). For instance a verbally expressed concept of tradition may be translated not only from one language to another but additionally from one historical context to another and in the process be connected to different concepts in order to aid incarnation in different cultures. In such circumstances, then, can the concept mean exactly the same thing (:34)? The Second

Vatican Council recognised that the language used to express doctrine can change its meaning and require a restatement.² Tilley comments:

In fact, there is reason to believe there may be a real instability in whatever formulations one might choose as expressing the 'core' of a tradition such as the 'deposit of faith', the 'core' of the Catholic tradition. The contexts in which that 'core' is expressed radically affect the expression; and if there is a 'deposit of faith' or another 'core' of a tradition, there can be no direct access to that 'core'. All communicable expressions are necessarily contextualized expressions (Tilley 2000:35).

However, as noted earlier, tradition is more than verbal or conceptual formulation. Traditions are 'communications systems' that provide both a relative stability and additionally a relative flexibility in order to cope with novel and different cultural contexts. Tradition is always a living tradition involving people, beliefs, practices and cultures. The living and reciprocal interaction between these components of dynamic tradition will on the one hand shape people and on the other hand people will reshape the tradition they receive (Tilley 2000:45). Indeed, Schreier suggests that the imaginative transgression of boundaries may reshape traditions. 'Thus, when Jesus rearranged the boundaries concerning who would have a place in the kingdom of God, who would have the first place and the last, a distinctively different image of what it meant to be a part of the chosen arose' (Schreier 1985:66).

Tradition is at core praxis. Tilley contends that Catholic tradition

[c]an be very formally construed as that set of enduring practices in which the members of the Church (however understood, but especially as the body of Christ and the

² 'Consequently, if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in Church discipline, or even in the way Church teaching has been formulated – to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself – these should be set right at the opportune moment and in the proper way.' *Unitatis Redintegratio* #6.

people of God), strive for the sanctity of life characterised by discipleship. ...The Catholic tradition, then, can be seen primarily as a set of practices that, when, engaged in properly, shape people into a communion of saints (Tilley 2000:58).

We could perhaps better understand tradition as an amalgam of complex practices involving belief, attitude, action and practices.

In summary, then, tradition cannot be simply reduced to *traditio*, (what is transmitted). Beliefs are never independent of practice. Indeed we become what we practice. Avery Dulles (1992), in his understanding of symbols in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition,³ claims that 'revelation never occurs in a purely interior experience or an unmediated encounter with God. It is always mediated through symbol' (:131). Revelation for Dulles is never independent of tradition, for it is internal to tradition.

In the next section the integral and living relationship between scripture and tradition will clarify further the nature of tradition as foundation, content and mode of the historical consciousness of the Church.

Scripture and tradition

The concluding part of the last section stated clearly that revelation is inextricably linked to tradition. The integral, and indeed, living relationship between scripture and tradition is the locus of revelation. As observed earlier, tradition in catholic understanding is an ongoing event in which the faith is 'handed down' from generation to generation. Scripture, as written tradition, is part of that 'handing down', especially its interpretation through the Christian ages. However, tradition cannot be reduced to scripture as it is wider and prior to scripture. John Thiel notes:

³ See Tilley 2000:123-151. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition is much broader than theology, especially theological orthodoxy. Tilley deals with five aspects of this tradition: Analogical Imagination (Tracy: 1981); Universal Hope; An Inclusive Community; A Public Church and A Gracious God.

The kerygma that took shape in the writings of the New Testament was first proclaimed in the faith, hope, and joy of the earliest Christians. In their stories of Jesus, their liturgical prayers, their testimonies of conversion, and their exhortations to discipleship, the first Christians at once formulated the claims that would receive written and revelatory shape in the many genres of the New Testament and initiated the 'handing down' of the faith in the very acts of voicing, enacting, and relating these claims (Thiel 2000:14).

Indeed, the written tradition, the scriptures, became the most authoritative expression of what tradition 'handed down'. 'Scripture and tradition, then, represented not different avenues to the truth of Jesus Christ but rather truthful authorities mediated in a common ecclesial life' (Thiel 2000:15).

Scripture and Tradition can be seen to constitute a single reality,

the historical consciousness of the Church insofar as this is explicitly appropriated and deliberately transmitted from generation to generation with the intention that what is transmitted will function as effective historical consciousness in the ongoing experience of the Church (Schneiders 1999:81).

Scripture is then part of the witness to the wider tradition⁴ but its written character gives it a permanence that allows it to function as the norm of that tradition. Emerging from that tradition, however, it is interpreted from within and in terms of that tradition. Sandra Schneiders expresses this dialectical relationship in these words: 'Tradition is the essential context for the interpretation of scripture but scripture is the norm by which the true and living tradition is discerned' (1999:86).

⁴ Tradition ... is more original, more inclusive, and fuller as witness to the fundamental revelation. It includes the New Testament (and the distinctively Christian understanding of the Jewish scriptures as the Christian Old Testament) as the expression in written form of that which was considered most essential in apostolic tradition (Schneiders 1999:81).

While the Second Vatican Council recognised very explicitly that the work of biblical interpretation belongs to the Church as community, that is, to the whole body of the faithful, it reserved the final authority in interpretation to the hierarchy. It was seen that the Magisterium, or teaching authority of the Church, would on occasions have to make binding decisions about the meaning of revelation in particular circumstances. However, it was seen by the same council that the Magisterium, like the rest of the church, was subject to the Word and not in control of it.⁵

However, the ecclesial interpretation of scripture can be carried out only within the context of tradition:

Tradition is carried by the church as a whole, by its faith, its liturgical celebrations, its spirituality, its ministerial involvement, as well as by official doctrine. It is only in solidarity with the whole church, that is, under the effective historical consciousness of the Church as a whole, that ecclesially valid interpretations of scripture can be achieved (Schneiders 1999:86).

Attention will now turn to an important magisterial document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) in order to confirm the conclusions reached above. There are twenty principles of Catholic interpretation which Peter S. Williams (Williams 2003:327) identifies in this document but this article will address only a few principles relevant to this research.

‘What characterises Catholic exegesis is that it deliberately places itself within the living tradition of the church, whose first concern is fidelity to revelation attested by the Bible’ (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (IBC):111b).

‘The believing community, the People of God, provide the truly adequate context for interpreting Scripture’ (IBC: 1.c.1.g).

⁵ ‘Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what is handed down’ (DV #10).

‘Scripture took shape within the traditions of the faith of Israel and the early Church and contributed, in turn to the development of the tradition’ (IBC: 111.A.3.f).

‘The Scriptures belong to the entire Church (IBC: 1.B.3.1) and all the members of the Church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture’ (IBC: 111.B.3.b).

‘Church authority is responsible to see that interpretation remains faithful to the Gospel and the great tradition, and the Magisterium exercises a role of final authority if occasions require it’ (IBC: 1.c.1.g).

‘Catholic exegesis deliberately places itself within the stream of the living tradition of the Church (IBC: 111.b) and seeks to be faithful to the revelation handed on by the great tradition, of which the Bible is itself a witness’ (IBC conclusion e).

‘Within the living tradition, the fathers of the Church have a foundational place, having drawn from the whole of Scripture the basic orientation which shaped the doctrinal tradition of the Church, and having provided a rich theological teaching for the instruction and spiritual sustenance of the faithful’ (IBC:111.B.2.b).

It is worthy of note that the Biblical Commission identified the Fathers’ contribution as threefold: defining the canon of Scripture, drawing the Church’s basic doctrinal orientations from Scripture and providing a biblical interpretation that is theologically rich and spiritually sustaining (Williams 2003:8).

The Biblical Commission’s 1993 document provides official confirmation of the fact that extra-biblical tradition provided and still provides an authority that, on the one hand, complements scripture and yet, on the other hand, provides a context in which scripture is read, lived and handed down to the next generation of believers.

In the next section we turn to an early source, Irenaeus of Lyon in his dispute with Gnostic Christians, in order to find the early roots of an integral and living relationship between God’s one revelation in

scripture and tradition as lived within the Christian community and 'passed on' to subsequent generations of Christians.

Irenaeus and tradition.

The Fathers of the Church considered tradition to be the faithful preservation and passing on of the Gospel from generation to generation of believers. Moreover, they believed that this saving Gospel could be understood clearly, faithfully and correctly across the generations. This gospel included more than the apostolic canonical documents; it included also the practices and beliefs contained in the Church's rule of faith (*regula fidei*). William Abrahams expresses the relationship thus:

We might sum up by thinking of the varied canonical traditions as different elements in the production of a grand symphony. The music which results is the music of salvation which naturally transposes itself into hymns of praise. Some of the canonical tradition, like the water, oil, bread, and wine of the sacraments, represents various instruments in the orchestra of the Church. Some, like Fathers and bishops, represent various players. Some, like liturgical material, represent the scores, which are best followed according to the programme notes which accompany them. Everyone involved in the orchestra must approach his or her role in a spirit of humility and dependence, of joy and praise. Most important of all, everyone must heed and be open to the leading of the great conductor, the Holy Spirit, who, through the use of the canonical tradition of the Church, creates within the participants the melody of Christ the Saviour, a music which leads ineluctably into the unfathomable, unspeakable mystery of the living God (Abraham 2002:55).

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon in the second century AD, is a clear exponent of this 'grand symphony'. Again, to his Gnostic opponents he strongly asserted the authority of Scripture and the Church and her tradition. Various Gnostic teachers claimed to possess a secret divine authority for their particular doctrines and often taught that they had

received secret revelations handed down to them by the apostles. Irenaeus writes: 'They tell us, however, that this knowledge has not been openly divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Saviour through means of parables to those qualified for understanding it' (Irenaeus: 1.3.1. ANF 1.319).

Irenaeus insists that there is no need to go beyond the apostles in search of additional revelation. As he sees the position, the apostles possessed 'perfect knowledge... For, after our Lord rose from the dead, the apostles were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down upon them, were filled with all his gifts, and had perfect knowledge' (Irenaeus:3.1.1).

Irenaeus understood the situation such that revelation to the apostles was intimately linked to the Holy Spirit and divinely inspired in such a way that apostolic testimony was the Word of God. Further, Irenaeus would not separate the authority of Scripture and the task of biblical interpretation from the community of the church itself. The Gnostic error, for Irenaeus, lay in the failure to join themselves to the Church. Irenaeus explains:

... this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the [means of] communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit ...the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God (Irenaeus: 3.24.1 ANF 1.458).

Irenaeus is convinced that because the Gnostics deserted the church in their quest for 'knowledge', they have forfeited the spirit and the life of Christ. 'For where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church' (Irenaeus: 3.22 ANF 1.415). It is then within the church that the traditions (the teachings of the apostles) have been faithfully preserved and passed on, rather than within the Gnostic communities.

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole

world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted in the Churches and [to demonstrate] the success of these men to our own times (Irenaeus: 3.3.1 ANF 1.415).

The apostolic tradition flowed from the apostolic teaching and had been handed down publicly by them in their writings to specific Christian leaders who in turn were to pass on and preserve that same truth faithfully. Whatever the church chooses to say must find its roots in the apostolic tradition. The Gnostics refused to submit to apostolic doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and preserved by the Church. Gnostic doctrine itself is confused and 'scattered here and there without agreement or connection' (Irenaeus: 5.20.1 ANF 1.548). The remedy for this willful blindness is to run 'to the Church...be brought up in her bosom, and be nourished with the Lord's Scriptures' (Irenaeus: 5.20.2 ANF 1.548).

In this section we have noted how at an early period in the history of the Church, Irenaeus testifies that the content of the apostolic tradition was already identifiable and Scriptural interpretation was bound to the community of the Church itself. Failure to read Scripture well on the part of the Gnostics arose from their failure to join themselves to the Church where the Spirit is.

In the next section we skip certainly more than a thousand years to Newman's development of Christian doctrine. We will observe that essential tradition conserves essential values even though subject to developmental change. Indeed, Newman anticipates *Dei Verbum* in teaching that Scripture is interpreted by tradition, tradition is verified by Scripture.

Newman and tradition

Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) presents tradition and development as clearly not mutually exclusive, but rather, mutually related. Essential or core tradition conserves essential truths and values even though they continue to be subject to developmental change. Newman expresses the idea thus:

In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall about it; dangers and

hopes appear in new relations, and old principles reappear under new forms; it changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise; but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often (Newman 1968:1.1.7. 40).

Newman's contribution is in no small measure responsible for the Dominican theologian Nicholas Lash's comment: 'One of the factors that has contributed most powerfully to the strong convergence, in recent years, of Catholic and Protestant positions...has been a recovery of a far richer, more flexible, and more traditional concept of tradition' (Lash 1975:122).

Anticipating later scriptural exegesis, Newman would hold that the doctrine of development relates not only to tradition, as such, but to Scripture. Thus the prophecies and types of the Old Testament would have to be interpreted in the light of Christ (Sullivan 1993:39). If scripture is written tradition, then, tradition is the interpreter of Scripture. This means that 'the bible does not carry with it its own interpretation',⁶ rather 'the testimony of past ages', (Harrold 1948:122, quoted in Brimer 1961:158) is the background in terms of which Scripture is to be understood. The very haphazard structure of Scripture presents a serious problem of interpretation: the intrinsic structure is itself unmethodical and irregular⁷ and many insights related to revelation lie hidden beneath the surface and are contained in scripture only implicitly and indirectly. In Newman's view the doctrine taught by the living tradition came at the same time as scripture and provided the necessary help to understand Scripture. However, there is a dialectical relationship between Scripture and tradition: on the one hand, no writings could have become canonical without reflecting the faith and teaching of the universal Church and, on the

⁶ *The Via Media of the Anglican Church: Vol I. Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church. Viewed Relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism* (1837), 245, quoted in Gunter Brimer, *Newman on Tradition*. London: Burns & Oates. 1961, 158.

⁷ *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (1872), 142 quoted in Gunter Brimer, *Newman on Tradition*. London: Burns & Oates. 1961, 156.

other hand, tradition may not contradict Scripture for 'what is written is a safeguard to what is unwritten'.⁸

To clarify further Newman's view on the relationship of Scripture and tradition Brimer provides the following summary:

According to Newman, revelation is a great and fertile idea, some aspects of which have been made explicit, while others have still to be unfolded. These aspects are presented and preserved in Scripture and in tradition, in written and oral form, ... scripture contains particulars which were not taken over by tradition, and tradition contains truths which do not lie on the surface of scripture (Brimer 1961:164).

A clarification of the relationship between Scripture and tradition prepares the ground for a deeper view of tradition. Tradition is, indeed, the life of the church, moving and developing, ever penetrated by the Spirit. Newman sees tradition as the conscience of the Church. As the individual Christian possesses in his/her conscience a firm and prescribed norm of conduct, so by analogy, does the church in tradition have an inviolable rule of faith (or instinct of faith) which she must keep. In Newman's terms this instinct of faith is described as the illative sense (1870:360). This sense is the power of judging about truth and error using memories, probabilities, associations, testimonies and mere impressions in order to reason and conclude but without the aid of explicit analysis. The illative sense applied to the Church, then, is the principle of tradition but the act of tradition as a process. Gunter Brimer provides the following analogy: 'Just as the Christian possesses in his conscience a firm and prescribed norm of conduct, so too the Church possesses in tradition an inviolable rule of faith, authoritative in itself, which it must keep' (Brimer 1961:147). Effectively, this means tradition is the norm for the understanding and explanation of revelation as a whole.⁹

⁸ *Manuscripts of J.H. Newman dealing with Tradition* from the Newman Archives in the Oratory, Birmingham A, 13, 2, quoted in Brimer: 1961:160.

⁹ *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (1849) 276 ff, quoted in Brimer 1961:148.

Newman makes a distinction between episcopal tradition and prophetic tradition. Episcopal tradition is primary, performing a regulatory teaching role and comprises the creed and the Church's solemn rites and liturgies, all handed down from bishop to bishop. This concept of tradition represents the static quality of tradition. Prophetic tradition, on the other hand, led Newman to recognise the dynamic element in tradition. This aspect of tradition involves those who 'interpret' revelation. It develops and defines the mysteries of faith, clarifies its documents and harmonises its content. Newman expounds:

Apostles rule and preach, prophets expound. Prophets or doctors are the interpreters of the revelation; they unfold and define its mysteries, they illuminate its documents, they harmonise its contents, they apply its promises. Their teaching is a vast system not to be compromised in one code or treatise, but consisting of a certain body of Truth, permeating the church like an atmosphere, irregular in its shape from its profusion and exuberance; at times separable only in idea from Episcopal Tradition, yet at times melting away into legend and fable; partly written, partly unwritten, partly the interpretation, partly the supplement of scripture, partly preserved in intellectual expressions, partly latent in the spirit and temper of Christians; poured to and fro in closets and upon housetops, in liturgies, in controversial works, in obscure fragments, in sermons. This I call the Prophetic Tradition, existing primarily in the bosom of the Church itself, and recorded in the writings of eminent men.¹⁰

These two strains of tradition never exist in isolation. Prophetic tradition, however, pertains *par excellence* to the laity because it is primarily lived and not formulated. Newman realised that as the laity share in a particular way in the prophetic tradition of the Church, it is appropriate to consult those who hold such a spiritual treasure of discernment in their Christian lives.

¹⁰ J.H. Newman, *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church*, ed, Parker (1837), 266.

The faithful are a 'body of evidence' since they are witnesses to the reception of revealed doctrine. Their consensus is a real and indispensable part of the voice of the infallible Church. Newman was always concerned to show that the infallible teaching of the Church resides in the whole community of the faithful and not exclusively with the hierarchy. These two elements 'are put together, as one twofold testimony, illustrating each other and never to be divided'.¹¹ There is thus a mutuality in the learning process unfolding in the living tradition between those who teach and those who are taught. This is a spiritual sense which discerns what is part of the deposit of faith, what is consonant with the apostolic faith. Emmanuel Sullivan notes: 'this crucial element in the church's life of faith we might say ...is an instinct for true faith in all the faithful by the grace of the Holy Spirit' (Sullivan 1993:59).

What of the Protestant concern for the corruption of the true faith by tradition: which are genuine developments and which are corruption of the Christian faith? Newman names seven characteristics that distinguish true development from corruption.

The first is the *preservation of type*. He notes that 'one cause of corruption in religion is the refusal to follow the course of doctrine as it moves on, an obstinacy in the notions of the past' (Coulson 1961:177). Later in chapter six of the *Essay*, Newman, in an analysis of the Church of the first six centuries in its struggle with various heresies, identifies, by the application of the preservation of type, that church with contemporary Catholicism (:321-322).

The second characteristic is the *continuity of principles* where Newman works analogically from mathematics. He contrasts principles which are abstract and general with doctrine which deals with facts. Doctrines grow, develop and are enlarged while principles remain permanent. 'A development, to be faithful, must retain both the doctrine and the principle with which it started' (Coulson 1961:181). As an example, he uses the incarnation which is able to hold together dogma, faith, theology, the sacramental principle, Scripture in the mystical sense, grace, asceticism, sin and mortification leading to sanctification (:325-326). He contends that the Catholic

¹¹ J.H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed.J. Coulson. 1961:71.

Church holds all these together in a continuity with the incarnation which is its central truth and principle.

The *power of assimilation* uses an analogy from the physical world. 'In the physical world...life is characterised by growth ...It grows by taking into its substance external materials; and this absorption or assimilation is completed when the materials appropriated come to belong to it and enter into its unity' (Coulson 1961:185). This analogy is then applied to doctrines and ideas. Thus, 'The stronger and more living the idea, that is, the more able it is to dispense with safeguards, and trust to itself against the dangers of corruption' (:188). The Church is able to take into its system many things, both good and bad. Its healthy constitution enables it to sort out the chaff from the wheat.

Logical sequence is not syllogistic logic, but rather, the logic that develops from life. It is an idea that affects all relationships:

An idea under one or other of its aspects grows in the mind by remaining there; it becomes familiar and distinct, and is viewed in its relations; it leads to other aspects, and these again to others... and thus a body of thought is gradually formed without his recognising what is going on within him (Coulson 1961:190).

Only later are we able to see a true development, a development that is both natural and harmonious (Coulson 1961:190-191).

Anticipation of the future captures the notion that the idea, that is, Christianity, is living in that it assures development, is effective, and makes new things happen. 'Developments are in great measure only aspects of the idea from which they proceed...[and] those later and more systematic fulfilments are only in accordance with the original idea' (Coulson 1961:195-196). Moreover, 'the faithfulness of an ultimate development is its definite anticipation at an early period in the history of the idea to which it belongs' (:199). Thus Newman relates certain Catholic practices, such as the veneration of relics, the cult of Mary and the saints and the idea of martyrdom and virginity, to legitimate developments from the incarnation and the resurrection (:400-418).

A true development is *a conservation of the past*. 'A true development ... may be described as one which is conservative of the

course of antecedent developments being really those antecedents and something beside them: it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds' (Coulson 1961:200).

Lastly, true changes display *chronic vigour*; they stand the test of time; they persist, whereas changes that corrupt are transitory (Coulson 1961:203). A corruption, if vigorous, like some heresies, runs itself out quickly, and ends in death; on the other hand, if it lasts it fails in vigour and passes into a decay (:437-438).

While ideas live in men's minds, they are ever enlarging into fuller development: they will not be stationary... Corruption cannot, therefore, be of long standing; and thus *duration* is another test of a faithful development (Coulson 1961:203).

Thus a Christian community that retains its youthful vigour, in spite of its antiquity, may be presumed to be authentic. Corruption, on the other hand, of its very nature leads to stagnation and decay.

In conclusion, Newman, as we noted, trusted the Church's basic instinct for the true faith and her infallible ability to reach Christian truth eventually by the Spirit's guidance. He provided a way of testing the authentic development of the Church's tradition by testing later doctrinal positions by their correspondence to the original deposit of Christian revelation. On the other hand, tradition, for Newman, was open to development; consequently, he was never afraid of new ideas and practices. Moreover, he realised that real truth cannot be purely notional or theoretical but must reach right down into every facet of human life and activity. Thus, the Church in her pilgrimage of faith needs the living, developing apostolic tradition in order to sustain a wholesome community life in the Spirit in all her members.

The four senses of tradition

John Thiel's *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Catholic Faith* (2000) offers a contemporary theology of tradition. He draws upon the ancient notion of four senses of Scripture – literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical – to suggest that there may indeed be senses of tradition. He identifies four senses of tradition-

literal, development-in-continuity, dramatic development and incipient development.¹²

Thiel begins with the literal sense of tradition, the most basic and fundamental beliefs of the shared community of faith. However, even here the literal sense is the result of interpretation by the community. This means that even the literal sense does not possess its meaning intrinsically and is not necessarily a simple rephrasing of the deposit of faith. However, '[if] the literal sense presents an interpretation, it is one that abides for long periods of time and elicits a relatively clear and common recognition on the part of those who share its meaning' (Thiel 2000:33).

Thiel calls the second sense development-in-continuity. This sense of tradition recognises doctrinal development over time. '[It] fathoms the truth of tradition as a growth that occurs in a consistent way throughout an ecclesial time and space, a growth that preserves traditions truth as it develops it' (Thiel 2000:57). He acknowledges a Catholic belief in a closed revelation but questions whether this need imply a finished or completed revelation as tradition continues in history (:81). He further argues that this second sense ought to be conceived in a retrospective, rather than in a prospective way. He defines a prospective concept of tradition as one that regards 'tradition as finished or completed and locates its finished or completed character in what has already transpired in the past' (:80). In contrast, the retrospective concept of tradition measures

[c]ontinuity, not by taking a divine stance in the original event of Christian revelation and imagining traditional time from a privileged, timeless point of view; rather, it

¹² The literal sense is the primary sense of scripture in the sense of being the necessary foundation for the other senses. In the allegorical or Christological sense one author may draw on the account of another and reapply this account to events or expectations which the first author did not have in mind. In the New Testament, then, the whole of the Old Testament revelation could be reapplied in a unique way to Christ himself. The tropological or moral sense offers models for living or counsel about living whether positive or negative. The Anagogical or eschatological sense is relevant to the overall end – the final destiny of humanity with God. In simple terms the literal sense teaches what happened, the allegorical shows how to relate to what happened in faith, the moral sense how to act in faith in the light of what happened and the anagogical how to turn to where one is finally heading.

does so by envisioning tradition from the actual limitations of the present moment and looking back to the Christian past to configure traditional continuity (Thiel 2000:82).

In other words, according to Thiel, the development-in-continuity of tradition happens in and through the messiness of time and is not a simple rephrasing of a primordial deposit. 'Tradition is a historical reality. ... Traditions truth cannot stand apart abstractly from the conditions of historicity' (Thiel 2000:88).

In the next two senses, 'dramatic development' and 'incipient development', Thiel accounts for more radical mutations in tradition from the apostolic church to the contemporary church. 'Dramatic Development' is a sense of tradition which refers to the process by which an aspect of belief passes beyond the first or second sense and either falls away or changes significantly.

This sense judges that a particular belief, doctrine or practice is developing in such a way that its current authority as the authentic teaching of the Magisterium, and thus its status as either the literal sense or the sense of development-in-continuity, will be lost at some later moment in the life of the Church and that such a teaching or practice exhibits signs in the present moment that this final loss of authority has begun to take place (Thiel 2000:101).

Past examples include changes in Church teaching concerning usury, slavery, religious freedom and the exclusion of separated churches from membership in one, true Church (Thiel 2000:103ff). Thiel suggests that teaching about birth control and an exclusive male priesthood are current examples of dramatic development (:110ff). Thiel finds three criteria (taken together) for dramatic development: magisterial teaching judged not to have been widely accepted by the faithful, teaching that presents rational justification for its position through theological argument and which does not enjoy support from a wide segment of Catholic theologians (:108-109). One could conclude that in theory, at least, dramatic development can only occur among non-infallible doctrine. However, Thiel concludes that 'the

lack of explicit definition of infallible teaching makes it difficult to know with precision what doctrines are infallible and which are not' (:106).

The fourth sense 'incipient development' involves the handing of the new. Thiel calls it 'tradition's imagination' (Thiel 2000:130) in that it can '(1) envision a larger or wider and in any case richer continuity than the one framed in traditions most recently configured pattern and (2) considers the value of new ideas, possibilities, and opportunities that might be occasions for tradition's truthful development' (:130). Thiel sees in the trinitarian debate of the fourth century an example of this process at work in the past. He maintains that subordinationism was normative in the early Christian centuries (:135) and that the conciliar teaching of Nicaea is a powerful expression of the development of doctrine. He concludes that:

the high christology professed by the fathers at Nicaea in 325 is a good example of an incipiently developing belief moving closer towards its incorporation in tradition as a second sense claim that retrospectively configures previous claims for continuity in such a fashion that these are now defined in terms of present-day claims; in this case the Nicene condemnation of subordinationism (Thiel 2000:136).

Current candidates for incipient development include the notion that God should be imagined as exclusively male (Thiel 2000:139-144) and the preferential option for the poor (:144-147). Thiel argues that current Vatican theology defending an all-male priesthood is an incipient development as the theology is new and not yet universally accepted (:147-149). Fourth-sense claims often first occur 'as an act of faith that finds a previously unnoticed truth of the living Word in the immediate particularity of culture and time' (:150). The universality of tradition begins then to take shape and is often recognised by the regional claims for the universal truth of tradition. The fourth sense displays a particular attention to the future. In Thiel's words, 'it looks forward to the future from a present into which the future ever spills' (:155).

In concluding Thiel's exposition of the four senses of tradition, a short examination of three theological styles, which each foster a

particular understanding of tradition, narrative, hermeneutical and critical will be undertaken.

Catholic *narrative theology* takes its point of departure from tradition's literal sense, for it finds in the literal sense a continuity, a stability that runs from traditions beginnings right through to the contemporary movements.

Hermeneutical theology relates best to tradition as development-in-continuity for

[t]he hermeneutical style of theological interpretation regards the juxtaposition of the Word and worldly wisdom as but a movement transcended in a creative interweaving of the two that makes the sacred text inseparable from worldly context and makes worldly context inseparable from sacred context (Thiel 2000:198).

Hermeneutical theology will be able to establish first a relative balance between constancy and renewal and, secondly, refuse to distinguish between theological form and content. In this sense, hermeneutical theology will value the sense of continuity-in-development for, on the one hand, worldly historical wisdom will be welcomed into theological discourse and on the other hand, will shape the Spirit-in-reception in historical time.

Thiel notes that '*(c)ritical theologies* (my emphasis) take their point of departure from the restlessness of faith in local circumstances and [their suspicion] of the universalizing tendencies of hermeneutical constructions' (2000:204). For this reason critical styles in theology relate well to the third and fourth senses of tradition which can be described as the critical powers of the *sensus fidei*. 'Theologies in the critical style, ... appreciate that the Spirit's truth is not exhausted in acknowledged reception... [but becomes] possible only through the renewing contributions of the third and fourth senses'.

Thiel concludes that tradition can only be expressed in the spectrum of different theological styles. Alone, each style, can reduce the richness possessed by the living tradition; the narrative can effectively reduce tradition to the past and assess the new, the contemporary, as deviations; the critical can likewise assess tradition in relation to the new, the contemporary and be in danger of losing the past faith of the whole Church and the hermeneutical (2000:209)

focuses on the wide interpretation provided by the hermeneutical style. But Thiel is aware of shortcomings (:209). However, he asserts that the Spirit's truth appears in all four senses of tradition.

Instead of viewing the styles as competing claims for the constancy and renewal of tradition, the church would do better to regard all styles together: the host of ecclesial claims on how and when and where the Spirit is truly present to the created order, to the community of believers, and to every receptive life (Thiel 2000:209).

Conclusion

This article has noted that Catholic tradition is both fixed and mobile, static and dynamic. Vatican II awakened the sense that tradition involved not just the content of revelation but the process of handing it on. In the course of this process cultural and temporal boundaries are crossed and tradition seeks to understand revelation in new ways that address and respond to new situations. 'That tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on' (DV 8).

In confirming the close relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the Church evident from the early patristic period (e.g., Irenaeus) and not clearly demarcated until the reformation period, Vatican II taught that tradition comprises both the written scriptures and unwritten tradition. Thus 'Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church' (DV 10) and 'Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture, then are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other, for both of them, flowing out from the same divine wellspring, come together in some fashion to form one theory, and move towards the same goal' (DV 9).

Indeed, the whole church draws her life from '[t]he one deposit of revelation, made up of Scripture and Tradition, [which] has been entrusted to the whole Church' (DV 10). The Magisterium is the authentic interpreter of the deposit of faith, but the Magisterium is not above the Word of God but serves the Word of God (DV 10). The same Magisterium scrupulously guards the Word of God, losing

nothing of it, deleting nothing from it and adding nothing to it. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium [i.e., the church] are inseparable: 'It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the other' (DV 10). We need all three.

Newman's *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* demonstrated that the infallible teaching of the church resides in the whole community of the faithful with a reciprocal relationship between those who teach and those who are taught. Further, he provided a way of testing the developed doctrinal positions and their correspondence to the original deposit of Christian revelation. Newman trusted the church's basic instinct for the true faith. Moreover, as noted earlier, Newman's 'tradition' was always open to development, unafraid of new configurations of tradition, for he trusted the Church's guidance by the Spirit to enable her to move towards the full unfolding of the truth.

John Thiel's *Senses of Tradition* moves further than Vatican II in a contemporary and deeper analysis of tradition. In the same way that the Great Tradition saw 'senses of Scripture', Thiel sees 'senses of Tradition'. Newman saw Tradition prospectively, that is, a development in time and space from the apostolic deposit of faith. Consequently, he could identify comfortably with Thiel's first two senses – the literal and development-in-continuity. The third and fourth senses are concerned in a retrospective way and both deal with the new, more radical, re-formulation of tradition. Certainly, these two senses, not yet 'official', provide for novel insights. Some analysis of the contemporary situation must guide the reading of tradition and Thiel provides for this possibility.

This article has sought to understand more comprehensively the dynamic process inherent in tradition, that is, the handing on of the experience of God in the Christian community. It has shown that the responsibility of tradition is not only to conserve the apostolic deposit but to understand revelation in new ways that address and respond to new situations.

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The development of clericalism and the need for a theology of secularity

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Introduction

Over the past 50 years a growing number of lay people in the Catholic Church have taken on leadership positions in their parishes. This is seen as a response to the teaching of Vatican II (1962-1965) which proclaimed that all Christians are equal through their baptism. 'As all members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ.' 'Christ called a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God' (LG 7,10). This teaching reverses centuries of clerical power, on the one hand, and the passivity of the laity, on the other. Yet there is a strong movement from the Catholic Church's centralised authority to reverse this recent progress.

In this article I describe how the hierarchical power structure developed within a church which originally had no distinction between 'cleric' and 'lay'. I also show how this development led to the disenfranchising and passivity on the part of the majority of the baptised. Pointing to two important theologians (one in the 19th and the other in the 20th century) who tried to correct this imbalance, I show how the present clerical culture in the church is a denial of the equality of the baptised, as well as the teaching of Vatican II. It is therefore, in Christian terms, unethical, particularly as the church authorities have much to say about the lack of equality and freedom in the socio-political world. I conclude with a consideration of the challenges facing the institutional church in overcoming the power of the present clerical elite so that all members of church communities can once more find their voice and actively live out the radical equality

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and communion to be found in the early church, both in its teaching and practice.

The people of God

The phrase that seems to have caught the imagination of Catholics during the past half century is the title to Chapter II of the Second Vatican Council's document on the church, (*Lumen Gentium*): the people of God. This chapter deals with the equality of all the baptised. Christians are not individuals in the church, but a people who are bound together as one because of their baptism. The Christian community is 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...who in times past were not a people, but now are the People of God' (1 Pt 2:9-10). They form the Church of Christ and in them dwells the Holy Spirit as in a temple. Christ alone is the high priest and all the baptised share in this priesthood, being called to consecrate their lives to God through spiritual sacrifices (LG 9-10). Consequently, there is no such thing as a passive member of the church; everyone is called to a ministry. Indeed, 'a member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his/her possibilities must be considered useless to both the church and to him/herself' (AA 2). One of the outcomes of this teaching is what someone has called 'an explosion of ministries'. Many lay people, taking this teaching seriously, firstly, became involved in parish life, taking on many of the tasks that were once reserved to the priest, and, secondly, also participated in service to the world in innumerable projects aimed at the betterment of society. Most priests welcomed this renewal and saw the church come alive in a new way.

As with so many of the documents emanating from Vatican II, a compromise had to be found between those who wanted full participation of all the baptised in the life of the church, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and others who feared a diminution of the dignity of the priesthood, to which certain ministries ought to be reserved. While all are called to ministry – and the priest's first task is to preach the Gospel to all (PO 4) – we are taught that there is an essential difference between the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful (LG 10). No clarification of this statement is given in the Council texts with the result that the efforts to clarify this essential difference remain a matter of heated discussion

to the present moment (Osborne 1993:119, 594). Ever more emphasis has been given to this distinction between clergy and laity by Vatican authorities in recent years. The term ministry is now reserved to the ordained, while the term *munus* (office or duty) is used for the work of the laity. Thus, those lay people who handle the Eucharist (whether during a church service or when attending to the sick) are called 'extraordinary' ministers of the Eucharist. They are performing this task because there are not enough priests to do it. This would mean that once there are enough priests the laity will have to withdraw from this service to the community. The thinking behind this can only mean that lay people are merely 'participating in the apostolate of the hierarchy' (Osborne 1993:522), or 'helpers of Father' (Prior 1997:12-16, 31-35), who can withdraw their services when he feels they are not needed. This is what is meant by *clericalism* in this article. It is the reservation of certain unaccountable powers to the ordained. Members of the laity receive their instructions 'from above' and any initiatives on their part need to be approved by a member of this clerical elite.²

It may seem logical to many that the ordained should keep to 'sacred things', while the laity's main task is to 'work in the world'. In practice there will always be a blurring of this distinction. More than that, such a distinction between clergy and laity did not exist in the early church. We now turn to a reflection on the church of the New Testament and note how the development of a clergy-laity divide took place in history. We then look at the inadequacy of the present-day basis for lay involvement, using the insights of John Henry Newman and Yves Congar, and conclude by pointing to the need for a secular ecclesiology within which context both the laity and the ordained can find their place.

The Apostolic Church

The term *laikos*, or laity, is not to be found in the Christian scriptures (Faivre 1990:15; Osborne 1993:18). The word *laos* is used in both the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures for the whole people of God, a concept which, as we have seen, re-emerges in the documents of

² An example of this: in 2011 an archbishop in South Africa banned the lay movement *We are all the Church in South Africa*, a branch of an international movement, from meeting on church property.

Vatican II. It carries the sense of God's nation, as opposed to all other people. It indicates the special destiny of those called to be the people *of God*. We read, for example, of the Christian church being referred to as 'a people of his own' (Tit 2:4), 'my people' (Rev 18:14), and, as we have seen, 'a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Pt 2:9-10). *Laos* 'indicates the fellowship of all in a single community' (Küng 1966:116-126).

Likewise, the term *kleros* is not used to describe a certain group within the church, but rather to describe the portion or inheritance that sets God's people apart. Paul speaks of *kleros* as the inheritance of Christians (Col 1:12). In Christ Christians have been 'set apart' (*kleronomai*) or 'named in advance' (Eph 1:11). They are members of a people who enjoy a joint inheritance which is shared equally between all the heirs. Referring to Acts 8:21, Osborne says: '*Kleros* in this context of Acts clearly refers to the eschatological inheritance. It has no connection at all with either a minister or a ministry' (1993:15). The word 'priest' (*hierous*) is used in the Christian scriptures only for Christ, or the whole believing people who have been called to be a kingdom of priests serving God (Rev 1:5b-6; 5:9-10). The elders, or presbyters, were not called priests. Their task was to care for the community and to be models for all the chosen people (Faivre 1990:6-8). As followers of Jesus, they were to dedicate their lives to *diakonia* (service) of the people.

Abstracting from later developments in the church as regards the gathering together of believers with their leadership, and especially from our own experience, it is important to remember that the first Christian communities were 'small, face-to-face assemblies that met in houses of wealthier members' (Perkins 2004:26). Their relationships were personal. The organisation of these communities varied from place to place, but 'the accepted cultural and social forms of domination are not representative of God's order' (:27). The various structures that came about were grounded in Christ and the apostolic tradition. Once those basics were in place any form of leadership structure would be accepted as legitimate. Thus diversity marked the early communities (Bausch 1982:16-18). This includes the leadership of women, many of whom are mentioned in the books of the New Testament. Some are clearly described as founders of Christian communities. The term reserved for such persons is 'apostle'. This word is to be distinguished from the term 'the twelve' who, apart from Judas,

were not replaced once they died. It is in this sense that Paul claims to be an apostle: he founded numerous communities of Christians across Asia Minor and Europe on the basis of belief in the Risen Christ as handed down by the twelve.

In light of the above, it is impossible to hold that there was a uniform structure for all the Christian communities which existed in the apostolic and post-apostolic times. Before moving on to the latter period, it seems necessary to pick out certain ministries whose titles have come down to us today. The importance of this is to show that what we understand by those titles today is not what was originally meant by members of the early church. One of these is *episkopos*. This is a neutral term to designate the leader of a community – a host or presider – whose main duty was to preside over the assembly and to facilitate widespread participation (Giles 1989:37). Their task was to see that all things were to be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). These *episkopoi* were usually wealthy heads of households in whose homes a local community of believers would meet for the Lord's Supper and for instruction. Some of these *episkopoi* would have been women, such as Prisca whose pre-eminence in her marriage is noted by her usually being mentioned first. A large number of such women are mentioned in the New Testament. They would have been 'persons of some social standing and wealth, with a large house' (Giles 1989:34-35). Closely working with the *episkopoi* were *diakonoi*. The latter were the 'servants' of the community who attended to the practical needs of the members (:40). Whatever titles were used, though, the concept of church does not seem to have changed: 'church is still all the believers, not just their leaders' (:38).

Giles posits the idea that each house-hold community had its own bishop (*episkopos*). Where there were many such communities in one city, there was a group of 'elders' who 'formed a governing council' for all the Christians in, for example, Ephesus and Crete (Giles 1989:38). Another ministry mentioned in the New Testament is that of *presbyter*. We have no clear understanding of this title as it is used interchangeably with *episkopos*. This 'imprecise, vague and indefinite' use of titles points to how diverse were the practices of the early Christians in the ordering of their communities. What was important for them was not so much what the leaders were called, but that they were in the service of the community. 'The community is shaping the ministry, not the other way round' (Bausch 1982:20).

The Post-Apostolic Church

In the midst of this diversity of church structures, one clearly defined three-fold church order appears in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. Giles describes it thus:

If there is a constant refrain in the epistles of Ignatius it is the demand for obedience to the bishop. ... Beside the bishop stand the presbyters and the deacons. ... This three-fold ministry is mentioned frequently, and several details are of interest. The bishop is related to God, while the presbyters are consistently related to the apostles. The elders are to be obeyed along with the bishop but they are not drawn as ministers of the word and/or sacraments, but as a patriarchal council. Ignatius repeatedly speaks of the council of elders (the presbyterion). The deacons complement the bishops work by giving service to the community and are regarded by Ignatius as his fellow servants and people worthy of great respect (Giles 1989:42-43).

This clearly defined concept of the monarchical bishop, Giles argues, arose for two reasons. The Antioch community of believers was divided among themselves and were facing persecution from without. They needed a strong leader to keep them together. Ignatius rises to this hierarchical position out of prophetic inspiration and not as a successor of the apostles (he never mentions this). In his letters there is a constant demand for obedience to the bishop (Giles 1989:42-47). Through this ordering of the Christians in Antioch – when they gather for the Eucharist the bishop must be present – peace and stability came to the church which was facing threats, both internally by dissensions and externally from persecution. Yet many other forms of organising the Christian communities preceded that of Ignatius and were to continue after him in other parts of Asia Minor and Europe. In these all the disciples of Christ were called to have a ministry of one kind or another (:49-50), and their style of ordering the community varied from place to place.

There seems to have been a similar issue in Corinth as in Antioch where dissent within the community dates back to Paul's day. At the end of the first century Clement of Rome wrote to the Corin-

thians with the intention of restoring order in the community in which some of its leaders had been wrongly dismissed. Much has been made of the examples Clement uses to explain why there must be order. For example, he speaks of soldiers under the command of their officers, the interdependence of the body's members, and he even refers to the levitical priesthood (Faivre 1990:16). His most common description of the church, though, is 'God's flock' and those who are in charge of it. He does not, though, refer to members of the church as cleric or lay, his main argument being that each should keep to the rank to which they belong (:17-18). Faivre maintains that the distinction between cleric and lay was unknown throughout the second century during which time writers, for example, Justin and Irenaeus, seemed firmly convinced of 'the eminent dignity of all Christians'. Indeed, for Justin, all Christians are priests, although it was presbyters who were leaders of the community, particularly at the Eucharist. Faivre concludes that 'it is impossible to find dependence in the early church of lay people on a clergy. There were only Christians and disciples claiming Christ as their master' (:25, 31, 38-41). During the second century another title, *episkopos*, was given to the leader of the Christian community. Being the main teacher and preacher of a local community, he also presided at the community's liturgies,

including the Eucharist. This positioning came not on the basis of any theological foundation, such as: *episkopos* is the 'successor of the apostles'. Nor was there any clear view at the end of the second century of a collegial nature of such *episkopoi* (Osborne 1993:572).

While Faivre believes that the clergy-laity divide began in the third century (1990:43), Osborne asserts that this distinction began a century later. With the Edict of Constantine in 313 CE the church gradually became the only accepted religion in the Roman Empire. 'The status of the ordinary lay person ... was established, indirectly, by a directly ideological and theological positioning of the major cleric within both church and socio-political structures' (Osborne 1993:164). Boff regards this date as the occasion when the church authorities had a choice: to paganise Christianity or to christianise paganism. They chose the former and assumed all the earthly powers

that went with the existing order (Boff 1985:50). In the words of Congar, the bishops

were invested with public authority within the framework of the Empire, even in the sphere of the secular life of the cities. The bishop was the defender of the people, especially of the poor and the weak. He shared in the administration of justice, and he exercised a measure of control over the magistrates and the city assemblies. He cooperated in defence preparations... The bishops frequently called on the imperial authority for support ... Under these conditions we ought perhaps to expect that authority would change its character and that it would acquire a much more secular, much more juridical meaning, based simply on the relation of superior to subordinate. ... Such a danger was very real (Congar 1965b:46-47).

Throughout the following centuries the cleric-lay divide was clearly established as theologically valid, even leading to an opinion that there was an 'ontological' difference between the two, an opinion which, says Osborne, presents serious theological difficulties (1993:593-594). Any efforts by lay groups, particularly in the High Middle Ages, 'to re-establish themselves crashed against the established position of the cleric' (:115-116). It was in these latter centuries that lay people became more educated and found positions of power within government structures. The response of the church was to increase its emphasis on clerical authority (:117). This was the position of the leadership of the church till it was challenged by Vatican II's description of all the baptised as belonging to the priesthood of all believers. The baptised – that is, all Christians – are not called 'lay' but 'people of God', *Christifidelis*, and 'priesthood of all believers'. Church ministry in all its forms is based on Christ, with all sharing in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly functions (:593; LG 9-13) .

Despite this teaching, recent years have seen a growing insistence in Vatican statements that there is a clear and essential difference between cleric and lay. In practice, this means a differentiation in power: the one wields it in decision making, while the other is

destined to obey. The momentum created by the Council, though, has not been stopped, with the result that throughout the last half century there has been a growing awareness among lay people that they have a significant role to play in the church. Before we consider this contemporary phenomenon there are two moments in the history of theology that deserve our attention. The one is John Henry Newman's view on the *sensus/consensus fidelium* and the other Yves Congar's contribution to a theology of the laity. It may be of interest to note that both suffered from church authorities for their opinions.

John Henry Newman

Newman had converted to Catholicism from his adherence to the Church of England in which he had attempted a reform of the church, through what became known as the Oxford Movement, by returning to the teaching of the early Fathers. Before we come to his important publication on the laity, it is of significance to note that six years earlier he had been invited by the Irish bishops to set up a university in Dublin, a task which he eagerly took up, as the attendance of Catholics at both Oxford and Cambridge universities was openly discouraged by the secular authorities. Newman's dream of 'an intelligent, well-instructed laity' (Sharkey 1987:339-346) might now come about. Things did not work out well for him, with the Irish bishops, for example, refusing to allow him to appoint laymen to professorships. Twenty years later he was to write that he deplored the way the bishops had denied the possibility of lay people from cooperating with them in the matter of education.

As far as I can see there are ecclesiastics all over Europe, whose policy is to keep the laity at arm's length. ... I came away from Ireland with the distressing fear that in that Catholic country, in like manner, there was to be an antagonism, as time went on, between the hierarchy and the educated classes (Sharkey 1987:5).

Says Chavasse,

he saw in Ireland that the ecclesiastical powers were in fact jealous of the laity and, what is more, fearful of

them, if their knowledge and education grew too great. For the bishops their control had to be absolute, and Newman could not tolerate this (1989:49-78).

Newman returned to England in 1858 and a year later was asked to take over the editorship of *The Rambler*, a journal run by laymen and whose aim

was to rehabilitate Catholic thought in a non-Catholic world, and it did so by combining standards of scholarship previously unknown in Catholic journalism with attitudes critical of ecclesiastical authority which had become equally uncouth (Coulson 1961:2).

The previous editor had been removed because of an article in which he criticised the English bishops for not cooperating with the government's Department of Education in the inspection of teaching methods in Catholic primary schools (the Catholic Church had recently been emancipated). Newman reluctantly took over the hot seat, mainly to preserve the journal as a means of education for its readership which consisted mainly of lay intellectuals. Founded in 1848, its purpose was 'to show that English Catholics were intellectually serious and capable of rational discussion' (Gaffney 1992:392-428). In his first issue of May 1859 Newman apologised to the bishops for any disrespect they may have felt due to the opinions of the previous editor, but also stated that he believes the bishops 'really desire to know the opinion of the laity on subjects in which the laity are especially concerned' (Coulson 1961:13). As an example, he refers to the action of Pius IX who had requested the bishops of the world to 'ascertain the feeling of the clergy and the faithful both towards the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and its definition' (Sharkey 1987:3). In an 1854 letter he explained that he had wished to know the sentiments of the people as well as those of the clergy. If the pope thus consults the laity in a matter of dogma, how much more should lay people not be consulted in matters which affect them in their daily lives?

These words did not go down well with the hierarchy and Bishop Ullathorne visited Newman to discuss the issue. Newman describes the meeting at which the bishop had demanded a *peaceful* church, one without controversy. 'I stated my own view strongly. ...

he saw only one side, I another. ... He said something like "Who are the laity?" I answered (not in these words) that the Church would look foolish without them' (Coulson 1961:18-19). The outcome of the meeting was that Newman would have to resign as editor after the following issue in July in which he was to publish his famous essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*. It is to this essay that we now turn.

Newman firstly wishes to clarify what he means by the word 'consult' which had led many bishops to think that they had to 'rely on' the opinion of lay people, or that the laity would become their 'teachers and leaders'. Newman insists that this is not the case; rather, the hierarchy ought, as did Pope Pius IX, to seek to know what the belief of the laity is, for this is their witness to apostolic tradition. In 1854 when the pope proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception he wrote that, while 'he *already* knew the sentiments of the bishops, still he had wished to know the sentiments of the *people* also' concerning this teaching (Coulson 1961:71). In the same way, one may 'consult' the church's liturgy which witnesses to the universal doctrines they contain. There is a *sensus fidelium* and *consensus* which should be regarded and consulted (:54-55). This does not mean that the laity carry the teaching of the church alone, but that in consensus with the *ecclesia docens* they express it correctly. As Newman puts it:

The body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their consensus through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church. ... I think I am right in saying that the tradition of Apostles ... manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors [theologians], sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect; granting at the same time fully, that the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides solely in the *Ecclesia docens*. ... One [person]

may lay more stress on one aspect of doctrine, another on another; for myself, I am accustomed to lay stress on the consensus fidelium (Coulson 1961:63).

For Newman it is essential that all the above 'indications' of church teaching be taken into consideration, although stress will be laid now on one aspect and later on another. When taken together, though, one can see that the *sensus fidelium* coincides with the *sensus Ecclesiae*, although the former is distinct from – not separate from – the latter. This distinction is important because there are times when the faith of the laity has had to fill the lacuna when the episcopate has failed to teach correctly. As an example of this, Newman refers back to his first book *Arians of the Fourth Century* in which he describes how the Arian heresy spread throughout the church.

There was a temporary suspense of the functions of the 'ecclesia docens'. The body of bishops failed in their confession of the faith. They spoke variously, one against another; there was nothing, after Nicaea, of firm, unvarying, consistent testimony, for nearly sixty years. There were untrustworthy Councils, unfaithful bishops; there was weakness, fear of consequences, misguidance, delusion, hallucination, endless, hopeless, extending itself into nearly every corner of the Catholic Church. The comparatively few who remained faithful were discredited and driven into exile; the rest were either deceivers or were deceived (Coulson 1961:77).

Newman defends his opinion by citing how, after the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE when the gathering of 318 bishops proclaimed the divinity of Christ, twenty two synods and councils were held at which there was dissent among the bishops about this doctrine. The majority of bishops, along with the Emperor Constantine, supported Arius who had denied Christ's divinity. He quotes one of the 'faithful' bishops, St Gregory, who in 382 CE said: 'If I must speak the truth, I feel disposed to shun every conference of bishops; for never saw I a synod remedying, and not rather aggravating, existing evils' (Coulson 1961:86). In case some thought he was accusing his contemporary ecclesiastical leaders of a lack of faith in the apostolic tradition,

Newman hastens to add: 'As to the present time, certainly if there ever was an age which might dispense with the testimony of the faithful, and leave the maintenance of the truth to the pastors of the church, it is the age in which we live' (:103). But faithfulness on the part of the bishops does not dispense them from consulting the laity. 'Each constituent portion of the church has its proper functions, and no portion can safely be neglected. Though the laity be but the reflection or echo of the clergy in matters of faith, yet there is something in the 'pastorum et fidelium *conspiratio*', which is not in the pastors alone' (:104). The word 'conspiratio' literally means 'breathing together'. Newman, as mentioned before, is not pitting the laity against the clergy, but appealing for a common search and expression of what the church, that is, the faithful (a term which Vatican II uses for all the baptised), believes to be true. Each has its own contribution to make and leaving the lay person to passively accept whatever may come from the mouths of the clergy is, at the very least, disrespectful to the church at large, the Body of Christ. Newman's concluding exhortation to the bishops could also be seen as a warning and, perhaps also, a description of what has happened historically, as we can see in many countries today. Where the laity have remained passive, and even uncommitted to the church, they become 're-connected' only for occasions of infant baptism, First Communion and perhaps burial. When well-read lay persons are not listened to they either 'back off' because their potential contribution is not recognised, or they leave the institution altogether.

I think certainly that the *ecclesia docens* is more happy when she has such enthusiastic partisans about her as are here represented, than when she cuts off the faithful from the study of her divine doctrines and the sympathy of her divine contemplations, and requires from them a *fides implicita* in her word, which in the educated classes will terminate in indifference, and in the poorer in superstition (Coulson 1961:106).

One of the reasons for the strong opposition to Newman on the part of the English episcopate could have been the implications his essay had on the issue of doctrinal development. He had earlier published his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) and, accor-

ding to Owen Chadwick, the essay on *Consulting the Faithful* was his 'first attempt to resolve publically one of the major difficulties in his theory of doctrinal development: how, before a definition, is the mind of the church to be discovered?' (cited in Coulson 1961:26-27). For Newman, as for Pope John XXIII,³ one needs to distinguish between a doctrine and the method of its presentation. While certain truths and values may remain intact, their method of explication – taking into account, for instance, culture and language – will change over the centuries. The clear difference between the clergy and the laity was not denied by Newman – he called them the *ecclesia docens* and *ecclesia docta* (Gaffney 1992:10) – but he will not accept a separation between them. 'Consensus is a real and indispensable part of the voice of the ... church ... [which] resides in the whole community of the faithful and not exclusively with the hierarchy' (Moss 2009:25). The one cannot do without the other. The two 'portions' live in mutuality, in *conspiratio*.

Yves Congar, OP

'The story of the great Dominican theologian Yves Congar is in many respects the tale of the twentieth-century Catholic Church.'⁴ In the short space available here, we can only make a brief reference to Congar's major book on the subject, a monumental work that was first published in French in 1953.⁵ Shortly afterwards the author was silenced by the Vatican and sent into exile in England. He was rehabilitated by Pope John XXIII who appointed him to serve on the preparatory commission for Vatican II. During the Council Congar had a huge influence on the writing of documents, particularly *Lumen Gentium* and its chapter on the laity.

In *Lay People in the Church* Congar begins by categorizing the laity in terms of clerics: 'canonically, the lay[man] can be defined only by distinction from the cleric'.⁶ But he immediately adds that

³ See the Introduction to this book.

⁴ An excellent summary of Congar's writings on the laity can be found in Lakeland 2003, pages 49-77. This author is indebted to him for the choice of some of the themes from Congar's opus.

⁵ Citations in this chapter will refer to the revised English edition, 1965.

⁶ Congar also speaks of a third category in the church, namely, that of 'monks' who include both clerics and lay people. Today, following *Lumen Gentium*, we would

‘this point of view cannot supply a complete, positive notion of the lay condition’ (Congar 1965a:10). He then sets himself the task of looking at the issue in greater detail. He rejects the ‘absurd’ distinction that is often made between clerics and the laity, namely, that the former deal with divine things, the latter with earthly things. People in either category deal with both arenas. Lay persons, like clerics and religious, are ‘directly ordered to heavenly things’, though their competence in ecclesial matters is limited. They are Christians in the world and their activity is intrinsically spiritual because everything is oriented to God (:18-25). In his revised edition Congar takes in the thinking of Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*:

The starting point now is the idea of the People of God, the whole of it active, the whole of it consecrated, the whole a witness and sign of the purpose of God’s grace for the imparting of that purpose to the world. The whole living People has a structure; the dynamic sign of salvation which it represents and plants in the world has a structure: thus the hierarchical fact is set within this whole People of God, living and sent, but without dividing its mission into specialised parts. ... There is no particular mission differentiating the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. The latter also refers the temporal to God in Christ, and the lay faithful in their own way carry on the Church’s evangelizing mission (1965a:25).

There is, then, a fundamental equality between clergy and laity. Within this one People some are ordained for service of the community, while others engage in activity in the world which is their own calling and their own responsibility. They do not need ‘permission’ to witness to Christ and the church, and they engage in this activity both within the Christian community as well as in their daily lives. Thus, the laity ‘are not just taught in the church and sent into the world. They [also] exercise a positive, active role in the church’ (Lakeland 2003:56). Lay life, then, is based on what *Lumen Gentium* calls the priesthood of the faithful, which is not restricted to the laity

use the term ‘religious life’. To include this category in this study would take us away from our main theme of clerics and lay people.

(or 'non-clerics') but which refers to the sacredness which is endowed by God on all those who have been baptised into the Christian community. All that they say or do can become a sacrifice to God (Col 3:17).

Building on this theology of community, Congar wishes to investigate ways in which lay people can be brought into a renewal of the church. Firstly, he mentions the move in society in general towards forming groups in which their members can relate more informally and personally. He refers to this movement as 'irrepressible' (1965a:339). Through similar Christian groups lay persons could find renewal for themselves and also contribute towards the renewal of society. From the renewed notion of the church as community in Vatican II's documents there sprung up movements across the globe, for example, the base communities in Latin America, small Christian communities in Africa, and small ecclesial communities in Asia. The emphasis in all of these is reflection on the scriptures and social action. They are mainly lay organised and lay led, and have contributed enormously to the revivifying of the church. Although this new movement appeared after Congar wrote his book, they are fulfilling his desire that small groups of men and women – he actually calls them 'basic communities' – would rediscover the church 'and, in a sense, re-enter and renew her from below' (1965a:339).

A further argument for such small groups is the need to overcome the institutional barrier that can mask the church's 'deep and living mystery' and which can only be found 'from below, through little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity' (Congar 1965a:339). These groups are important because they form a kind of protest against the 'rigidity and unadaptability' of church structures and organisations. Without denying ecclesiastical hierarchy and its 'administrative machinery', these groups would offer their members the opportunity of making a personal contribution to ecclesial life and, through a mutual give-and-take, would pool their resources (:339-340).

The growth of such communities will require a change on the part of the clergy. 'The more their authority is exercised at a higher level, the more it gets out of touch with those below'. The clergy would still make their own unique contribution to the building up of the church, but they would also need to find new 'pastoral methods adapted to the new needs, particularly of a church which is more of a

community and wherein the contributions of the people are taken more into consideration'. Quoting M D Koster, Congar says that this 'means becoming a people again' (1965a:340). The traditional way for the laity to be involved was through the membership of confraternities⁷, but today they are challenged to form a 'community of communities' through which they will be able to become active members of the church (:341). In this description of the renewal of church life, Congar is already ahead of his time. As mentioned above, the post-Vatican II church was to see a rapid growth in small communities, particularly in the global south, through which lay persons sought after a more personalized Christian life in community. These groups, though, were to go beyond Congar's vision, for today they are mainly lay based, whereas he saw the necessity of an ordained priest being part of each (:341). Where many such communities exist, for example, in a South African parish, there is usually a mechanism by which they are related to the local parish and are thus still part of the wider church (cf. Lobinger 1981:62-63; Prior 1993:76-77). This provides for and maintains a healthy clergy-laity relationship, which Congar deals with in terms of hierarchical functions and personal charisms (Congar 1965a:341-343).

Lumen Gentium includes a chapter titled 'The universal call to holiness'. Congar has anticipated this with a section in his final chapter on 'lay holiness today'. The basis of lay spirituality is an embrace of secularity, of the reality of the incarnation. The daily life of people cannot be accepted as holy if 'the lay condition is presented as a concession to human weakness' (Congar 1965a:12), or as second best to the celibate life of clergy and religious. Nor does it help to be taught, as was so widespread, that Christian spirituality is based on a renouncement of the world, and 'effacing of secular tasks and aims by supernatural tasks and aims' (:412). Rather, lay spirituality is characterised by seeking God, not immediately, but through something other than God, through human beings and through the world (:412-413).⁸ It

⁷ Confraternities consist of groups of lay people who meet under the mandate of the church hierarchy in order to pray, become involved in church life and/or engage in social action. (In the Philippines they are called mandated organisations.) For a more extensive description and analysis of the movement in South Africa, led by members of the Lumko Institute, to build up the parish as a communion of communities, see Prior 1997.

⁸ Congar here quotes Gauthier though without giving a reference.

consists of a recovery of the human which had for long 'been swallowed up in the divine and, in this sense, as it were made alien to it' (:413). Even in religious life there has been a move towards a certain 'being in the world'. For example, agricultural work in common was introduced, then intellectual and cultural activities, scientific work of the reason, a rediscovery of the excellence of marriage and of the excellence of the body. Christians are recovering the value of the human, and nature itself at work in history. 'Little by little, the church enters into the experience of a secular world and of a fully lay condition of the faithful in this secular world' (:414). Growing out of the Renaissance and its godless humanism, we are moving towards recognising in wonder a 'God-centred humanism and a "christofinalized" human work on earth which yet remain truly human and of this world' (:414). With the Renaissance the church lost its control over 'the world' which has now become thoroughly secular. The challenge to the church is to develop a spirituality and new forms of holiness for those engaged in 'worldly' work. Not only must the clergy find new patterns of ministry to suit this new situation, but are faced with discovering new forms of priestly life (:415).

From working in confraternities through which lay people shared in the apostolate of the hierarchy, a new way of putting Christ back into the whole of life is required. Daily life 'is simply an aspect and a part of one single Christian life in which the faithful have to sanctify themselves and give glory to God'. It is 'a dying [of] sacral Christendom and the first hints of a new' form of following Christ. The quality of this spirituality 'must inform the whole personality and its integral life' (Congar 1965a:415). There is really only one holiness, a clinging to God, and this is expressed in a lay spirituality which is at the service of others, with an emphasis on family life and one's work situation (:417-420). Consequently one finds oneself working for the betterment of the world, not in an over-optimistic way in which one identifies all good works as acts of Redemption. Rather, 'we want the Christian to be able to put one's heart in to the world's undertakings and achievements but without being enthralled by them as if they were a last end' (:420-421). Congar sums up his spirituality of Christians 'living in the world' as: 'the holy and hallowing will of God → vocation → service and its demands → engagement and responsibility: the whole beneath the sign of the Cross' (:424-450). Throughout it all, Christians give things their real meaning according

to the pattern of Christ's lowly service, and thus become sacraments of salvation before all' (:450-451).

It is difficult to assess 'Congar's majestic' work which Lakeland regards as 'the most influential single work ever to be written on the topic' (2003:77). Recognising that Congar's theology of the laity is an ecclesiology in itself, Lakeland examines Congar's radicalism in terms of liberation theology which itself was perhaps the most radical of post-conciliar ecclesiologies, and which could be seen as a further development of Congar's thought. Lakeland reduces liberation theology to three major principles.

Firstly, it prioritizes the experience of the poor. Second, liberation theology draws the eschatological promise of salvation and the historical project of liberation into close relationship. Third, liberation theology is an inductive, grass-roots, 'bottom-up' movement that starts from the experience of the poor as analysed, celebrated, and transformed in base Christian communities (2003:76).

Both theologies manage to keep in balance the church-world distinction and are able not to reduce the church's mission to mere socio-political activism (2003:77).

As already mentioned, Congar was to make a most important contribution to the teachings of Vatican II. Yet, the Council documents do not reflect his radicalism. Moreover, says Lakeland, despite the fact that lay people are involved in the work of the church as never before, 'we are still no nearer to knowing what it is to be a lay Christian' (2003:77). We have already noted that in the documents of Vatican II there is the possibility of a renewed ecclesiology based on the equality of all the baptised. We have referred, too, to strong efforts in documentation emanating from the church's Roman curia to re-emphasise the importance of the cleric-lay divide, and so preserve clerical power. There is no space here to examine in detail the Vatican II documents on the subject, nor the many utterances which have since come from official church authorities.⁹ Keeping in mind the early church and its lack of the cleric-lay divide, and the radical contributions of Newman and Congar towards the role of the laity in the

⁹ This issue is well dealt with by Osborne, *Ministry*, 518-595.

church (each in his own way did not see the realisation of their vision for the church), we conclude with suggestions as to what is required for a theology of church for today which will concentrate on the role of the overwhelming majority of the faithful, namely, the laity, and subsequently will challenge the clericalism which has grown throughout the centuries and which is proving to be an obstacle to true Christian community today.

A secular ecclesiology

‘The more I go out among people, the less I come back a person’, writes Thomas à Kempis in the *Imitation of Christ*. This view sums up much of Christian spirituality over the centuries. In this view there is a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, between world history and salvation history. The church is a ‘perfect society’ and the more we avoid the world the less we will become contaminated by it. The more we stay within the church’s ambit, the more likely we are to remain sinless and eventually reach our heavenly reward. The above title ‘secular ecclesiology’ would make no sense to people with this attitude. But with the God-centred humanism that we find in the theology of Yves Congar we can begin to appreciate that the world is God’s creation and that all was created good. This requires a belief in the reality of the Incarnation, by which God became fully a member of our humanity and, as it were, consecrated it. What is needed is a renewed understanding of what the secular is. Far from being in opposition to the sacred, the secular means ‘the world dependent on God for its existence and suffused with divine presence through Christ and the Spirit, but not in such a way that the presence of God changes or suspends the natural laws of the universe’ (Lakeland 2003:149). It also means that ‘God gave the world to itself, with its own autonomy, as the place in which human beings live out their destiny to be – human beings’ (:150).

The church is the People of God *in this world*. It is a community of those who believe that there is a possibility of people becoming fully human, that is, being restored in God’s image (Stone 2004:97). Consequently, this becomes their lifelong programme of action. ‘The baseline for Christian spirituality is a worldly orientation. ...We are taken up in the world, fully engaged in the world, interested in the things of the world, as Congar would say, for their own sake, not for

the sake of some “higher” calling’ (Lakeland 2003:179-180; cf. Congar 1965a:20). It means being ‘in the world, there to do God’s work *in so far as it must be done in and through the work of the world*’ (1965a:19; italics in the original). The Christian vocation, then, is a worldly one; it is secular. ‘God has been concerned also with the *polis*, not only with the *ecclesia*. The Christian community therefore has a responsibility towards the public to see God’s will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10)’ (Saayman 2011:5). We are driven to work for what is more fully human, knowing that we are limited by a sense of responsibility, as well as the difficulties that occur as we attempt to live and work with respect for the whole of creation, both human and non-human. Lakeland puts it thus:

The Christian, as the believer in Jesus, is then the one who is confident in the need for the struggle, assured of its eventual outcome, and sober both about the price that individuals may have to pay and about the time that may pass before the reign of God begun in Jesus is fully realised in the world. The lay Christian, not the cleric, is the one who must take the heat in the day-to-day work of co-creation. The lay Christian is the one upon whom the burden and honour of working for a more fully human world have been placed (Lakeland 2003:183-184).

This cost of discipleship is based on service and suffering. Jesus placed *diakonia* at the centre of life for those who are to follow him, as he made clear on many occasions. For example, his own life of service for the kingdom will lead to suffering and death (Mt. 16:13-28). In the same gospel Jesus defines leadership – for his disciples as well as for himself – as ‘drinking the cup’ (Mt. 20:20-23), and as kneeling before those whom society regards as ‘inferiors’ in order to wash their feet (Jn. 13:1-20). No one in leadership may be domineering by lording it over others. Servant and slave: ‘these two terms lie at the very heart of the categories which serve to define Christian existence’ (Congar 1965b:25). Congar continues:

Because their life belongs wholly to Christ, is wholly of him and for him, the disciples can rise only by humbling themselves, only by following Christ on the downward

path of self-giving and self-abnegation, along which St. Paul has traced God's victorious trajectory to the death on the cross and from the tomb to glory (:26).

A theology of secularity is none other than a reflection on what faces human beings every day:

the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts...Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (G&S 1).

It is lay people who are at the coal face, as it were, facing the challenges of daily life, while their counterparts, the clergy, are more concerned with 'churchly things'. The call to lay involvement, which followed the renewed understanding of church in the Vatican II documents, has too often resulted in the laity entering the sanctuary, as it were, and getting involved in ecclesiastical affairs. A secular ecclesiology puts things into perspective: the lay person's call is to move out through the church door to face daily life with renewed faith and enthusiasm, to find God in all events, and to enable those on the margins of society to work for a liberation out of their misery and reach that fullness of humanity which is their destiny. This is the true meaning of Gospel ministry.

Within this ambit the ordained can find their own vocation. As members of the priesthood of the faithful, and leaders within that Christian community, they are to be at the service of those who work for the renewal of humanity. Such an orientation will colour all *ad intra* activities of the church, including worship. Thus, it makes sense that the role of the clergy is determined by the vocation of the laity, for their calling is to serve the community and not to be served (Mark 10:43-45; Rites #14). There is, then, no room for autocracy which separates the leader from the people one is supposed to lead/serve, or the lack of accountability – what Lakeland calls a 'self-policing system' and I refer to as clericalism – which creates a kind of elitism (cf. Lakeland 2003:189-190). The response to this situation points

towards an inclusive leadership with clerics and laity working together, the former the 'servants or slaves'. This is what Congar calls a 'community of communities' and Newman describes as the '*sensus/consensus fidelium*'. 'Fellowship and accountability are a good recipe for a mature community of faith' (:92). It is time to turn upside down the centuries-old and outdated pyramid with the clergy above and beyond 'the rest'. What is needed is a return to a Gospel spirituality of discipleship, which in contemporary parlance could be titled a theology of secularity, a sure way of building a Gospel-based Christian community.

Abbreviations

Vatican II documents (taken from A. Flannery. (ed) 1975. (2010)
Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents. Vol.I. Mumbai: St. Pauls):
 LG: *Lumen Gentium*.
 AA: *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.
 PO: *Presbyterorum Ordinis*.
 G&S: *Gaudium et Spes*.

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Revalorisation of mysticism for society and the church

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Introduction

The basic premise of this article is that *mysticism* is a *gift* for society and the church. It is suggested that a revalorization of mysticism can lead to the revitalisation of society and the church. With respect to the latter, it would facilitate a re-discovery of the pristine message of the gospel. This would be one in which the inequalities, suspicions, injustices, devalorisation of the body and the material realm, and above all the basic lack of love for fellow human beings, of whatever persuasion, are seen to be a thing of the past. In order to understand the importance of the phenomenon of mysticism, a brief look at the current crises in society and the church will contextualize the discussion.

Crisis in society

Objectivistic philosophy and reductionist theories have contributed to a malaise in society and the church. In many cases, the observable and the empirical are considered the true index of reality. There is a loss of purpose and meaning in life. Western society today is clearly characterised by rationalism, technological expertise, strident competition and an ever-increasing desire for material possessions. The observable and the empirical are considered the true index of reality. That which is non-productive in a technological or material sense is denied validity by prevailing rationalism and scientism. Meritocratic society thrives on mendacity and secularization, with the result that science and achievement is the true measure of the *real* with a concomitant emphasis on the products of the rational mind. The shifting sands of anarchism and

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hopeless nihilism found in many sectors of society have become for many in modernist and post-modernist society the basic reality, resulting in the 'victory' of nothingness that engulfs the human person at his or her death. Much of the prevailing malaise is due to what has been called the 'eclipse of the spiritual world-view' (Lorimer 1990:220). Without discounting the necessity of attending to technological, social and economic welfare, nevertheless the resultant spiritual vacuum cannot be filled in spite of attempts at 'divertissement' and the use of palliatives that temporarily camouflage inner vacuity instead of allowing anguish and boredom to lead to an inner metamorphosis.

Paul Tillich illustrates this situation cogently, in his description of the *lost dimension of depth* in contemporary society: 'As long as the preliminary, transitory concerns are not silenced, no matter how interesting and valuable and important they may be, the voice of ultimate concern cannot be heard. This is the deepest loss of the dimension of depth in our period – the loss of religion in its basic universal meaning' (in Thomas 1988:44). Left-brain analytical, logical and intellectual activities are valued more highly than right brain activities such as the world of feeling, instinct and intuition. The latter are diverted from the mainstream of life, especially in the academy. More often they are relegated to the artist, poet or mystic, and are given subsidiary status. Together with the reductionist tendencies of scientific empiricism, such modern philosophies lead to an addictive, work-oriented functional consciousness that is neither psychologically nor spiritually satisfying. The fallacy of attending only to the material surface of life leads to a state of ennui and emptiness, often unrecognised until some or other crisis brings it to the forefront of consciousness.

The denial of the metaphysical often leads to worship of the trivial. Much of so-called Western Enlightenment therefore gives allegiance to penultimate things. The priority of the spiritual has given way to the primacy of the physical. A loss of a sense of purpose and meaning can result in a situation where there is no legitimate hope or purpose in the universe or of our place in it. A leading question we have to ask is whether it is possible to address the concerns of both the scientifically and the spiritually oriented without violating the sensibilities of either, or surrendering critical enquiry and legitimate scepticism? In order to attempt an answer to this problematic, it is necessary to reflect on the crisis in the church. The church is part of society and it

is undoubtedly true that the problems experienced in society will be reflected in one way or another in the church.

The Institutional Church in crisis

Religion in general and the church in particular is under attack. This is clearly seen by the powerful and often ferocious critique, *inter alia*, by Dawkins (2006) and Hitchens (2007; cf. Nürnberger 2009). The reductionist stance propagated by such writers gives rise to cynicism; in many quarters religion is no longer seen to be relevant, and the ... 'divine, at least in its classical forms, has receded into the background of human concern and consciousness' (Berger 1970:1). Many organised religions are outmoded and in decline and often characterised by 'empty ritualism, hypocrisy, clericalism, corruption, abuse of power, superstition, and many other deformations familiar from the history of religions and from which no religion is totally free' (Schneiders 2003:171). Many sociologists of religion point to the fact that particularly in Europe church structures are evaporating, organised Christianity is in decline, and the future of religion itself is at stake.

Some of the reasons for what can be called an 'allergy' towards the institutional church are as follows: firstly, a fanatical intolerance among certain church groups who espouse and are committed to an ideology, with such remorseless zeal that its absoluteness is maintained at any cost, even to the detriment of purely humanitarian feeling and ethical behaviour. Such a lack of tolerance for views other than one's own occurs not only with respect to 'outsiders' but also to those within a particular church grouping whose ideas are considered less orthodox or possibly 'heretical'. A 'cursory glance at history will confirm the spectacle of human beings ready to die for and kill in the name of ideologies and religions' (Lorimer 1990:239). Jung tells us that fanaticism is overcompensated doubt, and therefore the exclusiveness and correctness of one's doctrinal position is more important than compassion and care for the other (Lorimer 1990:240). Clearly, arrogant certainties of dogma have alienated many. Secondly, autocratic systems of church governance, requiring conservative obedience, together with certainties of dogma, do little to encourage honest and critical thought among members of the community. In fact, in many traditions there is what could be called the 'thought-police', monitoring dissent.

Thirdly, even the bible itself is held up as 'law' instead of a life giving, sustaining and nourishing text. Fourthly, the church's treatment of women leaves much to be desired, although in some Christian groups this situation is slowly receiving attention. Fifthly, particularly in certain established churches, the legacy of the past is clearly seen in the visible division of the body of believers into two parts, viz., the clergy and the laity a division which has contributed to the fact that the former are often considered 'higher' than the latter. Such a dichotomy has inevitably led therefore to elitism. Sixthly, a further criticism is the fact that the church does not take seriously the *pluralist* situation that it finds itself in at this point in history. Almost everywhere different religions and *Weltanschauung* exist together, and the church needs to adapt and dialogue with its neighbours from different traditions. This could hopefully lead to an alternative to Christian exclusiveness in which there is no obliteration of distinctions, but rather an open dialogue in which each participant can contribute in an atmosphere of creative rapprochement. Finally, a large number of Christians maintain that '... these institutions have fallen into disuse because of their failure to respond to [a] spiritual hunger ... [which] seeks immediacy with God ... many people think that as a result of their dogmatic or practical intransigence the churches are a source of violence and do not encourage spiritual experience' (Duquoc & Gutierrez 1994:vii). This perception has indeed led many to leave the church and seek fellowship and understanding elsewhere, or to abandon Christianity or even the spiritual quest for truth in its entirety. However, not all Christians fall into this camp. In spite of what has been called the 'dark night of the church' there is a willingness to remain within the body of believers and help effect 'a new way of being Church'. Although this may be painful, it is '... for the sake of the Church, for community, for new patterns of relating, out of fidelity to the Spirit, who is the very energy of relation, connection and the vitality of all living things' (Grey 1997:52).

As a sign of hope and possible corrective to the foregoing, it can be said that there are currently many and various attempts to come to a greater understanding of the church. For example, just to pinpoint one example, church bodies throughout Christendom have taken seriously the call for ecumenical endeavour. Whereas in the past discussions on the church, particularly in Europe, have perhaps concentrated too much on ecclesiastical structures, nowadays there is increasing interest in explicating the *essence* of the church. Ecumenical endeavour, whilst not

ignoring questions of church structure, concentrates more on the *mystery* of the church. Biblical language is used to describe the church, in preference to scholastic or juridical categories. Christocentric, pastoral, biblical, historical and eschatological concerns are uppermost; the church as witness, ministry and fellowship is clearly of prime importance (Abbott 1972:11). In the New Testament itself there is a plethora of images which attempt to elucidate the nature of the church. Metaphors abound and indeed the very use of imagery is itself an attempt to express in human terms, that which is essentially a mystery. Perhaps one of the contributions that Africa and South Africa, in particular, can make towards an understanding of the reality of the church is to provide fresh metaphors unique to the African continent. In addition, many of the African Christian churches are not as hierarchically stratified as the established European Christian communities; they may therefore illustrate elements of the church which have been buried for too long within the cast of ecclesiastical stone.

In summary, however, notwithstanding the above caveat, the crisis in society and its ramifications in the church are clearly very serious. Western culture, prizing functional success over caring communion, stresses having over being, calculative over meditative thought, and rational knowledge over mystical awareness. As a result the depth dimension of reality is bracketed out or forgotten and the world is seen from the perspective of its usefulness. It is therefore necessary that we be liberated from a deterministic and rigidly objective sense of reality, so as to comprehend how the physical participates in the metaphysical. The church finds itself in a situation of crisis, and needs to admit its own shortcomings in order to be a leaven for society. We need a heuristic faith that is open and eager and allows the transcendent experience of the divine to become imbedded in daily life. The ultimate goal in life is not merely to adapt to the socio-political and economic environment, but to experience the Spirit in a direct and mystical way. It is my contention that a revalorization of the mystical will bring renewal and a return to the pristine message of the gospel. Let us now look briefly at the nature of mysticism.

Mysticism: its value for society and church

By way of contextualization, it is important to note that constructive postmodernism, in contrast to deconstructive postmodernism (Griffin

1990), lends itself to a greater appreciation of the mystical, due to the breakdown of the dominance of scientific positivism and Enlightenment modes of certitude. Atheistic nihilism as well as dualistic supernaturalism are giving way to an organic and ecological spirituality in which the reality of spiritual energy is seen ‘...to exist within and between all nodes in the cosmic web of interconnections’ (Griffin 1990:2). Such spirituality is post patriarchal and *telluric* – expressing sensitivity towards and solidarity with the earth, not as an object to be dominated, but as mother, symbol and abode of the divine (Kappen 1994:33). Clearly, the ‘strong’ and often harsh values of modernism are being pulverised, and there is a new awareness of the world as a place where life can be lived poetically and mystically.

For purposes of the present discussion mysticism can be described as *the experience of union with God*. In *Christian* mysticism it is Christ who articulates this union through the Spirit. The problematic concerning definition, etc., of mysticism has been dealt with elsewhere (Kourie 1992); suffice it to say at this stage, that it continues to be a cause of intense debate and controversy, not only in academic and church circles but in everyday discourse. Perhaps one of the reasons that the subject of mysticism is so prevalent today is the fact that it witnesses to a current desire for access to the divine, a quest for an experience, dissatisfaction with dogma and a longing to live life in depth. In addition, it is a realisation of *panentheism*: ‘...the world is in God and God is in the world in a kind of “perichoresis”’ (Carozzo 1994:19). Waaijman defines mysticism as ‘... a relational process between God and man (sic), a process which has its own language and logic ... the intimacy of mystical love purifies the intellect, the will and the memory until they are completely attuned to God’ (2002:357). McGinn, drawing on the work of Lonergan and Merton, speaks of mystical consciousness as ‘meta-consciousness– a consciousness *beyond* – which is ... the co-presence of God in our inner acts, not as an object to be understood or grasped, but as the transforming Other’ (2008:47; cf. 2011).

Mysticism is not an isolated experience, but one that impacts on life, affecting not only the individual concerned, but also society itself. As McGinn (2005:19) points out, the only validation one has with respect to the mystics claims is ‘through the impact their inner transformation has upon their lives and the lives of those they influenced’. Mystics can be seen as paradigms of human authenticity; in many cases they are pioneers shedding light on what is hidden and pointing to a

passionate encounter with the Divine. They witness to the active infusion of Infinite Spirit into finite spirit, or perhaps more accurately, an awakening to the inner actualization of the same. The fruits of mysticism can be seen, *inter alia*, in their warmth of love in self-giving, dynamic qualities of leadership, and the fact that there is 'an exceptional, deep-rooted mental healthiness, which is readily recognisable. It is expressed in the bent for action, the faculty for adapting and re-adapting oneself to circumstances, discernment of what is possible, and what is not, in the spirit of simplicity which triumphs over complications, in a word, supreme good sense' (Bergson 1980: 227-228). We see in the life of Thomas Merton a prime example of the need to combine the mystical with the ethical in his commitment to the common good, '... to make the world better, more free, more just, more livable, more human' (Furlong 1980: 253-254). Mysticism, therefore, encompasses a way of life in which a process of transformation occurs, followed by a life of service to others. The means by which this is effected vary, but suffice it to say that systematic structuring of the mystical reality enriches both church and society, so that the insights gained are brought into daily life.

Although the basic argument of this paper is that mysticism can *benefit* society and the church, this does not mean to say that cordial relations have always existed and continue to exist between them. On the contrary, there remains a great deal of equivocation as to the value of mysticism. Particularly with respect to the interface between mysticism and the church, history shows us that there have been contradictory opinions. Lee (1989:105) correctly points out the '... curious contradiction mysticism has historically proved to be for the Church. It has been the wellspring of both saints and schismatics, the hallmark of luminaries and lunatics alike. It has been a force for the active up-building of the body of Christ and an impetus to the counter-currents of sectarianism, anti-nomianism and quietism. It has issued in theologies of impeccable Trinitarian monotheism and in the heterodoxy of pantheism'. Mystics have more often than not been viewed with distrust as disturbers of the institutional order. The fact that mysticism is no longer an esoteric phenomenon, limited to a few marginalised people, has led to further alienation within certain churches. Mysticism has spread so rapidly, and has gained a social significance that was lacking three or four decades ago, that the church is now confronted with a movement that can no longer be ignored. The church can resort to

mechanisms of self-defence in order to deal with this situation, for example, 'rigidity directed inwards' and 'suspicion directed outwards' (Carozzo 1994:20). Complex and rigid orthodoxy can be used to expel the mystically inclined, with the disclaimer that mysticism is syncretistic and leads to relativism, and as such is a danger for the church. On the other hand, the church can react with openness and see mysticism as a divine gift (charism) for the Enlightenment of all its members (Lee 1989:105). Mysticism might even be 'a sign through which the Spirit of Jesus is addressing itself to the churches ... postmodernist mysticism is an invitation to change pedagogical key and in particular to *put experience of the God of Jesus rather than propositions at the centre of religious education*' (Carozzo 1994: 24).

Karl Rahner (1971:15) states cogently, '... the devout Christian of the future will either be a mystic – one who has experienced something, or he will cease to be anything at all'. Particularly, with respect to the Christian church, a recovery and revalorization of its mystical heritage will enable the church to be more relevant at several levels. Firstly, the democratisation of structures – with less emphasis on the distinction between clergy and laity – will result in the dismantling of monolithic structures and greater co-operative endeavours among all the members of the body of Christ. Secondly, there will be a greater understanding of the needs of a pluralistic society and a greater openness to the insights of world religions. Thirdly, the role of women will be more readily acknowledged with the result that the androcentric and patriarchal bias of the past will be eliminated. This would result in a mutually supportive relationship of complementarity between women and men, instead of adversarial relationships of difference. Perhaps women would become more assertive and differentiated, and men would become more permeable and connected! A new understanding of gender would also lead to fewer dichotomies: between mind/body, spiritual/secular, masculinity/femininity; as a result the world could become less violent and the warring factions both within the individual and at a societal level would be diminished. Fourthly, a renewed ecological sensitivity would emerge as the church becomes aware of the fact all is inter-related, and therefore each part of the whole is deserving of respect.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it can be said that the revalorization of mysticism counteracts a purely external, dissipated and alienated existence. A true understanding of the mystical argues against the tyranny of scientific materialism so prevalent in the frenetic and secularist world. The mystical life effects transmutation of character and transformation of consciousness; transcendence is found in immanence and the essential in the phenomenal. Mysticism can be seen as a gift and a palladium for society and the future of the church. A realisation of the coinherence of God in matter and history effects freedom from the fragmentation and lonely atomisation of modernity and draws us to the deep levels of connectedness in the Spirit. Mysticism is a charism, and needs to be reclaimed from the mists of ignorance surrounding it for so many decades. Revalorisation of the mystical leads to enhanced life; daily life undergoes a gain in sensory intensity. There is a new dimension of temporality in which validation of the world is pre-eminent. Mystics are not those who possess a certain sixth sense, which separates them from others; they are part of the human family, but have been awakened to a transfigured existence. Religion is no longer seen primarily as doctrinal adherence, institutional affiliation or ethical endeavour, but rather as personal engagement with the Absolute. God is not seen as a metaphysical concept, but a mystically experienced Reality. Mystical Enlightenment does not imply manumission of effort, but on the contrary, a return to the market place in altruistic simplicity.

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The prophetic role of Christian faith communities in contemporary Africa

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Introduction: Christian Faith in Public Life

From the very beginning of its Jewish roots in the Hebrew Scripture the Christian faith has always faced two challenges. First, there has been the temptation for rulers to turn themselves into gods and require from their subjects such allegiance as belongs to God alone. Secondly, there has always been the temptation for Christian believers to give acquiescence to this blasphemy, either actively by supporting it in various ways, or passively by not vigorously resisting it. The intensity of this temptation in its two manifestations has, of course, differed from epoch to epoch in the history of each location the church was to be found, and Christians in each place and era have had to weigh the manner and strength of their response. Because of different situations, Christians have therefore responded to the challenges differently in actual practice in different locations and times. In all cases, however, the 'prophetic tradition' of the Hebrew Scriptures remains paradigmatic for all Christians of every age in its resistance against the excesses of the rulers of this world and the idolatrous demands of their false gods.

Having in various ways resisted and defeated the false gods of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, contemporary Africa is faced with new types of rulers with their gods against which the Christian faith and Church are mandated by the God of Jesus to rebel and resist. 'No other gods, only me' remains the divine directive. The inescapable question for the Church in Africa today is, therefore, how to respond to the challenges born of the false gods of international exploitation and injustice, internal oppression and discrimination, tribalism and bad governance, corruption and marginalisation of people, and the

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numerous ideologies of 'development' which, instead of promoting holistic human development, subject the African person all over the continent to materialism at the expense of his/her identity, human dignity and rights. Does the distinctive voice of Christian communities come out loud and clear in the public square, just as that of the prophets did against the rulers of Israel? My goal here is to show how, citing pertinent examples, the contemporary African social, economic and political situation calls for a vigorous prophetic response from the Christian Church based on its faith in the one God revealed by Jesus Christ.

The question of identity

The Christian church has had to face the challenge concerning the meaning of its identity from the very beginning of its existence, initially vis-à-vis Judaism and the Gentile religions, and then against Roman imperial-religious power, as well as the dominant philosophies of the day. The early development of doctrine was a result of this struggle. But the process cannot end as long as the church is a living organism in a changing environment, and so it has continued throughout history up to our own day. That is why the question cannot be escaped: What is involved in being church in Africa today? In our age of sharply conflicting interests, the church has to be clear, for the sake of evangelization, about her position in the areas of political, economic, and social structures and ideologies. Failing this, or being ambiguous about it, compromises her mission.

'Identity refers to commitment and loyalty of a particular culture, religion, or community', as Aquiline Tarimo explains. 'It is a medium through which people define themselves vis-à-vis other groups as well as reinforce patterns of social relationships between members of a given community' (Tarimo 2009:26). Thus identity defines social space. How am I, or are we different from others? This is not a strange question at all; rather, it forms part of the normal process of growth and development of a specific identity. No individual or corporate body is completely identical to another; we are condemned, so to speak, to be different. Nature has designed us in such a way that not only our similarities, but even more so our differences, make us who we are. In other words, our differences distinguish us from one another and the others and so identify us. They

provide us our 'personality'. They constitute, so to speak, our identity markers.

In voluntary associations, such as religion, conscious choice is normally the main factor of identity, the fundamental aspect of the process of belonging and loyalty. The questions usually are these: What kind of group are we, and do we want to be and become, and in pursuit of what ends? These are issues of vision, process, and goal. They describe any group's character as the all-embracing identity-marker that subsumes all others. We can speak of the 'character' of either individuals or corporate bodies to define them, to point them out for what they really are, and to distinguish them from other similar entities.

Christian identity

We will be concerned in this reflection with the identity of the Christian Church as an institution, a corporate body, a community. Since inculturation is of the very essence of the church, it means that local churches sport certain particular identity-markers. Although we can speak of a general *Christian* identity throughout the ages because of the church's faithfulness to Christ and his message, we must also, and perhaps more accurately, at the same time refer to the *Christian identities* of Christian churches in various locations and times.

In the New Testament, the existence of different churches, with different characteristics in terms of theologies, is quite clear and seems to be taken for granted. Most of the Apostles preach to the Jews but Peter and Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles – this seems to be the acknowledged consensus in the Apostolic Church at the beginning of the Christian movement (see Acts 15). Consequently, it is customary to speak with reference to the New Testament of Pauline churches, for instance, Christian assemblies quite distinct from one another, each with particular organisational forms, problems and strengths. But there are also others, such as Johannine and Petrine communities.

Paul in his letters refers to the various churches he founded or was somehow associated with clearly by name – the Church in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Galatia, as well as others which are home-based. He also spells out the problems and virtues of each, the things with them that make him sad and those of which he is proud. In fact, the letters are written to address some of the problems and

strengths Paul recognises to be brought about in these churches by different circumstances. New Testament scholarship has, in fact, established that, broadly, the different styles of writing and content we find in the various books there indicate basically different social, political and economic environments. In short, they point to the context conditioning the development of the ecclesial identities of the different apostolic churches.

Just like the individual person, the church's identity and character depend on many factors. In Africa today these are shaped by the church's reaction to what happens around it, indicating at the same time what happens within it. It is essential first to be clear about what context the church finds itself in. Then we have to look at how it responds to this context. In the process of contact and the dynamics of reaction, that is, in the act of mutual affirmation and rejection of elements between the church and the surrounding milieu, Christian identity is formed. There is no other way around this because identity, it is important to underline, does not and cannot happen in a vacuum. It is a result of the dynamics of individuation of persons and communities, on the one hand, and the struggle to respond to the prevailing environment, on the other. And we must understand 'responding to the environment' in a very interactive sense, which includes challenging and modifying each other. The survival of the individual or corporate body in any environment depends on how successfully this process is carried out.

Earlier contexts and responses of the churches in Africa

At the end of the nineteenth century, a period signalling the beginning of establishing the church in Africa south of the Sahara, we note two dominant aspects of the prevailing environment. First, we have strong traditional cultures in place. Although cultural contact with the outside world was not completely absent even then, notably, with Arab merchants along the coast and slave traders inland, it had hardly affected traditional cultures, specifically in the strictly religious arena. Africans in this region continued to pray and worship in their customary ways, and there were neither questions asked nor thought entertained about changing or modifying them.

But this was also the period of the establishment of the colonies. The colonial situation formed the other side of the contextual

coin in which the Christian churches, arriving simultaneously with it together with the European exploratory and merchant entrepreneurs had to situate itself. It was a situation that was generally negative in the perception of, and definitely antagonistic and hostile towards, the traditional context at all levels of the political, economic, social and religious spectrum. The political, commercial, and social interests of the new situation were at odds with their counterparts in the old. This conflict created an atmosphere of hostility, oftentimes open, as in the Maji Maji and later Mau Mau struggles in Tanganyika and Kenya respectively. Much more often, however, the discontent was simmering and permanent. The identity of each of these protagonists was often defined in the struggle. For the church, the question was clear, though not articulated in so many words: How could the church establish its identity in the context of these competing perceptions and ways of life? How should it navigate between the two worlds? On one side, there was the traditional context of political administration by leaders (whether chiefs or other elders) who also wielded sacred power, ancestor veneration, belief in spiritual presence everywhere, and customs not only different from, but strange to and condemned by European perceptions. On the other, there was the European and Christian churches desire to 'civilise the natives' through commerce and the introduction of new religious beliefs and behaviours.

History gives us a picture of the contemporary church's choice in this dilemma. By and large, it chose to side with the colonial context in its self-imposed, so-called civilizing mission of the natives. In other words, it generally blessed the colonial context with very little critique, if at all.² Largely, it failed to create a new context based on God's word found in the prophetic position of the Scriptures, which we now realise should be the church's primary responsibility in any situation. Through its preaching and practice the church should transform any given situation so as to create 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The church's identity was therefore at this time blurred among the majority of Africans. They felt themselves unable, except in very rare circumstances, to distinguish between the colonial political

² Later on, in the middle of the 20th century, there were Christian voices cautioning about the wisdom of this choice. Among others, Adrian Hastings (1979:285, at footnotes 24) mentions Roland Oliver, John V. Taylor, J.H. Oldham, Max Warren, and Alfred de Sora.

dispensation and the new Christian evangelical one, which often claimed to have nothing to do with the former. In different ways, this is the legacy the church in Africa is still struggling with today.

When political independence finally came to the African states beginning with the decade of the 1960s, the colonial versus traditional conflicting situation remained fundamentally unchanged. Let us discuss briefly here three aspects of this situation: the cultural-social, the political, and the economic features. All these contribute to shape the identity of the Christian church in Africa today. They also point to ways in which the church should define its identity in this century.

The cultural-social situation

In the cultural-religious sphere, the identity of the Christian churches is approached variously. The new charismatic, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal branches of Christianity, originating mainly since the 1970s, seem to define themselves in radical opposition to African religiosity and spirituality.³ To say that for them it seems as if Jesus has nothing at all to do with African religiosity is surely not a caricature of the Pentecostal position. Once one has been 'born again', has 'met Jesus', or been 'saved', one must abandon almost totally the African worldview which the missionaries and early colonists also rejected and fought against. In this position Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal identity enjoys the voice and stance of clarity: 'Reject African spirituality'. But at what cost? The price people have to pay for this stance is clearly alienation from their roots. The benefits they seem to reap in terms of healing, deliverance and economic success are usually short-lived, probably because the identity thus formed does not send deep enough roots into cultural spirituality.

Opposition to the religious sensibilities of traditional value systems also to some extent still defines mainline Protestant and Catholic identity. If the missionary (and several current Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches) approaches of total condemnation have been toned down in the mainline churches, this is only slightly, and not in the areas that really matter. In the fields of ancestor veneration, the unity of the visible and spiritual universes, and similar matters of

³ For a brief but comprehensive study of these movements in the Nairobi area of Kenya, see Aylward Shorter and Joseph N. Njiru 2001.

belief important to the general African Christian, the church's position is still worlds apart from that of the African traditional reality. The African Christian, even the modern educated one, still feels basically at a loss to identify him or herself at the same time as African and Christian. Although the mainline churches theoretically encourage the process of deep insertion of faith into culture, they seem unable to bring it about for fear of losing their conventional identity through what is sometimes referred to as 'relativism' and 'syncretism'.

If the task of the Gospel of Christ is to challenge culture, including the culture it is currently expressed in or bears, then it needs to construct a new culture, constantly. But this new culture will not be something that falls from nowhere because it happens in the process of borrowing values from the cultural experiences around, including, once again, from whatever culture it may be clothed in at any particular moment. This is what is now referred to as the process of inculturation. Caution here is necessary, however. For Africa, what inculturation should mean is that Christ must be born anew in African cultures and live, preach, and die in this context. In this way, he brings out what is best in this culture as a new culture, just as he did with the Jewish culture. Christ's work is thus not predicated essentially to an intermediary criterion, save only the will of God for the fullness of life of humankind. This is the radical meaning of the incarnation, God becoming human and dwelling among us, Emmanuel.

From this perspective, inculturation, as is often understood, is skewed, in the sense that it makes of the process a priori weighted too much against the African religious environment. Since it takes as a necessary intermediary the expressions of the faith in Christ as developed in another place (Europe), it is indeed often no more than adaptation. The process appears as if, compared to African religiosity and spirituality, European Christian cultural expressions of faith in Christ enjoy superiority over African cultural experiences of divine revelation. From the outset, it subordinates African to Western categories of belief-expression. In this way, the identity and voice of the church remain substantially foreign. This is why, in practical terms, syncretism, understood not as liberal compromise, but positively as the fusion of what is life-giving and life-enhancing from both Christian and African spiritual traditions, may be what we want if we are to construct an authentic African Christianity. This will be a new iden-

tity, one that is neither essentially European nor exclusively traditional African, but precisely *African-Christian*.

With different degrees of success, this is what most African Initiated Churches (AICs) struggle to achieve. Analyses and critiques of these movements have sometimes focused on their failures, their emphasis on Old Testament biblical tradition at one extreme, or on African traditional spiritual practices at the other. These are indeed serious shortcomings and must be pointed out and critiqued. But it should be borne in mind that the movement at constructing a truly African Christian identity is not foolproof among AICs or mainline ones. Just like all human attempts at relating to God, it is full of pitfalls on account of human limitations in this area, and so ongoing critique of it is necessary.

What is clear and admirable in the struggle the AICs are engaged in is the general vision they espouse. Contrary to some perceptions, theirs is not an 'anything goes' type of exercise or the mindless syncretism it is sometimes alleged to be. It is rather, in many cases, a struggle at conscientious and judicious reading, interoperation, adjudication, and fusion of the meaning of two texts. There is the text of the African life experience on the one hand, and the text of the good news of Jesus Christ as found in the Scriptures on the other. This procedure can provide us with a new Christian identity in the African cultural context where, especially in this age of globalization, Western and Black African philosophical and spiritual perceptions on life are in unavoidable, constant and immediate conflicting contact more than ever before.

One of the most obvious positive features of the mainline churches in the social sphere has been their clarity and distinctiveness of commitment to service, historically evidenced in the areas of education and health. Church-run schools have excelled in providing quality education throughout Africa. The same can be said of the health sector, with the churches establishing facilities exceeding, in many cases, those of the state in size and quality. With the eruption of the HIV/AIDS epidemic since 1983, the churches have been quite clear about their rejection of the use of condoms as a way to tackle and arrest the pandemic. They have been severely criticised for this stance. Of course, whether or not the arguments they advance are correct can, and perhaps should, be debated. However, the point here

is that the position of the churches, their identity on this issue is unambiguous.

The church in politics

If the struggle for the identity of the churches vis-à-vis African traditional spirituality may be considered an intra-church affair, one usually involving inner beliefs and teachings of religions, the churches' political involvement touches directly on the public sphere. It attracts much wider attention and, in Africa, it is often looked at with anger from the state.

The doctrine of separation of church and state preached in secular states around the world, as also in much of Africa, has much to commend it, but is valid only up to a point and is often used selectively for convenience. Conversely, the church's claim that it has nothing to do with politics, as well as the politicians charge that it should not meddle in politics, carries meaning only to a certain extent. Adrian Hastings observes that 'No church can wholly escape a political dimension to its behaviour' (1979:265). Since the context of both the state and the church is society (and indeed the universe they both share), absolute categories of separation of involvement in activities and competencies cannot be sustained. Here, as elsewhere, the church struggles for its own identity in necessarily muddled waters. Many factors are involved that constrain different churches to identify themselves differently. Let us cite some clear and current examples.

The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), spear-headed by several prominent churchmen in the country, was at one time a fierce critic of then President Daniel Arap Moi's regime for its alleged oppression and muzzling of political dissent. The Africa Inland Church, a mainline denomination, however, left the NCCCK over the issue because it perceived this body as biased against the President, a member of the latter church. Archbishop Ondiek of Legio Maria, an African Initiated Church, was at one time a minister in Moi's government, obviously putting the weight of the church behind the government. The World Intercessory Ministries, a Pentecostal body, and the NCCCK were at loggerheads in 1992 over Moi's disputed re-election results, with the former urging that the results be accepted

against the position of the latter (see Gifford 2001:51). As *Christian churches*, what and where was their identity?⁴

A similar scenario repeated itself in the same country with the controversial presidential election results of 2008, which both President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga claimed to win. The top leadership of the Catholic Church in Kenya was publicly divided along ethnic lines, thus putting exclusionary tribal identities ahead of inclusive Christian identity and commitment. According to theologian Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, the church's 'moral capacity' and 'credibility' 'to challenge society and uphold principles of right and wrong, truth and falsity' was thereby 'severely eroded'. By colluding with unethical political leaders, the church has compromised 'its prophetic voice and provides cover for the states unethical machinations' (see Orobator 2009:184).

For Rwanda the question involves the role the churches played during the genocide of 1994 and the years leading to this tragic event (see e.g., Dellaire 2002). The trials at the International Criminal Court for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, indicate that, with some notable exceptions, many of the Christian churches in their top representatives, were in one way or another accomplices to the situation resulting in the crimes associated with the 1994 tragedy. The orgy of brutal killings lasted for one hundred days and cost over 800,000 lives. In other words, the church failed to distinguish itself as an entity with a different message from that which was brewing before 1994. It was one of tribal stereotyping and crude propaganda. If the political context in Rwanda for many years was one of hatred and vindictiveness and the use of political power for reasons of tribal discrimination and oppression, where was the voice of the church? More precisely, *what* was the voice of the church? For, especially in a context such as Rwandas, silence was precisely a form of speech. What distinguishes the church of Christ in every situation, in every context, is intolerance to evil, at whatever cost to herself.

⁴ Dr. Manasses Kuria, Bishop Alexander Kipsang Muge, Bishop Henry Okullu and Dr. David Gitari were prominent leaders in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) who fiercely defended the freedom of the Church to criticise human rights abuses during the one-party regime in the country. Bishop Muge died in a suspicious car accident, widely believed to have been politically engineered because of his outspokenness on the injustices perpetrated by the regime.

The same general question applies to the situation in Tanzania and Uganda. During the long experimentation with *Ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania, what kind of voice was the churches'? The relationship of the Catholic Church with a devout and practising Catholic Christian spearheading this experiment provides interesting study. With reference to *Ujamaa*, perhaps the only example of a firm and public stance in the Catholic Church was from one prelate, Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of the diocese of Rulenge. The national association of bishops, known as the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), was obviously unsure and prevaricated about the *Ujamaa* experiment throughout Nyerere's long tenure as President of the nation.⁵ Surprisingly, however, it issued no clear statement, one way or the other, explaining its position. This at a time when the general population, mostly illiterate and confused about the direction of the country only a short time after the euphoria of independence, needed unambiguous guidance on this issue.

In Idi Amin's reign of terror in Uganda, a pre-eminent example of the church's position was Archbishop Janani Luwum of the Church of Uganda who, unsurprisingly, paid for it with his life. But, unlike in Tanzania, the position for which Archbishop Luwum died was initially collective. For, in September 1976, at a meeting of all the bishops of the Church of Uganda, the Catholic Church, and prominent leaders of the Muslim community, Archbishop Luwum was elected chairman. The meeting surveyed major aspects of national life under the Amin regime and denounced the performance of the government in very clear terms. This meeting would spell the fate of the Archbishop. 'Amin, when he obtained the minutes of this meeting, was furious, and also nervous lest the religious leaders should unite against him' (Gifford 2001:119). He etched the plan to have the Archbishop eliminated. Suddenly, after the murder of Archbishop Luwum, the Church of Uganda made a complete about turn; it placed at the head of the church bishops who were either related to or in total agreement with heads of state! And this seems deliberate, apparently to safeguard the church's position in the good books of each succeeding regime. It

⁵ In many of his writings and speeches, Nyerere discussed *Ujamaa's* relationship and relevance to the Christian faith. See Nyerere 1973: 213-228. Also van Bergen 1981, Westerlund 1980, and Hastings et al 1969.

is not difficult to see, of course, that the identity of the church as an independent entity has also thereby been seriously compromised.

The economic sphere

When we speak of economics in Africa, we are speaking of a situation of poverty, *material* poverty. Most of the highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) of the world are to be found in Africa. When the media and human rights organisations talk of people who live ‘under a dollar a day’, as is fashionable to do nowadays, it is in most instances Africa they are referring to. And Africa is on the agenda whenever the rich industrialized nations meet to discuss issues of international aid. Most or all of the eight millennium development goals (MDGs) established and committed to by 189 nations in 2000 (and renewed in 2010) to free people from poverty and other wants apply directly to the African situation: (1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) Achieve universal primary education; (3) Promote gender equality and empower women; (4) Reduce child mortality; (5) Improve maternal health; (6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (7) Ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) Develop a global partnership for development.

It is true that the church cannot do much directly in this field. But ‘directly’ is an important qualifier since the poverty of Africa is caused by factors that the church can *directly* influence. These factors are mostly ethical, and involve many Christians. Reference here is to the corruption of people in high places. Embezzling public funds, or funds provided for development projects by donors, is one form of the rampant corruption bedeviling Africa. The money does not reach its targets in building the necessary infrastructures that could speed up the industrialization and the development of the African nations. Instead, it simply disappears into the pockets of the already filthy wealthy, so that the gap between the few rich and the majority poor is so wide that it exceeds similar phenomena anywhere else on the globe. There is really no need to illustrate this. Cases of corrupt government officials known by name constitute the daily headlines of the media in all African countries. This is not a new phenomenon; it comes to the forefront of the public only because of the freedom of the press currently asserting itself against a degree of totalitarianism that was in place in many countries previously. In Kenya it has been dubbed ‘the

culture of impunity', where rarely the criminals are prosecuted or the crimes punished.

This may seem like an exaggeration, but it is not. As an example, at least one Eastern African country is said to have the dubious honour of having the largest number of ministerial positions in the world. To hear, moreover, that Members of Parliament in a poor African country are some of the highest paid representatives in the whole world baffles the imagination, this at a time when many of the people they represent die daily for lack of basic needs. Reportedly, the types, sizes, and number of vehicles for many African leaders, bought at public expense, rival those of the countries giving aid to the continent. Africa constantly asks for economic aid, yet occasionally here, a president arouses the nation's fury because he wants to buy a state-of-the-art personal jet at huge public expense.

However, all of this fades into relative insignificance compared to the corrupt deals African governments make, virtually selling their countries to outside, wealthy interests, and thus putting the existence of Africa's future generations in actual jeopardy. The sale of huge tracks of land to foreign transnational corporations is one such instance, and is reportedly not limited to one or two countries in the continent. Apart from trophy hunting in the continent's national parks, there are also the mining and drilling concessions, where the same thing happens. The most well known instance of this (but by no means the only one) is the drilling of oil in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. But perhaps the most heinous instances concern those deals that allow the transfer and dumping of poisonous waste materials from foreign industries on to African soil. A particularly notorious case was that of Transfigura, an oil trading company, which dumped such waste in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in September 2006. The immediate consequences in terms of people killed or maimed were bad enough, but the long-term ones in terms of harm to health and the environment brought to future generations of Africans and other creatures are indescribably unconscionable.

Here, perhaps more than anywhere in the economic sphere, the role of the church should be clear. For, the church's identity is expressed most clearly in defence of life and the protection of God's universe. How, then, does she treat those of her members who are known embezzlers, or who collude in murderous deals such as the above? Public censure or excommunication would certainly not

contravene the spirit of the Gospel? The goal would be, of course, not ultimately to keep the people in question outside the fold of the church: we are all sinners and need the mercy and grace of God. But we cannot arbitrarily presume God's mercy; we have at the same time to show repentance for our faults and amend our ways. It is the responsibility of the Church as teacher to show us, and in no uncertain terms, where we need repentance.

There are precedents in history about religious groups, on the basis of their faith, taking serious action against blatant injustice, exploitation and oppression by their members. The example of the Quakers (or Society of Friends) and the North American Episcopal Methodist Church's rejection of the institution of slavery as an unmitigated evil comes to mind. As John F. Maxwell reports, towards the end of the 18th century, by 1780, the Methodists had rejected slavery. They described it as 'contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion and doing that which we would not others should do to us or ours' (Maxwell 1975:96). Maxwell observes: 'In 1785 all slaveholding members of this Church were given 12 months in which to emancipate their slaves or quietly withdraw from the Church. Those who disposed of them in any other way than emancipation were to be expelled from the Episcopal Methodist Church. This rule was reaffirmed in 1801' (:96).

Of course, modern day slaveholders – the corrupt government officials – might not think much of this kind of action against them from the churches. They may just ignore it and consider themselves none the worse for it. But it would be an important symbol of integrity of the churches as a whole to the world. When the church embraces such people and their actions, however, and in one way or another benefits from them, her mission is compromised.

Towards true Christian identity/image

To be able to play a meaningful role in resolving some of the serious problems brought about by conflicting interests in Africa, the Christian church needs to have a true identity, a clear image of itself. Historically, as we know, Christianity came here as a fragmented reality, with so many conflicting denominations, theologies and claims, all in the name of the one Jesus Christ. Even though this was not a conse-

quence of African agency but of European realities, it remains a fact in Africa as well and still impacts Africa very negatively at times (Welbourn 1965). This makes the process of ecumenism or ecumenical dialogue something of utmost importance in building an African Christian identity able to influence society. A fragmented image, with fragmented loyalties will only play into the hands of those who advance fragmented ethnic or tribal royalties for ends that may actually be inimical to African nationhood, rights and dignity.

The image of the Christian church should be built on the fact that we are first of all Christians who happen to be Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, or Catholics, and not the other way around. Christian identity means trying to form what Tertullian called 'a third race of men', people who identify themselves primarily by their concern for justice and truth, wherever its origin, as Jesus did. Obviously, one cannot be so naïve as to see in this necessarily doctrinal unity of the Christian churches. What is possible, and even more effective, as a method of evangelism, is the dialogue of life. In conflicting situations, cannot the Christian churches join together as one in their faith in Jesus whose main mission was to bring completeness of life? Why should the churches show this concern as divided groups rather than speak with one voice and act together as people inspired by the one and same faith in Christ?

The church's image will be defined by where it puts its institutional weight in conflicting interests. It is often said that the church should not take sides in social and political issues, that it should be neutral. This may be true, but only to a point. Perhaps the church should not be a political party, or engage directly in party politics, or espouse partisan ideologies. But that is as far as it goes. To take this axiom further is not only to obfuscate the identity of the church; it is to compromise and frustrate her mission. In reality, to be neutral in matters of consequence is not to be impartial at all; and not to take a stand in matters of life and death is really to take one. Someone will always claim the church's weight in these situations, when it would be much better off for the church itself to claim 'the right camp'. This is a constant and continuous process of evaluation and re-evaluation that involves several factors: (1) autonomy, (2) informed choice, (3) prophecy and (4) advocacy. What do these factors mean?

Autonomy

The very essence of individuation and identity is autonomy. Without autonomy there is no real identity. Autonomy means the capacity to choose, to make decisions. It is doubtlessly possible to suppress autonomy, either forcibly or by way of indoctrination or bribery, so that the decision-making faculty in an individual or community is eliminated or compromised. Autocratic and dictatorial rulers hate autonomy and do everything in their power to stifle or eliminate it.

The church, if it is to guarantee its true identity as guardian of justice, human rights and dignity, must jealously protect its autonomy to speak and act. The source of her autonomy is to be found in God's Word whose correct interpretation can only be seen in how it guarantees life in this world. Divine revelation and inspiration are always difficult to interpret, and sometimes the church experiences failure in this task in various practical circumstances. Yet the only sure criterion of correct interpretation of God's will for humankind and the universe consists in the principle of promotion of life in love for 'God is love' (see 1 Jn. 4:7-21). If the church must err let her err on the side of love and service to life. Concern for life here on earth is her mandate, for the church is the sacrament or visible sign of God's life and concern for the universe.

The problem for the autonomy of the church in Africa and Africa at large is twofold. As J.N.K. Mugambi shows, African leaders often solicit the favour of the church on the one hand, and church leaders sometimes solicit favours from the state (2004:13-34). This has often compromised the autonomy of the church to speak. True autonomy demands that the church must denounce evil or affirm love-justice without fear or favour. St. Paul instructs Timothy as a leader in the church that his true calling is to 'proclaim the word; [to] be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; [to] convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching'. There will be obstacles, of course, 'But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfil your ministry' (2 Tim. 4:2, 5). This is the kind of ministry Jesus ascribed to himself, the ministry of freeing everyone who is in bondage, the bondage of evil (see Lk. 4:16-21; also Mt. 25:31-46). It is the ministry at the service of truth, the only kind of truth that sets free (see Jn. 8:31-38).

Prophecy, informed choice, and advocacy

Autonomy is the foundation of prophecy, understood as speaking on behalf of God or uttering God's word. Autonomy, in Christian terms, means placing oneself before God alone and being ready to be used by God. 'Here I am, send me, Lord.' The biblical prophetic literature is clear on one point: speaking in the name of God often has painful consequences. Yet, when things are not quite right in society, especially when the poor and helpless suffer, God calls forth prophets to point out wrongdoing and explain what God wants. The church should be such a prophetic voice. If there is any ministry the church desperately needs now in Africa, it is the ministry of prophecy. As President Jomo Kenyatta advised the Catholic Bishops of Eastern and Central Africa in 1976, 'The Church is the conscience of society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we are wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes' (quoted by Healey 2009:92, at footnote 19).

In Africa there have been some such voices everywhere. But in most cases they have not been sustained. The Old Testament prophetic figure shouts until people listen. Regardless of personal imperfections, Bishop Pius Ncube of Zimbabwe must be listed as an example of Christian prophecy when he pointed out the ills of the regime. Leaders who denounce oppression and discrimination in our societies must expect their imperfections similarly exposed by the enemies of truth as Ncube's were. But what is crucial for her own identity is that the church must support the prophets among her children. No one, no church, is perfect. But does that excuse her from denouncing evil? God works with saints and sinners alike; the choice is God's. Divisions within the Church in Zimbabwe to a great extent contributed to frustrating Ncube's voice.

Although, as we have just pointed out, we cannot expect that the church must be completely perfect before she engages in her prophetic task of denouncing injustice, we must nevertheless insist that her credibility will be enhanced if she sincerely seeks perfection, if she denounces first or simultaneously with her criticism of political rulers injustice within her own borders. The importance of this requirement cannot be overemphasised. The 1971 Synod of the Catholic Church meeting in Rome said as much in its concluding document, *Justice in the World*. The statement was radical: No one –

the church particularly – should presume to talk to others about justice unless he or she is just in their eyes, according to the document. The churches must bear this in mind if their stewardship of the Gospel in this area is not to be justifiably despised or hesitant. Especially as an institution, introspection in the sense of examination is part and parcel of Christian prophecy.

To be able to announce God's word for the salvation of the world, the church needs to inform herself as deeply as possible on the issues at hand and pray for the assistance of the Holy Spirit to guide her. Can the church pronounce on economics? Can she say anything about politics? Does she have the experts or expertise to do so? She may not, and perhaps should not, portray herself as having specific solutions to specific political or economic problems. Many popes have pointed this out. Nevertheless, the church's faith gives her a certain confidence to point out evil where it occurs. What expertise is needed to see and point out crass oppression, marginalisation, and suffering among people?

Prophecy for the church today, in the sense of pronouncing the word of God in affirmation or denunciation of given situations caused by human agency, means putting the church's institutional weight behind her declarations. In other words, it involves the ministry of advocacy. Perhaps the church has not done enough in this area? Has she in practice relegated almost completely this responsibility to (secular) non-governmental organizations (NGOs)? This is not to say that NGOs have no place in advocacy; it is rather to say that the church should do it from the perspective of her faith in the liberating power of Jesus Christ. It approaches the issue from a different angle than that of the civil NGOs, one that is part of her identity. And this makes all the difference.

Aquiline Tarimo quotes Donal Dorr to the effect that the Catholic Church may be standing 'under the judgment of ... Its own social teaching' which has been developed 'fairly comprehensively' over many years. The question is how it puts this teaching into practice, how the church lives it. How concretely does it side with the oppressed? Tarimo suggests that one way to do this is to uplift the awareness of the masses. For this the church needs more effective methods of bringing its message where it is needed to create what Tarimo refers to as 'public impact'. Could the church cooperate with NGOs in this task? Why not? According to Tarimo, in our current

African situation, 'Without this cooperation the entire effort of transforming social structures will not bring forth the desired fruits' (Tarimo 2005:103).

Conclusion

Thirty years ago, in 1979, Adrian Hastings, an eminent historian of African Christianity, observed something which still holds true in many parts of Africa. After years of independence, 'politics [in Africa] have become a bad joke in the eyes of many due to corruption and pure bad governance, so that people do not really identify with the political administrations in place'. The churches, however, seem in comparison to have 'grown in popular credibility as much as the governments have declined in that commodity'. In personalities like Archbishop Janani Luwum, already mentioned, Cardinal Joseph Malula of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Archbishop Jean Zoa of Cameroon, the churches seem to attract the confidence of the masses and so exert considerable influence with the people. According to Hastings, 'Many a government continues to find that there is no reasonable alternative to accepting this fact of life and keeping what ecclesiastical friends it may' (1979:263). The question is how the church will use this influence, its 'institutional weight', as we have called it, to bring about change.

About six years before Hastings wrote the words above, Julius K. Nyerere addressed this question in very clear, unambiguous language. He put it to a group of nuns that the task of the church is to participate 'actively' in the process of 'rebellion against those social structures and economic organisations which condemn ... [human beings] to poverty, humiliation and degradation'. Failing this, according to Nyerere, the church becomes 'irrelevant'

and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful. Unless the Church, its members and organisations, express God's love for ... [human beings] by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present conditions ..., then it will become identified with injustice and persecution. If this happens, it will die [at least as a meaningful, liberating institution] – and, humanly speaking, deserves

to die – because it will then serve no purpose comprehensible to modern man (Nyerere 1973:215-216).

In its mission to advance God's reign here on earth, the church should construct its identity based not on 'safe', 'polite', or 'popular' decisions, but on conscientiously 'right ones'. On this matter Bishop Barbara C. Harris said definitively: '... there comes a time when we must act not because it is safe, not because it is polite, not because it is popular, but because conscience says it is right' (Otieno nd:146).

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Part 2:

Women perspectives

Vatican II: Did anything happen?¹

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Professor Fr. Rodney Moss, with whom I have been privileged to work at St. Augustine College these past six years, was, like myself, ‘in the pews’ at the time of the calling of the Second Vatican Council. We come from a generation in the Catholic Church which knows both the pre- and post-Vatican II eras, and well remember the excitement generated by the Council, ‘the most important event in the history of modern Catholicism’ (Faggioli in Heft 2012:15). We would not hesitate to say ‘yes’ to the question posed in the title of this article.² The fact that today we take for granted such things as a vernacular liturgy, lay participation, ecumenical relations, and social responsibility testify to the momentous shift inaugurated by the council both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.³ Certainly something did happen. Then why fifty years on such a question?⁴

Perhaps the question is being asked today, not just for historical interest at the 50th anniversary of the council, but in light of the fact that there are conflicting opinions as to how the council is to be interpreted and its teachings applied in the present life and ministry of the church. This is not a new problem. Komonchak quotes Henri de Lubac as saying ‘from the very beginning a distorting interpretation of [the Council] began to spread’ (2008:26). ‘Progressives’, clearly the majority at the council, saw the council as a good thing, ‘the long-overdue accommodation of Catholicism to the modern world’ (:29).

¹ This article is reprinted with some minor additions from *Grace & Truth*, 28(3):88-97.

² This title is taken from Schultenover, David G. (ed) 2008. *Vatican II Did Anything Happen?* New York/London: Continuum.

³ Cardinal Suenens of Belgium proposed that the Council consider the church under these two aspects at the end of its first session (cf. Gaillardetz 2006:14).

⁴ The 50th anniversary of the inauguration of the Council has seen a continuation of attempts to interpret the event, for example Faggioli, Massimo 2012. *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*. New York: Paulist.

‘Traditionalists [saw] it as a bad thing, the capitulation of Catholicism to principles and movements ... rightly resisted for 150 years’ (:29). This later perspective was representative of a small but powerful ‘minority’ within the council, many of whom occupied positions of influence in the years which followed. Although there are many shifts and nuances within these positions, these two perspectives are generally seen as representing two interpretations of the council.

But today there is a third interpretation, entitled ‘reformist’ or ‘mediating’ (Komonchak 2008:29; Rush 2004:58), as exemplified by Pope Benedict XVI who has said there is no pre- and post- Vatican II, but only a re-affirmation of the continuity of Catholicism (cf. Rush: 2004:6; Komonchak 2008: 29-30). In the foundational elements surely there is continuity. ‘[T]he Council never intended to sever itself from the great tradition’, nor should it be interpreted as against that tradition (Rush 2008:7). But in significant ways the bishops broke with that tradition, a break seen as necessary in order to ‘rejuvenate that tradition’ (:7).

It may be that this ‘reformist’ perspective, in some ways a denial of the change and dynamic of the council, is what various authors address today. They clearly state that something *did* happen. ‘Vatican II left the Catholic Church very different from the way it had found it’ (Alberigo 2006:129). An understanding and interpretation of these differences will be determinative, not only of the ongoing implementation of the council, but of the very identity and mission of the church.

The actual proceedings of the Council are a matter of record – the participants, the speeches, the documentary drafts, and of course, the 16 final documents. These ‘brute facts’ so to speak provide fertile grounds for examination, interpretation and further understandings. But as the council cannot be understood apart from all that preceded it, so too it cannot be read apart from what it set in motion. The manner in which it has continued to influence the tradition must also be considered if a true measure of its significance is to be determined.⁵ In what follows I will look briefly at two interpretations of the council; first that of Joseph Komonchak, the council as ‘event’, and then that of John W. O’Malley, the council as ‘pastoral’. Komonchak

⁵ A recent example of this can be found in Heft, James L. (ed) with O’Malley, John 2012. *After Vatican II. Trajectories and Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

offers a historical interpretation of the council, demonstrating that it cannot be limited to its historical and documentary parameters, but must also be seen in relationship to what it set in motion within the church. O'Malley, through a literary examination of the 'style' of the documents – a significant break with every preceding council – demonstrates the pastoral nature of the council and so its understanding of its mission in the world. Finally, I will reflect on Ormond Rush's development of 'reception pneumatology'. If we are to continue to live out the council, both 'reception' and 'dialogue' are necessary. He situates these in the very life of the Trinity, whose Spirit 'poured forth upon the earth' continues to engage in creative fidelity the implementation of the vision of the council.

Stephen Schloesser, in the text noted at the start of this article, demonstrates that, given the world situation at the time of the Second Vatican Council, *not* to have addressed the issues that it did would have been an ethical and moral failure of the Church's mission (2008:138). The larger and deeper questions that the world was asking, implicitly or explicitly, about human existence and meaning, called for a response, a direction that only such a council could have given. Neil J. Ormerod (2008:176) also argues that it would be a failure of its mission if the church were to return to a mentality of removal and reaction against the world, the very world its members are called to live in. 'This must not be allowed to happen' (:176). It is this retreat that many see as occurring today. Perhaps in the considerations that follow, some understanding of the intent of the council, and of the necessity of its continuation – under the aegis of the Spirit – might be shown.

The Council as *Event*: Joseph Komonchak

Joseph Komonchak, a foremost ecclesialogist and historian⁶ says we cannot view the council merely as a single, historical occurrence. Nor can we determine its intent solely from a critical reading and interpretation of the documents. Rather, he speaks of the council as an 'event', an 'episode in a plot' which carries meaning beyond the historical records and documentary outcomes. Such an 'event' makes a

⁶ Komonchak is translator and editor with Guiseppe Alberigo of the five volume *History of Vatican II*. 1995-2006. Maryknoll New York: Orbis.

break with the past manner of operating and sets in motion a new way of proceeding. 'It implies "novelty", discontinuity, a "rupture", a break from routine, causing surprise, disturbance, even trauma, and perhaps initiating a new routine, a new realm of the taken-for-granted' (2008:27). He notes that while this may not have been the intent of those present, nonetheless the 'rebellion' of the bishops at the first session when they rejected the preparatory committees draft proposal of the document on the church was clearly experienced as a turning point, 'a break with the routine'.⁷

Kommonchak draws analogies between the council and Caesar's crossing the Rubicon or the storming of the Bastille. Both of these 'events' were limited happenings, but they became symbolic of all that we understand today as the Roman Empire and the French Revolution. They were turning points against which much of subsequent history is interpreted and understood (:28, 34). Vatican II, he argues, was just such a shift, an event whose meaning goes beyond its historical parameters. It was a decisive moment in history, symbolic of how things would come to be perceived from then on. While the documents of Vatican II stand as the 'fixed intentions and authoritative decisions of those involved' (:31), what they set in motion cannot be considered to have ended with their promulgation.⁸ 'Many, if not all, of the most significant conciliar documents are part of a history larger than the one that began with the preparatory consultation, and they are larger also than a history that ends with their promulgation' (:32). Some of those things which have come to be 'taken-for-granted' since the 'event' of Vatican II were noted above.⁹

⁷ He notes that 'those who had controlled the preparation of the council had lost control of the council itself to those who were extraneous to its preparation' (Kommonchak 2008:35).

⁸ Massimo Faggioli in 'Vatican II comes of age'. *The Tablet* 11 April 2009, 16-17, speaks of the 'political reception' of Vatican II which 'created a new face of Catholicism not only for Catholics, but also for the world at large' (:17). The Council documents 'created a core of belief that world leaders, opinion-makers, religious communities and others take for granted today when they interact with the Catholic Church' (:17).

⁹ O'Malley gives a fuller enumeration, in retrospect, of the aims of the council: "1) to end the stance of cultural isolation that the church was now seen as having maintained; 2) to initiate a new freedom of expression and action within the Church that certain Vatican institutions were now interpreted as having previously curtailed; 3) to distribute more broadly the exercise of pastoral authority,

Komonchak cites *Dei Verbum* as an example of a document whose ramifications have extended well beyond the original intent of its framers. A key element of the document was its vindication of the historical-critical approach in exegesis (:42). However, it also affected 'Catholic attitudes and habits with regard to scriptures, ... understanding of the *Magisterium*, ... ecumenical treatments of the ... relation between scripture and tradition, etc.' (:41).¹⁰ The renewed prominence of scripture in liturgy and catechesis are but one example. Yet even as this document validated historical-critical exegesis, Komonchak notes that more recent developments in biblical hermeneutics refuse to be limited by 'historical-critical conclusions' and today are exploring 'more literary, theological, and spiritual readings ... not unlike the way in which the fathers and monastic theologians approached and applied Scriptures' (:41). Catholic biblical interpretation did not, then, end with this document, but when subsequent history is taken into account, 'one's understanding of what was under way in this regard at Vatican II is altered, precisely because the story continues' (:42). *Dei Verbum* was a bold and necessary step forward in the Catholic Church, yet subsequent developments have moved even beyond its allowances and encouragements, testimony to the 'eventual' nature of the council.

especially by strengthening the role of episcopacy and local church vis-à-vis the Holy See; 4) to modify in people's consciousness and in the actual functioning of the Church the predominantly clerical, institutional and hierarchical model that had prevailed; 5) to affirm the dignity of the laity in the church; 6) to establish through a more conciliatory attitude, through some new theological insights, and through effective mechanisms a better relationship with other religious bodies, looking ultimately to the healing of the divisions in Christianity and the fruitful 'dialogue' with non-Christian religions; 7) to change the teaching of the Church on 'religious liberty' and to give new support to the principle of 'freedom of conscience'; 8) to base theology and biblical studies more firmly on historical principles; 9) to foster [new styles of piety]; 10) to affirm clearly that the church was and should be affected by the cultures in which it exists; 11) finally, to promote a more positive appreciation of 'the world' and the relationship of the church to it, with a concomitant assumption of clearer responsibility for the fate of the world in 'the new era' that the Council saw opening up before its eyes" (quoted in Rush 2004: 99-100, numbering added).

¹⁰ Rodney Moss develops this further in *Beyond Two Source Theory and Sola Scriptura: Ecumenical Perspectives on Scripture and Tradition*. *Grace & Truth* 28(3), 43-57.

Komonchak (quoting Sewell) further describes an ‘event’ as a ‘sequence of occurrences that result in transformations of structures ... a rupture ... that disarticulates the previous structural network ... and makes a novel re-articulation possible’ (:28). This ‘disarticulation of previous structures might lead one to expect some shift in the structures of the church, some possibility of novel re-articulation’. And to some extent the institution of more inclusive local structures, of national bishops conferences, and even new pontifical councils (cf. O’Collins 2006:29-38) are a response to this. Yet the dominance of the centralized structures of the church persists, to the frustration of local and national initiatives (:154-158).¹¹ How or whether some ‘re-articulation’ will come to pass here remains a question. Alberigo allows that reforms of the Roman Curia ‘have come at a faster pace than ever before, but these [are] ... of marginal significance and far from introducing any effective renewal in harmony with the new conditions of the faith and ecclesial communion’ (2006:128). Nor is Rush hopeful: ‘At the universal level, we have come to realise that not even an ecumenical council has been able to curb the power of the Roman Curia and its practices’ (2004: 84).

Komonchak said the Council was ‘a dramatic struggle between what... [the church] ought to be, to do, and to say...to be at once faithful to Christ and an effective sign and instrument of his revelation in the world or worlds of today’ (2008:44). The message and the mission of the church, received from the Founder, cannot be changed or adulterated. But the world in which that mission is actuated has changed. In the fifty years since the council, there have been many developments never foreseen by the fathers of the council: the feminist movement, the ecological crisis, the emergence of the church in the southern hemisphere, inculturation, post-modernism. A faithful and fruitful engagement with such realities may in some measure depend on the council’s reception and ongoing interpretation.

Whether one considers Vatican II as a ‘symbolic event’ or a moment of ‘divine intervention’, Komonchak cautions that it cannot be read as the ‘last scene in the drama’. What happened before, during – and ‘at least in some sense *because* of the council’ – must be factored into any interpretation (:44). To argue for a return to a

¹¹ A present example is the imposition of the Latinate-English translations of the texts of the Eucharistic liturgy.

previous way of being church would be a denial of the conciliar 'event'.

The Councils *Pastoral style*: John W. O'Malley

John O'Malley has written extensively on the history of the council and would disagree with those who say there was no 'before' and 'after'. Something did happen. Perhaps his most insightful interpretation of the council and what marks for him a 'before' and an 'after' is in regards to what he terms its 'pastoral style' as evidenced in the dramatic shift in the literary genre of conciliar documents.¹² This new style was not merely a 'cosmetic' shift, some icing on the cake, 'an ornament [or] superficial affectation, but an expression of deepest personality ... the ultimate expression of meaning' (2008:82). It was indicative of a shift in the very way in which the bishops saw the church and desired that it operate.

In earlier councils, it was often necessary for the church to establish norms for discipline and societal behaviour as well as for belief. On the assumption that councils were legislative-judicial bodies, conciliar documents were written as 'canons' which established a definition, a law or limit, with penalties attached for transgressions (recall the '*anathema sit*' formulations of Trent) (:69-70). The documents of Vatican II differed markedly from all previous councils. O'Malley locates this difference in their 'style'. Neither canons nor norms, their purpose rather was to set forth an ideal so as to inspire believers to its appropriation (cf.:74). The documents of the council were pastoral not only in the focus of their teaching, but in the very manner of their articulation, i.e., their style. O'Malley finds in this style a key to how the council is to be understood and interpreted. He further delineates this style. It is reminiscent of early patristic writings, as well as later writers of the Renaissance era such as Erasmus. In the years immediately before the council, *ressourcement* theologians such as Daniélou and de Lubac uncovered this style which was named 'panegyric' or *ars laudandi*.¹³ It is described as 'the painting of an idealised portrait in order to excite admiration and

¹² A full treatment of this can be found in O'Malley's 2008, *What Happened at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹³ The technical name for this style is epideictic (:76).

appropriation' (:74). Its intent was to 'touch hearts and move hearers to action for their fellow human beings' (:74), to 'teach' but in a different manner. The documents of Vatican II return to these 'principles of epideictic-rhetoric and are operative in them' (:75). Their intent was not to define but rather to 'heighten appreciation for a person, event, an institution, and to excite emulation of an ideal' (:76). The documents of Vatican II are of this style. They hold up ideals, often draw conclusions and consequences not as a code of conduct, but as an ideal to be striven for. Such a style does not position the writers above those being addressed, but unites both by reminding them of what is shared, proposing the ideal to be striven for, and exciting all towards a common cause (:76). The focus is on the broader issues, inviting generosity, sacrifice and magnanimity (:77). Arguably the most quoted line of the council is illustrative of this style:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts (*Gaudium et Spes* 1).

O'Malley says one of the most identifiable manifestations of this style is in the vocabulary (:77). The words used are not threatening or condemnatory, but 'horizontal' words such as 'brothers and sisters' and 'people of God'. They are words of reciprocity such as 'cooperation', 'partnership' and 'collaboration'. They are words of 'empowerment and engagement, even initiative'. He notes that the word 'dialogue' – or its equivalent – is found on every page (:79).

There are also words of friendship and humility such as 'the human family' and a 'pilgrim people' which applies to clergy and people alike. There are words of change: 'development', 'progress', 'evolution', and most especially '*aggiornamento*', a watch word of the council, spoken by John XXIII in his opening address stating this as a key motivation for the council (:79-80).

But perhaps most significant of what the council sought to be about is what O'Malley terms 'interiority words'. He refers to the fifth chapter of *Lumen Gentium*: 'The Call to Holiness' (:80). He notes 'no

previous council had ever explicitly asserted [holiness] and certainly never developed it so repeatedly and at such length' as Vatican II (:80). In this, O'Malley says, the council proposed a model of spirituality, an inner spirit, related not just to codes and conformity, but 'more immediately to the outpouring of the Spirit into the hearts of the faithful, to their free and willing acceptance of the gospel, and to their commitment to service of others in the world' (:80).

Through his analysis of the style of the conciliar documents, O'Malley summarises the entire council as being a movement

from commands to invitation, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to conversation, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical and top-down to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from static to changing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from prescriptive to principled, from defined to open-ended, from behaviour-modification to conversion of heart, from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience, from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness (:81).

Clearly O'Malley saw the council as breaking with the past in significant ways. He argues that nothing in the documents indicates 'any change ... in procedures, discipline, doctrine, or ecclesiastical style' (:55), yet its subsequent interpretation 'seemed to imply a reality that to some extent transcended the letter of its documents and carried with it an implication of ... "a new beginning"' (:56). References to the spirit of the council took hold of many and seemed to suggest a new orientation. From his examination of 'the letter(s)' of the council then, O'Malley says we are able to arrive at its 'spirit'. The 'style' is the other side of the coin of the 'content' (:82). There cannot be a distinction between the 'letter' and 'spirit' of the council (cf. Rush 2004: 49).

Pope John XXIII called for a pastoral council, and O'Malley sees one fulfilment of that not only in the pastoral concerns of the documents, but in the very style of their presentation. There was a before and after. Attention to the continuities must be balanced with attention also to dis-continuities. But the fruit of an analysis of style

reveals that there was significant change in the council. In such analysis one thing at least becomes clear; the council *wanted* something to happen (:85 – italics in original).

Continuing the Council: ‘Reception pneumatology’: Ormond Rush

Both Komonchak and O’Malley suggest an on-going dynamic within the church arising from the council. Perhaps this is what is generally referred to as ‘the spirit of Vatican II’. It is this ‘spirit’ which Ormond Rush considers in the final section of his 2004 work *Still Interpreting Vatican II. Some Hermeneutical Principals*. He situates that ongoing dynamic within the very life of the Trinity and proposes a concept of ‘reception pneumatology’ as the basis for an ongoing interpretation and implementation.

Rush says that within the Trinity and within the self communication of God to humanity, the Holy Spirit can be conceived as the *dynamis* between *traditio* (giving) and *receptio* (receiving), the *dynamis* between Father and Son, and between the Godhead and humanity. *Communio* within the Trinity is ‘an active process of *receptio*’ (2004:70). So, too, in our relationship with God, the invitation to *communio* is an invitation to *receptio*. Rush speaks of the Spirit as ‘dialogue’ between the Father and the Son, and of the Spirit as enabling our response to God whose ‘way is the way of dialogue’. The Spirit thus ‘works in human affairs through reception and dialogue’ (:70). It is that same Spirit, ‘palpable’ at Vatican II, who remains with us today and facilitates our fidelity and our participation.

Rush engages with the question of the council’s fidelity to the past or its continuity, but also to its dis-continuity, its ‘micro-rupture’ as he terms it. Such micro-ruptures were introduced by the council itself ‘as necessary for faithful continuity with the past...a deliberate break with particular elements of the tradition...now judged to be impeding a more effective *receptio/ traditio* of the Gospel in the contemporary world’ (:75).

How then does one allow for both continuity and dis-continuity within the tradition? Here is where Rush situates his new pneumatology. He terms it a pneumatology of *aggiornamento*, a ‘constant re-reception’, effected in the Spirit (:75) He describes this as a creative involvement of God with our creative involvement as ‘active participants ... co-deciders with God’s Spirit, assuring continuity

through creative discontinuity' (:76). Rush argues that our task is one of ongoing struggle to understand, interpret and apply the 'Gospel anew in a thousand new situations'. 'Vatican II reveals the church coming to a realisation that, in response to the task given by our God, it is up to us to work it out as we go along – with the help of the Holy Spirit ...' (:76). That Spirit 'whispers' through scripture, tradition, the *sensus fidelium*, theology and the Magisterium, the five interrelated witnesses to revelation which keep alive our 'communal memory, prevent ... ecclesial amnesia and ignite ... our creativity' (:77). There is as much need to be creative in our reception of Vatican II as the bishops manifested in their deliberations and eventual documentations. 'What was written with imagination must be received with imagination. The "spirit" of the council demands it; the "Spirit" of the council enables it' (:69).

There are certain characteristics of such a reception pneumatology. Dialogue is essential: 'Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches' (cf :77) Reception pneumatology likewise receives all, even from sources outside of the favoured tradition. It is only when all voices are heard that *aggiornamento* becomes possible. Such a pneumatology envisages the divine-human action in terms of the Spirit's 'igniting imaginative receptions of the tradition in light of contemporary events that need to be discerned to the best of our ability' (:80).

Vatican II, says Rush, did not leave us with answers: 'It left us with a new way of being faithful to the past. ... It was an exemplar for the way it itself is to be interpreted!' (:78) We are to interpret Vatican II using same methodology used by the council itself, recognising the Spirit as the source, not only of continuity, but of dis-continuity if it is in service to the greater *traditio*.

Rush finds a key to interpreting both the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of the council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the document on liturgy. This document states that 'full, conscious, active participation of the faithful ... is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful derive the true Christian spirit' (SC 14). This principle of active participation relates not only to liturgical participation but to the whole of Christian life (:82). It belongs to the 'office' of the whole people participating, in the whole of life, in reception and dialogue. Rush notes then the need of greater structures of participation, a spirituality of communion and a spirituality of reception, of dialogue

and conciliarity at all levels (:84). While some 'might wish to snuff out the light on the hill that Vatican II was and is, the wind of the Spirit of the Council will not allow its own beacon to be extinguished ... the Holy Spirit was with them; the same Holy Spirit is with us' (:85).

In conclusion

Guiseppe Alberigo in a 2006 book summarising the history of the council concluded:

The importance of the wide reception of Vatican II, which involves not only the 'official' Church ... but also the people of God as a whole, is shown by the general approval with which the Council's documents were met. If the impulse of the Council were to collapse back upon itself, the result will be widespread disappointment and the squandering of the extraordinarily powerful expectations and willingness accompanying this genuinely historic opportunity (2006:130).

There is little question that something new was set in motion by the Second Vatican Council. It was an 'event' whose symbolic resonances and ramifications continue even into the present age and its 'style' testifies to a pastoral intent and engagement in the world that broke with models operative for over 400 years in the church. It has evoked creative understandings of the very dynamism of the Trinitarian Godhead, and of our relationship and reality within that Godhead. In spite of those who would curb its dynamism or restrict its interpretation in both 'letter' and 'spirit', it continues to animate the church today. But fidelity to its intent and creative reception of its gifts is an ongoing task, requiring openness to the Spirit and a willingness to be led by the voice of that Spirit until such time as the Gospel has been 'received' in all the multiple languages of the world. Perhaps coming generations will have a somewhat better idea of the task that is theirs, and how they might go about it creatively because of the work of the Second Vatican Council.

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Women and Vatican II: From absence to presence

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Introduction

If you peruse the index of any edition of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, there are usually only two references to women: confessions of nuns and political and social equality. All the bishops at the Council were men and only in the third session in 1964 were the first of twenty-three women admitted as auditors.

As the Council opened in October 1962, Douglas Horton, a Protestant observer from the United Church of Christ, realised the total absence of women:

It suddenly came over me, as I sat looking at this vast assembly of almost three thousand people today that it has about it an air of artificiality and that the main reason for this is that there is not a single woman in the whole company. Up and down the nave you look and into the transepts, nothing but men. It is an abstracted body, incomplete, a torso of true catholicity, speaking more of an outmoded past than of the living present. Let us hope that the world will see something of Rome's strong women at Vatican III (McEnroy 1996:13-14).

While Horton was struck by the absence of women at the Council, I doubt that any bishop, member of the clergy or most women themselves would have wondered 'Where are the women?' Fifty years ago women's place in the church was extremely limited: sacristy work and women's organisations in parishes and the ministry of women

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religious whose self-less work was often derided by the clergy who named them the 'good sisters' with an air of condescension.

However, these fifty years have been a revolutionary time for women in the Catholic Church and their ministerial presence and contributions – not without much controversy – are 180 degree different from the Council days. This chapter will present the story of how women became auditors at the Council, examine several important texts of the Council documents which speak of women, and discuss four themes of the post-Vatican II era – women's ministries, the development of feminist theology, the use of inclusive language and the question of the ordination of women. Lastly, some hopes for the future will be presented.

Guests in their own house

The male Protestant observers often brought their wives but they were not permitted to sit with their husbands in the observers' seats; instead they were taken on special tours of Assisi and Monte Cassino (McEnroy 1996:15). At the liturgies, Catholic women journalists were often refused Holy Communion. The most famous incident occurred during the second session when a Swiss Guard physically prevented Eve Fleischner from receiving the Eucharist. No apology was given and the result was 'that no more journalists were invited to the conciliar mass' (1996:99).

Laity, male and female, were not on the Council's agenda in its initial preparatory stages and in its first session. Douglas Roche comments:

So great was the chasm between hierarchy and people when Vatican II began that the thought of lay involvement was hardly mentioned. This was a reflection on the church's withdrawal from the world, of the defensive, rigid and patronizing attitude the hierarchy had developed following the Protestant Reformation (quoted in McEnroy 1996: 33).

The first male lay auditor, Jean Guitton, a French philosopher, was admitted at the express request of Pope John XXIII during the first session. Beginning in the second session in 1963, additional male lay

auditors were admitted to the Council. Pope Paul VI was surprised that when the first list of auditors was brought to him there were no women on the list. McEnroy comments, 'Apparently, they were intended to be on the papal guest list, but someone else controlled the list' (1996:15).

On 23 October 1963, Léon-Josef Cardinal Suenens of Belgium, a leading progressive at the Council, called for women auditors: 'Women too should be invited as auditors; unless I am mistaken, they make up half of the human race' (1996:35). This comment angered many conservative bishops and McEnroy observes that 'it delayed the appointment of women auditors' (1996:39).

At the beginning of the third session of the Council on 14 September 1964, Pope Paul VI welcomed twenty-three women: 'We are delighted to welcome among our beloved daughters in Christ, the first women in history to participate in a conciliar assembly' (quoted in McEnroy 1996:47). But there were no women present to hear these words of welcome because no women had yet been officially named. The first woman to cross into not-very-welcoming male hierarchical territory was Marie-Louise Monnet of France on 25 September 1964. Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban acknowledged her presence with a word of welcome: 'Flowers have at last bloomed in our land' (1996:109).

The twenty-three were twelve lay women, eleven members of religious congregations and one member of a secular institute from fourteen countries.² Only one woman was married. It had been assumed by the bishops that the women would concern themselves only with 'women's issues' in the documents, e.g., marriage and family and religious life. Little of the council discussions pertained specifically to women, and yet all the female auditors considered *everything* of interest to them, having a bearing on their lives, and therefore as their business, so they showed up for everything – Mass, formal conciliar sessions, press briefings, special lectures, social gatherings, as well as their own auditors' meetings (1996:120).

² Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Spain, United States and Uruguay. Note the absence of women from Africa and Asia. Carmel McEnroy, *Guests in the Their Own House* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 297.

They made especially important contributions to *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People). The first draft of the document on the laity 'was, as Canadian bishop Alexander Carter of Sault Marie declared, "conceived in original sin of clericalism", that is, without any lay input' (1996:168). The one married couple, Luz-Marie and José Alvarez-Acaza from Mexico, attended the final session and drew up a list of important areas about the life of the Church that the bishops should consider.

Bernard Häring CSsR, the most important Catholic moral theologian of the 20th century, was the secretary of the Commission which drafted *Gaudium et Spes*. He was responsible for making six of the women auditors full members of the Commission. They worked on sections which included 1) 'human dignity, especially of women; 2) the dignity of marriage and family; 3) safeguarding peace; 4) construction of the community of nations; 5) culture in relation to women' (1996:139).

Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life, was directed to both women and men religious. Women were and are the majority of religious. However, none of the women auditors were able to serve on the commission that drafted the document. Cardinal Antoniutti was adamant that no woman would work on that document, even though the religious superiors were to implement it. So the women went through the back door, appealing to the pope and bishops on the commission. One of the auditors, Constantina Baldinucci, recalled that the 'religious representatives were not asked so much for interventions or explanations about their lives because the council fathers had bigger problems to deal with and discuss' (quoted in McEnroy 1996:169). Once again, women were considered of little account in the church. Baldinucci gathered the concerns of the religious and presented them to Pope Paul VI to give to the Council.

Reflecting on *Perfectae Caritatis*, Sister Jerome Maria Chimy recalled that the document 'was thrown together in a hurry. The sisters felt that they were not wanted by some bishops, and there was one council father who said that he would rather have lay people working with him than religious because the sisters were only there for the money ... It was mostly Latin rite bishops from the U.S. and Canada who were saying these things' (quoted in McEnroy 1996:175).

Another auditor, Sr Mary Luke Tobin, tried to speak to Archbishop Lawrence J Shehan, head of the US bishops' administrative board, about having sisters represented on the commissions that were making decisions about their lives. She said, 'I brought him a statement from the American religious, asking for a deliberative or at least consultative voice' (quoted in McEnroy 1996:175) but he stone-walled the suggestion.

After the Council, women religious, especially in the United States, embraced *Perfectae Caritatis* as a charter for renewal and used it as a guide for far-reaching change in all aspects of religious life. They were the most obedient group in the Church to the vision of the Council. This has upset many bishops and in the last few years US sisters have been investigated by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has placed the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) 'under administration', mandating three US bishops to reform it according to Vatican wishes.

Women in the documents of Vatican II

Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical *Pacem Terris* described women's expanding roles in society as one of the 'signs of the times'. Secondly, it is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations with a Christian tradition, and more slowly, but broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim, both in domestic and in public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person (PT 41).

Women were not only physically absent from the Preparatory Commissions and the first two sessions of the Council, they were hardly mentioned in the conciliar debates.

Not a single mention was made of women in the first conciliar session, not even when *De Ecclesia* was discussed for the first time. Two interventions were made in the second session. At least fifteen interventions were made during the third session and ten during the fourth. Not all were positive or contributed to women's advancement,

but the most important point was that *women were present in the flesh and could no longer be ignored* (as written) (McEnroy 1996:30).

African bishops called for 'an end to slavery by promoting the full liberation of women in the church as elsewhere' (:30). Since the documents were written in the 1960s, when the movement for inclusive language had not yet begun, references to 'men' in the various documents are intended to include women. For example, in discussing the nature of the human person, *Gaudium et Spes* states that all men 'have been created in the likeness of God' (GS 24).³ Thus women too are truly human and full members of the People of God.

McEnroy counts about fourteen explicit references to women. This was the result of deliberate actions by the women auditors who wanted 'to avoid anything that would define women's role in a rigid or poetic way that would ultimately be limiting' (McEnroy 1996:149). The first draft on the lay apostolate contained two separate sections—one on men and one on women. The document was re-structured and a strong statement was inserted:

Since in our days women are taking an increasingly active share in the whole of society, it is very important that their participation in the various aspects of the Church's apostolate should likewise develop (AA 9).

When *Gaudium et Spes* was being drafted, Rosemary Goldie was asked whether the Council should speak about women. She consulted the other women and their consensus was that 'Yes, the council should speak about women, on condition that women are not isolated as a problem apart, as it were on the fringe of society and the modern world, or as if real problems that women experience were their exclusive concern' (McEnroy 1996:150).

Gaudium et Spes contains the most forthright statement on what today we call gender justice:

All men are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God's image; they have the same nature and origin

³ All quotations from the documents of Vatican II are from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, volume 1. Edited by Austin Flannery OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1988).

and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all men and it must be given ever greater recognition. Undoubtedly not all men are alike as regards physical capability and intellectual and moral powers. But forms of social and cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of *sex* (emphasis mine), race, colour, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design (GS 29).

This is a very far-seeing vision which certainly has not yet been fully implemented. Women are mentioned in three other texts of *Gaudium et Spes*. Referring to conditions in the 1960s, the bishops wrote: 'On the family level there are tensions arising out of demographic, economic and social pressures, out of conflicts between succeeding generations, and out of new social relationships between the sexes' (GS 8). In a long list of crimes against human dignity, 'slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children' (GS 27) are included, but there is no mention of rape. Section 60 states:

At present women are involved in nearly all spheres of life: they ought to be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature. It is up to everyone to see to it that women's specific and necessary participation in cultural life be acknowledged and fostered.

This statement takes one step forward and one step back at the same time. While affirming women's contributions in society (note the omission of the Church), the bishops imply that women are some kind of different human being – their nature is not that of men, who have always been the norm in church teaching.⁴

Section 32 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, emphasises the unity of the Church, quoting Ephesians

⁴ See Susan Rakoczy, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004), 33-36 for a discussion of woman as image of God in the Christian tradition.

4:5 – there is ‘one Lord, one faith, and one baptism’. There is a common vocation, salvation and hope in Christ and thus ‘in the Church there is then, no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex, for there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28)’. In this statement of the fundamental equality of women and men in the Church the bishops wrote more than they knew. The statement did not reflect ecclesial reality in the 1960s and it certainly does not do so in the early 21st century.

Some African bishops made forceful statements about the conditions women in this continent. Bishop Malula of Leopoldville in the then Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) spoke about the church as a whole: ‘The church itself should give an example by abandoning its distrust of women and according them a larger share in the common task’ (quoted in McEnroy 1996:153). Other bishops pointed out how various aspects of African culture – marriage customs, polygamy, forced marriage and abuse of the dowry system – have negatively affected women. They called for the inclusion in the section on marriage in what became *Gaudium et Spes* the necessity of free consent and the indissolubility of marriage.

The documents of Vatican II implicitly include women in its teachings and sometimes explicitly mention them in certain contexts. When the bishops returned home in December 1965 when the final session closed the Council, few (maybe none) foresaw how women’s ministries in the church would dramatically expand in the next few years and that in less than ten years the issue of women’s ordination would be on the Church’s agenda.

Women in ministry: Responding to the Spirit

Lumen Gentium’s theology of the church places two paradigms in tension. On the one hand the fundamental equality and unity of all believers because of baptism is asserted (LG 7) and thus all the baptised are truly members of the one body of Christ. All the faithful share in the one priesthood of Christ (LG 10) and therefore ‘It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love’ (LG 40). This statement demolished the hierarchy of holiness which

had persisted in the church from its earliest years – the pope, bishops, clergy and religious (male and female) were higher on the ladder of holiness than the majority of the Church, the laity.

On the other hand, *Lumen Gentium* clearly articulates the hierarchical nature of the Church (Chapter III) and devotes considerable discussion to the roles of the bishop and the clergy. Only then in Chapter IV are the roles of the laity discussed. All Catholic women, including women religious (who are not clerics), are laity.

Catholics around the world experienced the changes brought by the Council first in the liturgical reform which began in the mid 1960s. The most obvious change was that of the language: the liturgy was now celebrated in the vernacular. The Scriptures were proclaimed in the language of the people and the priest's prayers were now understandable to the congregation.

In 1961 then Cardinal Giovanni Montini (later Pope Paul VI) had declared that 'Women must come closer to the altar, to souls, and to the church to gather together the people' (quoted in McEnroy 1996:14). In the reformed liturgy 'closer to the altar' meant a variety of liturgical roles for women – as lectors, as Eucharistic ministers, as ministers of hospitality. We now take these for granted (although in South African parishes some priests still forbid women to minister in these roles because of 'culture') but the first years were very difficult all over the world.

This was for two reasons. First, it had never happened before – but this was also true for male lectors and Eucharistic ministers. But more importantly, women 'on the altar' broke the taboo that had been codified by tradition and the 1917 Code of Canon Law – no woman could be in the sanctuary. This reflected male fear of women and the 'blood taboo' that a woman cannot approach the 'sacred space' because she is unclean due to her sexuality and especially unclean when menstruating, pregnant or has recently given birth.

Another break with tradition was the gradual introduction of female altar servers. If it was uncomfortable for some priests to listen to a woman reading the Scriptures, young female servers aroused great anger. These women crossed into the 'sacred space of the clergy' and by doing so they might be influenced to think that they too could be priests. Altar 'boys' had always been a fertile source of vocations –

what if girls also thought about this? Eventually Pope John Paul II in 1994⁵ officially allowed 'girl altar servers' after they had been accepted in many parts of the world – a good example of 'law following practice'.

Women's ministries gradually expanded to include theological education, pastoral work, directors of religious education, adult education, spiritual direction, justice and peace work. The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People gave impetus to this through its statement:

Moreover, centres of documentation and research should be established, not only in theology but also in anthropology, psychology, sociology, methodology, for the benefit of all fields of the apostolate. The purpose of such centres is to create a more favourable atmosphere for developing the aptitudes of the laity, men and women, young and old (AA 32).

For example in Germany, lay parish assistants including women are full members of the parish staff and exercise many ministries. In South Africa, the Ignatian Spirituality Centre is directed by three laywomen.

Spiritual direction is a good example of a ministry which had been almost exclusively male until after the Council. Although women religious directed their new members in formation, the ministry was seen as clerical since it was often linked with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The 'directed retreat' movement, a one-to-one experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, was a major agent of change. Beginning in the late 1960s in England, Canada and the United States, and then gradually spreading around the world, including South Africa, women who made the Exercises were then assisted to learn how to direct others. At first the new women directors were religious sisters, but then laywomen also responded to this call. The Church has realised that the charism of spiritual direction is given to both women and men, and clerical status has nothing to do with this call.

⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship, Vatican Communication on Female Altar Servers, 15 March 1994. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdwcomm.htm>. Accessed 26 July 2012.

These fifty years have seen a dramatic entrance of women into the ministries of the Church throughout the world, including Africa. The life of the Church continues to be transformed by their presence as women and men minister together for the good of all.

The development of feminist theology

Since Vatican II, Catholic women and women of other Christian churches have developed their own methods and perspectives on Christian life and teaching. This is a totally new development in the Church because feminist theology and its sisters – womanist theology, *mujerista* theology, African women's theology, Asian women's theology and others – are public theology.

Until the 20th century, women's theology had been a private experience. It was done in the monasteries and convents by women such as Hildegard of Bingen (German, 1079-1198), Julian of Norwich (England, 1373-1416? 1423?), Teresa of Avila (Spain, 1515-1582) and Thérèse of Lisieux (France, 1873-1897). A few other women had a more public role. Marguerite Porete, a French Beguine, was burned at the stake in Paris in 1310 for the supposedly heretical teachings in her *Mirror of Simple Souls*⁶ and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a Dominican tertiary who led a very public life in church and political reform wrote *The Dialogue*. These women reflected on their prayer and experience of God and interpreted it in their writings.

Men did public theology in two ways. Though they may have also written in monasteries – Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) is a good example – their theology was accepted by the Church because it was written by a man. When the new universities in England, France, Italy and Germany were founded in the late medieval period, they were closed to women. No woman could study theology – or medicine or law or the humanities – since the accepted anthropology of the Church was that a woman was deficient because she was not fully created in the image of God – a teaching handed down from Augustine of Hippo and strengthened by Thomas Aquinas who named woman a 'misbegotten male'.⁷ Thomas Aquinas taught only men at

⁶ It was later attributed to Meister Eckhart (c. 1260- c. 1327) and Marguerite and her book were only reconnected in 1946 by the Italian scholar Romana Guarnieri.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q 92, a 1.

the University of Paris and women could not even be visitors to the lecture halls since they were considered intellectually deficient.

Since ordination was closed to women (and remains so) there was no need for women to study theology. The Code of Canon Law of 1917, which was in force during the Council, does not explicitly state that women cannot study theology but since its discussion of the course of theological studies is set in the context of seminaries and it declares that only men can be ordained (Canon 968), it is implied strongly that women are excluded from theology. Graduate and professional education for women in the West was extremely limited until the 20th century and women could not study theology at the graduate level at Catholic universities.

But in 1943, Sister Madeleva Wolff CSC, president of St Marys College in Notre Dame, Indiana in the United States, broke through this ecclesial glass ceiling and opened a Graduate School of Theology for women. One of the women who obtained her PhD in theology from St Mary's in the early 1950s was Mary Daly, who became a professor of theology at Boston College in the United States.

In 1968 she published *The Church and the Second Sex*, a strong critique of the sexism and misogyny in the Church. It was followed by *Beyond God the Father* (1973) which addressed the question of language for God. Thus feminist theology was born.

After the Council, women in the West – first in small numbers led by religious sisters and then increasingly larger numbers that included lay women – began to study theology, religious education and pastoral ministry in North American and European universities. Some studied in Catholic institutions and others in state institutions. In South Africa the first women began to study at St Joseph's Scholasticate (now St Joseph's Theological Institute) in the mid 1980s, twenty years after the close of the Council. Women such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who studied in Germany have stories of the outright rudeness they experienced from professors and male students. But they persevered and in the last forty years women have produced a very significant body of theological reflection.

Feminist theology has three steps. The first is to 'deconstruct and critique what has been received in the Christian theological tradition' (Rakoczy 2004:17). Then feminist theologians 'search for an alternative history and tradition to support the inclusion of women as full human beings' (:17); the third step is one of creativity: to recon-

struct and reformulate the teachings of Christianity in ways which express women's experience and questions.

Feminist theologians have written about all the central themes of Christian belief: Scripture, God, the Trinity, Christology, Christian anthropology, ecclesiology, sacraments, moral theology. They have made important contributions in the area of spirituality which was emerging as an academic discipline in the 1970s. Feminist theologians have developed ecofeminist theology as a new sub-discipline. In Africa feminist theologians have especially engaged with cultural issues and with HIV/AIDS.⁸

Rosemary Radford Ruether asked the question 'Can a male saviour save women?' and answered yes, if Christ is interpreted as a friend to women. Women have written about the understanding of the human person and how to understand the relations between men and women. Critiquing the tradition which had taught that women are not fully created in the image of God, they have developed new ways of understanding the relationship between men and women. Here John Paul II unexpectedly offered help. Building on the Councils understanding that all people 'have been created in the likeness of God' (GS 24), he wrote in *Mulieres Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women) that 'both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image' (MD 6).⁹ Thus was over 1500 years of Church teaching changed. South African Anglican theologian Denise Ackermann has developed a 'relational anthropology' which is based on the Scripture text 'You must love your neighbour as yourself' (Mk 12:31). This is 'the praxis of right relationship' (Ackermann 1992:20) and to love another is to affirm their dignity as created in the image of God.

⁸ Some of the most significant Catholic feminist theologians by country are: Great Britain: Tina Beattie, Celia Deane-Drummond, Mary Grey; Kenya: Teresia Hinga, Anne Nasimiyu Wasike; Netherlands: Catherina Halckes; Nigeria: Teresa Okure; South Africa: Judy Coyle, Celia Kourie, Susan Rakoczy, Mary Ralphs Ryan; United States: Anne Carr, Margaret Farley, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sandra Schneiders.

⁹ John Paul II, *Mulieres Dignitatem*, 'On the Dignity and Vocation of Women' (#6) in Ivy A Helman, *Women and the Vatican* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 129.

Inclusive language

Including women, affirming God as mother

Languages are elastic and changing as new words enter and older words may be used less frequently. Beginning in the early 1970s the English language began to change to inclusive and gender neutral usage. Standard written English which had used 'men' to include both men and women gradually became incorrect usage and the new norm was that 'men' meant male human beings. New words such as chair-person were coined.

Other international languages such as German and French and African languages do not have this problem. But in the English liturgical setting, women (and some men) began to be uncomfortable when the priest intoned, 'Pray, brethren' to a congregation that might be over 60% women. Priests began to say 'for all' rather than for 'all men'. Some people objected but these changes were usually easily accepted.

Much more problematic were attempts to change biblical and liturgical texts which consistently named God as male. The language of the Scriptures and of the Church's public prayer is androcentric and seldom are female symbols for God used. Women and men hear constantly that God is Father, Lord, Judge. Men begin to unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) identify themselves with God who is like them, but many women experience distance from God who is not only unlike them, but reminds them of the ways they are abused by men in their families, society and the church. If God is male, then the male is God.

All words about God are not literal, but analogous. God is not 'Father' in the ways we experience fathers. These symbols fit and do not fit at the same time. To name God as Mother (or friend or lover) awakens a different set of thoughts and feelings than to name God as Father. Augustine of Hippo's statement 'If you have understood, then what you have understood is not God'¹⁰ is a salutary warning against making any image of God idolatrous. The apophatic tradition in Christian spirituality cautions us to be careful in our use of names for God

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 52, cf 6, n 16.

and calls us to silence before God who, as Karl Rahner has said, is Holy Mystery.

But still speech must be used. Feminist theologians, especially Elizabeth Johnson, author of *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, have reflected on the many ways we can speak of God and urge the Church to broaden its language. We must not enclose God in a 'box' of only male symbols but speak of God in ways that opens our imagination to the depth of the mystery of God. There are female symbols for God in the Scriptures such as God teaching a child to walk (Hosea 11:1-4), as a housekeeper (Lk 15:8-10), and Jesus as a mother hen (Lk 13:34). The Hebrew word *ruah* – Spirit – is feminine.

But some women and most men resist the use of female images. Sandra Schneiders has suggested that we need a 'therapy of the religious imagination' (Schneiders 1986:19) which will help all members of the Christian community to be open to naming God in multiple ways and so will help us to respond to God more faithfully as our unconscious religious conditioning is healed of its androcentrism.

The ordination question

The most contentious question in the Church regarding women is ordination. It was not on any bishops' agenda at the Council, but by the mid70's it had become a major issue. The St Joan's Alliance had been formed in England in the 1960s in order to work for the ordination of women. In 1974 a group of American women religious sent a statement to the US National Council of Catholic Bishops, urging them to consider the ordination of women.

The first public event was the Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit, Michigan in the United States in 1975. 1200 persons attended and 500 were turned away because of lack of space. During the conference women who felt that God was calling them to the ordained ministry were asked to stand and about 300 did so. After this conference WOC evolved into an organisation and was joined by similar groups around the world. In South Africa, Women's Ordination South Africa was founded in 1997 in Durban.¹¹

¹¹ It is now dormant due to lack of funding.

In the energy of the post-Vatican II years it was felt by many people that the ordination of women was on the horizon. Pope Paul VI asked the Papal Biblical Commission to study the question of women's ministries, including ordination. The Commission 'voted unanimously that the New Testament alone seemed unable to settle the question of the possibility of women priests, and the members voted 12-5 that scripture alone was not sufficient to rule out the admission of women to the priesthood' (Zagano 2000:54).

In 1976 the Vatican issued the first document which ruled against the ordination of women. Titled *Inter Insigniores: On the Question of the Admission to the Ministerial Priesthood*, it had a three-fold argument.

First is the argument from tradition: the Church has never ordained women. Jesus ordained only men. However, scholars pointed out that the New Testament does not speak of priests in the way the Church does so today and that Jesus did not ordain anyone. Secondly, Scripture does not speak of women's ordination. It was the third argument which aroused the most controversy, that the priest must have an iconic, that is, a physical resemblance to Christ.

The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this 'natural resemblance' which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role were not taken by a man: in such case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man (II 5).

The theological implications of this argument are very serious since it calls into question the meaning of the baptism of female members of the Church. Does their baptism allow them to image Christ to the world? Is Christ seen in women or not? Women began to declare 'Ordain women or stop baptising them'.

The document did not stop the discussion and in the early 1990s, after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, it was learned that five or six women had been ordained in Czechoslovakia to serve

the underground church which suffered severe persecution.¹² This news and the continuing discussion about women's ordination probably were the impetus for Pope John Paul II's 1994 'Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone'. The document asserted that the Church 'has constantly held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with the God's plan for his Church' (OS 1) and therefore the Roman Catholic Church has 'no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women' (OS 4). The argument against women's ordination had now shifted: from women not having a physical resemblance to Christ, the Pope now asserted that the Church could not do it because it was not God's plan. It was as if the Pope threw up his hands and said, 'Even if we wanted to do it, Jesus has said "no".'

A year later Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI), the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), wrote a letter to the presidents of bishops' conferences around the world in which he used the language of infallibility:

... the teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women ... requires definitive assent since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (Ratzinger 1995).

The intention of these documents was to silence debate and discussion about women's ordination in the Church. The use of the word 'infallibly' aroused much consternation. Ladislav Orsy SJ, a distinguished canon lawyer, replied that the CDF cannot make infallible statements on its own since 'Infallibility cannot be delegated. It is a charism granted to the pope (as well as to the Episcopal college and to the universal body of the faithful); no other office or body in the church can possess it' (quoted in Zagano 2000:61).

¹² Ludmila Javorova was ordained a priest by Bishop Felix Davidek in 1970 and ministered to the underground church until 1989. See her biography by Miriam Therese Winter, *Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmila Javorova, Ordained Roman Catholic Priest* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001).

Opposition to women's ordination is now a litmus test for any prospective bishop. But this teaching is not being 'received' by many Catholics. 'Reception' is a term which describes the acceptance of a teaching by members of the Church.¹³ It is based on the theological principle that the Holy Spirit dwells in the whole Church, and is not the sole possession of the hierarchy. Examples of reception of the teachings of Vatican II include the liturgical reforms, ecumenism and freedom of religion.

Surveys in Europe and North America consistently show high support for the ordination of women, but less so in Africa. People are quick to point out that 'the Church is not a democracy' and no matter how many people hold a position, the hierarchy has no need to take heed of their views. While Anglicans and Protestant churches now ordain women – and the Orthodox at least can talk about it – the non-ordination of women is now an identity marker that places the Catholic Church in opposition to the movement for women's full equality.

Some women have decided not to wait. In 2002 the first seven Roman Catholic women priests were ordained on a boat in the Rhine river between Austria and Germany (this was done so that it did not occur in a specific country and diocese) by Argentinian Bishop Romulo Braschi and Bishop Rafael Regelsberger of Austria, both validly ordained Roman Catholic bishops. The ordinations have continued each year. In 2003 South African Patricia Fresen (previously a King Williamstown Dominican sister) was ordained a priest and in 2005 a bishop. The Vatican reacts quickly to each ordination with excommunications. The women regard themselves as Roman Catholic clergy – a vanguard for the future.¹⁴

The argument for women deacons has history on its side. In the early church catechumens were baptised naked and thus it was imperative to have women deacons. The women instructed the newly baptised, visited the sick and were involved in the charitable ministries of the church. Phyllis Zagano states that 'there remains clear evidence from tradition that women were solemnly ordained to the diaconate, possibly but not necessarily in concert with their member-

¹³ See James A Coriden, The Canonical Doctrine of Reception. www.arcc-catholic-rights.net/doctrine_of_reception.htm (Accessed 10 June 2012).

¹⁴ See www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org for information on this movement.

ship in another order, that or widows or virgins' (Zagano 2000:233).¹⁵ The office of female deacons was discontinued in the West in the fourth century and about the ninth century in the East. The hierarchy's fear of women and its absolute prohibition of women's ordination to the priesthood make it blind to this clear historical evidence.

So what can be done? The theological arguments on both sides are at a standstill and the use of the language of infallibility is a strong stumbling block. Since the Spirit guides the whole church, I suggest that processes of discernment be used. There are women around the world who say that they are called to priestly ministry. Suppose a brave pope contacted the bishops of the world and said, 'I want to listen to the stories of women who say that they are called to the ordained ministry. Please help me find 50 (or 100) such women from all over the world. I will bring them to Rome and for as many days as it takes I will simply listen to their stories.' But will that happen? Not without a direct intervention of the Spirit. But we can hope.

And the future?

What will the future hold? In one sense, it is more of the same: more women in ministries of all kinds at all levels of the Church, more women theologians, especially in Africa, a greater acceptance of women as fully part of the Church. Young women especially must be invited into all ministries as their calls are discerned.

The ordination question remains a giant blockage. Will it take Vatican III to move towards change? We do not know. But we do know that surprises of the Spirit, such as the development of women's ministries in the last fifty years, are always possible. Women are only longer 'guests in their own houses' but seated at the table of ministry.

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**Land is our mother:
An African Shona eco-feminist theology**

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Introduction

In this chapter, a creative dialogue of Shona religious orientation, feminist theology and the Gospel explores a theology of land that is sensitive to the questions people ask today concerning wholesome God-human-cosmos mutual connectedness. The spotlight is on a Shona contribution to an inclusive theology of the land that transcends all -isms (anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism, racism, imperialism, elitism, sexism, androcentrism, denominationalism and ageism) and promotes eco-justice including environmental preservation and sustainability, especially for the purpose of preserving life's resources today and also for future generations. The chapter gives a brief background to Shona people of Zimbabwe, inculturation, and eco-feminism and explores a Shona conception of land as our mother as a trajectory of Shona religious orientation. That, in turn, subscribes to monotheism (Mwari cult), creation myths, belief in the unity between the mundane and extra-mundane world, an ethic that flows from ontology, symbols of life and celebration of life through a series of rite-de-passage. Other theological loci to be pursued for 'theanthropo-cosmic' (Chimhanda 2011a:80) theology that affirms land as 'catholic space' (Sheldrake 2001:163ff.) in which God is all in all include: quintessential doctrines of the triune God in relation to creation, divine providence, governance, the Incarnation, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Biblical motifs that are highlighted include: the integrity of creation; human dignity, status and responsibility as stewards in God's household (Gk: *oikonomia*) and created co-creators with God; Lordship of God and humanity over creation; governance,

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and conservation of the world's resources for sustainability of present and future generations.

African Shona Bantu people of Zimbabwe

Shona people of Zimbabwe are an African Bantu group and subscribe to *Mwari* cult. The origin of Shona Mwari myths is traced from agrarian Bantu people of Tanzania in the lake region in the vicinity of Mt. Kilimanjaro (Daneel 1970:24; Chimhanda 2011b:82-84). In the historical Bantu movement from Central- and East Africa, the Shona are said to have migrated from this region to the south. In this perspective, Mwari, the God of the Shona *communion sanctorum* (E.K. Mosothoane in Kuckertz 1991:12, 80) is worshipped as a universal God who gives rain and sunshine to all and is thus responsible for the fertility of both humans and the land. In this context, a theology of the land is a trajectory of the God-human-cosmos mutual inter-connectedness and relationality.

The urgency for a contemporary African theology of the land is highlighted by the fact that the African continent as a whole has in the mid- and end of the last century, freed itself from Western colonialism and is now seriously engaging in democracy, reconciliation and sustainable development programs.

Inculturation

Inculturation, as synonymous with the Incarnation, focuses on incarnating or enfleshing the gospel message in time, place and a particular culture. According to Louis Luzbetak (1988:65-66), it is comprised of two other processes, that is, 'enculturation' (learning from one's own culture) and 'acculturation' (learning from other cultures). John Pobee (1992:34), sees enculturation as a dynamic process involving *kenosis* (self emptying) of historically conditioned cultural elements and the Christian message resulting in a *tertium quid* (third position) – *Skenosis* (the tabernacling [pitching of the tent] of the eternal and non negotiable Gospel of Christ) of the gospel message so that the believer feels at home in his/her own culture and faith. Pobee (1992:34-35), explains that enculturation is, in turn, a process of translation, assimilation and transformation. Nyamiti (1973:19, 29-30) concurs with this view by distinguishing four factors of inculturation, that is,

extrapolation of the 'spiritual', 'apologetic', 'pedagogical' and 'comparative' aspects. He explains that this is, in turn, a process of 'rejection', 'correction', 'completion', and refinement of cultural elements. Phillip Sheldrake shows that in the incarnation human placedness is specified by God's commitment in Jesus Christ to a world of place and time. Concerning the Incarnation as synonymous with Inculturation, Sheldrake (2001:163-164) lays emphasis on how to live in a complex world of particularities and yet God exceeds the bounds of the local and specific. Furthermore, Sheldrake notes that within every particular there is an impulse toward the universal or catholicity and in particular, disciples or believers are called to journey towards boundaries and to exceed limits in search of true catholicity. Here it is important to note that there is no pure African or Shona culture and that the Bible Christian traditions are comprised of a pluriform of cultures.

In the Shona culture-Christianity dialogue, it is important to note from the outset the dual nature of culture and the Bible. The Bible as text is God's word in human words. As such, it has a patriarchal stamp in that women's voices and experiences are faint or silenced. On reading the Bible with women's eyes, lost memory can be retrieved and this can be a spinoff for structuring emancipatory praxis. Culture is a double-edged sword in that it 'always seems to be dynamic and accommodating, liberating and oppressing, socializing and alienating, useful and irrelevant' (Punt 1999:313). Kanyoro (2002:13) hits the same note as follows:

In some instances culture is like a creed for the community identity. In some instances culture is the main justification for difference, oppression and injustices – especially to those whom culture defines as 'the other', 'the outsider'.

Furthermore, when considering the historical development of revelation seen against the historical and cultural conditioning of knowledge, it is appropriate to engage in what Pope John XXIII termed *aggiornamento* (Italian: for expanding the view, renewal or updating). The pope precisely encouraged *aggiornamento* in view of answering the needs of the times. In his encyclical, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), Pope John XXIII pointed out that the issue of the liberation of women is one of the *signs of the times*

(1965:19, § 41). Thus, pursuing the enculturation agenda, and, in a Paschal Mystery motif, it follows that in the quest for a feminist theology of land, some of the cultural elements may have to die in order to rise in new splendour.

Eco-feminist theology

Eco-feminist theology exposes the paradox between the high value of both women and ecology and yet both are circumscribed, negated and violated through patriarchal marginalisation and human lordship, respectively. John Mbiti (1991:59ff.) gives a pictorial portrayal of this paradox saying 'African women are flowers in the garden; their men are the fence around it'. The close link between women and land is explored as the hermeneutic key to the understanding of land as our mother. Liberative and reformist feminist agenda sets to restore wholesome God-given dignity and relationship of humanity to creation.

According to Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993, 1994:18-19) the feminist critical principle appraises elements that affirm women (as well as men) as of God's will and denounces those elements that alienate and oppress (in this case women, men and land) as ungodly. There is a strong conviction that gender is a social construct and besides the obvious biological and sexual differences, men and women are endowed with what society assigns as feminine and masculine. Furthermore gender constructs differ from culture to culture. Pursuing the feminist agenda in my Master's dissertation², I postulated that both Shona culture and the Gospel have seeds for the liberation of women and that the two texts show historical development of patriarchy. The corollary of this is that since culture is not static, patriarchal structures can be changed in liberative praxis.

Ontological and communal epistemology

In the context of inculturation, the concept of land as mother is examined in exploring, biblical and Shona creation myths for ontological aspects of land, including the understanding of land as the great womb from which humankind is born and buried, the big breast

² Christ the ancestor, Shona Christianity and the roots for liberative praxis (2000).

that feeds all to satiety, the back on which humans and other earthly realities are carried, and the ancestor that has to be revered and used sparingly in preserving its riches for future generations. Consequently, ontological derivation of a Shona feminist theology of land takes note of the Shona holistic worldview and in particular the Bantu principle (ethic that flows from ontology) in creative dialogue with Christian doctrines of the triune God, creation, providence, governance, ecclesiology and eschatology. The doctrine of the triune God undergirds ontological, existential and relational perspectives; ecclesiology lays emphasis on communal relational orientation; and soteriology and eschatology undergird renewal and conservation of resources for sustainability of present and future generations.

Biblical ontological motif of the God-human-cosmos relationship

The Bible explains land as the earth and all that is in it as follows:

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it, for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers (Ps. 24:1-2).

The God-human-cosmos mutual interconnectedness is portrayed as a creation derivative. Here Genesis 1 and 2 creation myths are often cited to affirm the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as *Pantokrator* (the Almighty Creator who holds all things in being), creates 'ex-nihilo' (out of nothing), and appreciates creation as 'good' (1:12, 18, 21, 25,) and in fact 'very good' (1:31). The last element points to the 'goodness' or 'integrity' of creation. God also assigns humanity the role of lordship (dominion) over creation and this is best understood as stewardship (2:19-20; see also Ps 8:6-8).

It is noteworthy that in the first creation myth, it is humanity as male and female who are created in the 'image and likeness of God' (Gen. 1:26-27). In this context of ontological derivative status, the feminist theologian, Joan Chittister (1998:7) confirms the 'sacramentality' of creation in saying that 'all things remember, reveal and reflect the creative presence of God'. Dermot Lane (1992:11) accentuates this spiritual, sacramental and incarnational mutual connectedness of creation in a quantum (atomist) aspect as follows:

The whole of creation, from the smallest speck of cosmic dust, to its personification in the human being is shot through sacramentally with the holy.

Humanity as male and female are blessed and acknowledged as created co-creators with God. Furthermore, humankind is given responsibility to exercise lordship over other created reality. The hermeneutic key to understanding humanity's lordship over creation is found in the related role of stewardship of God's graces (Gen. 1:28-30). But the present context of environmental degradation (deforestation, siltation of rivers, lowering of biodiversity and the threat of extinction of some species especially through factory effluent, global warming through hydrocarbon emissions affecting the ozone layer, acid rain, droughts), is a sign of distorted human understanding of lordship that has resulted in a warped relationship – the –isms (sexism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism) in which 'those who have power dominate and those who have not power become a resource' (Chittister 1998:6). However, in the New Testament, we are made to understand that the litmus test for good stewardship is that all are given 'their portion of food at the proper time' (cf. Lk 12: 42-48). In 1 Corinthians 4 (1-2) we read:

This is how one should regard us as servants of God and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

Responsible stewardship here entails trustworthiness, accountability and responsible use of things.

Mwari religion and ontological understanding of the God-human-cosmos relationship

According to John Mbiti (cf. Olupona 1991:59 ff.) and Charles Nyamiti (1973:26), although mythopoeic language does not fully satisfy modern historiography, nevertheless, in oral aural cultural hermeneutics, it has primacy over history in that:

In myths we are confronted with the picture of women in the early state of human existence...This is not history.

On the contrary, myth is much broader than history in explaining some aspects of society. It is language depicting truths or realities for which history does not provide a full explanation. Proverbs express wisdom acquired through reflection, experience, observation and general knowledge.

Charles Nyamiti further clarifies that:

Mythopoeic language (symbols and images) tends to speak to the whole person (head and heart) and is suggestive and provocative. He adds that on account of the openness and multi-valence of images and symbols, they can better designate divine mysteries which normally elude human analogy and comprehension (cf. Chimhanda 2011b:81).

Like other cultures, the Shona have creation myths but it is *Mwari* myth that has gained popularity in Christian circles although the Shona have no coherent *Mwari* myth. The etymology of *Mwari* the Supreme Being and Creator of all things is from *muhari* (in the pot) or *Maari* (in Him/Her) or *Muari* – indicating the enigmatic character of *Mwari* and this is in parallel with the character of Yahweh, the God of Israel described as *I am who I am* (cf. Ex.3:14). According to Herbert Aschwanden (1982:245), *Mwari* as *muhari* can be explained as denoting the pro-life sexual act symbolically portrayed as ‘cooking’. The *hari* (cooking pot) here is understood as symbolic of the woman’s uterus (Mbiti 1991:61-62).

Mwari the God of the Shona is understood as a universal God who is neither male nor female and gives gifts like rain, sunshine and children to all. Consequently, the earth’s natural riches like wild honey, fruits, mushrooms, etc., are to be made available to all including strangers (Thorpe 1991:55). In a theanthropocosmic theology, everything has communal and sacramental value. The sacramental, spiritual and mutual reciprocal relationship of humanity to land and all that is in it are accentuated in the Shona understanding that the forests are ‘holy’ (*anoyera*) and things found in them (fruits, honey, mushrooms, medicinal shrubs etc.) are to be picked with reverence

and sparingly so as to be made available to all including future generations.

The ontological importance of land and all of creation is recognised in Shona designates of God as *Musikavanhu* (creator of human beings), and *Musiki* (Creator of all things). Shona androgynous designations of God include, *Nyadenga* (Lord of the skies), *Musikavanhu* (Creator of humans), *Chidzachepo* (Eternal Being), *Zendere* (mythical young woman regarded as Mwaris emanation) (Daneel 1970:16), *Dzivaguru* (Greatest Pool), *Sororezhou* (Elephants head), etc. For example, whereas *Nyadenga* and *Sororezhou* affirm male headship, *Zendere* and *Dzivaguru* affirm female reproductive potency (Chimhanda 2011b:80). Furthermore, Shona language is gender neutral and spiritual leaders include both men and women.

Indeed at the Shona cult of Matongeni (Matopos) in Bulawayo, women are given high status as voice of Mwari – spirit mediums especially in intervening for national issues such as petitions for rain, peace and removal of pestilence such as those caused to crops by locusts (Daneel 1970:16). An interviewee, VaNyakurwa, relates to government peace missions during the protracted liberation struggle (of the 60s and 70s). On the other hand, he pointed to what could be an omission in sending a mission of thanksgiving after gaining independence from colonial rule.

It can be said that Mwari God of the Shona is not a *deus otiosus* (remote god), but is understood as a living dynamic presence who governs, provides, leads people to Godself, shows mercy, and is glorified in creation. Thus relational attributes of God that point to this abound in Shona theophoric names. These include *Tinashe* (God is with us – a Shona equivalent Emmanuel [Mt 1:21]), *Simbarashe* (power/strength of God), *Kudakwashe* (will of God), *Ruvarashe* (flower of God), *Ngonidzashe* (mercy of God), etc. The suffix *she* here stands for *ishe* (chief or king).

In a theanthropocosmic Christology, and understanding Christ as the answer to the questions Shona women ask today, some respondents acknowledged Christ as ‘mother, who was there at birth and is there in sickness and health, and in sorrow and joys’ (Chimhanda 2011a:206). Shona women also claimed the Christological designation *Muponesi* (deliverer, midwife) as affirming women’s experience of giving birth and affirming life. Indeed, Christ is seen to play a dual role of being the one who gives birth and mediates life-giving or

salvation on the Cross – a role some mothers play when they deliver babies on their own without the midwife. The other Shona Christological attribute, *Mununuri* (the go-between, Mediator) can refer to both female and male although the *Munyayi* (mediator in the marriage process) is often a male.

Shona Bantu principle: An ethic that flows from ontology

The Shona subscribe to communal ontology (ways of being) and epistemology (ways of understanding). In the Bantu ethic that flows from ontology, we can identify four key values of *unhu* (personhood), *umwe* (togetherness), *ushamwari* (friendship) and hospitality that are necessary to the understanding of Shona God-human-cosmos mutual relationality.

Unhu (Personhood)

The Shona like other Bantu groups subscribe to the principle of *cognatus ergo, sum ergo* (I am related therefore we are). In other words, they believe a person is a person through other persons (Mbiti 1969:108-109; Pobee 1992:66; Pato 1999:56-57). Life here is participated in. The Shona *munhu chaiye* (real person) practises respect of elders and has to be exemplary to the young. In Shona communal ontology, while the individual can be a liability to the welfare of the group (family, clan, tribe), however, it is paradoxical that the individual's rights and dignity can be compromised in the group. Practical examples are in the cases of murder, drought or poverty and barrenness as concerning substitute and pledged marriages.

Through the culture-Christian creative dialogue, the Shona have learnt that humans have inalienable rights and dignity. Therefore, instead of using humans (young girls usually) in wife substitution in situations of barrenness and *kuripa ngozi* (reparation of vengeance spirits as in the case of murder), animals, money and other things can be used. Similarly, they have learnt that all children are a gift from God and have stopped the killing of twin babies whom they traditionally considered as a bad omen. *Kuzvarira* (pledged marriages – as barter exchange in situations of poverty and famine) and inflated payment of *roora* (bride price) reduce women and the girl-child to a

commodity to be used and misused. In the Shona culture-Christian dialectic some practices have died completely and following the 'Paschal Mystery' (Shorter 1988:83) motif, other aspects (have to die in order to rise in new splendour) need to be revised.

Important to the Shona understanding of land as mother, there are cases in which the autonomy and the unique individuality and autonomy of women were safeguarded traditionally. The first example concerns levirate marriages. Here the Shona proverb *nhaka ndeyemombe yemunhu inozvionera* (only cattle can be inherited automatically but the people are free to choose) highlights this value. The second example is the case of sin or violence against the mother (whether physical or psychological). The Shona regard this (like the biblical sin against the Holy Spirit) as the most heinous sin that is punishable (if the offender does not make reparation before the mother dies) in the condition of *kutandabotso* (the offender experiences psychological instability and goes from house to house wearing sackcloth and begging). Such an offender will regain normality only when he/she has made reparation to the mother's agnatic group.

Umwe (togetherness)

The factor of togetherness as appropriate to a theology of land is highlighted in the Shona traditional practice of *humwe* (people gather to a common task such as ploughing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing of grain where the host provides a festal meal and home brewed beer). Furthermore, there are several Shona proverbs that lay emphasis on *umwe*. These include: *Gunwe rimwe hari tswanyi nda* (One thumb cannot crush a louse) and *Rume rimwe hari kombi churu* (One big man cannot circumvent an anthill). There are many rhythms that emanate from people working together on land especially in initiating rhythmic threshing, winnowing and pounding of grain. These in turn have enriched Shona Christian liturgy.

Ushamwari (friendship)

The Shona say *ushamwari hunokunda ukama* (friendship has greater value than consanguine relationship). Indeed, for the Zezuru *sahwira* (friend) is not necessarily a blood relation and plays a significant role especially at funerals – a role equivalent to the Karanga *muzukuru*

(niece or nephew). The Karanga also say *muzukuru anokunda mwana wokubereka* (a grandchild is greater than one's own child).

Hospitality

The Shona put a high stake on hospitality. This is evidenced in that they have a time of day called *ruvhunzavayeni* (time of dusk when visitors are expected to arrive and – if strangers ask to put up for the night). They allow the visitor to upset their budget in providing a festal meal. The stranger is directed to the village headman or chief. The chief also provides for the needy – in line with the biblical *anawim* (poor of Yahweh) trio of widow, stranger and orphan (Ex. 22:21-24; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deut. 27:19; 24:17). The Shona also see physically and mentally challenged people as *vanhu vaMwari* (people of God) in line with the biblical *anawim*. These are to be meticulously cared for according to the biblical view that some people entertained God in the guise of strangers without knowing it.

Traditionally the Shona enable the chief to do this through the practice of *zunde ramambo* (the people work in the chief's field and the proceeds are used for the needy. The interviewee, Chief Serima, expressed the need to revive this practice in post-independent Zimbabwe (Chimhanda 2011b:137). Again, traditionally they were crops considered *zvinhu zvinodyiwa nevapfuuri* (things to be eaten by hungry passers-by or travellers).

Land as the ancestors

It can be asked: What relevance do these traditional practices have today? Alternatively, we can ask whether it is possible to have a coherent and relevant African/Shona theology without appealing to the ancestors. The response to this is that, despite cultural mix through evangelization, westernization, colonization and globalization, ancestor religion is very much alive among Shona people. Bourdillon, in his book *Where are the Ancestors* (1993), shows that interloping cultures have failed to influence Shona people to jettison ancestral belief. Belief in ancestors as the living dead who communicate with living members of their family is what undergirds a series of rite-de-passage that take place from birth to life after death.

In the Shona religious worldview, God is clearly creator par excellence. In the context of Shona ancestral belief, Mwari is understood as the Highest Being at the apex of the ancestor mediation ladder. Both men and women are accorded a place on the ancestral mediation ladder. I have often heard it said that *Mwari mudzimu mukuru* (God is the Highest Ancestor) and that *mai mudzimu wangu* (my mother is my ancestor). But it is clear here that ancestors are not God and that the Shona are monotheistic. This view is supported by the fact that in accordance to Bantu migration, the Shona primogenitors occupied an already inhabited land (displacing the Bushmen). In a Shona culture-Christian dialectic, ancestors can be seen here as stewards of God's graces. Thus land is a gift from God through the ancestors.

Concurring with the Synod of African Bishops' (Rome 1994) postulate of the model of church in Africa as family, Joseph Elsener (1999:20; Chimhanda 2011b:202-203) clarifies aspects of ancestral veneration that do not compromise Christian belief. He says ancestors are venerated (and not worshipped) because:

... it is they who have passed on life, the gift from God as well as moral and cultural standards. They are guardians and protectors of this life ... veneration is conceived in the monotheistic context.

Charles Wanamaker (1997:281-298) hits the same note in asserting that ancestors are understood as the living dead who have supernatural powers to protect, bless or punish their living descendants.

In the mutual connectedness of land and humans, the Shona believe that land is the ancestors and that as such, they are 'children of the soil' (*vana vevhu*). Thus the hermeneutic key to understanding the link between ancestors and land is found in Shona symbols of life that include totemism, soil, blood, womb and water (Aschwanden 1982:23; Chimhanda 2011b:85; Manley1995:70-74).

Totemism and Shona: Understanding of land as the ancestors

Mofokeng, a proponent of the concept of land as our mother (1997:49), asserts that the identity of African people is tied up with the land as expressed in totems and rituals. He explains:

The religion [of agrarian people] is imbued with elements of life on the land ... planting time, harvest, festivals, the sacramental rites of water and grain and fruit grown there. Land has the greatest moral significance and constitutes the core of life.

Zimbabwe (land of the Shona whose major ethnic groups are *Karanga*, *ZeZuru*, *Manyika*, *Korekore* and *Ndau*), itself is divided into tribal tutelary spirits areas. In other words, it can be said that land was originally apportioned according to ancestral foundations of the family, clan and tribe and as undergirded by totemism (*mitupo*) (Chimhanda 2011b:86-8). Like the Judeo-Christian Sabbath – a concept derived from the Genesis creation myth, Shona people observe a ‘day of rest’ (*Chisi*) associated with the founding (primogenitor) ancestor. Various regions observe *Chisi* at different days of the week. For example, in my home area *Chisi* is on Thursday. On this day, Shona people must not do hard work, in particular, working the land. Linked to ancestral tribal tutelary spirits, is Shona totemism.

Shona totemism shows how the Shona universe is a place where humans, animals and other created reality are ontologically harmoniously intertwined. The totem (*mutupo*) is derived from an animal, such as lion, elephant, buffalo, monkey, bird, mouse, etc., or part of an animal (leg, heart), or even other created reality such as *dziva* (pool of water and the fish in it), and is in turn acquired through patriarchal lineage. Land acquisition as related to totemism is undergirded by myths that depict the primogenitors encounter with the respective animal.

The totem is very important in that it links one to the primogenitor and gives a person identity. On the one hand, totem praise names (Shona: *chidavo*) affirm good characteristics (strength, power, headship, e.g., for the lion and elephant totems) and bad elements (stealing, cunningness, tendency to have white hair on aging for the monkey totem) of the animal in question. On the other hand, the praise names are anthropomorphic and have subtle sexual connotations since the full praise names are used in the rhythm of the conjugal act. More important still, the totem and praise name are recited in the funeral rite and this is a prerogative for correct burial. In this context, the Shona

show a kind of *xenophobia*. They are afraid to harbour a total stranger because they are afraid to be implicated in *ngozi* (vengeance spirits) for not giving the stranger correct burial. Otherwise the totem and the first line of praise names are used in everyday greeting and especially when thanking. The underlying principle is that a person has group value. Thus in the totem symbolism, it is the persons whole family, clan and the living dead ancestors who are greeted and thanked.

There are also taboos linked to the totem. These include abstaining from eating the animal or the part of the carcass that is one's totem and this is linked to incest taboo – marriage within one's totem is forbidden. It is important to note that the latter practice is affirmed by modern science as good in widening the gene pool and thus in preventing abnormalities that may occur through in-breeding. But the pertinent question to the understanding of land as mother is: Where does Shona ancestral belief position woman in relation to land ownership and access to the means of livelihood?

In the Shona religious worldview, we can distinguish two kinds of ancestors – *vadzimu* (family spirits) and *mhondoro* (lion spirits). Although Shona totems are acquired through patriarchal lineage, we have seen that in everyday parlance, the Shona say *mai mudzimu wangu* (mother is my ancestor). Furthermore, interviewees³ (VaViolet and VaNyakurwa) acknowledge both men and women *mhondoro masvikiro* they have known and encountered in their times. Schoffeleers (1978:235-313) calls the *mhondoro* *guardians of the land*. The *mhondoro* living hosts are called *masvikiro* (mediators). Lion spirits are also called *makombwe* (Singular: *Gombwe*). According to Bourdillon (1976:294-317), the greatest *gombwe* of the Karanga and Zezuru is Chaminuka and as subscribing to the Mwari cult. Schoffeleers (1978:235-338) and Bourdillon give Mutota as the greatest *gombwe* alongside *Dzivaguru* and *Karuva* among the Korekore. According to Bourdillon, *Karuva* is the highest *gombwe* among the Manyika, and on a par with Chaminuka. Paul Gundani (personal communication), gives area *makombwe* – Rasa for the Karanga (Gutu area), Chaminuka, for the Zezuru (Epworth, Chitungwiza area).

³ Informal interviews of Shona elders in my Masters research - Violet Kucheka and Henry Nyakurwa. The prefix 'va' to elderly people's names (e.g. VaViolet, and VaNyakurwa) is part of Shona respect for elders.

Interviewees (VaNyakurwa, VaChifike, VaViolet, and the late chief Serima) explain that the main function of the *mhondoro* is mediation in calamities, e.g., pestilence (from locusts, army worms – devastating crops), illness, drought, war. VaViolet explained that in some cases the *mhondoro masvikiro* may fore-see such calamities and advocate remedies. Both chief Serima and VaViolet talked about the importance of *nhendo* (thanksgiving) particularly for a good harvest. They noted that whereas today this tends to be omitted, traditionally people had to wait for the *nhendo* ritual in order to pick fresh crops or vegetables (such as the traditional vegetable *muboora*, ‘pumpkin leaves’) from the fields (Chimhanda 2011a:68-69). In the latter context, *nhendo* is also called ‘kuruma gore’ (a ‘bite’ or ‘taste’ of first and new produce of the ‘year’) (Paul Gundani – personal communication).

Soil

Marcelle Manley (1995:70-75; see also Chimhanda 2011b:91-93) explains that among the Shona, *vhu* (soil) is not just the material base of the subsistence economy of people, but represents the very power of chieftaincy. In the soil symbolism, and Shona understanding of ancestors as guardians of the land, the chief as an *amanuensis* is a power to reckon with. As different from the modern political functionaries, the chief has spiritual powers vested on him/her by the soil through the *mhondoro masvikiro*. Consequently, the soil is both the founding ancestors who conquered it and the rulers by which those who occupy the land today – *vatorwa* (aliens) and living descendants – have to obey. Manley (1995:72, 74) emphasises this view as follows:

Morals governing life are issued by the soil and breaches of these rules incur not only material penalties, but in extreme cases, also drought, disease, sterility and death. This is the very ground of chiefly authority even in these times of rapid change.

Territorial integrity is maintained in that ancestral land is where one is buried. Most Shona in urban areas maintain rural ties – they come from towns and the Diaspora to be buried in rural homes. When

entering alien territory, the Shona have the ritual of *kunanzva vhu* (lick the soil) so as to redeem oneself from alien spirits. And again, if one dies and is buried in alien territory, the Shona have the ritual of *kutora mudzimu*. They take soil from the grave for ritual burial of the deceased kin in ancestral land. The ritual of *kutora vhu (mudzimu)* applies when one moves place to settle somewhere, that is, soil from ancestral graves is taken (Chimhanda 2011a:93).

As mother and the great womb, land is the eternal home in that the grave is understood as *imba* (house) of which everyone helps to construct even by the mere throwing of soil onto the coffin. Indeed, early in the morning after burial, the Shona perform the ritual of *kumutsa* (awaking the deceased – asking for well-being in the new home). The ritual is still performed today but Christians now include prayer.

The Shona refer to the dead as *vari pasi* (those from below). Consequently, when making petitions to the dead (on going on a journey, illness, etc), there is the ritual of *kukanda fodya pasi* (to throw snuff on the ground). Pertinent to our understanding of land as mother, it is important to note that the family prayer place is woman space – the kitchen *huva* (shelf moulded from soil) where clay pots and other kitchen utensils are stored. Furthermore, the mother's round hut with a central fire (cooking place) is a space for recreation and also a place where the body lies in state, especially for the night stay (vigil). It is also important to note the link between the grave as the earth's uterus and the mother's womb.

The womb

Although Shona patriarchal marginalisation negates women as *vatorwa* (alien) and tends to treat them like a field receptive to male seed, the crucial and active role of women in human reproduction is affirmed in Shona proverbs, songs and pithy sayings. Taking the concepts of birthing and parenting, that run in parallel with the understanding that from the produce of the land we are nourished, secured and healed, Shona proverbs hail the mother as follows: *zamu guru ndera mai* (mother has the bigger breast [to feed to satiety]), *kusina mai hakuyendwi* (you do not go to a place where your mother does not dwell, that is, home is where the mother lives; *baba ndi mupakamwe* (father gives once), *mai ndi mupa kaviri* (mother gives twice). It is

important to note here that modern science has thrown light on this, in particular, the science of genetics and sex determination.

There are Shona sayings that show that maternal consanguine relations are stronger than patriarchal ties. Here reference is to the importance of the *dumbu* (womb). The Shona say: *uyu mwana wamai vangu* (this is my mother's child), *mukoma, munin'ina, hazvanzi yangu womudumbu rimwe – buda ndibudewo* (my elder, younger, sister/brother from the same womb – come out so that I may follow). Also when it comes to life-threatening momentary experiences, the Shona always ejaculate *mai-we!* Connected to the womb is the *mbereko* (back sling) symbolism. The root word of *mbereko* is from *kubereka* (to carry or give birth), and hence the reference to *chibereko* (the womb or more specifically – the uterus).

The Shona attribute womb qualities to the protective work of maternal ancestors. In situations of illness or death, the Shona say, *mudzimu wamai wadambura mbereko* (maternal ancestors have broken the back sling). For this reason, traditionally, in cases of barrenness, child illness or death, it was the woman who was blamed). They say the barren woman *haana mbereko* (does not have a back sling). From the point of view of *mbereko*, we can understand that the Manyika refer to land as *musana* (back). It is also obvious that reference is to the mothers back (Nisbert Taringa, in personal communication).

The Shona acknowledge the importance of the mother's back in a series of rituals surrounding birthing and nurturing most of which are part of the *roora* (bride price). The rituals include *mavhunwa* (damages), *masungiro* (redeeming damage done in psychosomatic association to parents' backs when the daughter is first made pregnant), and *mbwazukuru* (goat used to redeem maternal ancestors (woman's paternal grandmother) for protecting the womb and grandchildren). VaNyakurwa explains that in the *masungiro* ritual, the Billy goat and nanny goat are used to redeem the father and mother, respectively. The Billy goat is termed the *chidyamushonga* (that which is used in medication) since it is killed and eaten with medicinal herbs. But the nanny goat is left to produce the young. In the *roora* the mother's role in birthing and parenting is also acknowledged in the payment of the *mombe yhumai* (mother's cow). Although other items of *roora* like *danga* (a head of cattle) can be in cash and kind, the

mombe yehumai must be 'on fours'. Its produce and that of the nanny goat form part of the mother's wealth.

The *danga* is paid only when there are children born to the couple and this is done 'to transfer the status of the child as a member of the maternal group to that of the paternal group'. In view of what, Dora R. Mbuwayesango (1997:27-28) makes a strong assertion that *roora* should more accurately be termed 'child price'.

Water, blood and milk

We can see that there are many synergies concerning maternal role in birthing and nurturing of the young in the fusion of the mundane and extra-mundane world. In this context, Shona symbols of life would not be complete without the mentioning of blood (milk and water). These body fluids are mutually connected biologically. In the Shona patriarchal worldview, children are a gift from God through the ancestors. In this case paternal ancestors use *mutorwa* wrapping (placenta) that prevents the foetus from coming into contact with the mothers (*mutorwa*) blood that is regarded as dangerous. At birth, the placenta and the umbilical cord are treated with reverence in the ritual of burial of the placenta. Hence, the importance of the Shona politically clamouring for ancestral land in which their placenta and umbilical cords are buried.

The Shona metaphor of the soil drinking blood of, for example, fallen heroes and heroines, or that of children who die prematurely, in turn, symbolizing angry ancestors and water, particularly flowing water is said to have *donhondzo* (cooling) and soothing effects. Women who die in pregnancy and after giving birth and children who die through miscarriages and infants who die before teething are referred to as *vanhu vanyoro* (tender and wet people). These people are buried in wet soil and children in particular are buried on river banks – alongside streams with flowing water (Chimhanda 2011a:92-93).

VaViolet and vaPriscilla maintain that the Shona's regard of the woman's blood as foreign does not make sense in view of the fact that during the nine months of gestation the woman does not have menses. They explained that this points to the fact that the woman's blood is necessary for the health and growth of the foetus. They further vindicate maternal blood in that puerperal blood (that which flows for

a few days after giving birth) is in symbolic circumcision of boys. Aschwanden (1982:37-38) hits the same note in saying that for the Shona puerperal blood is understood to be a mixture of both father's and mother's bloods which means that both worlds of *vadzimu* are represented in this blood.

In the interconnectedness of nature and humans, women in their menses are said to have hot blood so that when they come into contact with, mainly what is understood by the Shona as women crops (peanuts, groundnuts) they say *dzinotsva* ('they burn' – wither and die). If they insist on working the crops in this condition, they have to do *kurapira* (doctor them usually with the herb *chifumuro* [acts as an antidote]). One common remedy is to sprinkle crushed root medicine *chifumuro* (that which redresses the harm) round the edges of the field.

Besides the important role of breast milk in nourishing the baby, VaViolet explains that the Shona use milk of virgin girls to cure a number of child diseases (sore eyes, allergies etc.). Similarly, milk understood by Shona to have mild and harmless effects is used as prophylaxis when applied to genitals of both boys and girls (see also Aschwanden 1982:40-41) to calm and control their sexual drive.

The Shona understand that an orphan is the one bereaved of the mother and this is affirmed in the song:

Musi wakafa mai (the mother died),
Nherera yakachema (the orphan cried)
Ikawana wakainyaradza (and found people to console
him/her).
Pakupera kwamazuva (days later), *nherera yakachema*
(the orphan cried),
Ikashaya wakainyaradza (but found no one to console
him/her).

Shona culture – Christian dialogue: Theological analysis and synthesis

It has been shown that land and all that is in it belongs to God the Creator par excellence. Shona theophoric names affirm that God is a living dynamic presence who, like a mother labours with creation in a process of giving birth, is continual creation, providence and directing

creation to its fullness. In this context, land and humans are created co-creators. Since land, human beings and other created reality reflect and reveal the Creator, they can therefore be used analogically in theological epistemology. In analogical God language, God has been called Father as well as Mother. In the Bible, God has been called the Father of Israel in terms of creation and redemption. Hans-George Link (1988:26-27) gives the following examples from the Old Testament:

The Lord is Israel's Father because he 'bought her with a price' (Deut. 32:6); 'when Israel was a child I loved him ... out of Egypt I called my son ... I led them with cords of compassion' (Hosea 11:1, 4); God's fatherhood is seen in his caring, comforting and nurturing his young child (Jer.31:9; 3:4).

He adds that in the New Testament, God is precisely the Father of Jesus Christ (Mk 14:36; Lk 23:46) and Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to God as Abba, Our Father. St Paul teaches that believers through Jesus are adopted sons and daughters of the Father (2 Cor.6:16-18; Rom.8:14-15; Gal.4:6).

Alternatively, God has been assigned motherhood images as follows:

Yahweh is likened to a protective mother bird (Is.31:5); a midwife (Ps 22:9); the mother conceiving (Num.11:12); the pregnant mother (Is.46:3); the mother giving birth (Is.66:13); the suckling mother (Is.49:45); the mother comforting her child (Is.88:13) (Link 1988:28).

Link is careful to note that Yahweh is never addressed as 'Mother' since God is addressed as Father.

In Church tradition God has been given motherly designates and specifically is called mother as follows:

*God is love
And for love of us has become a woman
The ineffable being of the Father has out of compassion
become Mother.*

By loving God has become a woman (St Clement of Alexandria, cf. Link 1988:51).
As truly as God is our Father, so just as truly is he our Mother.
In our Father, God Almighty, we have our being; in our merciful Mother, we are remade and restored (Julian of Norwich, cf. Link 1988:51).

Today feminist theologians strongly argue that we need to use inclusive images for God, so that in the mild form of feminism and in line with the above, God can be understood as Mother, in as much as he is Father.

Believers also affirm God analogically as my rock my stronghold, etc. In Shona Mwari religion, God can be understood as the first rain that rejuvenates life on earth. Land, like mother, in its fruitfulness, nourishes humankind and other earthly life and in this way manifests the glory and grandeur of God.

Shona holistic healing portrays the indispensable mutual connectedness of God-humans-cosmos. Here God is understood as healer par excellence who heals without medicine. The Shona understand that ancestors, being closer to God and possessing supernatural powers, can also heal without medicine especially through their *svikiro* (living descendant medium) using the ritual of *kufurira* (blowing our water). The living descendants can heal with medicine. Shona women have considerable knowledge of herbs used in healing common ailments, and in particular, those used as prophylaxis for babies. And as a means of conserving the environment and making the herbs available to all – especially future generations, herbs are to be picked in a reverential manner (ritual clapping in thanksgiving to God and the ancestors) and sparingly. There are rules to be observed and these are usually understood as part of the healing process. For example, one must always leave part of the shrub to allow for continued propagation and growth. On picking tree bark, one has to take a little *kumabva zuva ne kumadokero* (from sun rise and sun set – from the east and west). Acknowledging the mutual interconnectedness of humans and ecology, it is understood that as the tree heals, the sick person is also healed (Paul Gundani – personal communication).

It is important to note that the term mother here can be understood in inclusive and complementary ways of parenting and nur-

turing. Human beings have a divine obligation of fathering, mothering and nurturing their young, that is, of promoting life to its fullness and thereby giving glory and praise to God. St. Irenaeus affirms this view in his dictum: *Gloria Dei vivens homo* – ‘The glory of God is humanity fully alive’ (*Adversus haereses*, IV, 20, 7, in Pope John Paul II 1995:48). Women have been known to excel in this role better than their male counterparts. Pope John Paul II (Letter to women, 1995), Edith Stein (1892-1942) and Helene Cixous (cf. Ward 1996:225-235) acknowledge women as biophilic in their postulates of the *feminine genius*, *feminine ethos* and *écriture feminine* (*feminine economy*), respectively.

John Paul II describes the feminine genius as women’s special contribution to the mutual partnership of men and women in promoting life. For Stein (cf. Caldecott 1996:69), the feminine ethos denotes women’s intrinsic value to look towards the holistic, to be concerned with the development of people, to practise empathy, etc. Cixous explains *écriture feminine* as being able to write the narrative of ‘the other’, the narrative repressed by the masculine economy. As such, *écriture feminine* welcomes the other, gives voice to ‘the other’, and allows the strangeness to appear and to question the writer. In short, it gives space (plenitude) to know, write, read, love and take care of the other (Ward 1996:225). In this role, (African) Shona women display a kind of martyr-complex in that they put up with abusive marriages saying ‘ndinogarira vana vangu’ (I stay for the sake of my children). Mercy Amba Oduyoye accentuates this point in saying in African culture, and for a woman, motherhood or mothering is a biological niche that she leaves at her peril, since doing so draws shame down on her (cf. Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1989:43).

Concerning the masculine economy and the repression of the ‘other’, Ursula Pfafflin refers to the ‘abortion of fathers’. She explains that it is commonly observed that men find it easier than women to renege on nurturing their progeny opting instead for ‘serial parenting’ (Pfafflin 1993:66). Men thus nurture the children of their current sex partner and neglect their biological children.

But the challenge for both Shona culture and the church is to recognise the dignity of women in their own right – bearing in mind that before women are mothers, they are women in their own right and also that not all women are mothers. On the other hand, the church can learn from Shona culture to include women in all areas of Church life.

In the Roman Catholic Church in particular, since important church offices (teaching, defining of quintessential doctrines, etc.) are attached to ordained ministry, women are excluded from the centre of church life.

We have seen that in today's concern for eco-justice, humanity is seen to have misunderstood its role of stewardship or lordship over creation. Anthropocentrism, associated with machismo, have accounted for a situation in which humanity has alienated itself from God, other human beings and the environment. In this context, Chittister (1998:6) asserts that 'those who have power to dominate the resources dominate the resources', and 'those who lack the power become the resource'. In the mutual analogy of land as mother, there is then a link between the rape of the mother with the rape of the environment. This is a critical and alarming analogy that shakes the foundations of our faith and culture and challenge people to *metanoia* (conversion) in restoring the God-human-cosmos mutual interdependence in order to promote quality life and to preserve resources for future generations. In this context, the Shona holistic worldview and Bantu ethic that flows from ontology have a lot to contribute.

Concerning Shona understanding of land as mother, the 'great womb', 'the back' and 'the big breast', land can be seen as catholic space in which God is all in all as concerning the God-human-cosmos relationality. Feminist theologians (McFague, Ruether 1983, 1993:259 ff.) concur with this view in saying that the world is God's body). Men and women are called to conscious becoming – to appropriate the new humanity in Christ. The spotlight is on the Christian *magna carter* – the baptismal status in which all boundaries are dissolved in promoting the equality of believers so that:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female...neither
slave nor free...neither male nor female...for we are all
one in Christ Jesus (Gal.3:28).

Thus in Christ Jesus, we have become *hazvanzi nehazvanzi* (brother and sister), children of the same Mother/Father. In an organic Christology, difference is not seen as inferior, but is welcome for the richness it brings to the whole community.

For Rosemary Radford Ruether (1993, 1993:183-192), authentic *metanoia* requires both male and female journeys. Consciousness-

raising (Chimhanda 2008:309-332) into understanding how we have alienated ourselves from God, other human beings and the environment and consequently, into how we are to restore these estranged relationships involves making women understand that sometimes they are their own worst enemy. For example, as primary teachers women collude with patriarchy and thus co-opt their own personhood in that they socialize the children to patriarchal obligations (Mbuwayesango 1997:27-36). Furthermore, women as mother/sister-in-law, etc. tend to oppress other women (2011a:36-39). In the culture-Gospel dialectic, women are challenged to appropriate their creation and baptismal dignity of the imago Dei/Christi, looking at the kenotic and egalitarian Christ. In the incarnation Christ took up human nature and in Shona gender neutral language it is appropriate to say: *Izwi wakava munhu sesu* (the word became human like us, cf. Jn.1:14). Here it is important to note that Jesus Christ as Second Person of the Trinity is not limited to biological, geographical, historical and ethnical contingencies.

Women are challenged to take courage and become proactive agents of their own *her-story* by the Synoptic Christ who asked engaging questions ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’, ‘Whom do you seek?’ (Jn. 20:13, 15) ‘Woman, where are they?’, ‘Has no one condemned you?’ (Jn. 8:10). Consequently, Jesus asked specific questions that led to conversation and awakenings to new opportunities for women as well as men (Njoroge 1997:436). As an egalitarian teacher, Christ used examples drawn from male and female images and experiences, for example, in the growth of the Kingdom parables: He affirmed women’s rightful place in public space, in general, and in leadership, in particular – he had male and female disciples and Christ the rabbi, taught women at his feet.

In a patriarchal church and culture, men are challenged to realise that holistic truths of faith are drawn from images and experiences of both women and men. Therefore, where we have patriarchal marginalisation of women, we have at best half truths and at worst distorted truths. Against patriarchal reification and rationalization of sin against women, men are to learn from Jesus of the Gospels who advocated ‘symmetry of responsibility’ (Erickson 1991:584) between husband and wife, man and woman, for the sin of adultery (Mt 5; Jn. 8:1-11). The Shona say *musayera nyoka negavi iyo iripo* (do not measure a snake with a rope when it is there). It appears there is a real sense in which men fear to engage women on an equal

footing. Thus when men make decisions about, for and without women, this is based on presuppositions. Men need to realise that women need to be part of the decision that decides which vehicle to travel in and not to jump into an already moving patriarchal band wagon.

Conclusion

It has been argued that in Shona communal ontology and epistemology, it is appropriate to talk of land as our mother. This is done in a quest for identity, human destiny and sustainable development, especially to preserve resources for future generations. Shona orientation to land as mother was explored as a more suitable analogy in portraying the God-human-cosmos mutual connectedness than the masculine economy. It is very convincing that in anthropomorphic terms, and looking at the pragmatic, pedagogical, spiritual and comparative aspects, the fruitfulness, nurturance and woundedness of mother earth is closely linked to that of human mothers. It is important to stress that the idea of land as mother can only be accepted in an analogical way and also in inclusive terms of parenting and nurturing of one's young. The analogy also showed that environmental conservation is inherent in Shona holistic worldview, healing, and spirituality. Furthermore, the position of God as Pantokrator cannot be compromised since the earth and all that is in it belong to God. It is humanity fully alive, the earth and all within it that reveal the Greatness of God.

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Part 3

Contextual perspectives

**Reconciliation or conflict?
The challenge of the Apocalypse**

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Introduction: Reconciliation as Victorious Conflict

The word 'reconciliation' is not used in the Apocalypse but the book depicts before the readers the struggle by God to bring about the New Jerusalem on earth in which there will be harmony between God and humanity, among people and in the whole of creation. Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem come down on earth are symbols of this reconciled state. However, when focussing on Apocalypse 17-22 the first impression one gets is not one of a process of negotiation, reconciliation and peace between people but rather of division into two camps, the good and the bad, with the extermination of the bad ones as the final solution. This together with the many violent scenes appears to make the Apocalypse more part of the problem than part of the solution.

A statement by Philippe Buc (2008:13) might open wider perspectives on reconciliation which may enable us to discern more clearly what is at stake in the Apocalypse, even when features of the text are in tension and conflict with our contemporary sensitivities:

... in the premodern era at least, peace, pax, did not mean the absence of conflict but victorious conflict leading to right order and justice, iustitia.

If this is true, then the question needs to be asked: which are those victorious conflicts which lead to right order and justice? What is right order and justice? Many victorious conflicts in history have claimed to bring about the right order. John and his churches were in fact

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surrounded by, and even confronted with, claims to victory and peace by the Roman Empire which appeared to overshadow the victory and gift of Christ.

This article will begin by briefly evoking these claims by the Roman Empire as they are an important part of the 'world behind the text' of the Apocalypse. A second section will explore the 'world of the text' with regard to reconciliation: Gods anger against the present forces of chaos, suffering and sin; the nature of the struggle of the faithful as doing the works of Jesus and being faithful witnesses in this world, even unto death; the division of humanity into two camps as the outcome of this struggle; prophecy and witness in the process towards reconciliation; and finally an understanding of divine reconciliation. The final section will explore some aspects of the interaction and tension between the 'world of the text' and our contemporary world, a tension out of which emerges the 'world before the text' into which we are invited.²

The claim to victorious conflict by the Roman Empire

Particularly relevant for our investigation is the case of the Emperor Augustus, whose victories were celebrated in poetry (Virgil and Horace) and in the plastic arts (the *Ara pacis*) for having established the *Pax Romana* (Collins 1976:188; Collins 1998; Barnett 1989:111-120; Friesen 2000). We read in Virgil's passage in the *Fourth Eclogue* about the birth of a boy (Augustus):

*Now the last age by Cumae's Sibyl sung
Has come and gone, and the majestic roll
of circling centuries begins anew;
Justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign,
with a new breed of men sent down from heaven.
Only do thou, at the boy's birth in whom
the iron shall cease, the golden age arise...
Apollo reigns. And in thy consulate*

² For an understanding of the hermeneutical approach expressed in the threefold terminology of the 'world behind the text', the 'world of the text', and the 'word before [or in front of] the text', see for instance, West 1993, or the more complex work of Schneiders 1999.

*this glorious age, O Pollio, shall begin,
and the months enter on their mighty march.*

In 17 B.C. Horace wrote his *Carmen Saeculare* for a religious festival which was meant to lend lustre to the new political order inaugurated by Augustus. This text was known by many people since it was inscribed on a marble pillar in the ancient centre of Rome. Augustus had a special devotion to Apollo, the Sun God, and this song is addressed to him (also called Phoebus). The following passage (57-65) gives us an idea of the ideology:

*Already Faith and Peace and Honour and ancient
Modesty and
neglected Virtue have courage and have come back, and
blessed Plenty with her horn is seen...
May Phoebus, the prophet...prolong the Roman power
and
Latium's prosperity to cycles ever new and ages ever
better!*

All of this propaganda was most probably seen by the author of the Apocalypse, John, as one of the kinds of false prophecy he is writing against (Note the use of the verb *πλανάω* – ‘to lead astray’ in 2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10). The whole nationalistic and imperialistic ideology of the Roman Empire, which manifested itself all over in the cities, in monuments, altars, temples, inscriptions ... stood in stark contrast with the vision of the Apocalypse.

In response to this the Apocalypse's language of victory³ and sharing in the paradise-like future is prominent. This complex of images is used as a challenge and a promise to the churches in each of the letters to the churches in chapters 2-3. The first letter ends with the words: ‘To the one who is victorious I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God’ (2:7). Each of the seven letters to the churches ends with a similar exhortation to be victorious and a promise of eschatological bliss: 2:11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21. This challenge and this promise are repeated as soon as John has been

³ The verb *νικάω* is used 28 times in the NT of which 17 instances in the Apocalypse; 6 times in John and 3 times in Romans (Morgenthaler 1958).

given a first glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth and of the heavenly Jerusalem come down to earth: he is told by the One Sitting on the Throne: 'The one who is victorious will inherit these' (21:7).

The victory of the followers of Jesus is a sharing in the victory of Jesus (3:21) and this is made possible through the blood of the Lamb (12:11).⁴ The Lamb is the main and original victor (5:5) but ultimately the initiative and the power come from God (1:1). Paradoxically it is by having been slaughtered or by his blood that he has become the victor (5:9, 12). The stages of Jesus' victory are succinctly indicated from the beginning of the book (1:5): first, Jesus' faithful witness even unto death;⁵ next, his being raised from the dead as the first of a great multitude, and finally, his exaltation as ruler over all worldly authorities (see Ps 2:2); the whole of creation is subject to him (1:6; 5:8-14).⁶ The Apocalypse highlights both the past victory of Jesus through his death (5:5,9; 12; 12:10) and the ultimate victory to come as the completion of God's works (17:14; 19:11-21; 20:7-15). The ultimate victory is also the completion of God's work of creation: at the beginning and at the end of the Apocalypse we are told that the divine revelation is about what 'soon must' happen (γίνουσι) (1:1 and 22:6). The formula is also repeated at the opening of the door into

⁴ Van Schaik (1971:136) finds in this verse a mythological articulation of what elsewhere is expressed in the imagery of buying the freedom of slaves (5:9) or sacrificial purification (7:14).

⁵ While witness is not yet understood here as martyrdom but as credible and truthful witnessing of what he has seen (van Schaik 1971:17), nevertheless in the context of the whole of the Apocalypse it certainly includes witness unto death in which the death even obtains a sacrificial value. This faithful witness unto death of the followers (2:10, 13) is praised in 12:11; the sacrificial value of Jesus death is already expressed in the last part of verse 5. Giesen (1997:77) argues that 'witness' refers to the present activity of the exalted Jesus and not to his past earthly function. However, the quality of Jesus as faithful witness is manifested in his present heavenly function as well as in his past earthly function. As in the next part of the verse, the appreciation of the present love of Jesus is nourished by the memory of his death for the followers (blood) and possibly of their baptism (Giesen 1997:77-78).

⁶ In 3:14 Jesus is presented as the ἀρχή of creation; according to Giesen (1997:138-139) the temporal sense is predominant (1:17; 2:8; 22:13) but it does not exclude the sense of cause or Urgrund.

⁷ dei= must be understood in the pregnant sense of the divine plan and divine commitment; scholars refer to the expression in Dan 2:28,45 (Van Schaik 1971:11; Giesen 1997:57).

heaven (4:1). What it is that 'must' happen is spoken about in a variety of ways: with the seventh trumpet a chorus of great voices in heaven proclaims that our God and his Christ have established (ἐγένετο) their reign over the cosmos (11:15); with the seventh bowl a great voice coming out of sanctuary from the throne of God proclaims: γέγονεν (16:17); after John has witnessed the new heaven and the new earth with the holy and New Jerusalem descended from heaven the One seated on the throne says to him γέγοναν (21:6). The ultimate victory is therefore the establishment of God's reign in the cosmos which will take the form of the new creation, paradise, the descent of the New Jerusalem upon the earth, the life giving presence of God and the Lamb with human beings (21:3-4, 22-23). All evil will be excluded (19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8, 27; 22:5, 15). The New Jerusalem is the *place of reconciliation* with God, with creation and between human beings. The challenge is to qualify for that place. It is important to note how in 22:14-15 the readers are reminded about the conditions to enter and about who will be excluded, while verses 16-17 interpret the whole of the book as an invitation by Jesus to come [in] and receive the water of life as a gift addressed to all those who thirst for it and desire it.

As there are two stages in the victory of the Christ, there are also two stages in the victory of the members of the churches.

However, if they take part in the final battle (19:14)⁸ it is not made clear what their role will be; in fact, they seem to be spectators as the battle itself is very much a divine performance: the rider on the white horse strikes the nations with the sword from the mouth (19:15); fire from heaven decides the final battle (20:9).⁹ In other words, in the final battles God and his Christ fight for them. The outcome of the battle is that they rule the nations like Christ (2:26-27).¹⁰ While the final victory seems to be pure gift and the work of God alone, the first victory is a gift which is at the same time a challenge to the members

⁸ The army of Christ could be made up of angels but also of glorified followers of Jesus indicated by their dress: 3:4-5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13. Giesen (1997:423-424) argues that it must refer to the followers of Christ at the end time; angels are nowhere presented as following Christ; the βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν corresponds to the garments of the bride of the Lamb mentioned a few verses earlier (19:7).

⁹ In the final battle the camp of the saints, the beloved city, is attacked; they are not the ones attacking nor are they the ones defending themselves successfully.

¹⁰ They will reign: 5:10; 22:5.

of the churches and it is at this point that they have to enter into the right conflict. The challenge is to abandon Babylon and its sinfulness (18:4) and so to conquer in order to inherit the New Jerusalem and all that God has prepared (21:7). The question is then, who is the enemy to be conquered? How are they to conquer? Before answering these questions it will be important to understand that the fundamental conflict in the universe is that of God's war of creation against the forces of chaos. History is a divine, creative process towards the new heaven and the new earth, a process which pitches the creator against the destructive powers, the anger of God and the Lamb against evil.

Victorious conflict in the 'world of the text' of the Apocalypse

God's anger creating the space for reconciliation

The major conflict in the Apocalypse is that of God's anger¹¹ against Satan, the Beast, the False Prophet, and all those who worship Satan and the Beast. God's anger works itself out in the series of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. After the opening of the sixth seal all people on earth are in panic and try to hide away from the face of God and from the anger of the Lamb, because they realise that the great day of their anger has come (6:15-17). As the seven bowls are announced we are told that with these God's anger will be completed (15:1); before the action of the pouring out of the bowls begins we are reminded twice that these are the bowls of God's anger (15:7; 16:1). After the pouring out of the seventh bowl we read, 'God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ' (16:19). The same pair of words expressing God's anger occurs again, and for the last time, as the rider

¹¹ The noun ὀργή is used 36 times in the NT, 6 times in the Apocalypse (6:16,17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). In the Apocalypse the anger is always that of God or of the Lamb. The verb, ὀργιζέσθαι, is used twice in the Apocalypse (11:18: the nations; 12:17: the dragon), but never with God as subject. The noun θυμός is used 18 times in the NT, 10 of which occur in the Apocalypse. In seven of these instances the anger is attributed to God (14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; 19:15); in the other three occurrences the anger is attributed to the devil (12:12), or to Babylon (14:8; 18:3). In these last two texts θυμός is used with πορνεία (fornication) and a literal translation would be 'her passion for fornication.' The RSV translates it therefore as 'impure passion'.

on the white horse is about to confront the Beast and the nations (19:15). The Scriptures understood God's anger very clearly as an expression of God's passionate commitment to righteousness and his radical opposition to evil. All the plagues in the Apocalypse are an expression of God's anger, but also of God's commitment to justice and to the success of the project of creation. While Genesis 1 presents the victory of God over the forces of chaos as already complete, a number of apocalyptic texts see this victory as still in the future while the present is experienced as still, but only for a limited time, ruled by Satan and immersed in chaos.¹² Therefore, the creative action of God is seen in the Apocalypse as involving judgment and war (19:11).¹³ God's anger is therefore seen as a responsible, positive, life giving emotion which bears fruit in judgment, war, victory over evil, salvation. The resulting new heaven and new earth are the space of reconciliation in the divine-human, cosmic and personal domains of life.

The human victory as turning away from the worship of Satan and turning towards the love of Christ

In the symbolic world of the New Testament human beings are not seen as isolated, as individuals whose ideal existence is autonomy, but as beings who are part of the earth, a universe which is in the process towards the full establishment of God's rule and the total removal of the influence of the evil powers (compare Col 1:13; Eph 2:1-10). The crucial issue and the aim of the struggle for human beings are therefore to be on the side of God, who has a future, and not on the side of the evil powers, which are without a future. The Apocalypse does not directly address the Roman Empire or outsiders, but envisages first of all the churches. Some of them are accused of embodying the attitude of Babylon (Laodicea 3:14-22). A specific figure in the church of Thyatira, a prophetess labelled as Jezebel, is accused of leading astray

¹² In Apocalyptic texts 'the battle with Leviathan is projected on to the decisive moment of the future, and we are left with the bittersweet impression that the travails of the present, indeed all of history, are owing to the fact that the present order of things stands *before* rather than *after* the triumph of God: Leviathan is still loose, and the absolute sovereignty of the absolutely just God lies ahead' (Levenson 1994:48).

¹³ The view of creation as judgment and war against the forces of chaos in the Apocalypse is developed more fully in Decock 2008.

Jesus' servants by encouraging them to get involved in 'prostitution' and the eating of food offered to idols (2:20-21). In this activity she can be compared to Satan (12:9; 20:3, 8, 10) and to the False Prophet (13:14). In this way Jezebel is also closely associated with Babylon, the prostitute, who drags others along in her prostitution (14:8; 17:1, 2, 4, 5, 15, 16; 18:3, 9; 19:2).

The struggle and victory envisaged in the seven letters of the Apocalypse is therefore about commitment, perseverance or a change of mind wherever needed (μετανοέω: 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). The challenge to be victorious with which each letter ends is about such radical commitment to God. Of course, even outsiders are expected to get involved in this struggle and this is where the prophetic witness of the church is called for. However, the prophetic ministry meets with rejection and often ends in martyrdom (6:9-11). This refusal to respond to God's challenges is also prominent in the series of the bowls. After the fourth and the fifth bowl, we are told that people do not change their behaviour by giving glory to God (16:9) and by abandoning their works (16:11). This should be understood in the light of a widespread popular understanding that natural disasters of all sorts were seen as signs of God's displeasure and therefore that the expected response would be that self-examination and repentance.¹⁴

The church of Thyatira is challenged to conquer by 'keeping the works of Jesus to the end' (2:26). 'Keeping the works of Jesus' is an unusual expression, according to Aune (1997:209), even an 'extremely problematic' one, since one would rather expect as direct object 'the commandments' (as in 12:17; 14:12), or 'the words of the prophetic message' (as in 1:3; 3:10; 22:7,9). However, the expression makes it clear that the struggle and victory to which the followers of Jesus are summoned is not merely a moral struggle, although this is

¹⁴ See Hällström 2008:245: 'Starting from popular Christianity the terminology concerning natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, which are rather frequent in the Mediterranean area, reveals a concept of God's wrath. ... Earthquakes were, then, interpreted as expressions of God's anger, and the reaction among the Byzantines corresponded to that interpretation. The divine wrath had to be atoned. Holy processions, liturgies and rituals were used to satisfy God.' The scene of the storm in Jonah 1 shows that this perception was widespread and explains why the Apocalypse can express utter frustration at the fact that the appropriate response to the bowls is not forthcoming.

certainly included,¹⁵ but that it is a struggle of faithfulness to Jesus, a faithfulness which is made possible by Jesus.¹⁶ Ephesians 2:10 expresses this more explicitly: 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them' (RSV). Or, as it is expressed at the beginning of the Apocalypse: through his blood Jesus has released us from our sins (1:5) and with his blood he has bought us for God (5:9). The Apocalypse emphasises several aspects of this faithfulness. First of all, as opposed to the slavery of idolatry, the members of the churches have become sharers in Christ's rule and priests of God (1:6; 5:9-10). The priestly worship of God stands in contrast with one of the major sins envisaged in the Apocalypse, idolatry.¹⁷ In the proclamation of the three angels and the subsequent macarism (14:6-13) the first angel calls upon every nation, tribe, language and people to fear and give glory to God and to worship the creator. The second and third angel, by contrast, proclaim the punishment and the failure to find 'rest' for all προσκυνοῦντες the Beast and its image.

The last sentence of the words of the third angel (14:12) draws attention to a second important aspect of faithfulness, ὑπομονή,¹⁸ of which the concrete form is the keeping of the commandments and of faith in Jesus.¹⁹ Ὑπομονή appears also at the end of the series of qualities for which the church of Thyatira is praised: works, love, faith, service and perseverance (2:19). While the church of Thyatira is praised for its progress in all these, the church of Ephesus is challenged because they have abandoned their first love. Love must be

¹⁵ Various series of sins are listed: 9:21; 21:8, 27; 22:11, 15.

¹⁶ For further comments on 2:26, see Decock 2007:49-53; note the use of 'in Jesus' (1:9) and in the Lord (14:13).

¹⁷ Clearly, the verb προσκυνέω is an important word in the vocabulary of the Apocalypse; it is used 59 times in the NT, of which 24 times in the Apocalypse, 13 times in Matthew, and 11 times in John (see Morgenthaler 1958). Babylon is referred to as the prostitute in 17:1, 5, 15, 16; 19:2; for her involvement in prostitution: 17:2; 18:3, 9. This well known image for unfaithfulness to God and worship of other gods is applied to Israel, Judah, Jerusalem ...in a number of prophetic texts. In Jer 23:15-18, the profitable trade of Tyre is also called prostitution; in Ezek 28:1-10 Tyre is accused of turning herself into an idol in her foolish self-reliance because of the success of her trade and because of her wealth.

¹⁸ This endurance or perseverance is a crucial form of struggle in the Apocalypse: 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10.

¹⁹ Compare 1Jn 5:4-5.

seen as the ultimate shape of the commitment to which the churches are called (compare Col 3:14). After the example of Jesus (1:5; 3:9) they are called to love, a love which transcends clinging to their own lives (12:11). The call of the Apocalypse is ultimately for a passionate love which expresses itself in ardent longing (thirsting 22:17) for the coming of the bridegroom: Come, Lord Jesus (22:20; also 22:17; compare 1 Cor 16:22)²⁰ which sustains the perseverance in their prophetic witness and faithful practice.

Fundamentally the conflict and victory we have been looking at here is a personal one, namely, the process of liberation from the slavery of Satan to an ever fuller service and love of God. The words of Ephesians 6:12 are appropriate: 'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' (NRSV). However, the struggle has an impact on flesh and blood, on the human society. The result is a division; as Jesus announced: 'Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!' (Lk 12:51).

In the midst of conflict choosing the way to reconciliation

The Apocalypse, as a prophetic work (22:18-19), places people before the choice between Satan and God, between the Beast and the Lamb, between the False Prophet and the Church, between Babylon and Jerusalem. As a result of this choice people end up in opposing camps. The camp of Satan is experienced as powerful and aggressive:

- the devil will imprison some of them: 2:10;
- the death of Antipas 2:13;
- the martyrs under the altar 6:9-11;
- the attack on the holy city (11:2);
- the attack on the woman and her offspring in chapter 12;
- enforced worship of the Beast in chapter 13;

²⁰ 'Die Braut ist hier jedenfalls nicht das himmlische Jerusalem wie in 21,9 ... Geist und Braut sind die vom prophetischen Geist inspirierte empirische Kirche...' (Giesen 1997:491).

- the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet move the kings from the east to gather for war: 16:12-16
- death of God's faithful (their blood poured out) at the hands of Babylon, the whore: 17:6; 18:24; 19:2
- the Beast and the kings of the earth wage war against the saints: 17:14; 19:19;
- Satan gathers the nations for war against the camp of the saints and the holy city: 20:8-9.

There can be no reconciliation between the two sides. Reconciliation for the Apocalypse is not compromise or tolerance, because the whole project of God's creation is at stake. The side of Satan is a destructive force: they destroy the earth (11:18; 19:2). The successful outcome of God's project of creation requires the destruction of the destroyers (11:18). Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet are identified as the primeval monsters of chaos which God will finally conquer in order to bring about the new heaven and the new earth (21:1,5), in order to remove death and Hades, tears, mourning, crying and pain (20:14; 21:4). The absence of sea (21:1) and night (21:25; 22:5) in the new creation symbolises the total victory of the Creator over the forces of chaos.²¹

While obviously no reconciliation with Satan and those of his side is possible, the inhabitants of the earth and their kings are called upon to abandon the worship of Satan and to turn to God, a move which opens for them the way to share in the reconciled universe (21:24,26). The rhetorical aim of the Apocalypse is precisely to move people to leave the side of Satan and to commit themselves to the side of God (μετάνοια), and to persevere in this loyalty (ὑπομονή). Babylon and Jerusalem are vividly depicted as two possible approaches to life and two outcomes; on the one hand, a life of aggression and oppression (symbolised most forcefully in the Dragon and the Whore of Babylon) and, on the other, hand a life of commitment unto death to the just God, the creator of heaven and earth (symbolised in the Lamb and the Bride Jerusalem). We can easily recognise here the

²¹ While in the first creation night and sea are left as remnants of the primeval darkness and the primeval waters (Gen 1:1, 5, 10), these are now completely conquered.

familiar device or communicative strategy of the ‘two ways’²² by which the listeners are confronted with the choice between life and death, between blessing and curse (Deut 31:15-20; Ps 1; *Did* 1-6; *Barn* 18-21). The process of reconciliation requires therefore first of all abandoning the worship of Satan and turning to God in worship. The prophetic ministry of the church and of the Apocalypse are at the service of this process of reconciliation in radical contrast to the ministry of the False Prophet (13:11-14).²³

*Witness*²⁴ and *prophecy*²⁵

The struggle and victory to which the churches are called involve their *witness* and *prophecy* among the inhabitants of the world. The scene of the two witnesses (11:3-13) is particularly significant for this topic.²⁶ As chapter 10 ends with the message to John that he has to

²² See Decock (2009:276-279). According to T. Ash. 1:3-4: ‘God has granted two ways to the sons of men, two mind-sets, two lines of action, two models, and two goals. Accordingly, everything is in pairs, the one against the other.’ We find these elements in the Apocalypse. See also Lockett (2008), who has shown how the Letter of James uses the motif of the ‘two ways’ as its main communicative strategy. ‘Clearly James’ communicative intent was to challenge his readers to make a choice in light of two clearly antithetical ways of living and their respective ends ... He calls his audience to maintain (and, if necessary, realign) their affections and loyalties’ (Lockett 2008:285).

²³ Satan, the False Prophet and Babylon are said to lead people astray (12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3,810).

²⁴ μαρτυρεῖν is used 4 times in the Apocalypse (33 times in John; 10 times in the Letters of John; 76 times in the NT); μαρτυρία is used 9 times in the Apocalypse (14 times in John; 7 times in the Letters of John; 37 times in the NT); μαρτύριον is used once in the Apocalypse (20 times in the NT but not in the Johannine writings); μάρτυς is used 5 times in the Apocalypse (35 times in the NT; 13 times in Acts; not in the Johannine writings) (Morgenthaler 1958).

²⁵ προφητεία is used 7 times in the Apocalypse (19 times in the NT); προφητεύειν is used twice in the Apocalypse (28 times in the NT); προφήτης is used 8 times in the Apocalypse (144 times in the NT, especially in the Gospels and Acts); προφήτις is used twice in the NT, once in the Apocalypse in reference to Jezebel (2:20) and once to Anna in Luke 2:26.

²⁶ The identity of the two witnesses has been much discussed in the history of the interpretation; see the overviews in van Schaik (1971:118-119) and Aune (1998:598-603). Do we have here a reference to Moses and Elijah who will return before the end? Or, do these two figures represent the prophetic mission of the Church? A good number of scholars at present accept this last interpretation: van

prophecy again 'against', or 'about', or 'for the sake of', many peoples, nations, languages and kings (10:11), in 11:3-13 the churches are shown a picture of their prophetic task in the world. There is a strange mixture of power and weakness in the prophetic ministry of the two witnesses. On the one hand, they have received miraculous powers to call down plagues (11:6) and even to destroy their opponents with fire from their mouth (11:5).²⁷ On the other hand, when the time of their ministry is finished they are rejected, killed and even in death they are not given respect (11:7-9). Finally, however, they are raised and ascend to heaven (11:11-12), and ultimately their ministry bears some fruit (11:13). We find here the well known pattern of the authority and power of the prophets and the just, their suffering and their ultimate vindication, a pattern recognised by the early Church in a supreme way in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In spite of the violence, the ministry of witness and prophecy must continue. This seems to be the underlying meaning of the divine response to the prayers of the martyrs under the altar (6:9-11). Although they have 'been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne' (6:9 RSV), the ultimate judgment and vengeance upon the inhabitants of the earth will be delayed. God continues to reach out towards all, but only for a limited time; God has set the time and he has determined the number of martyrs (6:9-11; 11:3, 7).

Christian existence is therefore not merely to keep the commandments but also to keep the witness of Jesus (12:17).²⁸ 'Witness' and 'prophetic ministry' indicate a reaching out towards

Schaik (1971:119-121), Giblin (1984:440-443), Giesen (1997:248-261), Aune (1998:603,630).

²⁷ The 'torment' (11:10) of the ministry of the two witnesses is in line with the series of plagues, which also have as aim to bring the inhabitants of the earth to a change of mind and to the worship of God, although a positive outcome cannot be assured. Bauckham (1993:273-283) has contrasted the results of the ministry of the two witnesses (repentance) and that of the violent plagues (no repentance: 9:20-21; 16:9, 11).

²⁸ The interpretation of the expression 'keeping the witness of Jesus' is much disputed. According to Dehandschutter (1980:285-286), '...it is less probable that in these texts [6:9; 20:4], as well as in 12, 17, the prophets are indicated.' Giesen (1997, 294) explains: 'Das Zeugnis Jesu ist wie in 1,2.9; 19:10 und 20.4 nicht das Zeugnis für Jesus, sondern das Zeugnis, das Jesus brachte [...] und das die Christen deshalb bezeugen können.'

others, first of all towards other followers of Jesus. However, this witness also challenges and provokes all the peoples, nations, languages and kings.²⁹ Therefore they respond, but in different ways: in 11:9-10 they respond in a hostile way because they interpret the ministry and the plagues as mere torture (9:5); in 11:13 a remnant is overcome by fear and gives glory to God, as the angel of 14:7 demands; some of them have responded positively (5:9; 7:9). The official Roman response to the ministry of the prophets or witnesses³⁰ was exile (1:9),³¹ or execution (6:10). In fact, the Apocalypse pictures a kind of struggle between the prophetic Church and the False Prophet for the allegiance of the nations (10:11 and 14:6 versus 13:7-8). The Word of God and the testimony of Jesus as we read it in the Apocalypse is the proclamation that God, the Creator, has already conquered the forces of chaos through the death of Jesus and that any, whether members of the churches or the nations, who refuse to worship and give glory to God will share the fate of Babylon. This can be seen as a direct challenge to the ideology of the Empire with their claim of victory and paradise-like peace. This challenge was concretised in their refusal to participate in the liturgies of the Empire.³² Their

²⁹ Giesen (1997, 327-328) argues that in 14:6-7 the good news is addressed only to Christians, but *concerns* the nations. Louw and Nida (1989: I, 802-803) understand ἐπί plus accusative or dative as marker of opposition; the good news would then be *against* the nations; in 10:11, where we have the dative, the meaning could be either *against* or *for*. In any case, God's words *against* a group of people is usually disciplinary and includes the hope of their repentance, unless it is in the context of final judgment.

³⁰ According to Dehandschutter (1980:287-288) the two are used more or less as synonyms in chapter 11 as well as in 17:6. However, he interprets 1:5 and 3:14 of Christ as witness in a court setting, as the one 'who knows them and will witness for them if they endure' (:287); Antipas (2:13) is a model in not denying Jesus. However, this last interpretation is minimalistic.

³¹ According to Giesen (1997:85) and Boring (1989:82) διὰ with accusative in the Apocalypse always expresses the ground and not the purpose. Aune (1997:82) correctly points out that it can express both cause and purpose (with reference to Louw and Nida 1989: I, 803), but the context in the Apocalypse (6:9 and 20:4) suggest that John's stay on the island is a Roman punishment because of his ministry.

³² John 'believed that followers of Christ needed to make a stand. If they truly believed that Jesus was the Lord of history, then they must live in a way that showed it. He therefore demanded that they refuse to participate in any rite, or eat any food, consecrated to another person's or power's lordship – no matter what the consequences' (Blount 2000:408).

refusal to participate provoked a conflict, but they trusted in God as their defender and as the One who would bring down the pride of the Empire.

The aim of witness and prophecy is conversion. The Apocalypse does not represent a violent, revolutionary millennial movement, but rather a conversionist one³³ in which the violence of the plagues is the miraculous divine support for the conversion ministry. The frightening plagues are divine acts and not ordinary human means (11:5-6); they recall the ministry of Moses (Exod 15-17; Num 16 and 25) and some of the other Old Testament prophets.³⁴ It is clear that the early church was attentive to such frightening signs against people who resist God, but these were not seen as mere punishments but as signs from God to bring people to their senses. For instance, the benefit of the punishment on Jezebel and her followers will be that 'all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve' (2:23 NRSV).³⁵ In other words, confrontation as part of the church's mission is seen within the wider perspective of God's attempt to win as many as possible and let them have a share in the New Jerusalem.

Divine reconciliation

Although the word group for 'reconciliation' does not occur in the Apocalypse, the section on the New Heaven and the New Earth and the Holy and New Jerusalem (21:1-8; 21:9-22:9) is rich in imagery expressing the close unity between humankind and God and the Lamb, the harmony with creation and the absence of crime and violence among people. We can only list these here:

- God dwelling with humanity: 21:3
- the covenant formula: they will be God's people and God will be their God with them: 21:3,7

³³ Following the terminology and approach of Bryan Wilson (1973). The 'miracles' have of course a very different function from the ones connected with the ministry of Jesus. At most, we can think of the cursing of the fig tree (Mk 11:12-14, 20-24), which seems to be a 'foretaste' of the destruction of the temple (13:1-2).

³⁴ 1 Kgs 17:11-16; 2 Kgs 1; 2:19-25; Jer 28.

³⁵ For other texts: Acts 5:1-11; 12:20-23; 1 Cor 11:29-32; in this last text Paul presents the punishments as a saving discipline.

- the well being of the whole of creation: no more death 21:4
- the holy Jerusalem coming down from heaven as the bride of the Lamb: 21:9-10 (already 19:7-9)
- God and the Lamb will be their temple: 21:22
- God's glory will be their light and the Lamb will be their lamp: 21:23; compare 22:5
- the nations walk by its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory into Jerusalem: 21:24
- they will bring the glory and the honour of the nations into her: 21:26
- the abundance of the fruit of the tree of life: 22:2
- the leaves of the tree of life bring healing to the nations: 22:2
- the free gift of the water of life: 22:17
- absence of abusive behaviour among people: 21:8,27; 22:15

To cap it all, the longing for the coming of the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus (22:17, 20), is a powerful symbol of that future reconciliation. Whether God would succeed to bring about a universal reconciliation of all human beings (apocatastasis) has long been discussed since the early centuries of Christianity (see Sachs 1991; 1993).

The 'World of the text' and our 'Contemporary world'

Differences and tensions over the meaning of reconciliation: (Post-) enlightenment currents

The very understanding of reconciliation is contested. Graetz (2000:139) expresses this (Post-) Enlightenment sensitivity: 'In my view love, punishment and subservience are not compatible concepts.' While these currents may not yet be very strong in the African context, they need be noticed.

For the Apocalypse reconciliation is seen not as a purely human achievement but as a 'place' created by God, won by the blood of the Lamb, into which people are challenged to 'enter'. Reconciliation is at the most fundamental level reconciliation with God, before it can become reconciliation within creation and between human beings. The

difference between the Apocalypse and currents in contemporary culture is first of all about the 'space' within which reconciliation is conceived. For the Apocalypse, when 'space' is limited to the human space alone the essential dynamism towards reconciliation has been overlooked. The reconciliation is on earth but depends on the 'coming' of the Lamb or the descending of the heavenly Jerusalem.

For the Apocalypse reconciliation is therefore not possible without worshipping God, the crucial issue, while in contemporary culture 'submission' to God is seen as problematic and in tension with human autonomy.³⁶

For the Apocalypse reconciliation is presented as a radical choice between two ways, the way of oppression of Babylon and the way of peace of Jerusalem. The prophetic challenge with its threat of punishments is experienced by Enlightenment sensitivity as brutal imposition, as lacking dialogue, as against human freedom.

The Apocalypse and reconciliation in Africa

As God is the deepest source for the vitality for human society, how can the Church empower people to draw from that source?

The Apocalypse clearly presents reconciliation by means of a rich set of images as a goal for creation which will certainly be reached. However, this reconciliation is first of all reconciliation with God. It is not merely a state of affairs one could call 'tolerance' in which everyone is free to do what they like as long as they respect the rights of others. This is the level of peace usually aimed at by the State and wherever the State is successful in this a good start has been made, but not necessarily on a solid basis. Indeed, as is stated in *Pacem in Terris* (38), 'Inasmuch as God is the first truth and the supreme good, he alone is the deepest source from which society can draw its vitality ...' (Transl. Neuner – Dupuis 1996: nr 2124). One of the challenges is to explore how the church can enable people to draw more effectively from this source? How can the different churches and

³⁶ Roy (2012:606) opens his article with the statement: 'Beginning with Kant, modernity has developed the secular dogma that human autonomy is incompatible with obedience to religious law.' See also Zimmermann (2012:268-271) who refers to the recent arguments by H. Blumenberg and L. Ferry.

even the different religions work more effectively together towards that goal?

How can the Church give expression to the divine anger of God and of the Lamb wherever and whenever we are confronted with evil in its many forms?

The Apocalypse calls for a prophetic witness of the church against all idolatry. Idolatry destroys creation, but the Apocalypse inspires a powerful trust in the effect of the victory of Jesus through the cross and the future victory issuing in the New Heaven and the New Earth. To awaken or keep alive this prophetic potential in the church is an ongoing struggle. The *Kairos Document* (1986), a document which enjoyed worldwide attention, is still very helpful as a practical challenge to renew and empower the prophetic function in the church. At the height of Apartheid in South Africa the churches were challenged to move more forcefully towards a prophetic theology. This document criticised what it called State Theology and Church Theology and called for a Prophetic Theology. It was felt that the churches' opposition to Apartheid was too 'limited, guarded and cautious' (Chapter 3, Introductory paragraphs to Church Theology), and that 'the Church of Jesus Christ is not called to be a bastion of caution and moderation' (5.6). The divine anger of God and of the Lamb in the Apocalypse is a challenge for Christians to share in that divine anger in a human way wherever and whenever we are confronted with evil in its many forms.

Not remaining neutral, but how?

Establishing which is the side of God and which is the side of the Devil in a particular situation needs careful discernment and study of words which are used so easily: peace, reconciliation, non-violence, conflict ... need to be critically examined in each context. Conflict is not something to be avoided in favour of some sort of neutrality; it is question of discerning how to be involved in God's conflict, on God's side.³⁷ The picture presented in the Apocalypse is precisely that God's

³⁷ For instance, Hewitt (2008:210) argues: 'Using Caribbean hermeneutics in a re-reading of Rev. 17 and 18, I suggest that the Book of Revelation serves as a potent signpost to address the contemporary Babylonian system that is controlling the

work of creation is God's struggle against chaos and evil. This way of speaking has its dangers as people with any cause may like to present it as God's cause. It will be remembered that when Apartheid was introduced it was presented as commanded by God (Loubser 1996). The *Kairos Document* challenges this as 'State Theology' (Chapter Two). However, even if we take such obviously biblical words like reconciliation, peace, justice, non-violence, obedience to the political authorities, ... these can easily be uncritically applied to our situations. A major criticism by the *Kairos Document* was about the way these positive biblical concepts were used uncritically by the churches (3.1-3.4). The issue of violence and non-violence is an example of an area which needed to be reflected on more thoroughly in our context. One local example of such a study in the past is the document of the Theological Commission of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, *The Things that Make for Peace* (1985). Reconciliation is another word which is now very much in need of careful examination in our context.

There is a need for a spirituality of the 'earth', which will 'inspire' commitment to the human community supported by hope, based on a vision of the certain victory of God the creator.

The spirituality of the Apocalypse can be seen as a spirituality of the 'earth',³⁸ beyond racism, tribalism and nationalism. The call to move out of Babylon (18:4-5) should not be seen as turning our back on the 'earth'. The earth is the realm within which salvation takes place. Babylon will be removed from the earth; earth and heaven will be made new; the earth will become paradise and will become the realm where God and Lamb will dwell with us. The new heaven and the new earth will be the realm where the marriage feast of the Lamb and the holy city Jerusalem will be celebrated. Removing evil and

world economic order. The Accra Confession and the Agape Call to Love and Action do not leave room for the church's ministry and mission to be neutral.'

³⁸ The 'earth' is not taken here in the restricted sense of the physical universe, but in the sense of the multi-dimensional human environment, of which the human community is the heart. This is the focus of the divine work of creation. As Levenson (1994:12) reminds us: 'Two and a half millennia of Western theology have made it easy to forget that throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel, the point of creation is not the creation of matter out of nothing, but rather the emergence of a stable community in a benevolent and life-sustaining order.' See Decock 2008:1838-1844.

transforming the earth is clearly presented as a divine work. Nevertheless, Christians are called to share in this divine victory in their own human way. Through prophetic witness they are instruments of conversion from idolatry; through a holy life they contribute to establish creation and fertility (Hos 2:18-23), while it is destroyed through idolatry and sin (11:18; 19:2).³⁹

What is needed in our Christian spirituality is the proper interaction between hope and commitment. This is beautifully expressed by Dorothy Soelle (1975:107): 'To be able to believe means to say yes to this life, to this finitude, to work on it and hold it open for the promised future.' This is the kind of human victory expected from the churches in response to and in openness to the divine victorious conflict.

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³⁹ For instance, as the idolaters have poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, they will end up having nothing else to drink but blood (8:7-8; 16:3-7; ...). 'Idolatry with its shedding of innocent blood leads to a total "poisoning" of the sea and the rivers as they turn to blood. Life, therefore, becomes impossible' (Decock 2004:178).

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**The ministerial formation of a radical clergyman:
Douglas Thompson at Richmond College,
1928-1930**

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Introduction

It may seem a little perverse to honour a distinguished South African Catholic theologian like Rodney Moss with an essay on a Methodist pastor and political activist, but I hope Rodney at least can see the connections I am trying to make. First, as a scholar who has also been a pastor for many years, I think it appropriate to give an account of the education of a pastor. I hope that my account presents a mirror on theological education and its tension between forming pastors and training scholars. Secondly, that Douglas Chadwick Thompson (1905-1985) was a Methodist also points to the ecumenical dimension to Rodney's life, ministry and teaching: as a convert himself, as a member of an ecumenical faculty at St Augustine's, and as a specialist in Augustine, a theologian whose thought is as popular in Protestant and Catholic academe alike. Finally, as a colleague for many years I have talked with Rodney about my research subject and interest in the interface between faith and politics, scholarship and activism on a number of occasions: this may be my last professional opportunity to do so again, and I certainly won't pass it up!

Douglas Thompson: The path to ministry

Although born in Manchester, Douglas Chadwick Thompson grew up in Hatfield, Pretoria, the son of a British soldier who had served in the Anglo-Boer War. He converted from Anglicanism to Methodism in his teens and became involved in Methodist youth movements in Pretoria. It was in the Methodist Youth that he met May Roberts, sister of a minister and Thompson's future wife. As a young adult he

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continued his activities in the Methodist Church, being accepted in the early 1920s as a probationer minister.

Although extant essays and sermons from his youth show him to have been intelligent and more than moderately gifted as a writer, difficult family circumstances (his father was an alcoholic) led him to quit high school and begin an apprenticeship as a steel moulder on the South African Railways. In turn this led him to sympathise with trade union movements that in later life translated into Marxist commitment and activism within organisations like the South African Congress of Democrats (the white wing of the African National Congress alliance), the Friends of the Soviet Union and the South African Peace Council. This combination of Methodism and Marxism would categorise his whole life, a life made less easy as a result of it, that would see him charged with Treason in 1956, detained in the 1960 State of Emergency after the shootings at Sharpeville, listed as a banned person in the 1960s and suspended by the Church from ministry during the 1960s and much of the 1970s.

But that, as one sometimes says, is the future. In 1928, as this essay begins, with his probation completed Thompson was accepted as a candidate for ordination and sent, as were white Methodist seminarians at the time, to England to complete formal theological studies.

Richmond College

Thompson arrived by boat at Southampton, England, on 10 August 1928. He enjoyed the train journey to London, since it was a clear, sunny day and the scenery was so beautiful and fresh and green.² He and Joe Alistoun, a fellow candidate for ministry, were met at Waterloo Station at 11.20am by Mr and Mrs Reed, a Methodist couple with whom they would stay briefly, who took them on a short sight-seeing tour of London before putting them on the train for Richmond, Surrey. Over tea, before their departure, he told the Reeds his exciting news: before leaving South Africa he and May Roberts had become formally engaged.

² University of Witwatersrand Library, Douglas Thompson Papers: A1906.Db2.1.3: DCT to May Roberts, 12/9/28.

Arriving at the College, to his delight, a letter from May awaited his arrival. He wrote back giving his first impressions of the College:

It is a refreshing place, – beautifully laid-out gardens – beautiful old building, – it presents an aspect of quaintness to me (ibid).

Quaintness hardly describes Richmond College. Originally a manor house made of Bath stone with grounds containing gardens of rare plants and trees, including deciduous cypress, stone pine and ailanthus, it was donated to the Methodist church by its former owner, a squire Williams, and established as the Richmond Wesleyan Theological Institute in 1843 to mark John Wesley's centenary. In 1868 it became a missionary training centre, but in 1885 reverted to its purpose as a theological college for clergy candidates in England *and* the missions. In 1902 it was incorporated into London University so that students could sit for the London Bachelor of Divinity exams. In September 1940 it narrowly missed being destroyed during the Battle of Britain, but by 1970 with the decline in candidates for ministry it would close as a seminary.

Quaintness in another sense is perhaps an apt expression for the College, for it was a strange mixture of conservatism and fairly progressive theological thought. A measure of the institutions nature can be gauged by a list of rules for students promulgated by the Staff Tutors in August 1929. Punctuality at breakfast was required, unless the student was sick. No absence from lectures without permission of the Tutor concerned and the Resident Tutor was allowed. Nor were absences from meals, except tea. All students should be in college by 5.30pm. The morning was for class work or private study, the latter expected between tea time and supper, the only exception being Monday mornings for those who had been preaching the previous Sunday evening. All were expected to attend to common worship at the College Chapel. No one should be absent from College overnight without the Resident Tutors permission. Any damage to college property had to be reported at once to the Resident Tutor.

All these rules were to be loyally observed and the staff called on the whole body of students to see that every man observes these rules.³ Moreover, failure for the South Africans to complete their training meant a financial liability. As the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society indicated to SA Methodist President J W Allcock, Every man is supposed to sign an agreement to refund the money [£90 per annum] we pay for them if he fails to enter our ministry or to continue in that ministry until his liability is cancelled.⁴ Thompson and Alistoun had added incentive to conform.

Given that all the men at Richmond were in their early to mid-20s, a few of them already university graduates, the atmosphere must at times have seemed deeply restrictive. All this notwithstanding, the degree to which seminarians creatively interpreted how to use their free time can be measured by Thompson's comments on the first-year timetable to May:

[O]nly 4 days a week lectures as you will see.
[O]ccupying only [sic] the morning. All other time is free, to be utilised as one deems necessary.⁵

Thompson himself spent much of this time studying or on the playing fields. He also took walks around the countryside or visited nearby towns like Twickenham, where he frequented a second-hand bookshop, buying books that interested him, a habit he would pursue all his life.

The perennial question often asked of seminary education is its primary purpose: training clergy to carry on the traditions of the church, education in the latest academic theology or - what became the vogue in the United States from the 1960s onwards - training in humanistic or pastoral skills.

One approach argues that the seminary or theological faculty's role should involve a fourfold process: education in the programme of

³ John Rylands Library (University of Manchester). Richmond College Papers (R.C.) 3/7: Minutes of Tutors Meeting, 31/8/29.

⁴ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Papers, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. SOAS/WMMS SA Correspondence: W J Noble (?) to J W Allcock, 8/7/26.

⁵ A1906.Db2.1.4: DCT to May Roberts, 10/10/28.

the church; studying how the church operates within society; showing the need for the church to know its heritage in order for it to operate effectively; showing that the church's heritage is rooted in the Bible and revelation (Niebuhr et al 1957:85). The humanistic approach focuses more on the students and sees as its task the synthesis of role self (what one does) with real self (who one is). Learning is a process of personalising knowledge. They are encouraged to see their lives in seminary as providing them the opportunity to develop a way of life ... not merely acquiring a role self – a mask that can be put on or taken off depending on the situation – but discovering a real self (Kleinman 1984:30). The two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A seminarian can imbibe all the areas necessary to minister while at the same time develop a way of life that operates not merely out of the role self. To some degree Richmond, despite its quaint rules and regulations, managed to achieve this – at least in Thompson.

More significant perhaps was the Colleges theological tone. A conservative friend had warned Thompson before he departed for England that it is difficult to find a theological college fundamentally sound⁶, by which he may have meant soundly fundamentalist. Writing to May a few weeks after his arrival, Thompson remarked that although the studies examine details and dwell upon facts, I have seen nothing detrimental to the essential facts of what we believe.⁷ Later he would add a few more nuanced remarks:

... we find men not being content with the old methods of handling truth, yet as I said before I see nothing detrimental nor can there ever be such to anyone whose life is his religion. The studies will and can help a man, just so far as he is able to realise REALITY [sic] in life and conduct. We have no right to be dogmatic upon certain themes, but there is one thing certain if we could but realise it and it is this, that if a man is not right before he enters college, - he is less certain to go out right on the essentials ...⁸

⁶ A1906.Db1: Dick to DCT, 10/3/28.

⁷ A1906.Db2.1.3: DCT to May Roberts, 19/9/28.

⁸ A1906.Db2.1.4: DCT to May Roberts, 10/10/28.

What did Thompson mean by this? Was he becoming a fundamentalist? This seems unlikely given his only qualified approval of a preacher – Dr Dinsdale T Young – whom he heard one Sunday evening; he was a great orator but a rabid [sic] fundamentalist.⁹ Perhaps he was talking more of spiritual faith – a deep trust in God that was essential for critical theological enquiry where so much of what ordinary believers took as given came under often rigorous scrutiny. Those who knew him in later life would certainly never have called Thompson fundamentalist; trade unionist Leon Levy, who was in detention in Pretoria with him in 1960 regarded him as farsighted, even a theological liberal (Levy).

From the start Thompson enthusiastically threw himself into his studies. He welcomed what he saw as a critical and scientific approach to theology, keeping many of his lecture notes. From them we can see something of the education he received. Together with his experiences in England they might well be seen as the intellectual basis of his political and pastoral activities¹⁰ while also providing a valuable insight into the kind of formation Methodist clergy received in the early parts of the 20th Century.

Theologically, Richmond College was fairly mainstream Protestant. Scripture studies followed the German historical-critical method. 19th Century scholars like Von Harnack were frequently used, as were contemporary Anglican and Methodist writers, a number of whom actually lectured at Richmond.¹¹ Thompsons notes on the *Epistle of James* are significant given much mainstream Protestant disapproval of it for not referring to justification by faith; his notes include a remark that it should be read in tandem with St Pauls *Epistle to the Romans*, a more popular text because it advocated justification by faith. The strong emphasis in James on doing justice seems to have been passed over, either by Thompson or his lecturers.

⁹ A1906.Db2.1.3: DCT to May Roberts, 19/9/28.

¹⁰ The model I use here is that of John J Ansbro (1982), who returns to Kings intellectual training as a basis for understanding not so much why he took to Civil Rights activism as the operating assumptions he used. Thompsons training was neither as comprehensive nor as academic as Kings but nonetheless it seems an important source for understanding him. Ansbro does not mention Kings plagiarism: this was revealed years after this book was published.

¹¹ A1906.Ef3: Notes on Introduction to the New Testament (1928).

The rest of his notes on the New Testament are very technical, following the historical-critical mainstream.

Even more conventional were his Church History lectures, delivered by the aptly named Dr Lesley Church, a homely¹² man, who impressed Thompson more by his eminently practical lectures on problems and pitfalls new ministers might expect in the field. One aspect of early church history that made an impression on him Thompson marked with a large NB in the margin of his notes:

6. First Call on believers was to God [sic] For the Roman law and obedience to the Empire was not supreme. Though Christians everywhere prayed for the Emperor, – every true Christian obeyed Christ first. – He was no longer his own master – Christ was supreme.¹³

In later years Thompson would find himself at odds with the South African State and even at times the Methodist Church. To sustain such a position needed deep inner political and religious convictions. A conviction that demanded following one's religious beliefs before anything else – before following the Roman Empire of state or church – was central to him. In early Church History he found perhaps an *exemplum* par excellence.

In the period before Political Theology or Liberation Theology became common courses in theology faculties, the closest a seminarian might get would be to parts of the general course in Ethics or Philosophy. From the copious notes that remain, Richmond College provided Thompson with a solid grounding in general and applied Ethics. The notes¹⁴ show remarkable consistency in their criticism of a purely individualised ethic. Indeed:

An individual is inconceivable apart from the society which has raised and fed him physically – and even more mentally – for intellectual development depends almost wholly on environment ... The moral life is essentially a social life. We can estimate a man only, as relative to his

¹² A1985.F9: Interview with Thompson, 1982.

¹³ A1906.Ef1: Lecture Notes: Church History (n.d.)

¹⁴ A1906.Ef2: Lecture notes Ethics (n.d.)

times – as reflecting more or less the ideals and conscience of his day. Hence – a perfected individual and a perfected society seem each to require the other for its own existence. Yet we can live ahead of our age as in an ideal communion of saints – while trying to uplift our age, and as others in lesser measure have done (ibid).

This notion of a perfect and perfectible society, a utopia, is one of the common areas to be found between communist theory and much Christian theology. In communist eschatology, this is the state of communism where the last state – the socialist state – has withered away; in Christianity this is the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth. Christians like Thompson would see this final stage as completed only by God. For many the process whereby an approximation of this penultimate state may be reached can be fought for by believers and unbelievers alike; Michael Harrington has called this struggle the common defence of the very existence of values (Harrington 1985:216) which is essential for Christians and Socialists alike. Did Thompson see the political significance of such a social ethic? Perhaps. He certainly saw it later in his life.

On the social ethical implication of Christianity, Thompson's notes state that though Christianity is primarily spiritual it is social because

- the moral and spiritual life is lived in an actual social order;
- Christians believe Christ's principles are practical and have to be applied in context.

Thus the Christians duty in society is

- to Christianise society, through education and persuasion rather than through force of law;
- to alleviate its evils;
- to afford standards by which to judge its codes and actions.¹⁵

¹⁵ A1906.Ef2: Lecture Notes on Ethics (n.d.)

On work, the notes argue that honest work is a divine thing, that workers have moral economic rights to earn in proportion to what they do. Furthermore:

The present system must go. There are those who desire to change it, who endeavours [sic] seem based upon the desire to take capital from those who possess it – and place it in other hands – which would probably result in repeating in the new class – the very faults that have made capitalism socially undesirable. The point Plato saw long ago, is service for the community – with money entirely a secondary thing (ibid).

The tone of these notes suggests a classical moral argument for Christian Socialism: the dignity of work, rights of labour, avoidance of creating a new (what the Trotskyist might call a state capitalist) class. If the new historical-critical approach marked one aspect of the theological ambience of the times in which Thompson studied at Richmond College, Christian Socialism marked another. Since, in various forms, it is worth examining this theological – and ultimately political – movement in greater detail.

British Christian Socialism

Christian Socialism was a worldwide phenomenon that – its exponents argue – is as old as Christianity itself.¹⁶ British Christian Socialism was a branch of it, a small but vibrant branch still existing in pockets to this day (notably within some sections of Radical Orthodoxy), that emerged during the 17th Century English Revolution with radical religious fringe groups like the Levellers, the Ranters and the Diggers (cf. Christopher Hill 1964, 1976, 1990, et al.). These groups rooted themselves in a radically egalitarian reading of the Bible, often broadening it with humanist social philosophy (emphasised in Benn,

¹⁶ The most comprehensive single history of it is: John Cort (1988). It is highly uneven in quality. Cort's personal anti-Marxist prejudices emerge quite strongly, and his lack of theological sophistication (particularly in biblical exegesis) undermine the work. Yet for a presentation of Christian socialism as a global phenomenon it is excellent.

1980). One of their key figures, Gerrard Winstanley, combined in his thinking a subtle blend of biblical imagery, political reflection and call to action, something which marks him out as one who cannot be reduced to a political writer who merely chose the language of religion as a vehicle of his message (Rowland 1988:103). Winstanley's thought is also interesting because it represents an early Protestant evangelicalism. His reading of the Bible is at one level literalist, at another level analogical: the sin of Adam is greed, Christ (the second Adam) overcame greed, and a goal all Christians should pursue. He sees a cosmic struggle between Christ and the Dragon/Serpent [i.e. demonic forces] that he analogises as the struggle between communism and greed.

By the late 19th Century, however, English Christian socialism had diversified dramatically: between real radicals and conservative social reformers, High Church Anglicans (sacramental socialists), liberal or evangelical Anglicans, a few Methodists, and numerous smaller Nonconformist groups. The earliest groups, gathered around Anglican clergy-theologians like John Ludlow (1821-1911), Frederick Dennison Maurice (1805-1872) and Charles Kingsley (1810-1875), were concerned members of the middle class, dedicated to the upliftment of the poor, essentially Tory paternalist in tone (Leech nd:62). Later Christian Socialists were more radical. All shared a few basic beliefs, namely in applied Christianity, that Christianity *could*, indeed *should*, have social implications. For High Churchpersons this amounted to sacramental socialism: God's love was embodied in the Incarnation and Crucifixion (and in the corresponding sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion) which gave all people a basic equality. For liberal Christians God was immanent and part of the universe. They believed in the common brotherhood of man [sic] under God, which meant that all humanity was equal, although by the beginning of the 20th Century there was still no clear agreement as to means of implementing such a belief. Christian Socialists were variously drawn into Labour Party politics and even guild socialism.

A third religious theme was the emphasis on the person of Jesus, Christ the man, who lived a life of purity, social service, and supreme self-sacrifice and gave the world a philosophy of brotherly love, a selfless ethic, and a social ideal for all time Christ the lowly carpenter, who healed the sick and helped the poor and cast the moneychangers out of the temple (Jones 1968:445). It was this vision

that inspired many sacramental socialist clergy to work in poor inner city parishes, or to found Anglican religious orders like the Community of the Resurrection or Society of the Sacred Mission based on a socialist lifestyle under the vow of poverty.

A new development in British Christian Socialism began with the mainly Anglo-Catholic group the Catholic Crusade, led by Conrad Noel, the Red Vicar of Thaxted, Essex (cf. Leech 1993). Describing himself as a Liberal-Humanist-Democratic Catholic Noel saw the Eucharist as a foretaste of a New (Socialist) World Order, arguing that Holy Communism ... is the natural social expression of mankind, the goal of human life, and Holy Communion the necessary social training for all who strive to attain it (quoted in Leech 1993:48). He saw in the doctrine of the Trinity a notion of Comradeship that ought to be the model for human society. He was attracted to the thought of William Morris and Lenin (but found Marx boring), and was involved in helping to prepare a 1920 Communist convention, but steered clear from joining the Party. His Catholic Crusade movement was the first Anglican group to welcome the 1917 Russian Revolution. Its membership included non-aligned socialists, left-wing Labourites, a few Communists and a number who became Trotskyists. While advocating self-rule for nationalities (including Irish Home Rule) it also argued for internationalism rooted in interdependence, a Free League of Democratic Nations committed to Peace, not a League of Capitalist States based on Fear, (paraphrase of its Manifesto, in Leech 1993:72) in short a kind of democratic Comintern.

It is by no means easy to see how John Wesley's thought could be appropriated directly for the Christian Socialist Movement. For Wesley there are four sources of authority: Scripture, Experience, Reason and Tradition. Scripture was central. He tended to read Scripture literally, according to the plain meaning of the text, and then in its spiritual sense – how it applied to the life of faith. However, Wesley insisted that a text be interpreted in its total context, compared to other parts of Scripture so that its meaning could be more accurately discerned, read in the light of Reason and, where possible, confirmed by the lived experience of believers (Williams 1960:27-28).

The problem with this method is that so much is context-determined: by one's social class, level of education, personal concerns, religious and political perspectives. Using one example, the story of David killing Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40-54): even using

Wesley's method, we can understand the event in a number of ways. Either if God is on our side, we shall win, no matter the odds (theological), or God sides with the underdog (theological/political). Alternatively, one could infer that a well-trained small force can overcome a superior army with correct guerrilla tactics (military/political); on a lighter note one might observe, with certain gallows humour: Tall soldiers should learn to duck! More examples could be added but these illustrate the problem. The reader's context will determine meaning much more than Wesley's thought.

Though Scripture was fundamental, Tradition was not excluded. Wesley firmly accepted the formulations of the early church as they were handed down. Williams comments that while he did not consider that such forms which are without direct Scripture mandate are of absolute authority, [Wesley accepted] that such important traditional forms as the three-fold order of ministry [deacon-presbyter-bishop] and the liturgy of the church have very great authority and should not be altered lightly (Williams 960:29). Wesley was, after all, a High Anglican and a reformer *within* Anglicanism.

Wesley's position has its problems. Firstly, one might well ask – particularly if one holds to the notion of the creation and development of doctrines – whether his notion of tradition is too narrow. If one accepts the early church formulae, shouldn't one also accept the (very radical, some might say proto-socialist) social teachings of early church theologians? If one does, to what degree must one argue that they are themselves severely context-bound? Tradition is a living faith-memory, not an exercise in theological antiquarianism.

Moreover, Scripture and Tradition are mutually interactive. Biblical traditions reflect the religious and political ideologies of the period in which they arise. The translated Bible also inevitably falls into this paradox. The *King James Version* of the Bible, for example, the translation that Wesley would have used in his time, is a case in point: though a brilliant translation of the original Hebrew and Greek sources, its translators were products of their 17th Century times and their phraseology reflects the dominant Reformation theology of the time.

Wesley's use of Reason is important not that it provides another source of revelation, but that it is a logical faculty enabling us to order the evidence of revelation; and that, with tradition, it provides us with the necessary weapons for guarding against the dangers of the un-

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skilled interpretation of scripture (Williams 1960:32) Fair enough, but it still does not provide for a theological formulation for social justice. Theologies whether they are aware of it or not operate out of socio-economic and political contexts, and contexts determine how people act – even religious people. To appeal to a context-based reason, using context-based tradition and reading a multiple-context-based scripture, without being aware of the contextuality of one's actions, merely generates naive context-based responses.

Can Personal Experience, Wesley's fourth source of authority, help? For Wesley this experience is primarily religious experience, the experience of the Holy Spirit by which faith comes alive to the believer. Here, once again, there are problems. While Wesley certainly held that true religious experience would move the believer not simply to a more devout life, but would also have the effect of living a more charitable life in relation to others, the problem of limiting experience to the religious alone is twofold. Firstly, there is always the risk that the religious experience will simply be one of feeling divine grace for oneself and not in seeing the social dimension. The result may be what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace, a sense of personal salvation without the commitment to others. Secondly, limiting experience to the religious alone undermines the ability to use experience to understand the contextuality of one's politico-religious position. In short Wesley did not go far enough.

Yet Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection can have a profound impact on one's sense of social justice.¹⁷ William Sangster points out that Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection had social consequences, because even an individualistic reading has social significance: each person, however private and solitary, interacts with others and strongly held convictions, or richly received grace, will reach a man's [sic] neighbour whether the man wills it or not (Bailie 2009:168-169).

Wesley had no overtly radical political theology. As a child he must have been aware of the strain caused by political differences – his father supported William of Orange, his mother was loyal to King James. Yet Louis Bosch has suggested that Wesley deeply admired the political thought of John Locke (Bosch 1995:87). Freedom was an

¹⁷ For an interesting thesis that links Wesley's Christian Perfection and liberation theology, see John Bailie (2009).

indissoluble gift of God to Wesley, argues Bosch, though humanity's fall (original sin) meant that after the fall humanity only had freedom of will. All people were equal in this freedom; (t) herefore, one could not be better, worthier, more acceptable, or even more privileged than the other (:133-135). Moreover, Wesley accepted Locke's notion of civil liberty and the rights to life, person and fortune (possessions). He developed a work ethic of work all you can, save all you can, and give all you can, a notion that proposed a certain degree of fairness and social responsibility of individuals towards each other.

Such as they are, Wesley's social ethics are rooted in this notion of social responsibility. Unlike Locke, Wesley does not hold to the absolute protection of property. Property holders are Gods stewards – not absolute owners. The rich have a duty to redistribute wealth according to the needs of the poor – the gain, save, give what you can position. This was seen as a compromise position between the primitive communism of the early church and the realities of Wesley's time. From this vision developed Methodism's concern for social welfare and stewardship, a concern rooted in reformism rather than revolution.

Considering Methodism's significance it did not in produce many Christian Socialist theologians. Within its pre-1930 conglomeration of churches, only the working class Primitive Methodists seemed to produce Labour supporters and trade union activists in considerable numbers (Jones 1968:405). A few ministers like the Reverend Hugh Price Jones advocated that laws should be subject to Christian teachings and rooted in social egalitarianism. Still fewer ministers seemed ready to cooperate with secular groups – particularly trade unions. Reverend Samuel Keeble, ex-Anglican and ex-City businessman, was perhaps the most socialist Methodist of the late 19th and early 20th Century. He took very seriously the objections of secular socialists to Christian Socialism, writing tracts that reflected considerable understanding of socialist thought and economic history.

Another exceptional Methodist socialist was the Reverend Donald Soper. As a young minister in the 1920s, Soper came to see socialism (and pacifism) as an essential part of Christianity (Purcell 1983:108). In a 1965 interview he summed up his position:

... Socialism [is] the economic and political expression, in time, of what I believe to be the Kingdom of God ...

Socialism is the extension of the teaching of our Lord, so that it concerns the whole of human existence (:111).

This socialism he identified with the British Labour Party and in particular its (now defunct) Clause 4 on nationalisation and social ownership. From the 1920s onwards he became a regular at Speakers' Corner in London on behalf of Christian Socialism, trying to promote it as well in Methodist assemblies, at church gatherings and public meetings. He was certainly active during Thompson's period of studies at Richmond College, though they never met.¹⁸

With an eye on Thompson's later career, it may be worth looking forward to Christian Socialism's growth after 1930. By the 1940s Christian Socialists were well within the Labour Party mainstream. Historian E P Thompson has even said, on many occasions, that the growth of British Labour as a party was more influenced by local Methodist chapels than by Marxist theory. At least one Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (1881-1944) was openly socialist,¹⁹ although he'd resigned his membership of the Labour Party on becoming Bishop of Manchester. He supported the 1926 Coal Miners' Strike, advocated full employment and was an exponent of planned capitalism. Another Anglican, R H Tawney, a layman and economist, helped the Labour Party develop its 1928 and 1934 programmes.²⁰

In the 1930s and post-Second World War period, parts of the British Christian Socialism movement were almost identical with Christian Marxism. Two groups affirming Christian Socialism remained. The elder, the Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) is today an integral part of the Labour Party, and even started an Internet Web-page.²¹ The other (much smaller) group, the Jubilee Group, started as a support group for socialist Anglican clergy in London during the 1970s. Led by Kenneth Leech, a priest, writer, spiritual director and

¹⁸ No evidence exists of their meeting in Thompson's Papers. Nor did Soper recall meeting him. (Letter: Lord Soper to the author, circa November 1997).

¹⁹ He is remembered for a very successful book *Christianity and the Social Order* which was widely read. [It was certainly read by Thompson.]

²⁰ His key work, another Christian Socialist classic, was *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

²¹ See Christian Socialist Movement Homepage (www.csm.org.uk).

occasional lecturer whose pastoral work includes inner-city ministry, drug counselling and work against neo-Nazism in London's East End, its constituency was mainly progressive Anglo-Catholics (with openness to Marxist, non-Marxist and post-Marxist forms of socialism). It was committed to democracy in both church and state, feminism (including the ordination of women) and gay rights.²² Some, but not all, of its members also belonged to the CSM.

A synthesis of the long and complicated history of British Christian Socialism can be drawn together through a summary of its principles to be found in a 1962 pamphlet of the CSM. It is a follow-up to a 1959 pamphlet *Papers From the Lamb*²³ that sought to articulate the CSMs theological and political position.²⁴ Stanley Evans, its author, sums up what he calls the Doctrinal Basis of Christian Socialism as follows (Evans 1962:29-31):

- The Biblical Doctrine of the Kingdom of God, the commitment to making Gods vision of an ideal world a worldly reality;
- The Trinity, a Divine Community that should be humanity's social goal as well;
- The Church, a united, holy, egalitarian fellowship;
- The Sacraments, God mediated to humanity through *matter*, an indication of how matter should be rightly used: shared equally.

In terms of activity, Evans listed work for human and racial equality, unity among Christians, prayer, international peace, common ownership and friendship with the then Soviet Union (Evans 1962:31). All these categories were integral to Thompson's thought.

²² Observations based on Jubilee group publications (in authors possession), many conversations with Ken Leech himself and personal participation in some of its activities, London 1993-1995.

²³ In typically British CSM tradition, the Lamb is an East End pub.

²⁴ Long out of print, this document is now available on the CSM Website (see No.20 above).

The formation of an activist minister

Such views on Christian Socialism described above raise the question: to what degree was Marxism dealt with at the college. From a 1929 notebook *Philosophical Introduction to Theology*, there is a section on Materialism as a philosophy. It refers to scientific materialism, old and new, critiquing it from a scientific point of view, in effect science critiquing science. Modern realism, Thompsons notes continue, cannot prove that matter is the only reality – it can only prove the reality of itself.²⁵ This reasoning would later give Thompson the intellectual space in which to take Marxism seriously, even dialectical materialism, while not espousing its philosophical atheism.

The roots of what Thompson later would call his Christian Humanism can be seen in some theology notes which proclaim rather boldly: 'THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS REQUIRE A HIGH DOCTRINE OF MAN – for if he is no way like God the religion of the Bible collapses [sic]'.²⁶ He draws this from the doctrine of the Incarnation (that God became human in Jesus Christ). Following Irenaeus of Lyons, who held that God became human so that humanity might become [like] God, Thompson emphasises that humanity is as much social as individual: there is a unity of all people in Christ. From this the notes derive a very high notion of freedom: since humanity is so close to God (who is absolute freedom in Gods self), humanity's proper condition is freedom, the highest freedom of which (since humanity is social) is service. Intimately linked to this is fellowship, the fellowship of free persons. Beyond the theoretical, such an analysis provides an insight into the thought processes by which Thompson could have justified political activity: to build real community based on the Christian conception of freedom.

No minister engages simply in abstract theological discussion. Much of the minister's work entails leading services, preaching and various forms of pastoral counselling. From all accounts, Richmond College was an enlightened centre when it came to matters related to pastoral psychology. Thompson's interest was spurred on by his lecturers to such an extent that in the 1930s Johannesburg, he helped set up the Mental Health Society and was a regular at its meetings

²⁵ A1906.Df4: Lecture Notes on Philosophical Introduction to Theology (1929).

²⁶ A1906.Ef4: Lecture notes on Theology: The Christian Experience (n.d.)

until the Treason Trial and the subsequent state banning order in the 1960s forced him to step down. Moreover, though he never trained as a psychologist, he collected and read the works of the great psychologists – most notably Sigmund Freud – and freely used their techniques in marriage, family and personal counselling,²⁷ for which he developed quite a reputation.

This was rooted in the open but critical approach taken by the College to Freud. Two large notebooks (filled as most of his notebooks were with loose leaves and sheets containing quotes from books) on educational and counselling psychology remain. Since Freud, an atheist with views on sexuality often deemed inimical to Christian morality, has remained a controversial figure it is significant to note that Thompsons comments were critical but friendly. Freud exaggerated certain areas – like sexuality – the notes on psychoanalysis proclaim. In addition,

Psycho-analysis cannot be a science, unless it can prove that symbols are universal ... Freud and [Carl] Jung tell us that certain things symbolize certain other things – but patient inductive research with regard to symbolism is the last thing we receive from the analysts... When, however, the craze has died down, the morbid curiosity abated, and Freud's sex-obsession reduced to right proportions, considerable gain will remain, namely, a better knowledge of the hidden factors of the mind – a better treatment of nervous disorders – and perhaps a new alliance in which medicine, psychology and religion will come together in the unity of HEALING.²⁸

The final line seems crucial: psychology was for healing, not a dogma. The vision is pragmatic, much like Thompsons later approach to Marxism. Ultimately the issue was how it all might benefit humanity's need to live in freedom.

The most important task for any Protestant minister is preaching. With its emphasis on practice as well as theory, Richmond had a strong tradition in Homiletics, the art of preaching. Since

²⁷ Gwen Rogers, interviewed Springs, 11/4/97.

²⁸ A1906.Ef3: Lecture Notes on Psycho-Analysis (n.d.).

Thompson published almost nothing in his life – and since his papers contain many of his talks and sermons, which are the basis for retrieving his theological and political development – some detailed examination of the preaching techniques he learned at Richmond are appropriate.

The exhaustive notes on preaching Thompson retained²⁹ present a unique picture of what the Methodist Church expected of its preachers. The primary resource, according to Richmond's professor of homiletics, Dr Waterhouse, was the preacher himself. The preacher had to be utterly true to himself; an affected preaching-style, however much it might seek to be eloquent, would not ring true to the congregation. At the core of this was sincerity: 'It is unpardonable to preach anything that you do not wholly believe.[emphasis in the notes] (ibid) for otherwise it would simply not ring true to the congregation.'

A sermon's message must be in touch with the age in which it was preached, Waterhouse argued. It must engage with popular culture. It was primarily about the impression that was made, secondarily about theological content. It should be in the context of the service, which had as its primary purpose worship and the installing of awe in the believer. Waterhouse believed:

Good preachers can be made. Great preachers are born and made, especially if they have what is called personal magnetism. A man should judge which of these types [of orator] is natural to him, and should do his best to perfect his natural style – for no one can copy with complete success a type foreign to his nature ... the natural is always better than the artificial, however carefully the [preacher] has studied and prepared himself (ibid).

Sermons should be prepared early in the week with the selection of texts, but the sermon itself should be written only near the end of the week, giving it time to gestate. It should be written in brief note form, lest the preacher be tempted to read rather than deliver it. Illustrations should really illustrate the central point.

²⁹ A1906. Ef3: Lecture notes – Lectures on Preaching (1929).

Armed with these notes Thompson and his fellow seminarians were given ample opportunity to put them into practice. Groups of them would be sent out to neighbouring churches on what was called the Mission Band in their second year. In addition each student was put on a preaching roster to preach at the Sunday evening service in the College Chapel. According to the college Pulpit Notes – schedules for preachers – Thompson preached in Chapel on a number of occasions:

- 29 September, 1929: A children's service (Details not given).
- 17 November, 1929: a 6.30pm service with the theme The Heaven of Christianity. [This was crossed out suggesting that the service was cancelled.]
- 2 February, 1930: a 6.30pm service on The Passive Aspect of the New Life
- 23 March, 1930: a 6.30pm service on The Ministry of Suffering.
- 11 May, 1930: a 6.30pm service on Faith That Transcends Sight
- 15 June 1930: a 6.30pm service on A Testimony and a Hope.³⁰

Of these sermons one remains extant.³¹ Dated the day before the service (an indication that Thompson had taken Waterhouse's advice seriously), it takes as its text *John* 20:29, where the risen Jesus confronts the doubting Thomas. Thompson starts by arguing that John's Gospel is a gauge of Christian experience (a good Wesleyan notion) one in which

- we see the inward in the outward
- the essential in the phenomenal
- the universal in the particular
- the eternal in the temporal (ibid).

He goes on to suggest that physical contact has nothing to do with true faith in the Resurrection. He critiques the materialists demand for proof: the inability to find physical proof is no obstacle to the existence of reality (all echoing his philosophy lectures). He moves on

³⁰ Rylands (Manchester); R.C. 2.18: Pulpit Notes (1928-1930).

³¹ A1906. Ca2.1: Believing Without Seeing Faith That Transcends Sight (10/5/30).

to a fairly sympathetic study of Thomas in the Gospel as one who articulates human doubts and questions, not as a modern sceptic, but as one who was confused rather than disbelieving. For Christians working in missions, in slums and in lonely parts of the world Thomas is significant and loveable

- Because behind his doubts were his love of Jesus and his love for him.
- Because in the presence of the Risen Lord ... he renounced his doubts forever.
- Because his confession of faith is so short and so satisfying ... (ibid).

It is, in short, a fairly standard sermon, not particularly radical in content. From the notes it seems that Thompson was aware of the difficulties of belief in the modern world and saw in Thomas a symbol of such renewed belief turned into a faith leading to action. His references to missions and slums are interesting; one might speculate that such a reference suggests the very real problems of faith that arise in situations of poverty or injustice, but without the full text of the sermon ³²(ibid) no more than suppositions might be advanced.

While at Richmond, Thompson took the opportunity to see the greater London area. On many occasions he attended church services and revival meetings in order to study ministry in practice. He regularly wrote back to May Roberts, commenting on them. One who impressed him considerably was in fact Donald Soper, Methodist minister and Christian Socialist. They never met personally but, on hearing him speak a number of times at Speakers Corner, Thompson wrote to May enthusing about Soper's sharp analysis of current affairs.³³

Another area that caught his imagination and would become a preoccupation of his in the 1930s was the League of Nations. Whenever he could he attended meetings of the League of Nations Union in London and became convinced that the League was crucial to the maintenance of world peace.

³² Another lesson he learned from Dr. Waterhouse perhaps *too* well, to the detriment of any reader seeking absolute clarity as to what he said.

³³ A1906.Db2.1.4: DCT to May Roberts, 28/11/28.

The place that seems to have made the most impression was Wales. Not only was it a centre for Methodism, it was also a stronghold for socialists of every shade, including the British Labour Party. When he and Joe Alistoun first visited Wales, some of the Welsh Methodists they stayed with expressed surprise that they weren't black. Once over this shock, the Welsh warmed to them – and Thompson to the Welsh. One Methodist who made a lasting impression was the Reverend Joe Law, who lived with the miners in a typical miners cottage and was regarded as something of a radical and rebel by the Church because of his relentless and searing criticism of the conditions under which the miners lived and worked.³⁴ These experiences, Thompson would later say, did not convert him politically, but merely confirmed in his mind steadily growing convictions about the social relevance of Christianity.

An apparently accidental suicide of a Cambridge student gave Thompson an unexpected opportunity: to preach on mission to a meeting of a congregation in Kent that had long supported the Church's work in South Africa. At the meeting, having expressed admiration at the extent of British Methodist concern for mission and having given them an idea of the geographical extent of South Africa, he homed in on what he saw was the crucial issue for mission: the native question. Political problems intensified the problems of mission, he argued.

On Africans he remarked:

The natives were still in a Child's state of civilisation, and the white man has three attitudes to them. These attitudes were (1) the repressionist, the view of the man who wanted to keep the native down; (2) the equalist, who wanted to welcome him as a brother; and (3) the segregationist [sic], headed by the present Prime Minister (General Hertzog), who thought that the native should develop on his own lines and the white man on his.

Mr Thompson said that he did not think any of the ideas would suffice. Some white men treated the natives

³⁴ A1985 F9: Interview with Thompson, 20/8/82.

despicably, but it was not possible yet to treat them as brothers, and the idea of segregation was no good, because today the whole world was international. The only solution lay in a spirit of co-operation, allowing the native to partake in the industrial life, and so influence him with the better motives of the Western world. The great ideal was that all peoples should live side by side through Christ. They had their opportunity in Africa, and they had a number of missionaries. More and more natives were becoming missionaries to their own people, and they were setting a high standard, which was as it should be.³⁵

This quintessentially small-town English newspaper report says as much about English attitudes to Christianity's role in civilising people who do not fit into their Eurocentric worldview as it does about Thompsons own attitudes. The notion that Christianity civilises (i.e. Westernises) is a given; so too is the basic Christian assumption that not all of Western civilisation is good in itself.

That Thompson accepted these ideas himself are equally clear. In addition this incident shows a development in his ideas since his youth, since an essay he'd written justifying segregation in 1922. His liberal segregationist stance had changed: he now recognised that it was in the long term untenable and impractical, that the future lay with a common society, part of an international society, at this stage epitomised to him by the League of Nations. He had become a liberal gradualist: belief in a common society, belief in what would later be called multi-racialism (and by his death non-racialism), but not yet.

Despite his enthusiasm for books, Thompson was not a natural academic. He was also seriously missing May. At the beginning of his spell at Richmond, he had said to her:

Don't worry about England calling too strongly – it can't in my case. I will enjoy the sites I see and appreciate everything I see, of green fields, fields of flowers, sites in

³⁵ A1906. Eh: newsclipping: *The Richmond and Twickenham Times*, 8/3/30.

London, tubes (railways), buses, historic sites – but SA is my place, and my life's interest.³⁶

By 1930 the decision not to let South African students stay on for the third year was reversed. Though it meant another year's expense, South Africans of suitable ability, with the approval of their College, would be granted a third year.

Thompson was visited at Richmond by church officials to discuss whether he should stay on for a third year. They met with his lecturers, notably the Principal Dr Ryder Smith, who commented that he doubted whether Thompson would benefit from the extra year sufficiently to justify the additional expense.³⁷ In discussions with Thompson himself, the official reported that there were a number of questions in Thompson's mind, some of which are financial and others sentimental [probably a reference to May Roberts] but even if they disregarded the latter, the financial element made sense:

Therefore, with the consent, and indeed on the advice of the College authorities and Thompson's own expressed desires, I am arranging for him to leave at the end of the College year, and to return to S Africa. I am sure that in the circumstances it is the best thing to do (ibid).

The process was speedily completed. Nine days after the letter was written Thompson and Alistoun were designated as being bound for work in the Transvaal.³⁸ A few weeks later, the Tutors' Meeting posted a list of those who would sit for the B.D. and Diploma that year. The notes are terse and offer no formal explanations. It simply reads:

The following will sit for the Diploma...

Part I – All the Second Year Men who are not reading for the BD excepting Mr Thompson.³⁹

³⁶ A1906.Db2.1.3: DCT to May Roberts, 19/9/28.

³⁷ SOAS/MMMS SA Correspondence with Transvaal Chairman, 1926-1934: To JW Allcock, 1/4/30.

³⁸ Rylands (Manchester). R.C. 3/7 Minutes of Tutors Meeting, 10/4/30.

³⁹ Rylands (Manchester). R.C. 3/7 Minutes of Tutors Meeting, 28/4/30.

Despite this less than glorious end to his studies at Richmond, Thompson always remembered his time there with affection. The official who made the decision that he should return after two years commented, moreover:

I should not like this to reflect on Thompson in any way.
He is a thoroughly good fellow, and will do first class
work as a minister...⁴⁰

Conclusion

Though he completed no formal degree or diploma, the two years of study at Richmond College prepared Douglas Thompson for his highly unusual career as pastor, activist and unofficial chaplain to the South African Left during the mid-20th Century. That he held his studies in high esteem is perhaps manifested by the fact that he kept so many of his lecture notes till his death. His studies, above all, gave him an enthusiasm for what today is called lifelong learning which he pursued through regular frequenting of second-hand and leftwing bookshops in Johannesburg. Such commitment is both a tribute to him and his teachers, and a sign of what good theological education should facilitate.

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The imposed marginalisation of Black Liberation Theology in public discourse in post-Apartheid South Africa

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Introduction

According to Motlhabi:

If Black Theology is to survive and remain relevant in South Africa, therefore, it must undergo reorientation and readjustment in its approach to socio-ethical issues so that it can focus on these new developments in, and changed problems of, the new South Africa (2008: 15).

In this article I will endeavour to argue that in the context of South Africa Black Theology has in the past challenged the status quo. In other words it has been a vehicle for conscientizing the black populace. It fulfilled its prophetic role, though as I will argue later it was an elite's discourse, situated within the institutions of academia, yet it bridged the gap between academia and the struggles of the black oppressed. Post-apartheid South Africa brought about new challenges which have led to it being seduced to silence and power. Particularly when its forbearers ascended into administration posts. The emphases of the academic institutions on publications in accredited journals for subsidy have contributed to a large extent to the self marginalisation of Black Theology. Furthermore, as Manala (2010:523) points out, greed and corruption of some municipal employees entrusted with the resources for service delivery have and continue to destabilise and disable service delivery.

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Black Liberation Theology: The contribution from a South African context

One of the contributions of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa was the use of black consciousness methodology. This incorporation of black consciousness ideology enabled black theologians at the time to bring into the conventional theology an African flare. One is intentionally referring to African in the context of black people of South Africa. Furthermore, the influence of Marxism theory also contributed to the way theology amongst black theologians was done. This view is also observed by West, namely, that Black Theology and Marxist thought shared three characteristics:

Both adhere to a similar methodology, the same way of approaching their respective subject matter and arriving at conclusions. Both link some notion of liberation to future socio-economic condition of the down-trodden. And this is most important; both attempt to put forward trenchant critiques of liberal capitalist America (West 1979:553).

Theology in South Africa was purposefully theology from the context. It spoke to the existential challenges that people faced. It attempted to raise issues from below and asked the real and at times uncomfortable questions regarding how the biblical text was misinterpreted and taught by those who claimed to be the chosen people of Israel within South Africa. These misconceptions were brought by the great trek experience as well as the annual celebration of the Day of the Covenant which took place on 16 December. It is within such a context that black theology sought to theologise.

Furthermore its point of departure was what Evans, cited in Ware, refers to as 'deconstruction' as revision, in other words it is 'both iconoclastic and constructive, dismantling intellectual systems for the purpose of exposing new possibilities for thought' (Ware 2002:33). This view of Evans is taken further by Mosala (1986:175-196), who indicates the blindness of Black theologians in their attack/criticism of 'white theology' while at the same time they are actually using the same tools of analysis that whites have traditionally used to justify their case. Mosala further argues that even though

Black Liberation Theology advocates for black liberation and experience as its focal point, in its analysis the problem that emerges in Black Liberation Theology continues to draw its biblical hermeneutical assumptions from white theology. What Mosala was doing was to draw attention to the class character of the bible.

Challenges of Black Liberation Theology post 1994: Stony the road we walk

Maimela, has said 'Black Theology as a discourse will play an important role in the future because there will be elements in society who, for a variety of reasons, will feel themselves deprived, somehow oppressed and therefore in need of liberation, be it political, economic or socio-cultural' (Mothoagae 2011:27). While some may argue that the previous regime was better than the present one, whatever their theories might be, one thing that is clear is that the country is experiencing huge problems. Perhaps like any other country that has had to fight for its liberation at one stage it has to go through such problems. However, could this be the real reason why South Africa after eighteen years of democracy has a great number of unemployed youth and a high rate of the poor getting poorer and the rich richer? One would rather suggest that South Africa is moving from 'democracy' to 'timocracy'.

These concepts are borrowed from Ramose's article 'The death of democracy and the resurrection of timocracy' (2010:291). He argues that the clear move from democracy to timocracy is expressed by the love of money rather than the service of people. He further argues that ownership of wealth determines and defines power, in other words, what South Africa is experiencing with regard to the recent service delivery protests, can be attributed partly to timocracy. This is because the service delivery protests are from the 'grass-roots' they raise a serious ethical question which is 'citizenship'. Citizenship by its very nature draws attention to the material benefits of full social inclusion. This includes the right to be taken seriously on matters of the country.

In other words, it touches on intellectual capability, as well as the politicians' manner in which they speak to people in community organisations. The resurrection of timocracy affects the way in which the local municipality is administered. It further points to the question

of the deployment of officials belonging to the ruling party. This has led to questions around issues of leadership and accountability. Furthermore, these service delivery protests put into question the issue of the theology of the stomach which seems to have characterised the eighteen years of democracy in South Africa. In terms of the South African context the theology of the stomach can be summarised in the following manner: we have given our lives for the struggle and therefore the country owes us. This view is also observed by Johnson:

All the early BEE aspirants grew directly out of the ANC. Thus Thebe Investments was set up in 1992 by Vusi Khanyile, the ANC's head of finance, with Tokyo Sexwale one of its directors. Even more striking was Kagiso Trust Investments (KTI). The original Kagiso Trust was set up in 1985 by Eric Molobi, a former Robben Island prisoner (Johnson 2010:386).

It is evident from the above citation that making a theological reflection could lead to one speaking of a theology of the stomach, as been indicated above. A further observation made by Johnson is:

The initial flagship, Nail (New African Investments Ltd.), a consortium headed by Dr Nthato Motlana, Mandela's doctor, was set up in 1993 when the Afrikaans insurance giant, Sanlam, sold off 10 percent of Metropolitan Life to Nail... The Public outcry was so great that Motlana and Slander were forced to resign, though not before taking R100 million each out of Nail (2010:387).

It is important to acknowledge that though Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) in itself is not bad, it raises serious questions when it comes to the issue of citizenship. All citizens of a country are to enjoy the same privileges. Yet, the South African context does not in any way reflect this; rather it points in the opposite direction. Perhaps the philosophy of Protagoras that 'man is the measure of all things' could be a reality in the South African context, where the rich become richer and the poor continue to be poor. In other words, according to Ajei and Ramose, the Protagora's doctrine is that:

The same thing both is and is not, is both good and evil..., because often this thing appears noble to some, its opposite to others. An individual's perception, then, becomes knowledge in the sense of it being an infallible apprehension of what is objectively real (Ajei & Ramose 2008:25).

If one were to theologise about the above citation, as well as contextualise it within the South African situation, it could be concluded that, though the country is democratic, social justice is not for all; one cannot speak of the common good. This common good belongs to a few; as a result what is perceived to be evil and wrong by the masses does not translate into being so. Thus the issue of relativism applies in a context where every person is for him/herself, whereas when the common goal and the common enemy was the Apartheid system it was a communal endeavour. What Maimela laments about, as previously cited, could be summarised as follows: for as long as those who were in exile continue to see the country as a gold mine for their own interests, the notion of money will be the measure of all things and South Africa will continue to be a country that is characterised by corruption, maladministration and timocracy.

This in a way does not address the fundamental issues that continue to affect the ordinary masses. It is evident that the challenges of Black Liberation Theology eighteen years into democracy are enormous. This is precisely because the question of who their interlocutors are still remains a challenge. Furthermore, the reversal of Black Liberation Theology as only an academic discourse for the elites still needs to be taken seriously. This is because such a move has led Black Liberation Theology to self marginalise itself. This view is also that of Tshaka and Makofane (2010:544) who hold that Black Liberation Theology as an academic discipline was and continues to be by its very nature an elitist enterprise. Even though it drew a good number of black ministers from various church denominations it was the local academic base that spread its message through conferences and publications.

A further observation they have made regarding the self marginalisation of Black Liberation Theology is that the dawn of democracy came with new challenges with Black theologians leaving academia and taking on administrative roles in the public and private sectors.

The result of such an exodus has led to a certain degree of intellectual retreat. Perhaps it is no wonder that Mosala has concluded that Black Liberation Theology has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling masses that are found in every sector of life including our churches (Mosala 1986:176).

One could further argue that one other factor that has led to this self imposed marginalisation is that the problem with militant initiatives is that they are usually prone to the seduction of power. It is for this reason that Black Liberation Theology has moved, if one can say so, from its original objective to publishing what the various institutions and journals regard as research. This view is maintained by an observation once made that the easiest way of killing a revolution is to hire out from it its leadership of that revolution. This, according to Tshaka and Makofane (2010:545), continues to characterise the enterprise of Black Liberation Theology, precisely because the current generation of Black theological scholars stand on the shoulders of those who preceded them. As a result it is crucial to admit to these challenges since one can argue that we are pressured to comply with the expectations of the academe.

Black Liberation Theology following the track of suffering: A challenge to the theology of the stomach

One of things that Hopkins (2002:160) points to and warns against is the pressure of academe which might lead us to feel the need to dispense with the black intellectual experience of the poor. This is important considering that eighteen years into democracy South Africa is still characterised by poverty and unemployment, while those who are said to have fought for freedom are experiencing a life of glamour and prestige at the expense of the poor. Furthermore, this is seen and evidenced by the economic and political structures which have remained virtually unchanged since the dawn of democracy (Tshaka & Makofane 2010:545).

There are various hypotheses regarding service delivery protests in South Africa since 2004. One thing that is evident is that it is the poor who are standing up against their treatment. Perhaps a question could be posed as to why such protests are we not defending our own black government? It is clear that these protests have nothing to do with the questions cited above. They are about wellbeing, they are

about citizenship. They raise serious concerns regarding the role and function of a democratically elected administration that has to show its citizens that it cares. Furthermore, they put into question the issue of corruption, maladministration, accountability and timocracy found in the leaders of municipalities. Booysen as cited in Alexander makes the following observation regarding service protests:

Grass-roots protests against both the quality of service delivery and public representation of grass-roots service delivery needs (2010:25).

While Pithouse, as cited by Alexander, on the same note takes the matter further by drawing on a detailed knowledge of the shack dwellers' protests. In his study he rejects the notion that these protests are about economics; rather, he argues, they are about citizenship (2010:25). This citizenship, according to him, needs to be understood as material benefits of full social inclusion, as well as the right to be taken seriously when thinking and speaking through community organisations. This approach of those at the grass-roots challenges the theology of the stomach that seems to have characterised the democratic government. While at the same time the government has been preaching good governance as if good governance strengthens democracy and will address the issue of corruption. According to Ramose,

money is the means of corruption and corruption subserves the purpose of accumulating more money. It has the ability to undermine democracy and make it stand only as an empty shell (2012:292).

The same could be said about these protests as they question the use of the country's resources. Precisely because they are not treated as citizens, one can argue that this accumulation of wealth by the politicians is the sentencing of the poor to death. This is because, according to Vellem (2010:548), the sentencing of the poor to death cannot be referred to as reconstruction which is what the present government is doing. Reconstruction, he argues, must begin with liberation, and liberation cannot be downplayed simply because liberation is still to be attained by Africans.

Black Liberation Theology: Can a critic be a caretaker too?

One of the legacies of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa, as I have pointed out, has been criticism of the state. These criticisms have been influenced by the Marxist ideology of Communism. Meanwhile the Catholic Church in South Africa is influenced by the teachings emanating from the Second Vatican Council, as well as by other post-conciliar Vatican statements. Documents, such as *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), maintained that there is an obligation to maintain international social justice, as well as national social justice. It further insisted on social justice to be attainable only when the gap between development and underdevelopment was narrowed (Borer 1998:85).

Documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, according to Borer, introduced two ideas which contained the seeds which initiated a new class of theologies known as liberation theologies of which South African contextual theology is an example.

It is within such a context that people like Hurley emerged, although it is worth noting that most bishops lacked the prophetic vision of Hurley and new ideas were rarely translated into action. The 1977 meeting of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference brought about a self-identity contained in a statement titled 'Commitment on social justice and Race Relations' (Borer 1998:89). This was as a result of the pressure that the bishops were receiving from the Black consciousness movement. It is against this background that I raise the question: can a critic be a caretaker too? Clearly it is one or the other. In post-apartheid South Africa there seems not to be a clear distinction between the two. There is silence from the church regarding issues of social justice. Institutions such as the South African Council of Churches have lost their teeth. Perhaps this has got to do with what Motlhabi refers to as critical solidarity with the state. I am inclined to argue that this critical solidarity with the state brings about the ambiguity of whether these institutions are on the side of the poor or are concerned with the maintenance of the status quo?

Perhaps it is for this reason that Motlhabi urges and challenges us against 'critical solidarity with the state that black theologians seem to have taken by their silence' (Mothoagae 2012:128). One can argue that there seems to be a culture of silence that is permeating our scholarship and, as a result, the question of relevance continues to haunt us. As a result Black Liberation Theology instead of being

critical of the socio-economic, socio-political situation in the country and identifying with the masses has not done so. Yet, it is evident that the oppressed and the poor blacks will continue to reflect theologically about their situation and associate their suffering with scriptural texts, even though their theological reflections do not make it to the news paper headlines nor find ways into accredited theological journals. The poor will continue to reflect because the reality is severe and painful as a result of their poverty that is entrenched in the socio-economic and political structures of South African society. Furthermore, the critical contribution of Black Liberation Theology is to seriously reflect on such conditions. Above all, to acknowledge that the fall of apartheid did not suddenly bring down the structures that ensures that the poor remain poorer while the rich become richer (Buffel 2010:478).

For as long as the question of social justice still permeates the structures of South African society, there will be a need for Black Liberation Theology to be critical. Black Liberation Theology as a discipline has no choice but to be organically part of the black masses and to journey with them so that theology is done in the context of the many socio-economic and political challenges that the masses are facing. In doing this, it will take into cognisance the fact that the road is still stony and that following the track of suffering will enable it to be a challenge to the theology of the stomach which has characterised the order of the day in the name of the liberation struggle. This view is also observed by Chimhanda:

Liberation theology as critical discourse is informed by the past and the present and looks into the future. Engaging the memory of oppression and marginalisation in apartheid and colonial times to and thereafter, through dysfunctional democracies in Africa, Black Theologians, as proactive agents of history, need to be on guard that mistakes of the past are not repeated today (200:443).

The question of whether a critic can be a caretaker is taken further by Chimhanda who cautions South African Black Theologians to guard against slowly moving into the Zimbabwean style of loyalty to one party that is linked to the liberation struggle and to state leadership

supported by war veterans and youth militia. This view is taken up by Maimela also in the following manner:

In the new South Africa, Black Theologians challenge is to provide guidance for both black and white Christians to work for justice for everyone so as to prevent rulers from becoming oppressors themselves (Chimhanda 2010:443).

What Chimhanda is pointing to is the challenge that Black Liberation Theology has to grapple with, which requires that its critical tools needs to be sharp enough to disseminate primary factors in the marginalisation of Black people in a multicultural, interethnic, democratic and globalising economy. Furthermore, Motlhabi (1989:121-170) argues that in post apartheid South Africa racism is a secondary factor in the marginalisation and impoverishment of black masses. He shows that power games are the root cause of black oppression. From this stance, Motlhabi concludes that no radical change will take place without attacking the causes of the myth since the removal of racism would not in itself change the status quo. This observation of Motlhabi is insightful to the analysis of the Black situation of oppression.

Conclusion

The parable image of the new wine and the old wine skins perhaps seems to capture the dilemma in which Black Liberation Theology finds itself. Although the role and contribution of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa has been acknowledged, it is evident that there is still a lot to be done. This is because Black Liberation Theology as a discipline, as I have pointed out, has not yet become the property of the struggling masses. As a result this has led to its self marginalisation, particularly in public discourse. Furthermore, there is a need for Black Liberation Theology to remember its objectives, insisting on the Christian gospel by identifying with the poor and marginalised in society. Such a position, which Hopkins refers to as pro-poor, will sharpen the distinction between a Black Theology of Liberation which encourages a gospel of good news for all broken humanity, and a vague Black Liberation Theology which tends towards the maintenance of individual advancement and non-communal

privileges. The latter has characterised South Africa for eighteen years since the end of apartheid. One could then argue that the trademark 'A better life for all' would no longer be in essence 'Money is the measure of all things'. This then calls upon the poor and the marginalised to realise that liberation has not yet been fully attained. There is a need for a New Liberation and a call to actualise good citizenship. This citizenship will measure and determine the type of leadership they want, founded on ethics, service, responsibility and accountability.

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Suffering: A problem or a mystery?
Buddhist and Christian approaches to the human predicament

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Man is ready and willing to shoulder any suffering, as soon and as long as he can see a meaning in it (Victor Frankl).²

It would be a grave error to suppose that Buddhism and Christianity merely offer various explanations of suffering, or worse, justifications and mystifications built on this ineluctable fact. (...) Suffering, as both Buddhism and Christianity see, each in its own way, is part of our very ego-identity and empirical existence, and the only thing to do about it is to plunge right into the middle of contradiction and confusion in order to be transformed by what Zen calls the 'Great Death' and Christianity calls 'dying and rising with Christ' (Thomas Merton).³

Introduction

In this article I attempt to show how understanding suffering characteristic of Buddhism differs from the one which can be found in Christianity and in what sense the meaning these two traditions ascribe to the human predicament may challenge and stimulate both Buddhists and Christians. To answer these questions I will, first, examine the doctrinal understandings of suffering in Buddhism and Christianity in terms of the experience, origins, and meaning of suffering and,

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² Viktor Frankl 1961:5. Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist imprisoned by the Nazis in World War II.

³ Merton. 1995:4.

second, probe the Buddhist notion of *dukkha* and the Christian notion of *passio* in light of Gabriel Marcel's distinction between problem and mystery.

The first question that can be posed is: *Why suffering?* Why should the philosophy of religion or, as I prefer to think about this discipline, the phenomenology of religious experience, reflect on suffering? Let me answer this question with the words of the Polish priest-philosopher, Józef Tischner: 'Once philosophy arose from admiration of the world (Aristotle). And then also from the doubting (Descartes). And now, on our earth, it is born from pain. The *quality of human pain* determines the quality of philosophy. (...) He who does not see it is close to betrayal' (Tischner 1982:13). Of course, it is a subjective viewpoint and I imagine that many would not agree with Tischner or, at best, would see his opinion as applicable only to Western philosophy. What no one can deny, however, is that suffering, regardless of its cultural and religious qualifications, is – in words of Thomas Merton – 'a part of our very ego-identity and empirical existence' (1995:41) and therefore it deserves a particular place in philosophical-theological reflection.

The second relevant question to ponder is, *Why Buddhism and Christianity?* The reason why the subject of suffering interests me in this context, namely Buddhist and Christian, is connected with the challenge that each of these two spiritual traditions constitutes for the other. Interestingly enough, the awareness of this challenge is not equal on both sides. Buddhist interest in Christianity is – to say the least – moderate. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Western Christianity the question of the relation between Jesus and the Buddha appears often as a fundamental issue. The well-known statement of Romano Guardini is a characteristic expression of this *status quo*: 'There is only one whom we might be inclined to compare with Jesus: Buddha. This man is a great mystery. He lived in an awful, almost superhuman freedom, yet his kindness was powerful as a cosmic force. Perhaps Buddha will be the last religious genius to be explained by Christianity' (Guardini 1956:305).

Dukkha – Passio: Two visions of suffering

Looking at the Buddha's and Jesus' attitude towards the world, it is evident that their 'diagnoses' of the conditioned / earthly reality and

human nature coincide in certain aspects. For instance, similarly to Gautama, Jesus shows the world as changing and passing,⁴ and a human being as captured, lost, and needing help. What is more, both teachers identify the source of this predicament with the state of the human heart, namely its hardness and its tendency to follow lust and egoism. Although their 'ways of salvation' strongly differ from each other, both of them still constitute a *via media* between the extremes of sensuality and self-annihilation (cf. Guardini 1956:321, 323). Undoubtedly, both Buddhism and Christianity are above all soteriological systems, providing ways that lead the human person to liberation/salvation (:321, 323).

Although the traditions in question are similar in some regards, the differences between them are more fundamental. One of the most essential divergences lies in the character of liberation/salvation, to which the *mystic* practice of Buddhism and the *prophetic* piety of Christianity lead.⁵ While the Gospel constitutes the message about salvation open for anyone in the person and the name of Jesus Christ, the Dharma appears both independent of any particular narratives and accessible, at least potentially, to every human being; indeed, it is inherent in the human nature (the 'nature of the Buddha').⁶ The Buddha formulates a universal teaching about the path leading to the extinction of suffering, whereas Christ proclaims the 'irruption' of Gods eternity into human history and proclaims the beginning of the end of time, which materialises precisely *here and now* – in the event of his Incarnation and Passover (cf. Küng 1993:324).

What is more, the Dharma and the Gospel refer to totally different religious and philosophical backgrounds. The Buddha's teaching stems from the Hindu Law of Karma, i.e., an automatic law of retribution for all morally significant acts – good or bad (*karma*), whereas Jesus, ultimately fulfilling the Law of the First Covenant, claims and realises a new order in which enslavement to sin is opposed to the freedom of God's children. It can be assumed that all

⁴ However, unlike the Buddha, Jesus does not consider the world as something futile and empty. For him, it is Gods creation, good in itself, though continuously spoiled by human sin. Cf. Küng 1993:323.

⁵ This distinction has been developed by F. Heiler. Cf. Küng 1993:324.

⁶ The Buddha teaches, 'Good, Oh monks! I have led you up in this Teaching. It is here and now. Time does not matter. It is open to inspection, leads to the beyond and is to be experienced by the wise, by themselves' (MN 38, 27).

more detailed discrepancies between the two traditions come from their different ontological intuitions. In short, while in Buddhism the evaluation of the empirical world is negative, in Christianity it is positive. For Buddhism the world is radically (thus at its very root) *painful* and therefore self-liberation from suffering constitutes the obvious aim of human existence. For Christianity, on the other hand, the world, as the work of a good God, has been condemned to suffering and death by human sin but also definitively redeemed and reconciled with God by the revelatory-salvific work of Jesus.

Lastly, it is worth emphasising that within the frameworks of the Biblical traditions, the very fact of suffering does not occupy a position which would be comparable with that attributed to it in the Oriental thought in general and Buddhism in particular. In the Dharma, every specific issue, every single detail of teaching is directly connected with the Four Noble Truths concerning suffering, origination of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.⁷ In this sense, 'the very starting point of Buddhism, historically and conceptually, is the undesirability of suffering' (Williams 2002:60). In Christian theology, on the other hand, traditionally suffering as such constitutes only one of many particular matters, which – just as all others – is reflected on in the context of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. However, one should mention that the theme of suffering received a privileged position in the work of many contemporary theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer,⁸ Jürgen Moltmann and his famous work *The Crucified God*, and John Caputo with his 'weak theology', to mention only a few. According to thinkers representing this approach, inasmuch as Christianity concerns itself primarily with issues other than suffering, weakness, and powerlessness it betrays its true identity by *emptying the cross of Christ* (cf. 1 Cor 1:17) and, in addition, becomes detached from the reality of the world.

⁷ The Four Noble Truths teach that (1) life is suffering; (2) suffering arises from attachment to desires; (3) suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases; (4) freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path (which consists in right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right life, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration).

⁸ 'Human beings are called to suffer God's own suffering at the hands of the godless world.' *WEN*, 395 as quoted in Ralf K. Wüstenberg 1998:131.

I have chosen to focus on two notions that play the basic role in describing Buddhist and Christian visions of suffering, namely Pāli *dukkha* (Skt *duhkha*) and Latin *passio* (Greek *pascho*).

The first term, *dukkha*, usually translated as ‘suffering’, ‘pain’, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, or ‘sorrow’, unquestionably occupies a central position in the Buddhist doctrine. The second one, *passio*, is neither the only one, nor even the most important of the terms used by Christian discourse to express the truth of suffering.⁹ Yet the advantage of the Latin term *passio* is that it brings to mind the expression *passio Christi*, thus rightly suggesting that the Christian meaning of suffering should be reflected on, above all, in the context of the passion and death of Christ.

Experience of suffering: *Samsara/Temporality*

Acceptance of the radically painful vision of existence, which underlies the Four Noble Truths, is a *sine qua non* condition for entering the path of the Dharma. Suffering (*dukkha*) constitutes the most organic substance of the world (*lokha*).¹⁰ It is not a dogma but a truth which can be empirically verified by anyone. *Dukkha* has some relatively objective forms such as birth, ageing, illness, death, passing away, the Law of Karma, and the transmigration mechanism. It also contains innumerable subjective aspects such as negative feelings and emotions or existential anxiety due to change and impermanence.

Since any ‘becoming’ understood as coming into conditioned existence inevitably brings the necessity of passing away and destruction, Buddhism considers birth¹¹ together with ageing, illness and death, to be one of the basic forms of *dukkha* (cf. Pabongka 1994:74). Unlike these four manifestations of suffering, the Law of Karma and transmigration are not immediately perceptible to the

⁹ Another one worth mentioning is the Latin term *vanitas* denoting the human condition in a more abstract way, and all the terms related to evil (Greek *kakos*; Latin *malos*), sin (Greek *hamartia*; Latin *peccatum*) – especially, original sin (Latin *peccatum originale*) – and death (Greek *thanatos*; Latin *mors*).

¹⁰ In Buddhism, the world is not solely marked with pain but actually identical with suffering as such.

¹¹ The Pāli term *jati* means birth in the narrow sense (so in the Buddhist perspective actually rebirth), but it can also be comprehended in a much broader sense: as becoming, entering into existence, being always equivalent to *dukkha*.

human being. However, as the factors underpinning every particular existence, they enhance *dukkha* significantly by extending the consequences of all the volitional actions far beyond the current life. The Pāli term *samsara*, which means a series of rebirths, implies the idea of directionless wandering devoid of sense and goal which occurs against a cosmic background of inconceivably vast dimensions: the origin of today's sufferings is situated in far eons and, what is even worse, drifting through the ocean of *samsara* is potentially endless.

Not least, 'emptiness' (*shunyata*) should be mentioned as another dimension of a common experience of suffering. If all composite phenomena are of an impermanent nature, all of them are also a potential source of pain. Such a claim results from the Buddhist identification 'passing away = suffering'. Anyone who attaches himself to fleeting things, whose life is based on illusions such as 'this is me', 'this is mine', condemns himself to unsatisfactoriness which accompanies the process of losing these things and which includes all possible forms of suffering – ranging from direct, personal consequences of greed, hatred, and delusion, to subsequent existences in *samsara*.¹²

As for the Judeo-Christian perspective, the theme of suffering is strictly connected with the question concerning the origin of evil. It can be said that the person suffers whenever one turns against the Creator.¹³ Inscribed into the human condition, painfulness underlies lives of almost all characters in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the truth of the tragic character of human existence is illustrated, in a special way, in the history of righteous Job, commonly considered the 'icon' of suffering. Job's example shows that the only right attitude in the face of misery is persevering in faithfulness to 'God-Pursuer', even against common sense. The Book of Ecclesiastes contains, in turn, a pertinent reflection on human misery in general. In the famous

¹² Therefore, as *The Heart of Perfect Understanding* teaches, who discovers that all *dharma*s are marked with emptiness, that form is emptiness and emptiness is form, overcomes all pain. Cf. Harvey (ed.)1996:75.

¹³ This principle is visible already in the first couple's fall: the exile from paradise, described in Genesis, results in different forms of suffering such as pain of childbearing (cf. Gen 3:16), lack of harmony between people – in a special way between man and woman (cf. Gen 3:16; Isa 14:3; Ps 127:2), the toil linked to work and getting food (cf. Gen 17-18), shame, anxiety, the consciousness of guilt, fear of punishment (cf. Gen 3:8-10), and many others.

phrase, which in its Latin form has entered the canon of the European culture (*Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*), the Biblical sage announces the triumph of the absurd. 'All is vanity' means, firstly, that everything is temporal, impermanent, floating, and passing. Secondly, all worldly truths are essentially questionable and as such cannot provide satisfactory meaning for human life. Thirdly, all actions lead to the same result and therefore are futile: there is no difference between prosperity and misfortune, joy and sadness, etc. Although the First Testament reveals different forms of suffering,¹⁴ it does not provide any clear answer or antidote to this universal 'illness'. The Biblical examples rather show that faith in God does not save one from the acute sensation of misery and nonsense; it can, instead, change the way the person experiences, interiorises, and confronts the challenge of suffering.

In the New Testament, the fallen state of humanity is conveyed in numerous ways. The Gospels repeatedly give a long list of maladies and infirmities that beset people (cf. Mt 4:24; 8:16; 14:35; Jn 5:3). Demonic possessions, described by all evangelists, reveal the abject slavery into which the whole person can fall (cf. Mt 8:28-34 *passim*). Death, a recurrent motif of the New Testament, is also shown as the source of the suffering and sorrow of those who have lost someone close to them (cf. Mk 5:38; Lk 7:12-13; Jn 11:33-35). But it is moral misery in particular that is the focus of attention. Identifying himself with the teaching of the Israeli prophets, Jesus deprecates a too formal understanding of the commandments (faithfulness to the letter of the Law and violation of its spirit), thus shifting accent to the human 'heart' (cf. Mt 15:19). It means that the real – spiritual – suffering touches those who voluntarily refuse God's mercy, revealed in the life and death of the Messiah.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. the stories about Job, Jeremiah, or the Suffering Servant; Ecclesiastes' tractate on vanity and the Psalms.

¹⁵ The New Testament's text in which one can find the most sombre description of the moral decay of humanity, and the most subtle analysis of the condition of the sinner is, without doubt, the Epistle to the Romans (cf. respectively: Rom 1:18-3:20 and Rom 7:14-25).

Origins of suffering: *Avijā/Peccatum Originale*

Buddhism recognises that while some kinds of suffering are inevitable, others are self-created.¹⁶ And therefore it teaches that whether one experiences anguish or not depends, to a large extent, on how one *responds* to a given situation.¹⁷ In the Buddha's teaching there is no scope for the question about the metaphysical roots of suffering. It is exclusively the psychological-existential sources of pain that are of interest to the Buddhist reflection. The doctrine of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppāda*), which presents the chain of strictly connected factors of suffering, constitutes the explanation and extension of the Four Noble Truths. In order to comprehend the Buddhist view on the origins of suffering, one ought to take into account especially two factors, namely craving and ignorance, and also the so called 'three roots of evil' (greed, anger, and delusion) which may be conceived as their ethical extension.

Craving (*tanhā*) constitutes the direct source of suffering. Even though it is often equated with the lust of being as such, this desire is not abstract: it is expressed by attachment or clinging (*upādāna*) to concrete creatures and objects. The 'toxicity' of such a blind craving lies in the fact that it cannot be limited or definitely satisfied. *Tanhā*, understood as the lust of existence,¹⁸ constitutes the main driving force of the whole *samsara*.¹⁹ Being the main factor of what (or who) a specific being is during its present existence, the will to live warrants also the continuity between subsequent incarnations. Only extinction of

¹⁶ Among many unwholesome attitudes that cause human suffering, one may mention, for instance, the conviction that what happens to one is *not fair*, allowing ones regret to degenerate into excessive guilt, or resisting change. Cf. Dalai Lama 1998:127-141.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 123-125. Since it is in the mind that one converts one's pain into suffering, the latter may be lessened by modifying one's outlook and attitude towards the pain itself. It remains in accordance with modern science which claims that 'much of what we call pain, including the unpleasant emotional response, was learned rather than instinctive'. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

¹⁸ What is interesting is that the Buddha puts the lust of self-annihilation on the same level as the lust of life, especially if it is highly emotional. Just as a 'positive' desire which stems from the affirmation of existence, so also its opposition un-faillingly leads to rebirth.

¹⁹ From the functional and semantic point of view, it is almost identical with what Schopenhauer calls *Wille zum Leben* (the 'will to live').

craving can end the wandering across *samsara*: anyone who does not desire, does not suffer any more and therefore ceases to exist.²⁰

Ignorance (*avijjā*) already in Brahmanism was considered to be the first factor in the long chain of causes and effects through which the painful fate of the world is enacted; it also opens the Buddhist chain of dependent origination. Ignorance, underlying emotional and cognitive states of human mind, binds up people within the incessant cycle of life and death in *samsara*; therefore it is seen as the ultimate origin of suffering and, in the last analysis, of existence.²¹ Although some later Buddhist thinkers identify the origin of all things with ignorance itself, considering it not only as a psychological factor, but also a cosmic power responsible for setting the relentless karmic mechanism in motion, according to the oldest Pāli texts, *avijjā* belongs completely to the earthly, perceptible reality and is manifested as the ignorance of essentials.²² If human beings doom themselves to suffering, yielding to the will to live and moral vices implied by egocentrism, they do so only because of confusion of their mind: they have not yet discovered the real nature of the world, revealed by the Dharma, i.e., its impermanence, painfulness, and egolessness. That is why people infatuated with the illusion of their own identity unceasingly accumulate *dukkha*, for themselves and for others.

Although the ultimate cause of suffering is to be found in ignorance and its direct source in craving, it is worth emphasising that the first response the Buddha seeks to evoke in a disciple who turns to him for guidance is an ethical one. It consists in a firm resolution to turn away from unwholesome ways of living and to embrace wholesome alternatives instead (Bhodhi 2005:19-20). The three roots of evil

²⁰ Edward Stevens puts the same truth in the positive terms, 'The way to be who I am is to stop clinging to the desire to be who I am not' (1973:105).

²¹ The statement that the person exists because of ignorance can be understood on an ethical-psychological level (being free and conscious, people indulge greed, hatred, and delusion, and therefore they fall into the wheel of existence, condemning themselves to suffering) or else on a karmic level (*I exist because a being once occupying my place did not possess a specific knowledge and, as a consequence, had been caught into the wheel of transmigration, becoming the cause of my present existence.*)

²² Especially, the lack of knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, the Law of Karma, and the Three Marks of Existence (impermanence, suffering, and egolessness).

(*akusalamūla*),²³ namely greed (Pāli *lobha*), hatred (Pāli *dosa*), and delusion (Pāli *moha*),²⁴ encompass in fact all volitional actions: deeds, words, and thoughts motivated by any degree of greed, hate, and delusion that bind living beings to *samsara*.²⁵ By persevering in greed, hatred, and delusion the person condemns herself to slavery,²⁶ accumulates bad karma, and thus plunges in the abyss of suffering.²⁷

In the oldest texts of the First Testament, suffering is most often comprehended in a cause-effect relation with sin and in the context of a collective responsibility (descendants suffer for their ancestors' guilt). As the entire history of Israel is marked with unfaithfulness to covenants, sin or immorality is not a temporary *peripeteia*, but a constant, inherent situation which becomes consolidated from one generation to another. Thus also suffering, as an inevitable consequence of sin, is permanently inscribed into the experience of Israel. The New Testament does not contribute any important *novum* to the conception of the sources of human misery;²⁸ it rather stresses the mysterious character of suffering as correlated with the glory of God to be revealed in Christ. What will be of a central importance in later controversies concerning the primordial fall as a source of the universal corruption of human nature is Paul's theology which conceives all the forms of earthly suffering in close connection with Adam's sin.²⁹

²³ The term is also translated as the 'poisons of the mind'. Cf. Dalai Lama 1998:, *The Art of Happiness*, p. 117.

²⁴ More generally known in the Sanskrit version as *maya*.

²⁵ The 'three roots' should be conceived not as the sources of evil in a metaphysical sense, since for evil thus understood there is no place in Buddhism at all, but rather as the roots of all that is unwholesome, unprofitable, and painful.

²⁶ 'He who has not abandoned greed, hatred, and delusion, is called Māra's prisoner, captured in Māras snares, subject to the Evil One's will and pleasure' (ItiV 68). Cf. Thera 1977:34.

²⁷ This doctrine reveals not only the ethical but also the social aspects of suffering. From the most ancient times, the world has always been an arena of violent confrontations and conflict; while the names, places, and instruments of destruction may change, the forces behind them, the motivations, remain fairly constant and they can be generally identified with the three roots of evil. Cf. Bodhi 1977:21-24.

²⁸ At this stage, the origins of suffering, in themselves, do not yet constitute a subject of interest (in a doctrinal or metaphysical sense).

²⁹ It is Paul who, as the first one, develops an antithetic history of sin and salvation, concentrated on the figure of the two Adams, and emphasises the entering of sin into the world (cf. Rom 5:12-14).

St. Irenaeus of Lyons formulated the remarkable conception of creation as the history of a permanent progress. According to him, human beings, once created in God's image, are still being created in their resemblance to God. Therefore the fall of the first parents should be seen as a child's fault, as a failure that indeed 'has multiplied the perils and complicated the route of the journey in which God is seeking to lead Mankind',³⁰ but which also – as John Hick puts it – made the world 'a place of soul-making' (1978:253-261, as quoted by Pojman 1993:178). In Western theology, however, this optimistic vision of history has been dominated by the one coming from St. Augustine and based on the theological conception of original sin.³¹ The latter is to be understood as the abandonment of God resulting from pride, that is to say, from seeking one's aim not in God but in creation. The paradoxical situation of original sin consists in the fact that humanity is, at the same time, a 'victim' and an 'accomplice' in evil which is everybody's share. The human condition transmitted by Adam-the-sinner is described by Augustine as a 'depraved nature (...) changed for the worse' (*natura viciata [...] in deterius commutata*).³² In this context, original sin is also considered to be the ultimate source of suffering.

In one of his catecheses about original sin John Paul II distinguishes two dimensions of evil: a physical one, which belongs to the very nature of created beings, and a moral one, which is definitely and absolutely opposite to God's will, though allowed by the Creator in order to make human freedom 'real'.³³ Generally speaking, the same distinction could be applied to suffering: the human person

³⁰ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed., San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978, pp. 253-261, as quoted in Louis P. Pojman, *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1993, p. 178.

³¹ Latin theology attributes to the notion of original sin a double meaning: first, a state of humanity in general, i.e., the situation of every human being marked by a need for salvation (*peccatum originale originatum*); and second, the 'sin of the beginning' (*peccatum originale originans*), i.e., Adam's sin described in the Book of Genesis.

³² This standpoint is a recurrent motif of the anti-Pelagian writings; e.g., *On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin*, II, 35, 40; *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, II, 34, 57. However, one ought to remember that within the frames of the entire body of the Christian faith, the dogma of original sin plays the role of the 'assumption of salvation', and therefore it is far from establishing any arbitrary damnation of humankind.

³³ Cf. John Paul II, *The General Audience of 4 June 1986*.

experiences both the misery that is a result of sin (original as well as actual) as well as those dimensions of suffering which seem to be eternal and inevitably present in the very dialectics of existence.

The meaning of suffering: *Toward Nirvana/toward the Kingdom of God*

The vision of suffering worked out over the centuries by each of the traditions cannot be examined in isolation from the integrally comprehended teachings of the Buddha and Christ (cf. Merton 1995:41). It is necessary to look at this fundamental truth in the way that both Buddhism and Christianity do, i.e., in a soteriological key. Suffering appears in this context as an inherent yet not ultimate aspect of the human condition; it has to be overcome (or 'equipped with a sense') by stepping on the path of liberation / salvation.

In Buddhism, the most obvious and inescapable facts of human existence – ageing, illness, and death – are conceived of as the 'divine messengers' (*devadūtā*) whose task is to provoke the person into changing her mental and ethical attitude.³⁴ In other words, the varied forms of suffering play the role of revealing the truth about human situation and thus they allow one to realise that it is totally senseless to continue wandering across *samsara*. The only way to overcome illusions and be awakened to the factual human condition is seeing suffering, seeing the origin of suffering, seeing the cessation of suffering, and knowing the path of practice that leads to the cessation of suffering (cf. Chah 2005:58). Therefore, in the Buddha's pedagogy awareness of suffering turns out to be the only path to Enlightenment. Buddhist pedagogy uses suffering not only in a negative sense (as an admonition for people indulging the will to live) but also in a positive one. Beyond any doubt, the freedom from pain which is to a certain extent the share of monks belonging to *Sangha* (and which is entirely experienced by *arhats*, the perfect ones who appear occasionally), encourages the worldly persons to change their attitude and renounce delusive mundane pleasures.

³⁴ Cf. AN 3, 35; I 138-40, *Devadūtasutta*. Cf. also ThG 73.

Happy indeed we live, friendly amidst the hostile.
Amidst hostile men we dwell free from hatred.
Happy indeed we live, friendly amidst the afflicted [by
craving].
Amidst afflicted men we dwell free from affliction.
Happy indeed we live, free from avarice amidst the
avaricious.
Amidst the avaricious men we dwell free from avarice.
 (...)

Good is it to see the Noble Ones; to live with them is ever
*blissful.*³⁵

The Old Testament reveals many different senses of suffering. Sometimes it serves 'immediate' purposes (e.g., avoiding greater evil (cf. Wis 4:17-20), is expiation for sins (cf. Isa 40:2), purification (cf. Jer 9:6; Ps 66:10; Nah 1:3), educational function, *paideia tou Theou*,³⁶ etc.); at other times its meaning is hidden in less graspable areas of God's plan of salvation. The novelty of the New Testament vision of suffering consists in the fact that it is conceived, first and foremost, as the 'way' of the human person's reconciliation with God by Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. Suffering is thus situated in the context of salvation, in which its meaning and aim become, to an extent, intelligible.

What is more, in the light of Christian doctrine, each person, in her own experience, may also become 'a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ in order to *complete* by his [or her] suffering what is lacking in Christ's afflictions'.³⁷ The context in which human sufferings *complete* those of Christ is indicated by the mystery of the Church. 'Only within this radius and dimension of the Church as the

³⁵ DhP 197-199.206. Juxtaposing the above fragment with 2 Cor 4:8-11 may lead to interesting observations.

³⁶ Cf. Deut 8:2 *passim*; Lam 3,32 *passim*; Prov 12:1; 13:1; 2 Macc 6:12. In the New Testament God's educational logic is referred to, *inter alia*, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (cf. Heb 12:5-6 *passim*). In the Biblical pedagogy, suffering often appears as the proof of God's paternal love; through Christ's cross God teaches his children wisdom and calls them to conversion.

³⁷ John Paul II 1984:19; 24. The Pope continues by saying, 'It (...) means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering' (:24).

Body of Christ, which continually develops in space and time, can one think and speak of *what is lacking* in the sufferings of Christ' (ibid). Raised to the level of Redemption (cf. ibid, 19), suffering, borne in a union with the redeeming sacrifice which Christ offered in obedience to the Father's will, may therefore become a source of grace not only for an individual but also for the entire people of God.

In modern reflection on theodicy, the question *unde malum?* ['Where does evil come from?'] tends to be replaced by the question *cur malum?* ['What purpose does evil serve?']. Tackling the changing vicissitudes of life and all forms of physical evil as well as facing the sufferings of neighbours is to be conceived as an important factor of spiritual progress. As John Paul II points out, 'Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself (...) Suffering, in fact, is always a trial – at times a very hard one – to which humanity is subjected' (ibid, 2;23).

On the one hand, a Buddhist sage, not attached to favourable conditions and not repelled by unfavourable ones, seeks first and foremost liberation from suffering. Even when afflicted with bodily pain, he endures such a feeling patiently, with equanimity, since for him *dukkha* is nothing but an external object of contemplation (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005:133). D. T. Suzuki puts it pointedly by saying that in Buddhism 'there is no ego to be crucified' (Suzuki 2002:113). On the other hand, looking at the writings of great Christian saints and mystics, one may reach a conclusion that an intense experience of suffering is a *sine qua non* condition of being a Christian. The Cross seems to be the only way of uniting with Christ, which is so impressively reflected in the cry usually inscribed as a motto upon images of St. Teresa of Avila, 'Lord, either let me suffer or let me die!'

Suffering: A problem or a mystery?

The above outline makes it clear that Buddhism and Christianity have different ways of understanding the meaning and purpose of human misery. Although each of them offers some 'strategies' for responding to suffering based on its underlying beliefs, there is a fundamental discrepancy concerning their respective approaches. In a nutshell, it

can be described in terms of a difference between *problem* and *mystery*.

What associated the mendicant monks assembled around Gautama Buddha and became the main distinguishing feature of their earnest spiritual world was the overwhelming and clear consciousness that every earthly being is full of suffering. What followed was the view that the human being can liberate herself from pain only through resignation from attachments and an awakening to the true nature of reality. When it comes to the Buddha's teaching, it is much more evident than in the case of all revealed religions that his doctrine appeared as a response to the tensions at the heart of the human condition.

In Buddhism, suffering constitutes an 'original fact'. How ought we to understand this statement? Firstly, in an empirical sense: the experience of *dukkha*, being absolutely universal and inevitable, is shared by every living creature. Secondly, as concerning the inner logics of the Dharma: the truth about common painfulness is not only the starting point of the Buddha's teaching, but it plays indeed the role of a necessary assumption without which the entire doctrinal system lacks the reason for existence. However, this statement should not be understood in a metaphysical sense. Suffering is neither the result of some cosmic disaster (a sort of stigma), nor the consequence of some particular historical event. To find its sources one has to examine ones 'actual' – mental and ethical – attitude whose effects, according to the Buddhist teaching, spread over numerous, karmically conditioned existences.

Even though the inconvenience of being appears in Buddhism as an original fact, it should by no means be considered an 'insurmountable' aspect of the human predicament. What makes people suffer and sets the wheel of *samsara* in motion is ultimately ignorance which generates the will to live and all sorts of unwholesome states of the person's mind. Anyone who uproots ignorance liberates himself or herself from suffering and, *eo ipso*, from existence. Thus *dukkha* is nothing more than an obstacle that has to be overcome, a problem to be solved.

From the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition, temporality can be compared to a prenatal period: being on earth, the person ripens like a 'fruit of life': she learns what is good, develops her personality, and somehow exceeds herself. Among many components

of this process, the experience of suffering occupies a crucial position as the instrument of justice and pedagogy, as a cure, and so forth.³⁸

Even though relatively early (namely in later texts of the Old Testament), the conception of suffering as a direct punishment for sins (committed by the person herself or by her ancestors) was overcome and replaced by the understanding of suffering as a mystery which largely evades any schematic explanations and calculations, the relation between the truth about sin and the truth about suffering remains the hallmark of the Christian faith. Sin appears thus as an existential 'situation', a common 'fact' which concerns each and every one, as a trans-historical reality penetrating the whole history, from its beginning to its end. Ranging from the Pauline theology, through the Fathers' (particularly Augustine's) teaching, to modern times, what plays a central part in the reflection on suffering is Adam's sin conceived as a prototype, the 'matrix' of any human sin. It is the symbolic presentation of the original event and at the same time the figure of human tragedy in general. However, the fundamental message of Christianity is that in Jesus Christ the human person is saved, i.e., *de facto* already liberated from any evil. In this very context, Adam's fall, as well as every human sin, turns out to be secondary in comparison with God's grace that comes from the cross, and therefore – as far as it is admitted and remorsefully confessed – can be called a *felix culpa*, a 'blessed fault', which is to say, something necessary for recognising the depth of the *even more abundant* grace of God's mercy.

Christian theology discerns – more or less distinctly – also those aspects and dimensions of suffering which are not the result of original sin. Since everything has been created in Christ, and it is in him that the whole of history is recapitulated, suffering must have, from the very beginning, some meaning for the life plan of every single person and for humanity as such. Jesus from the Old Testament, the son of Sirach, repeats, 'A person cannot say, "This is worse than that", for in time [*kairos*] they shall all be well approved' (Sir 39:21.34). Believing that evil is unable to overstep the order established by God, to become absolutely independent of good,

³⁸ From the Judeo-Christian perspective, suffering can serve many purposes: it can test and potentially strengthen our faith, it can bring us closer to God in a very fundamental and intimate way, or it can loosen the bonds to the material world and make us cleave to God as our refuge. Dalai Lama 1998:168-169.

Christian theology opens onto a more profound interpretation of all the painful aspects of human experience (as well as of the entire natural order) which are difficult to reconcile with the revealed goodness of creation. Implying a trust in God's plan Judeo-Christian faith allows believers to tolerate various forms of suffering more easily, since they trust that every misery they experience will be outweighed by the ultimate good it produces. As the Talmud puts it, 'Everything God does, He does for the best' (cf. *ibid*, 168).

The deepest, salvific sense of suffering becomes visible only in the light of the Passover of Jesus. For the baptised who together with Christ are buried into death in order to rise with him from the dead by the glory of the Father and walk in the newness of life (cf. Rom 6:4), suffering is not a radical evil, but rather a *difficult good*. That is why, as modern Christian teaching underscores, the truth about suffering cannot be examined in isolation from its natural theological environment, nor apart from its personalistic background. The salvific sense of the mystery of suffering appears only at the intersection of these coordinates.

Throughout the ages, religions and philosophical systems have formulated many different explanations of the human predicament. Buddhism looks at human existential situation mainly through the prism of a concrete experience marked by a common painfulness: a burden from which a human being should simply liberate herself. Christian faith interprets it in reference to God's plan regarding humanity: the plan spoiled (and being spoiled on and on) by human sin but ultimately accomplished by Jesus-the-Son. Even though these two traditions start from different points (the first one from a certain empirical statement and the second one from the truth of the Revelation), they meet each other at least in two important aspects. First, they agree that suffering is 'part of our very ego-identity and empirical existence' (Merton 2005:41). Second, they profess a readiness and wish to carry human person through the abyss of suffering to the other shore (of nirvana/of eternal life), in which they exhibit their common, explicitly soteriological character.

For Buddhism *dukkha* is simply a 'state' of all living beings; suffering – in all its aspects – is identified with existence. Therefore, the only positive meaning of *dukkha* a Buddhist can be interested in is its didactic meaning (i.e., the experience of suffering as a motivation to follow the Dharma). As for the Christian *passio*, one has to

distinguish between what is in a certain sense inscribed into God's vision of the creation, and what – being the result of sin – is actually a curse that humanity has brought (and is still bringing) on itself by misusing its freedom. In view of the mentioned distinction, eliminating or overcoming every form of pain certainly cannot be considered the superior aim of a religious practice. A Christian ought rather to accept the mysterious character of suffering and be able to assume an adequate attitude depending on circumstances: the particular manifestations of suffering should be surrounded by compassion and possibly soothed, while trying to regard those which evade human forces as 'good in time', and to bear them in unity with Christ dead and risen.

A French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, one of the leading Christian existentialists of the last century, made a significant distinction between problem and mystery. Put simply, unlike problem which can be explained exhaustively and solved once for all, mystery does not allow easy solutions. As Marcel explains, 'mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity' (Marcel 1049:117). In light of Marcel's distinction, it can be assumed that for Buddhism suffering (*dukkha*) constitutes an original fact and the universal *problem* of the whole humankind which needs to be understood (overcoming illusion and extinguishing desire) and then practically solved (self-liberation). Whereas for Christianity suffering is most of all a *mystery*, at least to some extent rooted in *mysterium iniquitatis* – a mystery whose salvific sense is to be found by a personal participation in *passio Christi*.

Conclusion

After examining diverse meanings of suffering, I would like to conclude this analysis by asking in what sense Buddhist and Christian approaches to the human predicament, and in particular to suffering as the constitutive component of our earthly condition, can challenge and enrich each other. In a broad sense, the fruitfulness of Buddhist-Christian dialogue results chiefly from the distance which divides (in every sense) Banaras from Jerusalem. Even a superficial knowledge of both traditions allows one to presume that in an all-encompassing range of

possible answers to the question of suffering (as well as to many other existential questions) Buddhism and Christianity represent two opposite poles. This internal discrepancy between the two traditions may be considered as one of the factors of an unusual growth of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue which is practised on many levels (from broadly understood culture to sophisticated theological analyses) since the end of 19th century.

As Thomas Merton suggests, probably the most striking dissimilarity between Christianity and Buddhism consists in the fact that, although both 'set out in search of the true self', the Buddhist goes no farther than the inner self, whereas the Christian 'presses on through his personal centre to God' (Bailey 1975:203). For instance, Christian mysticism of unity (*unio mystica*) is basically the mysticism of love (cf. Mommaers 1995:197). It is this personal and relational context, the context of the intimate and often passionate love, a kind of 'spiritual eros', in which Christian mystics experience and equip with meaning their suffering (Mommaers 1997:196-197). On the other hand, Buddhism, as a religion of Wisdom, never came to assign a congruent place to love on the mystical path, even at the time when mercy and compassion were in practice accepted as the final outcome of the Buddhist path. It is so because the final state to be achieved by the Buddhist disciple, *upekkha* ('indifference' or, better, 'equanimity'), means to get rid of both love and hatred, 'to be interested neither in happiness nor in suffering, neither in pleasure nor in sorrow'.³⁹ Thus, as Merton concludes, while in Christianity the confrontation with God seen as the Absolute Being and the Absolute Love is *theological* and *affective*, through *word* and *love*, in Buddhism it is *metaphysical* and *intellectual*, through *insight* and *emptiness* (cf. Merton 1968:62).

In this context, engagement in dialogue with the Christian doctrine of suffering perceived through the prism of God's infinite love can protect Buddhism from dehumanisation. On the other hand, Buddhist mystical tradition has much to say about the 'technical' and intellectual side of meditation as a means of realising the impermanent

³⁹ Nagao 1980:245. And yet in Buddhist practice, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism with its bodhisattva path, mercy clearly rose to the rank of primary virtue, becoming *de facto* the basic dynamic element of the Buddhist path. Cf. Mommaers 1995:197-199. The mostly routinely repeated 'solution' to this paradox is a reduction of mercy to wisdom by a definition of mercy as 'the insight into the non-duality of self and other'. Ibid., p. 200.

and contingent nature of suffering, which Christianity often tends to compromise. Furthermore, due to its doctrinal focus on the undesirability of *dukkha*, Buddhism may remind Christianity that what lies in the very heart of each genuine religious practice is the transformation of one's mind and heart which logically excludes one's personal suffering from being a goal in itself. Christianity, in turn, need to continuously emphasise the positive role of the experience of suffering which – seen in a wider context as part of a greater spiritual path and as a component in the process of purifying the mind – ultimately allows one to achieve a state in which there is no more suffering (cf. Dalai Lama 1998:118).

Finally, important contribution Buddhists and Christians can make to the humanity today consists simply in honest and straightforward discourse about suffering. The contemporary world, the Western world in particular, seems to be more and more paralysed by the most common facts of human existence such as disease, old age, and death. In this regard the Dalai Lama rightly points out that 'as long as we view suffering as an unnatural state, an abnormal condition that we fear, avoid, and reject, we will never uproot the causes of suffering and begin to live a happier life' (1998:122). From the Christian point of view, it would be more accurate to say that without fully accepting the human predicament, together with suffering and death as its inescapable aspects, people are not able to truly acknowledge the goodness of creation and engage themselves in the mission of co-creating with God to which they have been called.

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Pragmatism and the epistemic virtues

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General perspective

A few years back, I wrote an article entitled: 'Pragmatism and Faith' (Van Heerden 2008:1-22). Here I attempted to correct the mistaken notion that the founders of American Pragmatism (in particular, Charles Sanders Peirce and William James) were antagonistic to issues of faith. Perhaps I could unmask another misconception. For many, post-modern thought is seen as a post-World War II phenomenon. However, even at the turn of the 20th century, M. Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) attracted a great deal of attention when he first proposed that, in the practice of science, the choice between rival hypotheses was merely a matter of choosing between rival **conventions**, which could both appeal to the same set of facts.² One of his contemporaries, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), however, was firmly convinced that the practice of any science entailed more than just **saving the appearances**, as science by its nature: 'seeks to discover whatever there may be that is true' (CP 7.186).

In this series of articles we pay tribute to the thought and writings of Prof Rodney Moss – a theologian of note, who has endeared himself to many for his sincere quest for the truth. I would hold it as self-evident that anyone who, like Prof Moss, took their particular science seriously – whether theology or nuclear physics – should be imbued with the same concern for arriving at the **truth** of the matter. This contention does not, however, remove the very real challenge of post-modernism. Everyone who has worked in teaching

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² Peirce makes frequent reference to M. Henri Poincaré's contention (CP 5.494; 5.597; 6.370), and sums it up by saying: 'Poincaré, on the other hand, seems to think that all theories are wrong, and that it is only a question of how wrong they are' (CP 5.169). He also was asked to translate, in 1905, Poincaré's paper: *Relations entre la Physique Expérimentale et la Physique Mathématique* (Brent, 1993: 271).

and research knows that rival hypotheses always exist and one needs more than just experience to guide one in deciding which is the better contender (i.e., closer to the truth). The crucial question, then, is whether there are any standards which can guide one in this judgment? In this essay, I would like to show how Charles Sanders Peirce saw these objective criteria – in the hope that these might resonate with those who practise science in its many incarnations and assist some in standing firm against the tide of post-modernisms charge of the ‘arbitrariness’ of all theories.

Charles Sanders Peirce – pragmatic scientist

Peirce was both a practising scientist (in such diverse disciplines as geodetic research, astronomy, chemistry and psychology), as well as a logician and philosopher who reflected on the epistemological and practical implications of scientific history and practice.³ For Peirce, abduction (retroduction, theory, hypothesis-construction), deduction and induction were the three essential tools in the practice of any science. By 1903, in the sixth lecture at Harvard, Peirce (CP 5.171-2) had become convinced that:

Abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis ...

Many authors have correctly noted that Peirce saw two crucial phases in this abductive moment of inquiry, what W. M. Brown (1983: 404) characterises as the: ‘initial presentation of a candidate for consid-

³ Peirce was well aware, for example, that Ernst Mach proposed to exclude from scientific explanations anything that could not be *observed*. Peirce made some important contributions to the 1893 English translation of his: *Science of Mechanics*, and in October of 1893, Peirce reviewed the book in *The Nation* (HP I: 545-54). However, as Stewart (1991: 506-7) correctly notes: ‘To Peirce, Mach’s theory mistakenly reduced the value of science to its utility for saving experiences ... The scientist also quite legitimately seeks an explanation for why the regularity itself holds, normally in terms of an underlying (and frequently unobservable) casual structure’.

ration', and then the: 'appraisal of the hypothesis-candidate as worthy of consideration'. The first phase is mostly a type of abandonment or free play of thought in the imagination (CP 5.581; CP 6.312) and is an instinctive ability that is at the heart of the creative construction of new theories. In 1901, Peirce gave his most orderly list of the principles that characterise the second phase, those that: 'guide us in abduction, or the process of choosing a hypothesis' (CP 7.219). These are the: 'elements of merit of a hypothesis' (CP 7.223), by which the **appraisal** of any hypothesis-candidate is done. The elements of merit, or what we could call the epistemic virtues, are given here by Peirce as respectively:

Abductive/Deductive merits (explaining all the facts):

- a) as natural concomitants
- b) as deductions

Inductive merits (experiential character of the hypothesis):

Economic merits:

- a) cheapness
- b) intrinsic value
- c) relation of hypotheses

Abductive/Deductive merits: Explaining all the facts

Natural concomitants: Genuine doubt and simplicity

The initial and most basic epistemic virtue for any explanation, hypothesis or theory is that it must **explain all the facts at hand**. If it is to explain all the facts, the first natural concomitant that it has to account for is the **element of surprise** which indicates the disruption of a belief pattern and initiates the scientific inquiry. As Peirce (CP 7.188-90; HP II: 723-4) notes:

Each branch of science begins with a new phenomenon which violates a sort of negative subconscious expectation ... The emotion is merely the instinctive indication of the logical situation. It is evolution (πληγσις) that has provided us with the emotion. The situation is what we have to study.

For Peirce, any artificially-created doubt, cannot serve as a natural concomitant requiring explanation. **Genuine doubt**, as opposed to the Cartesian doubt for doubt's sake (CP 4.71; 5.214-5; 5.265; 5.391; 6.498; 7.462): 'always has an external origin, usually from surprise' (CP 5.443). The scientific quest for truth is then a natural response to surprises or pressures coming from both the physical and social environments, as Luciano Floridi (1994: 563) coaches:

Such a conatus is the conservative force that activates the search for knowledge. It makes a human mind react against the pressure resulting from the contrasting presence of physical and historical realities. Its goal is the homeostatic restoration ... by means of the production of knowledge.

From, then, a state of genuine doubt, one proceeds to resolve that doubt by the formation of a hypothesis. Karl Popper gave this discovery stage one of its most articulate formulations in our time and he is adamant that in the initial stage: 'the act of conceiving or inventing a theory, seems to be neither to call for logical analysis nor to be susceptible of it' (1959: 31). However, for Peirce, the formation of theories has both an element of logic and of creative discovery (CP 4.476). The logical component begins with association, suggestion and attention which instigates the free play of thought in the imagination from which the creative formation of new ideas and hypotheses arise. The free play of thought in the imagination, as we have mentioned, is instinctive and so there is an element of surrender and irreducible creativity in this. 'But when, in the uncontrolled play of that part of thought, an interesting combination occurs' (7.555); which has: 'a close analogy to my difficulty' (CP 7.498), it arises into consciousness and presents itself as a new hypothesis or conception: 'in application to those phenomena' (CP 5.223) under consideration.

To give the lie to his own consciousness of divining the reasons of phenomena would be as silly in a man as it would be in a fledgling bird to refuse to trust to its wings and leave the nest, because the poor little thing had read Babinet, and judged aerostation to be impossible on hydrodynamical grounds (CP 6.476).

In the fertile imagination of the scientist, various different hypotheses are likely to arise. What should be one's guide here is again instinct: the **simplest** hypothesis should be chosen. For years, Peirce was to conceive simplicity in terms of Ockham's razor: i.e., the absence of *ad hoc* features. However, in his more mature thought, he realised that the absence of *ad hoc* features is shown in what he calls the naturalness of a good theory which is an economic merit that we deal with in the last section. Rather, Peirce now conceived simplicity in terms of Galileo's *il lume natural* - which is an intuitive ability that gives us the: 'impulse to prefer one hypothesis to another' (CP 6.476), or the ability to discern the: 'immediate differences in the fecundity' of ideas (CP 7.268). Simplicity is a term that can be misleading. The complexity of any theory will be dependent on the number and nature of new facts that need to be explained (one might say also the extent to which a belief system has been disrupted). The merit of simplicity is being able to intuit the **appropriate degree of complexity** for any theory.

An Insight, I call it, because it is to be referred to the same general class of operations to which Perceptive Judgments belong. This Faculty is at the same time of the general nature of Instinct, resembling the instincts of the animals in its so far surpassing the general powers of our reason and for its directing us as if we were in possession of facts that are entirely beyond the reach of our senses (CP 5.173).⁴

Deductions: Theorematic and corollarial

At precisely what moment we are in possession of that intuitive sense of the simplest hypothesis, Peirce never says. But, what is clear from his writings, is that there are *ad bellum* (genuine doubt, followed by association, suggestion and attention), in *bello* (free play of thought in the imagination) and *post bellum* (deduction and induction) phases to abduction. It is most likely that the intuitive sense of the simplest

⁴ See also CP 1.80; 1.630; 2.753; 5.47; 5.589; 5.173; 6.10; 6.477; 6.567. Murray Murphey suggests that perceptual judgments should also be seen as being abductive (1993: 114; 134; 369-72).

hypothesis arises during the last of these, which Peirce describes as the investigator proceeding to:

... study the phenomenon in order to find other features that the hypothesis will explain (i.e., in the English sense of explain, to deduce the facts from the hypothesis as its necessary or probable consequences). That will be to continue reasoning retroductively, i.e., by hypothesis (CP 8.231).

This process is a mixture of deduction and creative abduction, by which the hypothesis is rendered more distinct and clear. Pierce sometimes says that the attentive moments have elements of precision, dissociation and distinction (CP 1.353; 3.559; 3.642; 4.157; 5.449; 6.105; 7.544), other times he speaks of: 'association by contrast' (CP 7.392; 7.499). Peirce sees that this is the weakest link in the chain of inquiry; and: 'of all logical habits, that of confiding in deductions from vague conceptions is quite the most vicious', since it is: 'just such reasonings that to the intellectual rabble are the most convincing' (CP 4.627). Perhaps it is this fact that underscores the post-modern critique of the sciences: that all too often dilettantes come up with theories that are constructed not from genuine doubt, nor on vigorous and painstaking deductions. Nonetheless, it is a vital step as it clears the way to both qualitative and quantitative inductions and also the: 'proof of other propositions' (CP 4.6.3). These deductions can be both what Peirce calls **theorematic** and **corrollarial**. In the **theorematic** deductions a diagram is constructed of the suggested hypothesis and then the mind: 'performs an ingenious experiment upon the diagram, and by the observation of the diagram, so modified, ascertains the truth' of the hypothesis as well as a clearer conception of it (CP 2.267; MS 320). With **corrollarial** deduction the meaning of the hypothesis is clarified by: 'substituting for each term its definition' (CP 7.204; HP II: 734), so that: 'the very words serve as schemata' (CP 4.233). It is Peirce's description of corrollarial deductions that seems to echo most the stage of *anamnesis* in Plato's epistemology or the **recognition of essences** in that of Aristotle. In 1893, at the end of his Lowell Institute Lectures, Peirce put these elements into a Darwinian mode, i.e., human thought grows: 'by the violent breaking up of habits, and

by the action of innumerable fortuitous variations of ideas combined with differences in the fecundity of different variations' (CP 7.268).

Inductive merits: Experiential character of the hypothesis

Peirce realised that the boundaries between induction, deduction and abduction were vague and that they often overlapped.⁵ However, he is equally clear that, in the next stage of the appraisal of a hypothesis, its ability to be **verified inductively** is essential.⁶ Since the time of David Hume, many have considered the problem of induction as one of the central problems facing any philosophy of science.⁷ The kernel of the problem is what Peirce calls the: 'question of the grounds of the validity' (CP8.8) of the process itself. More basically: how do we know when the generalisations that proceed from our definitions and are implicit in the theory have been verified? For Peirce, there are the two moments in the inductive process: firstly, what Peirce calls the: 'pre-designation of the character' (CP 6.42) of **what would verify** a particular hypothesis; and, secondly, the process of experimentation, observation and study alongside the **continuing estimation** of whether these have verified or falsified a certain assertion. These moments are obviously somewhat different for the different disciplines and are also affected by the nature of the research methodology at hand. In sociology, for example, the predesignation and assessment of one's findings will be somewhat different for each of its three research methods (experimental design - where one has an experimental and control group of subjects, questionnaire survey or participant observation). Sciences such as theology or philosophy, as Prof Rodney Moss was acutely aware, tend to be more deductive in nature. So, here the inductive verification might have to be done by a literature review that assesses individual or communal behavioural patterns (both past and present) and how these are or were affected by a particular ideology or way of thinking. Theories in biblical theology

⁵ See also CP 1.80; 1.630; 2.753; 5.47; 5.589; 5.173; 6.10; 6.477; 6.567. Murray Murphey suggests that perceptual judgments should also be seen as being abductive (1993: 114; 134; 369-72).

⁶ CP 2.636; 5.579; 6.595.

⁷ See, for example: Koehn, 1973: 157.

must be backed up with solid historical reviews and credible archeology.

Len O'Neill (1993:211) notes that there is always a contrast between the evidence known prior to forming the hypothesis and the evidence that is discovered in the process of verification. This is why Ernan McMullin (1995:27) calls verifiability the diachronic virtue of **fertility**, which he describes as: 'the ability of a good theory to suggest, by way of plausible metaphorical extension, how the theory itself might be developed' in the light of the new evidence. Fertility shows itself when a theory is able to grow organically with the discovery of new evidence and not just 'survive' through the addition of countless *ad hoc* features. Many scientists have witnessed the inverse of fertility - encapsulated in a famous dictum: *Parvus error in principio, magnus est in fine* (a small error in the beginning, is a large one in the end). Here, as the process of inductive verification proceeds, the inadequacy of the theory becomes all the more glaring. For fertility to exist in the proposed theory, Peirce noted that the scientist needed what Pascal (1966:210) calls: 'the adaption of his sight'. Peirce describes this adaption of sight as the: 'observation of the right facts by minds furnished with appropriate ideas' (CP 6.604). These appropriate ideas, for Peirce, are the countless associations built up through the years of training (CP 7.218; HP II: 752-3). Hilary Putnam (1987:73) once remarked:

When Carnap and I worked together on inductive logic in 1953-54, the problem that he regarded as the most intractable in the whole area of inductive logic was the problem of giving proper weight to analogy.

For Peirce, analogy is our instinctual and learned ability to envisage from the parts of a system, some of the characters of the whole, as well as relations between different systems. If we have a capacity to infer from each part or some of the parts, some of the characters of the whole; and if, in each encounter, we have an ability to perceive some of the real characters of that which we encounter: then we do have a base upon which to work out the ratio of probable error and the combined value of our experimental results, observations or literature review (see, for example, Koehn 1973:157).

Economic Merits

Introduction

Reacting in 1902 to Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) attempts to define science, Peirce gave probably his best known definition of science.

Science is to mean for us a mode of life whose single animating purpose is to find out the real truth, which pursues this purpose by a well-considered method, founded on thorough acquaintance with such scientific results already ascertained by others as may be available, and which seeks cooperation in the hope that the truth may be found, if not by any of the actual inquirers, yet ultimately by those who come after them and who shall make use of their results (CP 7.54).

From this definition, two aspects are immediately apparent: that science pursues a **well-considered method** and is a social or **co-operative** venture. These two aspects are reflected in Peirce's choice of the term economic merits. The word economy obviously has both an allegorical and social meaning. In the realm of the philosophy of science, the allegorical meaning would imply that a given hypothesis has a certain succinctness or economy of expression (likelihood and naturalness); while the social meaning implies that science, like most social endeavours, is also accountable to the dynamics of funding (cheapness). In this section, both meanings will emerge and illustrate Peirce's irreducibly logical and social conception of scientific practice.

Cheapness and fallibilism

The basic need for the pragmatic **virtue of economy**, for Peirce (CP 7.219; HP II: 754), is evident: in view of the fact that the true hypothesis is only one out of innumerable possible false ones, in view, too, of the 'enormous expensiveness of experimentation'. In the interest of economy, then, it is wise first to dispose of those hypotheses which would be the cheapest to test. Another economic procedure would be to: 'find some observable fact which, under conditions easily brought

about, would result' from one of the hypotheses and not the other; and, if this fact occurs or not, one (either way) reduces immediately the number of hypotheses to be entertained (CP 6.529). Further, if there is only one hypothesis at one's disposal, then economy dictates that one begin testing: 'that positive prediction from the hypothesis which seems least likely to be verified', scientific experience shows that: 'a single experiment may absolutely refute the most valuable of hypotheses, while a hypothesis must be a trifling one indeed if a single experiment could establish it' (CP 7.206; HP II: 735).

Peirce was well aware that a scientist's interest is often drawn to **specialization** or the pursuit of **novel discoveries**. But, with these two impulses: 'the economics of the problem are entirely different' (7.157). The difference is hinted at in his earlier paper on economy and scientific research.⁸

All the sciences exhibit the same phenomenon, and so does the course of life. At first we learn very easily . . . but it becomes harder and harder, and less and less worthwhile until we are glad to sleep in death (CP 7.144).

Specialisation must be checked by economic considerations for two reasons: firstly, because it: 'requires more labour to make a given amount of increase in our knowledge of any subject the greater the previous knowledge was'; and, secondly, the overall utility: 'of a given increase in knowledge becomes, in the long run, less and less the more one knows about the matter already' (MS 678). With novel research and discovery, however, the overall economy dictates that the novel research be published so as to be open to the searching criticism of (and for the benefit of) the social group which comprised of: 'all those who are qualified by their life's devotion to inquiries nearly in the same line' (MS 615 (1908):10), and the new research can only become established when it is widely accepted by that group. Our knowledge is always incomplete, but the degree of its **fallibility** can also only become more evident when the community of enquirers has the opportunity to interrogate our research. Interrogation is a method designed to decrease the degree of fallibility and increase the veracity

⁸ From: 'Note on the Theory of the Economy of Research', (CP 7.139-57) which the *Collected Papers* dates at 1879.

of any theory. Further, this must not be seen as a form of relativism, for under the most extreme form of relativism (solipsistic subjectivism), where truth is held to be the momentary opinion of the individual, the possibility of error is nil.

Intrinsic value: Naturalness and likelihood

I have already noted that Peirce came to regard simplicity in terms which differed from Ockham's razor. This does not mean that he ever rejected Ockham's razor as a necessary economic feature, for he never meant to be interpreted as saying that logical simplicity is a consideration of no value at all (CP 6.477). Instead, he later called it the **naturalness** of a hypothesis: that it does not: 'introduce complications not requisite to explain the facts' (CP 4.1), that the features of the hypothesis: 'arrange themselves with obvious naturalness' (CP 3.308) and create the impression of: 'aptness, of reasonableness, of good sense' (CP 7.220; HP II: 755). Why this is an economic principle is evidenced by the fact: 'that most hypotheses which at first seemed to unite great simplicity with entire sufficiency have had to be greatly complicated in the further progress of science' (CP 5.26).

This, then, brings us to look at the **likelihood** of a hypothesis. At the outset, it should be noted that the very reason that Peirce drew up the list of the elements of merit of a hypothesis was so as to outline other ways to base historical and hermeneutical criticism apart from a mere: 'balancing of likelihoods' (CP 7.164-82). For Peirce, likelihood can be the: 'most deceptive thing in the world', this being because it is: 'nothing but the degree of conformity of a proposition to our preconceived ideas' (CP 2.101). However, as we noticed in Peirce's definition of science, science is also a mode of life, a habit of probity and industry. As Reilly (1970: 24) notes:

The inquirer begins his scientific work with a background of experience. The longer he has lived the life of a scientist, the more experience he has accumulated; the expectations that he brings to his project are more refined, more accurate than when he first began to do scientific work.

This is why he/she is able to not only ascertain what the relevant facts are, but his/her mind is furnished with more appropriate ideas, which aid in the construction of the hypothesis as well as evaluating its likelihood. So, the training, experience and application of the scientist can be factors in increasing the 'objectivity' or 'grounding' of his/her assessment of likelihood (CP 7.220; HP II: 755). But, on the other hand, because the assessment of likelihood was essentially 'prudent', Peirce knew that experience also taught that the: 'more adventurous mariner might make the same passage along a straighter course' (MS 678). So economy will then again be served by novelty and novelty falls under the same constraints as the pursuit of new discoveries.

Relation of hypotheses: Caution, consonance and scientific revolutions

The secret of the business lies in the caution which breaks a hypothesis up into its smallest logical components, and only risks one of them at a time. What a world of futile controversy and of confused experimentation might have been saved if this principle had guided investigations into the theory of light! (CP 7.220)

Caution means to risk each component, one at a time, and it is economic because: 'firstly, it leaves room for: 'the modifications which cannot be foreseen but which are pretty sure to prove useful' to the theory at large' (CP 5.376); and, secondly, this caution also reveals another portentous economic virtue as present or absent in the hypothesis itself, viz., **consonance** (CP 5.593). From Peirce's definition of science, it is obvious that he meant here a consonance with the scientific results of others that have already been ascertained.

More than seventy years before the advent of Thomas Kuhn's influential work: **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**, Peirce had been entertaining the nature of epistemic revolutions in knowledge. Writing for the **Monist** in 1891, he (CP 6.8) described these revolutions as:

... sometimes amounting to radical revolutions, suggested by certain difficulties which have been found to beset systems previously in vogue; and such ought cer-

tainly to be in large part the motive of any new theory. This is like partially rebuilding a house. The faults that have been committed are, firstly, that the repairs of the dilapidations have generally not been sufficiently thorough-going and, secondly, that not sufficient pains have been taken to bring the additions into deep harmony with the really sound parts of the old structure.

Thomas Kuhn (1970: 43-51) proposed that both theories and specific data in science are always dependent on the prevailing paradigm in vogue in the scientific community. While an accumulation of anomalies and *ad hoc* features in a hypothesis may eventually lead to a paradigm shift in which the old data are reinterpreted in new ways and new data is sought, this shift is always a judgment of the scientific community. But, what underscores this judgment? Is it the scientific theories or the scientific procedures? If the paradigms themselves change it cannot be the former. On the other hand, if the latter also changes, then there is nothing to ground a judgment. But, on the question of the gravity of the shift in overall scientific methodology and procedures, Kuhn's reflections are somewhat circumscribed. Sometimes, for example, he hints at a radical change of procedures together with the paradigms, akin to: 'trades in different worlds' (1970: 150), at other times he says that: 'paradigm debates are not really about relative problem-solving ability' (1970: 157).

Pierce's study of the history of science had convinced him that, while there were paradigm shifts, these were not complete revolutions. Firstly, in regard to the theories themselves, it was more akin to rebuilding a house, for not everything contained in an old theory was abandoned and even those features which were, served to present: 'some analogy to the truth' and helped: 'to suggest a better hypothesis' (CP 2.759). Secondly, and more importantly, scientific method and procedure were the really sound parts of the old structures, which became more and more refined as science progressed; but, which also showed an underlying constancy. Peirce could not consent to that: 'opinion which has of late years attained some vogue among men of science', that we must expect that: 'there will be a complete cataclysm that shall utterly sweep away old theories and replace them by new ones'; for, even the Ptolemaic system: 'has only been improved in details, not revolutionized' (CP 2.150).

Relation of hypotheses: Breadth, consilience and the community of inquirers

Correlative to the quality of caution is that of breadth. For when we break the hypothesis into elementary parts, we may, and should, inquire how far the same explanation accounts for the same phenomenon when it appears in other subjects (CP 7.221; Hp II: 757).

The next economic virtue that should emerge in the analysis of the parts of the hypothesis was, for Peirce, **consilience**. It is revealed when a new theory presents itself not only as consonant with other knowledge in its branch of science (consonance); but, also with knowledge in other branches of science. It shows itself in the: 'closest analogy with the rest of our knowledge' (CP 7.399), and also with its ability to unify different domains of knowledge so that we can: 'succeed in adapting the methods of one science to the investigation of another' (CP 7.66).

But does the co-operation of the community of inquirers and the growth of consensus between sciences mean that Peirce is tied to a rigid realism: that the community of inquirers reaches a final opinion that is infallible? Peirce here speaks more of the final consensus as a heuristic category towards which we: 'approximate indefinitely' (CP 1.485), and acknowledges that: 'Strictly speaking, the inquiry never will be completely closed' (CP 7.185).

Conclusion: Incomplexity and humility

Incomplexity might be said to be the economic virtue closest to the heart of a humble scientist. It bases the realisation that science is a mode of life that is never complete, nor can ever claim to be fulfilled. It highlights, however, the basic tenet of pragmatism which holds for all sciences i.e., that there is a vital link between *doxy* and *praxy*: right thought shows in right action and bad thought leads to bad action. During the Cambridge lectures of 1898, Peirce (CP 5.585-6) gave his most suggestive analysis as to where he considered our scientific theories to be at present:

There is one thing that I am sure a Harvard education cannot fail to do, because it did that much even in my time, and for a very insouciant student; I mean that it cannot fail to disabuse the student of the popular notion that modern science is so very great a thing as to be commensurate with Nature and . . . to show him that it is yet, what it appeared to Isaac Newton to be, a child's collection of pebbles gathered upon the beach – the vast ocean of Being lying there unsounded.

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