

WHAT CAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS IN AFRICA LEARN FROM THE CONTEMPORARY UPSURGE OF INTEREST IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY?

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Abstract

This article links the work of theological educators to both the social challenges facing African societies and recent developments in Christian Ethics and Spirituality - within a global and African context. It notes key issues and trends and seeks to evaluate the implications of these developments for theological educators in Africa, both in the universities and theological colleges. The author suggests that educators and churches alike can benefit from a re-consideration of norms and values and a renewed emphasis on Virtue Ethics to address the vital issues of moral formation, character and conduct. African educators can make a contribution to the renewal of the church and the moral regeneration of the people of Africa by engaging with scholars, students and church members concerning current moral worldviews and in actively advancing the theoretical and practical role of the church as a moral community.

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent of awesome beauty and bewildering contrasts. At any time, scenic beauty may characterise one region while the devastation of drought mars another. One finds the chasm of the Great Rift Valley, the soaring heights of Mount Kenya, the rolling savannahs inhabited by wildlife, and thousands of kilometres of varied coastline. Cultural and religious diversity both enrich and divide African nations such as Nigeria and South Africa. War and conflict in the Sudan and the Great Lakes region bring socio-economic devastation and political turmoil, while Botswana is politically and economically stable. However, within these contrasts, and the economic

and political questions they raise, deeper moral questions can also be posed. How could South Africa, abounding as it is with churches, produce and sustain the policy of apartheid? How can Nigeria, where one is surrounded by churches and mosques and even shops bearing names such as *Holy Spirit Tailors* and *Jesus loves you Garage* be regarded as the most corrupt country on the continent? What caused the reputedly largely Christian population of Rwanda to erupt into brutal ethnic violence - not once but several times? Given the potential wealth of the continent, why do inequality, poverty and misery persist? Why are greed, violence and HIV/Aids spawning further divisions between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the healthy and the sick? And what role does religion play in all of this?

Quoting Peter Barret's 1982 study, Kudadjie (1996:63) suggests that the adherents of African Traditional Religion amount to 8.9% of the continent's population; Christianity to 48.4%, and Islam to 41.6%. Cumulatively, the adherents of these three major religious groupings constitute virtually the entire population of the continent. Even if the figures quoted are only approximations, they still indicate vast numbers of religious adherents. Despite their differences, all these religions agree that there is more to life than the obvious material realities, that there is a God (and other spiritual beings), that moral conduct is essential, and that indeed, immoral human beings are not fully human. Values such as respect, peace and justice, and virtues such as kindness and fairness, are held in common. Why, then, do poverty, corruption, violence, and suffering still stalk the continent? What is wrong with the way in which these religious faiths are understood and practised?

Admittedly, the figures arrived at by Barret and quoted by Kudadjie may be significantly inflated, but this is morally and religiously less important than the often minimal effects that

the lives of the adherents of these faith traditions are having on their social contexts. Even once the distinction is made between the adherents of a faith (those loosely associated with a faith) and the genuine, committed practitioners of a faith (Kretzschmar 1997), it is still necessary to explain why the church's impact on its social context is so slight. This article will focus on the Christian faith and particularly the challenges posed by the disciplines of Christian Ethics and Christian Spirituality. What needs to happen in order for theological educators (and members of Christian communities) to have a constructive impact on the African continent? This is an especially difficult question to answer given not only the bewildering diversity already mentioned, but also because of increasing urbanisation, socio-cultural change, the re-interpretation or discarding of traditional beliefs and values by the young, and the resulting religious pluralism and moral relativism of African societies.

2. SOME ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT DEBATE WITHIN CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY

Readers familiar with these two areas of research and teaching will know that there has been a huge resurgence of interest in the disciplines of both Christian Ethics (e.g. Hauerwas 1981, MacIntyre 1985, Mugambi & Nasimiyu-Wasike 1999, Verstraeten 2000) and Christian Spirituality (e.g. Sheldrake 1998, King 1998 and Kourie 2000). Elsewhere (Kretzschmar 1996, 2001, 2004) I have discussed the link between Christian Spirituality and social reconstruction; I have argued that the disciplines of Spirituality and Ethics are experiencing a necessary resurgence, and stressed that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on moral and spiritual formation in 21st century Africa. In this article, I wish to focus on the need for African theological educators to engage with other scholars

as well as church members concerning current moral world views and to actively engage in the theoretical and practical moral regeneration of the people of Africa. In order for this to happen, however, Christian theological educators will need to “drink from their own wells”, that is, draw from the reservoir of the Christian tradition as well as from compatible elements of traditional African morality.

Richardson (1996) and Vosloo (1997) have shown that for many years, especially in the Protestant theology of the West, the main concerns of Christian ethics were those of moral theory and decision-making. More recently, virtue ethics, especially the study of the formation of character, has been re-emerging as a major theme. In the light of studies such as these, Christian ethics needs to be defined as *both* a reflection on what is right *and* a consideration of what makes persons good and faith communities morally constructive. Arguably, to stress theory without formation is escapist, and to stress formation without theory is simplistic. Both moral analysis and application are important, as are personal accountability and social responsibility. It is not enough to know what is right; the question is *how* to be good (Willard 1998:10). Both knowledge of what is right (the role of ideas, the mind, reason and imagination) and the will and ability (volition, motivation and character) to do what is right and good are required.¹ Moral formation and regeneration, thus, consist of intellectual, personal, volitional and communal aspects.

First, let us turn to the issue of “*what is right?*” and, specifically, to the moral norms and values that govern behaviour.

¹ See JA van der Ven’s (1998:9) discussion of what is right, good and wise, and the informal and formal aspects of moral formation (1998:55ff).

The seminal work of Alistair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (1985), critiqued the Kantian view that agreement could be reached as a result of the application of reason to moral questions. In support of MacIntyre, Verstraeten (2000) has argued that modernists understood people to be fully autonomous individuals who had the capacity of establishing meaning for themselves on the basis of rational analysis. This conception has been shown to be faulty. People are not simply autonomous, self-determining creatures, but are themselves possibly determined and certainly influenced by the society in which they live. Persons are morally formed by many different influences and experiences, such as the impact of parents, culture, school, the social ethos, the choices they make (based on the interpretation of what they have experienced), the media (films, television, advertisements), music, the values propagated in their places of work, and many more. The issue is not whether persons are influenced, but whether they are *aware* of the nature and impact of these influences. Have they reflected upon the consequences of their perceptions of reality and the effects of their choices, not only upon themselves, but also on their families, communities and the whole of creation?

If MacIntyre's critique of the moral capacity of autonomous human reason is correct, it has major implications for the teaching of both moral philosophy and Christian ethics, particularly in the fast growing field of applied ethics. It means, among other things, that both religious revelation and community wisdom are required, along with the reasoning capacities of individuals, to distinguish what is right. A suspicion of modernism means that some are again in search of a sense of moral conviction, meaning and direction. However, together with the increased individualism and pluralism of the world, some doubt that it can be found

at all; hence the moral uncertainty and relativism of much of modern culture.

The moral crisis in Africa, however, urges theorists and ordinary people to question both the certainty of modernism and the uncertainty of postmodernism. Have the theorists that have led so many along the path of secularism (a denial of or disinterest in God) and secularisation (the decline of the social impact of religion) been wrong? The ethical and theological debate must pursue the matter of whether the current “norm-less” nature of many societies is either religiously correct or sociologically advisable. As Mugambi writes (in Mugambi & Nasimiyu-Wasike 1999:11): “No society can sustain itself without norms and values on the basis of which priorities are determined”. How, then, can theological educators in Africa re-examine the Christian tradition itself and engage with the moral views of their contemporaries? Furthermore, how can traditional African moral convictions and strengths be recovered and related to the current debate?

Arguably, postmodernists have been too quick in their dismissal of moral norms and have discarded norms along with authoritarianism. According to Steven Feldman (in Brytting 2000:91), postmodernists tend to deconstruct culture because of a confusion between authority and power:

To recognise a moral claim is not necessarily to surrender to a repressive power. Rather, it is an act based on faith in a value-system which makes life meaningful and worthwhile. The common value-system is thereby being *given* authority as a consequence of a free act.

Hence, norms such as “love your neighbour as you love yourself” need not be understood as unduly restrictive. Their value is that they limit negative and destructive behaviour whilst making creative and constructive behaviour possible.

Without any norms, individual or corporate moral behaviour diminishes - even disappears in the prevailing culture of mindless and destructive self-indulgence.

Despite the avowed moral relativism of our age, there are many values that are actually shared by a wide variety of people. Wells quotes the research of James Wilson (1993) which showed that, even across varied cultures, four central moral intuitions about life can be uncovered, namely "sympathy [mercy], fairness, self-control and duty" (Wells 1998:154). Closer to home, Kinoti (1999:80) states:

Education in traditional African society aimed at producing persons who upheld the values that helped the society to remain integrated. These were the values of peace and harmony, respect for authority, respect for and fear of supernatural realities... Personal values were such moral values as honesty and reliability, generosity, courage, temperance, humility and justice.

Covey (1992:95) also argues that there are many core moral principles that people have in common:

The six major world religions all teach the same basic core beliefs - such principles as "You reap what you sow" and "Actions are more important than words"... I find a universal belief in fairness, kindness, dignity, charity, integrity, honesty, quality, service, and patience.

Further research into the norms and values that a plurality of African peoples, together with other nations, hold in common and the implications of these for day-to-day decisions in the realms of politics, business, social welfare, the economy and education would certainly benefit scholars, learners and the wider public. In this way, the vital and essential nature and effects of morality can again enter the forefront of academic and public debate.

In dealing with the moral crisis facing many countries in Africa, Hannah Kinoti (1999:80) has advocated an honest stock-taking. She declares:

Today the African society may seem to be in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality. People are disillusioned after suffering major cultural upheavals in just under a century. The effects of colonial intervention on the indigenous African communities cannot be under-rated. The emergent new African - Western, educated, Christianized and clothed - has been something of a caricature, least pleasing to himself.

Colonialism, cultural upheaval and change have simply wrecked havoc on the continent. This is a reality which no-one can ignore. She continues by stating (Kinoti 1999:73):

Other people have been making generalisations about the immorality of Africans: the sluggishness, unreliability, dishonesty, corruption and other things. These misgivings about the moral integrity of Africans annoy and deeply hurt those of us who hear them, especially because of the hypocritical self-righteous racism of many self-appointed critics of Africa. Nevertheless, criticism from whatever quarter should be allowed to serve as an indicator that all is not well, that some self-examination is needed. What has gone wrong?

This is the type of rigorous analysis and honesty that is required. Rather than reacting to the criticisms of others, Africans need to take joint responsibility in uncovering and rectifying the ills of the continent. (Kinoti is right to point out that if something is true, it remains true, even if someone you dislike or distrust says it)! To some extent recent debates concerning the African Renaissance have begun this task, but more attention ought to be given to the moral and religious aspects of this process.

Alongside this increased interest in the nature and importance of ethical norms and values, the return to virtue ethics has been particularly noticeable. Teachers and students of ethics alike cannot avoid the issue of *what makes us moral - or immoral?* Being and doing ought not to be separated (in Kretzschmar & Kourie 2000:37-54, 55-65, and 92-99).

Why is this focus on virtue ethics (Richardson 1996, Vosloo 1997, Van der Ven 1998), which deals with moral character and the moral life, important? Simply because if one only stresses rules and principles (what Business Ethics refers to as compliance ethics) the essential issue of motivation is left out, as is the internalisation of values.² In the teaching or study of ethics, it is unwise to separate the development of moral character from the task of determining the nature of the moral principles on which decisions ought to be based. This is because:

... the cultivation of virtue is of *primary* necessity when it comes to situations that demand choosing between conflicting principles of duty or revising working rules of right and wrong ... even when moral rules are adequate guides to conduct, they merely constitute the *form* of morality, not its *point* (Brown 1996:13).

This stress on the link between moral analysis and moral formation has particular relevance for the burgeoning number of courses in the field of applied ethics.

² Kohlberg argues that we need to move from the pre-conventional (obedience to external authority), to conventional (adherence to social norms) to post-conventional (internalised, self-chosen) approaches to morality. See the critiques of Kohlberg by Carol Gilligan, 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.27ff and JA van der Ven, 1998. *The formation of the moral self*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp 220ff.

During the last decade, at universities such as Stellenbosch, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, and Unisa, hundreds of students have embarked on courses in applied ethics such as Business Ethics, Medical Ethics and the like. But what is the effect of such courses and to what extent are students enabled to ask themselves basic questions about their own world views and choices? One of the purposes of a university education is to encourage students to embark upon radical thinking about themselves and the type of society they wish to construct. For example, Covey (1992:87-93) quotes these insights into the seven deadly sins as outlined by Mahatma Gandhi:

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce (business) without morality (ethics)
- Science without humanity
- Religion without sacrifice
- Politics without principle

These insights uncover much that is wrong with our own continent (and other continents) and challenge many of the prevailing views in the economic sphere, personal life decisions and media portrayals, the field of education, commerce, the world of science, all religious traditions, and the political set-up in many nations. In the light of Kinoti's "stock-taking" noted above, students could well be encouraged to reflect on statements such as these, drawn from the Christian and other religious traditions, in their conscious attempts to determine what norms and values they will choose, and what the effects of these decisions will be on their own lives and those of the rest of the continent.

What is required, both globally and in Africa, is moral competence which can be defined as “the *dialogical* ability to perceive, reflect and act on moral issues with preserved integrity” (Brytting 2000:82). In this article Brytting refers to highly skilled economies, such as those of Sweden, where a new emphasis is being placed on the specialised skills of individual employees. Consequently, characteristics such as “competence, experience and personality” again play a significant role in the workplace (Brytting 2000:83). The importance of team work, using the specialised skills of a range of people, has also meant that peer control has become an important factor in the workplace, since the activities of all the members of the group determine the eventual outcome of the efforts of the group. Because so many people spend a significant number of hours in the work environment, particularly those tasked with management and specialised skills responsibilities, it means that it is important to consider work itself as a moral space. It has become “a dominating life form” (Brytting 2000:84). But what Brytting says about Sweden is equally important in an African context where both moral behaviour at work (see Kretzschmar 2002a:365-386) and leaders taking moral responsibility for the fact that so many people have no work, are extremely important factors.

Moral self reflection is another important aspect of virtue ethics. This is necessary to counteract the overemphasis on technical knowledge, the “how to” aspect of knowledge, in the universities and colleges. The consequence of this overemphasis has meant that both the nature and content of knowledge have narrowed, as knowledge is seldom linked to wisdom, intuition or character. This reduction and compartmentalising of knowledge has discouraged people from discovering meaning in their lives by asking “why”? Uncovering both the purpose of life and the nature of material reality are

important for human existence and, thus, for educational purposes. Theological and other educators may end up with different answers, but are these questions actually being asked?

Moral agency, as opposed to moral passivity or ineptitude is another aspect of virtue ethics. As Anna Mukamwezi Kayonga (1999:144), noting the effects of the widespread discrimination against women in Africa, remarks:

Discrimination is offensive, humiliating and degrading to its victims: it creates tension, resentment, hatred and a desire for revenge. It is damaging to a person's self-image, discourages effort, makes people feel helpless and inferior and keeps them economically and politically powerless.

What she implies here about discrimination against women is also true for people generally. Particularly in the South African context, this insight is relevant in dealing with the long term effects of apartheid in South Africa. How can universities, theological colleges and churches help people to recognise and deal with this tumult of feelings associated with the experiences of injustice and marginalisation, often unconsciously expressed rather than consciously recognised? Unless theological educators can "scratch where it itches" and deal with the actual realities of peoples' lives, can they be called "educators" at all? As argued earlier, students of theology need more than information. Thus, theological educators need also to study and teach concerning what constitutes wisdom (what is the good life?) and how can persons be good and do good (moral agency).

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY FOR ETHICS

Earlier in this article, the point was made that recent critiques of both Kant and modernism have initiated renewed interest

in religious revelation and community wisdom. These two dimensions of moral insight are strongly represented in the study and practice of Christian spirituality which stresses both human consciousness of God and the moral renewal of persons and communities as a consequence of a growing consciousness of and obedience to God. But, because spirituality is so often misunderstood, it is necessary to begin with the question "What is meant by spirituality?"

In general terms it is a person's consciousness of the Divine and of a spiritual reality both within and beyond the material world. Thus there are many different forms of spirituality, often but not necessarily, connected with formal religion (see O'Murchun 1997). Christian spirituality could simply be defined as living in the presence and through the power of God and allowing God to transform all the dimensions of human existence. In short, to "re-order" human life as derived from and accountable to God (Deut. 6:1-19; 30:11-20). Spirituality, remarks Johnson (1989:22), "is our self-transcendent capacity as human beings to recognize and to participate in God's creative and redemptive activity in all of creation". It is not a narrow concern with the soul, though a deepening awareness of God in the consciousness of the human soul or spirit is essential, nor is it a world escaping or world denying approach to reality. Christian spirituality, properly understood, is not escape from the world, but God-directed engagement in the world (O' Connor 1968, Tastard 1989).

This can be easily illustrated with respect to the wide range of informal studies of spirituality and the Christian ministries that arise out of the practice of spirituality. Research centres and retreat venues have been established and seminars held on topics such as prayer, spiritual direction, spiritual formation and community ministry. In many communities, university, seminary and/or church based leadership and discipleship

courses dealing with a variety of social ministries focussing on HIV/Aids, poverty alleviation, skills training and social empowerment have grown out of the spiritual vision of believers. The extensive work of the Sisters of Mercy with HIV/Aids victims in Soshanguve is but one example of many church-based projects where service to the community arises out of religious experience and faith. The link between spiritual awakening and social involvement has also been evidenced in the lives of innumerable people throughout the Christian tradition.

For several decades now, various contextual theologians have made precisely this point; theology ought not to be purely speculative; faith requires action. It is equally important that faith, or spirituality, ought to be nurtured. According to Thomas á Kempis, theology ought to lead to “a love for God, contrition, and a changed life” (McGrath 1999:31). Hence, a person’s spirituality ought to determine her/his morality. This is in marked contrast to cases where self and group interests distort religion, and use it to legitimate personal selfishness or group injustices. The Latin tag, *lex orandi, lex credenti* (meaning the way you pray determines the way you believe) exemplifies the effect that a person’s spirituality ought to have on the convictions and attitudes that determine her/his conduct. Spirituality, then, is a deepened consciousness of God and it “encompasses the whole of human life and will develop a number of styles, depending on cultures, denominations, personalities and gifts” (Holt 1993:5). Historically Roman Catholics have used the term “spirituality” along with discussions of Christian life and doctrine. In the 18th and 19th centuries, “mystical” and “ascetic” theology were often used as specialised terms. Mystical theology referred to the teachings of the mystics (seen as extraordinary Christians) and ascetic theology referred to the path of ordinary Christians. In the 20th century, these combined into “spiritual theology” or spiritual-

ity (Holt 1993:5). Often, various schools of spirituality were associated with the religious orders, for instance Franciscan or Ignatian spirituality. Within Protestantism, although extensive use of the term is relatively recent, earlier terms such as piety, faith, and a holy life were approximate synonyms.

What, then, are some of the dimensions of Christian spirituality that are being emphasised by Christians in the international arena? As indicated above, there are writings that focus on the history of spirituality (e.g. Holt 1993), the link between spirituality and systematic theology (Sheldrake 1998, MacGrath 1999), the spirituality of different religious orders, such as the Benedictines (De Waal 1984, Vest 2000), prayer (Foster 1992, Houston 1996) and ethics and spirituality (O' Keefe 1995). Also within South Africa (Kourie & Kretzschmar 2000), a renewal of interest in spirituality at both universities and seminaries has been seen in the form of historical studies of particular traditions (e.g. Carmelite, Ignatian, Anglican or Reformed spirituality), thematic (feminist, African and environmental spirituality), methodological studies (definitions and approaches to the study of spirituality) and the practise of spirituality. These themes and books are but a fraction of the publications in Christian spirituality that have emerged in the past two decades.

Having defined what Christian Spirituality is, it can now be asked, what can African theological educators learn from its resurgence and the growing interest in spirituality on the part of students, both locally and globally? **First**, theological educators, I suggest, can note that this resurgence reflects a huge hunger for a deeper experience of God. For too long, especially at universities, knowledge *about* God has been stressed at the expense of knowledge *of* God. Worse still, theological, religious or biblical studies can be reduced to the study of religion with a concomitant neglect of knowledge of

God, prayer, worship, the formation of moral character, the role of the faith community and spiritually motivated social engagement. The theologian McGrath (1999:28) remarks:

Theology has become little more than the mastery of discrete bodies of data. It has something you know about - where it should be something relational, something that is *known*, that shapes your life, provides a reason to live, and gives direction to ministry... It is thus little wonder that so many seminaries report a burgeoning interest in spirituality on the part of their students, when they have been starved of the experiential and reflective dimensions of theology...

African theological educators, I suggest, can do no better than to begin here, both for themselves and for their students. There will simply be no genuine renewal of Christian moral insight (with respect to the current debates on the future of our continent), let alone revitalised Christian engagement with social needs, without the spiritual renewal of those who call themselves "Christian".

Second, theological educators can show that the social problems of Africa require not only technical solutions, such as finance, skills and infrastructure, but also moral and religious solutions, such as transformed persons and communities that can effect the transformation of the continent. The fundamental Christian conviction that at the root of many, if not all, of the current problems facing the African continent lies a spiritual problem is not a popular or comfortable one. This does not make it untrue. Willard (1988:xi) diagnoses the root cause of problems such as consumerism, violence and the inability to sustain relationships as a *spiritual* problem. Socio-political and economic revolutions will not benefit the continent unless they are accompanied by moral revolutions, as was revealed in the quotation by Gandhi cited earlier. Thus,

one major contribution on the part of Christian spirituality to the renewal of churches, theological education and, indeed, the moral regeneration of Africa, is to urge people to face the human problems of selfishness, greed and arrogance - the very sins that cause havoc in the inner and outer worlds of all. It is not by accident that the prophet Micah stresses that humility before God (honest self appraisal and the acknowledgement that all we are and have has been received from the hand of God) in the same breath as "to act justly and to love mercy" (Mic. 6:8). Like the prophets of old, theological educators are in the business of confronting evil, and calling people, including prominent social leaders and members of local congregations, to repentance.

Third, the connection between moral formation (the development of good character able to issue in moral conduct) and spiritual formation (the increased capacity of the human spirit to be conscious of the Spirit of God, and act out love for God, self and neighbour) must be made more obvious. This is the task of Christian discipleship, which is rather different from being a member, let alone an occasional attendee at a church. But how does moral and spiritual formation take place? In addition to the many psychological models upon which educators can selectively draw³, theological educators may do well to remember that Christian morality derives from and ought to be based on Christian spirituality. This does not mean that theological educators cannot use and interact with other models, psychological or otherwise, but it does mean that it is

³ Johnson (1989) discusses traditional behaviourism (Skinner); classical psychoanalytical thought (Freud), humanistic, third force psychology (Maslow), trans-personal, fourth force (Wilber), and structural-development (Piaget, Kohlberg). Her own view is that moral formation does not occur in regular stages, but during key *kairos* moments.

essential to remember that there is no Christian ethics without what Hauerwas calls the “Christian story.” Hauerwas’s writings, especially his *Community of character* (1981) have provoked much discussion (Richardson 1994), but his essential point is that Christian moral character is formed in the context of the faith community. Worship, fellowship and narrative are some of the key elements in this regard.

Spirituality encompasses our experience of God in a variety of forms, including prayer, meditation, solitude, communal celebration, and service in the world. But it also includes the effect that these ongoing encounters with God have on personal choices, character and conduct. Thus, worship properly understood and practised, argues Dirkie Smit (1997), teaches the Christian community both to look in the right direction (that is, towards God) and also to rightly see and respond to our neighbours, both within and outside a particular faith community.

A **fourth** aspect of the importance of spirituality for ethics is to draw insights and applications from the moral role of the community. Traditionally, African myths stress the bond of the community with that of creation:

This outlook has meant that the traditional society so accommodated its members that one individual could be required to answer for the wrongdoing of another... Often the whole community suffered retribution collectively for the ills of individuals (Kinoti 1999:79).

Consequently, family and community public opinion had a strong restraining and disciplining moral function. The relational repercussions of wrongdoing and the fear of being publicly shamed were strong deterrents. In modern day Africa, in an often urban, fast moving, fragmented society, new forms of community need to be found. But one way in

which new forms will not be found is to further secularize African society, thereby causing young people to feel contempt for traditional moral beliefs and community restraints. Nor if the moral role of the Christian faith in society is further diminished, particularly in the educational sector. Especially when such people adopt in their place other belief systems such as materialistic individualism.⁴ Hence the earlier discussion in this article on the need for moral norms and values, or their absence, to be rigorously debated in public spaces such as the educational system and the churches. Furthermore, as shown above, Brytting's insights can encourage members of the Christian faith community to make a contribution to the "moral spaces" at work, in the political and commercial sectors.

African Christian educators need to remind their students of the value of the traditional moral role of the community as well as finding new ways in which this vital moral function can be expressed. One aspect of this process is for theological educators to re-envision the nature and role of the church:

The African Church today is like the kinship system of yesterday. The Church in Africa needs to gain its confidence in the one who has called it into being. There is hope in what the Church can do in calling Africans to maintain what is good in their culture for their moral integrity (Kinoti 1999:81).

Again, this will not be possible, if the Christian community is unwilling or unable to rise to the occasion and meet this challenge of acting as the "salt and light" of their societies. As Jesus said: "But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it

⁴ Wells (1998) argues that this world view has led American culture, sadly the very culture which is now being widely imitated in Africa, to a "loss of moral virtue".

be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Mt. 5:13).

Along with a recovery and revitalised expression of the moral role of the community is a **fifth** task, namely for personal moral agency to be developed. The weakness of a communitarian ethic is that insufficient attention is paid to the development of the person as an individual self. Ultimately, moral decisions are made by persons and if there is no sense of self, equally there can be no personal responsibility or moral accountability. The sense of self being spoken of here is not the pursuit of autonomous self-fulfilment of secular humanism, the negative effects of which are all too clear in modern Western societies, but a sense of self as a person created in God’s image and redeemed by Christ. A person who can be delivered from both selfishness and wilfulness and be a conscious, willing and empowered moral agent. As Field reminds us: “*Genuine* freedom does not just mean freedom to *do* something ... but freedom *not* to do it, and it is here that human will-power is so pitifully weak” (1973:109). As stated above, moral formation, from a Christian perspective, cannot be separated from spiritual formation. Ultimately, it is God who forms moral persons and communities.

A **sixth** dimension of what can be learnt by African educators from the resurgence of interest in spirituality and ethics, is nothing new. African theologians in the academic sector have been saying it since the 1960s and African church leaders for over a century (e.g. Pobee 1973): the Christian faith must be more deeply rooted in the actual lives of African believers. Thus, African educators need to develop an African Christian spirituality that is rooted in the Christian tradition and able to draw on

aspects of African wisdom and experience.⁵ Such a task is both essential and risky. It is essential as nothing else will enable Christianity to be fully rooted in the soil of Africa and thus able to effect the transformation of culture.

This task is also risky⁶ because, as with all forms of inculturation, group and self interest can co-opt the Christian faith for their own purposes. Individuals can, and have, used the gospel to build their own empires. In South Africa, Afrikaner civil religion co-opted the gospel and propagated apartheid. In post-Independent Africa, some African leaders have co-opted, forced into exile, killed or marginalised leaders at universities and churches, thereby silencing moral communities and the prophetic voice of the church. In all churches, theological educators and ordinary believers alike need to choose not only between God and Caesar, but also between God and Mammon.⁷ Despite, perhaps because of these risks, an African Christian spirituality needs to be formed and lived, otherwise the effect of the gospel in Africa will remain marginal and shallow.

⁵ Some authors have sought to identify what constitutes traditional African spirituality as well as what might constitute an African Christian spirituality (e.g. Pato 1996 & 2000 and Kudadjie 1996).

⁶ The debate on Christian faith and African (or Western) culture is an extensive one that I shall not re-enter here. Suffice it to say that no culture is fully compatible with the Christian faith, as all cultures are human creations and thus imperfect. Difficult though it has been throughout human history to distinguish between the essence of the Christian faith and its various cultural manifestations, it remains the task of each new generation of theological educators and Christian practitioners.

⁷ Mammon is more than money - it is the love of money and represents the economic policies and structures that prevent *shalom* (well being), justice and mercy being experienced by all in the society.

4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This paper has pointed out that in seeking to make a contribution to the moral regeneration of Africa, the church cannot rest on its laurels. It needs to engage in a rigorous “stock-taking”, as only a renewed church can begin to tackle the problems experienced by Africans. Thus, the beginning point is for the church to be the church. Theological educators, by taking up the challenges presented by the resurgence of the disciplines of Christian Ethics and Spirituality, can refocus their own attention, and that of students, on knowledge *of* God, rather than merely *about* God. Religious experience of God ought not to be marginalised by intellectual knowledge about God. Further, an African Christian spirituality that owes allegiance first to God, rather than to self or group interest, can effect the renewal of moral persons and communities.

It has further been argued that one of the tasks of theological educators is to encourage a more extensive and a deeper focus on the teaching and study of ethics. This will encompass a study of ethical norms and values as well as an emphasis on virtue ethics and the formation of moral character. Such an approach will avoid a narrow emphasis on “knowing” without an accompanying stress on “being” and “doing” - in the lives of both theological educators and their students. Intellectual rigour and analysis, personal honesty and reflection, and courageous, unselfish actions, when combined, result in moral agency. By recognising and encouraging the role of moral communities, the social force of faith groups can be channelled to achieve moral ends.

In the teaching of applied ethics, theological educators can seek to encourage the acquisition not only of knowledge, but also of wisdom and character. The increased interest in

the various forms of applied ethics could also encourage theological educators to drink more deeply from the wells of the Christian tradition so as to bring the insights derived from an ongoing encounter with God (divine revelation) to bear on contemporary moral problems. This, together with a renewed Christian community, could create the many moral communities needed to interact with society generally. Theological educators, by engaging in public debate concerning norms and values, as well as in practical ministry in local communities, can refocus society's attention on what creates the good life for all, rather than a privileged few. This will assist the church as a whole to engage in a deeper moral and religious diagnosis of Africa's problems, thereby contributing to the theoretical and practical engagement of the church in African society to participate in finding solutions to its religious, moral and social problems.

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