

CHAPTER 4: AIDS AND KAIROS

(1) Introduction

The opening chapter of this work is a theological reflection on the reality of the AIDS pandemic in the “new” South Africa, and on how this pandemic affects the lives of millions of people. In the second chapter I examined another reality that forms part of people’s daily experience; namely, the cult of the ancestors. This relationship with the ancestors keeps many Bantu people of South Africa rooted in their tradition and culture, and in touch with their origins. It is an essential part of the identity of black South Africans. In the third chapter I showed how the Christian missionaries of the 19th Century tried to eliminate the cult of the ancestors from the lives of ordinary Christians. Membership of the Christian faith entailed abandoning traditional religious practices. I demonstrated, in the second stage of this history, signs of a changing attitude in the Catholic Church towards the cult of the ancestors, most particularly since the Second Vatican Council. This changing attitude towards the ancestors was accompanied by a more general recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in cultures apart from Western Christianity.

In the present chapter, I will synthesise my reflections on the AIDS pandemic and the cult of the ancestors. Both are unavoidable features of the context in which Christians live in South Africa, and in which they have to make sense of their faith. As a hermeneutical key for bringing the reflections together, I will use the idea of *kairos* which was popularised in the *Kairos Document* - a major theological work, influential during the struggle for liberation from apartheid. The document is also useful for our considerations here, because it represents a third strand of the present context, namely the fact that the country has recently emerged as a democracy after 350 years of racist rule and fifty of

resistance to white domination in apartheid politics. This emergent democracy is, in turn, of relevance in the considerations of AIDS and the resurgence of the ancestor cult.

AIDS, the ancestor cult and political liberation raise the questions of the meaning of salvation, death and the mission of the Church. These questions I will examine using the structure of the *Kairos Document* as a device with which to compare and contrast the theologies represented (sometimes implicitly) in traditional church teaching, in the cult of the ancestors, and finally in a more prophetically-engaged reflection on the context.

(2) AIDS as a *Kairos*

In considering the AIDS pandemic in the “new” South Africa, I propose that it is appropriate to treat the pandemic as the new “*kairos*.” I will apply this familiar theological category to a new situation. The following three articles (which I cite in alphabetical order) appeared in 2001, suggesting a *kairos*-type of theological reflection for the AIDS crisis:

(i) Maluleke says that the “HIV/AIDS pandemic has ushered in a new *kairos* for the world in general and for the African continent in particular.”¹ Using the definitions of *kairos* from the *KD* he says: “The AIDS crisis catapults us into a ‘moment of truth’ because it brings us face to face with the failures, sinfulness, frailty and interdependence of human beings. It reveals the ‘truth’ about the limits of human knowledge, the inability of science and technology to save us.”² It also forces us to confront the reality of death and our own frailty.

As Professor of Black and African Theologies at UNISA, Maluleke’s particular concern in this article regards theological education and educators. He suggests that “the challenge of HIV/AIDS would aptly highlight a dimension of theological impotence for

1. Tinyiko Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS for Theological Education in Africa: Towards an HIV/AIDS Sensitive Curriculum,” *Missionalia* 29, no. 2 (August 2001): 125.

2. Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS,” 130.

theological education today.”³ That is, there is no ready-made theology that is suitable for helping people to reflect on their experiences of HIV/AIDS, neither among traditional Western, nor among black and African theologies. The “*shibboleths* no longer suffice.” Just as the world and South Africa were celebrating the end of the cold war and apartheid, the AIDS pandemic came along and “makes a mockery of many of our hopes and claims - sending us all into a deep crisis.” Maluleke “argue[s] that in our times, there is no theological discipline that can afford to ignore HIV/AIDS issues in one way or another.”⁴

Maluleke argues elsewhere⁵ that as the “*new kairos*,” HIV/AIDS is connected to many of our “preferred agenda [-] race, gender, culture, etc.” Thus, from whatever angle one approaches Christian ministry, AIDS is a factor. This reality “beckons us to deeper analysis of culture and globalization so that we are able to penetrate” what is hidden or open, what is said and done.

(ii) Rakoczy says that a *kairos* is a “sacred time of God’s presence” which we ignore at our peril. She maintains that the HIV/AIDS pandemic constitutes one such “*kairos* for South Africa, a time to realise that the future of our country is literally at stake - both in terms of the economic and social indicators of life and more importantly, in the quality of the human response to those who suffer.”⁶ The credibility of the Christian community is also at stake, as it must become engaged again in the future of the whole country.

(iii) In his article on prophetic theology and the challenge of the *kairos*, Van der Water lists HIV/AIDS as one of the factors in the “new” South African context that calls for a renewed prophetic theology:

3. Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS,” 127.

4. Maluleke, “The Challenge of HIV/AIDS,” 129.

5. Tinyiko Maluleke, “Theology in (South) Africa: How the Future Has Changed,” in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T. Speckman and Larry.T Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 378.

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

Other factors such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the abuse of women and children, the breakdown of family life, corruption in the private and public sectors, secularisation and the escalation of violent crime merely underline the need for a re-defined prophetic theology that is coming to grips with the vicissitudes and vagaries of the post-Apartheid social order.⁷

While not specifically using the language of *kairos*, the SACBC link AIDS, which they call a “crisis,” to the past struggles in South Africa, to the need for divine intervention.

I believe that this is *kairos* implicitly theology. The bishops write:

We invite all people to unite in prayer to Almighty God in this time of crisis in our nations. In the past in South Africa, we approached God to help us in our struggle for freedom and human dignity and we experienced the great miracle of transition.

Now we pray for another “miracle” to bring us that inner freedom which will enable our nations to choose the right way to uphold human dignity in our new struggle - the battle against HIV/AIDS. Jesus is with us still today on our way of the cross of HIV/AIDS.⁸

Thus it is not an exaggeration, and nor am I alone in stating that the AIDS pandemic represents a moment of testing for South African society in general, and the churches in particular.⁹ Realising the implications of 5 million people being infected with HIV, these authors envision a concerted response, similar to that elicited by the system of apartheid repression. As the ideology of apartheid touched every level of society, so too,

7. Desmond Van der Water, “A Legacy for Contextual Theology: Prophetic Theology and the Challenge of the *Kairos*,” in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 47.

8. SACBC, *A Message of Hope from the Catholic Bishops to the People of God in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland*, Message from the July Plenary Session (Pretoria: SACBC, 2001), [Http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/hope.htm) viewed on 21 September 2001.

9. AIDS is not only a *kairos* for the churches in South Africa. In his North American context, William Henry Barcus III describes AIDS as a similar challenge for the Church, without actually using the term:

Occasionally in human history great clouds pass over us that, with all their lightning, thunder and darkness, become litmus tests for the human race. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is precisely such a litmus test. To humanity the question posed is, “Will you stay humane?” For the Church, with its curious mixture of humanity’s worst and best, the AIDS crisis is a challenge to raise ourselves toward the Divine, for that is what we call the more humane. Or will the Church cling with unquestioning and easy adherence to the beliefs and dictates of earlier primordial times?

See William Henry Barcus III, “The Gospel Imperative,” in *The Gospel Imperative in the Midst of AIDS: Towards a Prophetic Pastoral Theology*, edited by Robert H. Iles (Wilton CT.: Morehouse, 1989), 3.

the AIDS pandemic highlights the issues of poverty, migrant labour, unequal access to medical care, gender relationships and exploitation, church teaching, unemployment, etc. Neglecting to respond to this “moment of truth” would be a betrayal of the Christian mission. Or as Ross says: “[The HIV/AIDS pandemic] is a defining issue for Christian mission. If the church is not able to confess its faith in the eye of this storm, then it will have missed a part of its core calling in these times.”¹⁰ It is appropriate at this stage to examine in greater depth, this concept of *kairos* or “moment of truth” as it was presented in the *Kairos Document*.

(3) Introduction to the *Kairos Document*

The *Kairos Document (KD)* was drafted as an ecumenical¹¹ collaboration of South African theologians and church leaders. After extensive consultation with lay Christians, the document was published in September 1985, at the height of government repression of black people living in the townships of South Africa. The military clampdown was particularly severe on young people who were boycotting the inferior education of their black schools and who were highly mobilised to overturn apartheid.

(4) Contents of the *Kairos Document*

Citing Lk 19:44, the *kairos* theologians describe Jesus foreseeing the imminent destruction and massacre of Jerusalem and weeping over the city “and all because you did not recognize the time of your overseer” (αὐθ’ ὡν οὐκ ἔγνως τὸν **καῖρον** τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς

10. Kenneth R. Ross, “The HIV/AIDS Pandemic: What is at Stake for Christian Mission?” *Missiology: An International Review* XXXII, no. 3 (July 2004): 346.

11. There were several editions of the *Kairos Document*. Affixed to the edition published by W.B. Eerdmans in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1986, were the signatures of 151 theologians and leaders from twenty-seven Christian denominations. These twenty-seven denominations represent mostly mainline churches, a few AIC’s and one or two which would usually be considered Pentecostal. Thus the signatories of the *Kairos Document* came from a broad spectrum of church membership. That does not mean that they were signing officially on behalf of their respective churches.

σου). They maintain that South Africa is at a similar *kairos*, a dangerous time of crisis. The theologians say that as well as a moment of truth, a *kairos* is also a moment of grace and opportunity which calls for serious decision and action. Thus a *kairos* is a time in which people and organisations are exposed for what they really are. Not to take advantage of a *kairos* can only lead to peril. The *kairos* being referred to is the political upheaval and the threat of all-out war between the oppressed and the oppressors. This *kairos* also has an ecclesiastical dimension because, the theologians assert, the Church is divided into black and white churches, in which the oppressed majority is radically at odds with the affluent minority within the churches. There seem to be two Gospel messages: one for each group, and this seriously compromises witness to the Gospel.

Displaying a critical¹² consciousness, the *KD* then identifies and analyzes *three* *theologies* that were current in South Africa:

(i) The document is highly critical of “State Theology” which was used to support the apartheid ideology. It points out how Rom 13:1-7 was misused to justify authoritarian state rule. This in turn was used to ground an imperative to support the enforcement of law and order. The state declared how it was opposing the threat of atheist communism on the subcontinent, and thus God-fearing Christians owed it their allegiance. The *KD* then points out how the state-created image of God was false and was being used to lend a veneer of religious legitimacy to the dealings of the state.

(ii) The *KD* is marginally less scathing in its critique of what it calls “Church Theology.” This is the traditional theology proposed by the church leaders as they

12. I use the the term “critical” here in reference to the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas advanced the theory that knowledge can be used in technical, practical and emancipatory interests. The latter cognitive interest involves, *inter alia*, the recognition that oppressive societies use language to establish and maintain the interests of one or some groups, often at the expense of another or others. See Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt / Main, 1968) translated into English as *Knowledge and Human Interests* in 1971. Since the Kairos Document was published by a committee, it is not clear who among of the 151 signatory theologians was responsible for the introduction of this hermeneutical theory. However,

responded to the growing crisis of violence and repression. It relies on the stock ideas of reconciliation, justice and non-violence without examining the underlying causes of the problem. The *Kairos* theologians say that the theological response of the churches was largely barren because it completely lacked social analysis, and was based on an inadequate understanding of politics and political strategy. This brand of theology made “a virtue of neutrality and sitting on the sidelines.”¹³

The *KD* identifies the fundamental reason why “Church Theology” had not developed a social analysis as:

*the type of faith and spirituality that has dominated Church life for centuries. As we all know, spirituality has tended to be an other-worldly affair that has very little, if anything at all, to do with the affairs of this world. Social and political matters were seen as worldly affairs that have nothing to do with the spiritual concerns of the Church. Moreover, spirituality has been understood to be purely private and individualistic. Public affairs and social problems were thought to be beyond the sphere of spirituality. And finally the spirituality we inherit tends to rely upon God to intervene in his own good time to put right what is wrong in the world. That leaves very little for human beings to do except to pray for God’s intervention.*¹⁴

(iii) The document calls for a “Prophetic Theology” that is a “biblical, spiritual, pastoral, and above all, prophetic” response from Christians, that is seen to be “clearly and unambiguously taking a stand.”¹⁵ This prophetic response must be specific to the particular problem of South Africa, and hence begins with a social analysis or reading the signs of the times. It looks at the biblical evidence for God’s rejection of oppression, siding with the oppressed, and calling the oppressors to repentance. It looks to the Christian tradition of denouncing tyranny, concluding that the South African regime of the day is tyrannical, and irreformable. Thus there was an imperative for the present regime to be removed for the good of all the people. Finally, a prophetic theology conveys hope, founded not on illusion, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The core of this hope is the coming Kingdom of God.

Marxist theory was quite prevalent as a tool for analysing contemporary South African society.

13. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985), 35.

14. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 35.

15. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 37.

A final chapter of the *KD challenges churches to action*, reassuring them that God takes the side of the oppressed. Christians must become involved in the struggle for liberation and for justice. Church activities should be made relevant to the real needs of the poor and oppressed, and should include campaigns that promote the struggle for liberation. In order for Christians not to duplicate the efforts of civil society, they are urged to participate within the existing structures of the liberation movements: "We all have the same goals even when we differ about the final significance of what we are struggling for."¹⁶ The Church leaders should mobilise their members to work and plan for a change in the illegitimate government, and if necessary themselves participate in campaigns of civil disobedience. The Church should take moral leadership in action as well as in words.

A concluding *methodological note* is made by the theologians. They recognise the provisional nature of the document, as a work in progress. It is a response to a particular situation, and is designed to provoke and stimulate but not to prescribe reflection, discussion and action. The document ends with a call for the support of Christians around the world.

This methodology has come to be known as "people's theology"¹⁷ in which many people reflect together, in small groups, sometimes with the help of theologians, to come to a theological understanding of their situation. It shows that non-specialists can and should reflect theologically, not necessarily in the presence of, or under the guidance of trained theologians. When the fruits of this theological reflection are brought together, and issue a challenge and inspiration for other Christians, it is called "prophetic theology."

The *KD* is an example of contextual theology, addressing issues relevant to a specific people as they try to understand one dimension of their experience in the light of

16. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 49.

17. The epithet "people's" is designed to lend popular grass-roots validity to the method. Being 'of the people' is a very important claim in a society that has come to reject elitism as a mark of privilege and unfair access to the wealth that was denied to the majority for so many generations.

their faith. Its strength lies in its addressing one particular context and drawing on the Christian tradition to illuminate the situation in question. The document makes no attempt to be universally significant or applicable for all situations of oppression. It corresponds with Bevans' Praxis model of contextual theology in that it follows the basic circular hermeneutical movement from (1) committed action to (2) reflection (a) on the situation and the action and (b) on the Bible and tradition, to come to (3) further committed and intelligent action.¹⁸ As such, it may be considered to be in the same theological stable as Latin American liberation theologies, and the Asian feminist theologies described by Bevans. This poses problems of its own, which I shall now examine.

(5) Disadvantages of Using the *Kairos Document*

I will consider here two reasons for regarding the *KD* as an inadequate model on which to base one's theological reflections on the current AIDS crisis. Chief among these is the document's affinity to liberation theology. Because of this close association with liberation theology, I believe it is necessary at the outset to address some potential criticisms of the *KD*. Less importantly is its provenance in the heat of a struggle, and thus its very confrontational tone. I do not consider either of these to be overwhelming reasons to reject the document.

Firstly, the *KD* is closely identified with the liberation struggle in South Africa. It is what passed for "liberation theology" in South Africa.¹⁹ There are some legitimate criticisms of liberation theology raised, in particular, by the Congregation for the Doctrine

18. See Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), 68f.

19. The use of the term "liberation" was severely restricted and controlled under the Security and State of Emergency legislations. Until 1990 it was forbidden to belong to any of the liberation movements. To quote them or meet with their members was punishable. A number of popular circumlocutions and codes were devised to get around this restriction. Thus the term "liberation" was not applied to theology, although what was being called "contextual theology" looked remarkably similar to what was called "liberation theology" in other contexts.

of the Faith.²⁰ However from a close reading of the *KD*, it is evident that it avoids many of the concerns of the Congregation of the putative failings of theologies of liberation. Most importantly, the *KD* is not premised on the dialectical materialist presuppositions of Marxist social analysis.²¹ Accordingly, the *KD* neither reduces the novelty of the New Testament to a political or social agenda, nor identifies the Kingdom of God with a new secular order. The document does not regard sin as only in the political realm, and salvation as the abolition of apartheid. Nor does it subscribe to the theory of the necessity of the class-struggle and the inevitability of the victory of the working class. Finally, in its epistemology, truth is not a reality which is constructed in the engagement in the liberation struggle.

On the other hand, the *KD* has many traits in common with liberation theology. Its primary concern is for people suffering under the yoke of apartheid repression, and how through 'praxis' this suffering might be alleviated. The theologians relativise and critique some of the authoritative theological positions of church and state in South Africa. They write that there can be no compromise with evil and oppressive social structures. In denying that reconciliation and non-violence be the definitive theological ethical responses

20. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City, 1984). However, this document is not the final word on liberation theology, and is not beyond criticism, itself. For example, Leonardo Boff has a major critique of the document. He says its methodology is that of Central European speculative thought, beginning with *a priori* speculation which is then applied to a practical problem. On the other hand, liberation theologians begin with a concrete reality, namely oppression, and ask pertinent theological questions about liberation in that context. Liberation theology thus has an "essential relationship with liberating action." Consequently "most of the charges of reductionism leveled against the theology of liberation (. . .) do not really apply to this type of theology." See Leonardo Boff, "Vatican Instruction Reflects European Mind-Set," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by Alfred T. Hennelley, Originally Published in *Folha de São Paulo* on 31 August 1984 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 416f.

21. In his comment on the CDF Instruction, Gutiérrez distinguishes between using Marxist social analysis and adopting Marxism in its entirety: "Many schools of social thought have influenced theology, and one of them happens to be the social thought of Marx. But one thing is the critical use of the social sciences and another is the adoption of Marxist analysis in its entirety, with all the ideological presuppositions that implies." See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Criticism Will Deepen, Clarify Liberation Theology," in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by Alfred T. Hennelley. Interview in Peruvian newspaper *La República* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 421.

to apartheid, they appear to accept that conflict is an inevitable dimension of society at this stage of its history. However, this is not presented as a *necessary* state of human life. They also raise the familiar theme of liberation theology, namely, God's preferential love for the poor and oppressed, and the Church's obligation to do likewise.

Secondly, the document is a product of the heat of the moment when townships across the country were in flames with severe military repression. The authors deliberately used jarring, sometimes violent, expressions to stimulate reflection and to evoke a response. The document is thus not designed as a polished, nuanced theological statement. It was thus sometimes appropriately criticised for its strong language and lack of nuance. The document met much negative reaction and positive indifference from the established churches, some of which is recorded by Villa-Vicencio.²² The main thrust of the opposition seems to have been directed at the document's presentation of stark polarisation in the country and in the church, its denying the legitimacy of the apartheid government, and its support for violence as a means of overthrowing the regime.²³

Neither of these arguments amounts to sufficient reason to reject the use of the *KD* on the basis of its structural or theological inadequacy. I find the structure particularly fortuitous in allowing a juxtaposition of three different theological positions.

(6) Justification for Using the Kairos Document as a Structure

It may not be immediately evident why I propose to use the structure of a document from the history of the South African liberation struggle. There are five reasons why I find the *KD* singularly appropriate.

22. See Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 158–68.

23. See, for example, KwaZulu Government Bureau of Communications, "The Kairos Document," *Clarion Call* 3 (1986): 29, <http://disa.nu.ac.za/articledisplaypage.asp?articletitle=The+Kairos+Document&filename=CCV386> viewed on 28 April 2004.

Firstly, as shown above by Maluleke, Rakoczy and Van der Water, the category of *kairos* applies to the current context. The crisis of AIDS illustrates the economic realities and social division that prevail in the country. There are those who have access to privately-funded medical care, and can thus afford life-prolonging medications, while others die unmedicated. The overwhelming majority of the people living with AIDS are black. It is they who attend funerals weekly and mourn the loss of their loved ones. While it is said that “everybody is affected,” or the weaker claim everybody in the country knows someone with AIDS, the reality is that black people suffer disproportionately.²⁴ The experience of black and white people in the religious contexts are thus quite different, when so many black people attend funerals so often, and white people have more time for recreation at the weekend. It cannot be otherwise that the churches are divided.

South Africa is also facing a time of opportunity. The sooner the country acknowledges the gravity of the situation, and makes provision for the prevention of transmission and the care of people infected with HIV, the less the economic and social impact will be.²⁵ It is a time to stop political prevarication and to take decisive and bold action. It is a time that is calling for greater compassion, sympathy and support between those more and those less directly affected by the pandemic. It is a time that has seen campaigns of civil disobedience in the importing of generic drugs from Brazil, and special campaigns for the provision of medications. It is an opportunity for the churches again to

24. The reasons for this are manifold: partly due to an initial lower health condition, and hence susceptibility to opportunistic infections, as a result of apartheid, partly due to a prevailing culture of men's entitlement to sexual intercourse on demand, partly due to the migrant labour system, which still sees many men separated from their families for prolonged periods, partly due to less information about the prevention of AIDS, partly due to the use of sex as a means of transaction among poor and vulnerable people, partly due to the greater economic marginalisation and thus alienation of many black youth, who engage in risky behaviour, etc.

25. “Intelligence” sources in the country have been warning of the pandemic as the greatest threat to “security” in South Africa. See Margriet Malan, “The Influence of HIV/AIDS on National Security for South Africa: The Concerns and Implications from a Human Resources Perspective” (2000), [Http://www.mil.za/CSANDF/CJSupp/TrainingFormation/DefenceCollege/Researchpapers2000_02/malan.htm](http://www.mil.za/CSANDF/CJSupp/TrainingFormation/DefenceCollege/Researchpapers2000_02/malan.htm) viewed on 9 April 2003.

reflect theologically on the unique situation, to offer ethical teaching and to show moral leadership in care for ill people and orphans. In such a time of *kairos*, the *KD* offers a solid basis for reflection.

Secondly, the *KD* is uniquely familiar in South Africa and abroad. The document is well known in South African theological and lay circles. It has contributed to the recognised pedigree of a number of other documents. The *KD* initiated what became a tradition of calling an ecumenical range of Christians to give theological consideration to realities particularly affecting South African society. It was the first in a series of popular ecumenical theological responses to the oppression of apartheid,²⁶ and is the best known among them. Other such documents include, *inter alia* in chronological order:

(i) *The Road to Damascus*,²⁷ a document by third world theologians who consider the historical perspective of colonialism and oppression in the developing world,

(ii) *The Rustenburg Declaration* of 1990, from a conference which brought together delegates from 85 South African churches, who confessed their complicity with structures of oppression and resolved to become more engaged in the struggle to end apartheid.

(iii) *Violence: The New Kairos: Challenge to the Churches*, published by the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) in September 1990 when the townships were again on fire, and the army was engaged in battles against the youth. This document was very specific in naming the causes for the present violence, and the authors went as far as to suggest that there was explicit government involvement in maintaining a state of low intensity conflict in the townships.

I would argue that the *KD* remains the best known, the most influential and widely used of these ecumenical documents, and is in some sense seminal among popular

26. "It was the first of a number of statements calling for a new look at the role of the church in South Africa." See J.W. Hofmeyer, J.A. Millard, and C.J.J. Froneman, eds., *History of the Church in South Africa: A Document and Source Book* (Pretoria: UNISA, 1991), 362.

27. *The Road to Damascus* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989).

contextual theologies. However, there is little hard evidence that the documents did in fact effect a conversion of practice or theological stance of any church or group of individuals. The value of the documents lay in the process of bringing together a wide front of ecumenical theologians who publicly articulated a South African Christian response to injustice and repression, thereby undermining the claims of the state to theological legitimacy.

The *KD* has also been used internationally to stimulate reflection groups in developed and developing nations.²⁸ For example, the Kairos Covenant in the USA was the fruit of a convocation organised by the National Council of Churches to “reflect on the Kairos Document and to formulate appropriate responses to the situation in South Africa.”²⁹

Thirdly, the *KD* is also closely identified with the ecumenical movement of mainline churches through the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and ICT (established in 1981). While it is neither the first nor the only contextual theological document, its narrow association with the SACC and ICT lent it added weight and prominence, and helped to boost the profile of the emerging ICT. The document is considered foundational and the exemplary seminal work in contextual theology in South Africa. For this reason, it has become a reference point in ecumenical contextual theology, and one to which South African theologians often turn in theological writings.

AIDS is an issue that affects Christians across the spectrum. Whether they belong to the mainline churches, AIC's or the Pentecostal movement, whether they participated in the original *KD* or not, members of all the churches in South Africa suffer from HIV infection and AIDS. As we saw in the previous chapter, the cult of the ancestors is

28. One only needs to browse the internet to find *Kairos Documents* proposed for Europe and for Zimbabwe.

29. Willis H. Logan, ed., *The Kairos Covenant: Standing with South African Christians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1988), vii.

increasingly in the consciousness and practice of mainline churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and is thus no longer the preserve of some AIC's. The experience and reflection of the AIC's on the cult of the ancestors would be a valuable contribution to a new ecumenical reflection on AIDS in the current context. As very few AIC's participated in the original *KD* process, it would be enriching for them to participate in this kind of contextual reflection. Thus the ecumenical nature of the *kairos* process has the potential to bring together two strong strands of local theology.

Fourthly, the *KD* took the notion of *kairos* and turned it into a hermeneutical category for analysing a current situation from theological and political perspectives. Without going into in-depth justification for linking a social situation to faith-inspired action, the theologians take it as self-evident that the political crisis elicited a response of a certain kind. The nexus is made between orthopraxis and orthodoxy without getting lost in the details of the connection. I find this very useful in the search for an appropriate response to the AIDS *kairos*, which should be doctrinally sound but also issue in action that esteems human life and dignity.

Finally, I find the structure of the *KD* opportune because it illustrates two less than adequate theological responses to a given context, and proposes a third, more appropriate, prophetic theology. This is a useful structure for developing my theological considerations, as I believe that neither classical Christian nor ancestral theologies provide satisfactory responses to the AIDS crisis. It is toward a third response to this crisis that this thesis is directed.

(7) Conclusion

On balance, I believe the *KD* offers a legitimate template for pursuing an enquiry into the AIDS crisis and the cult of the ancestors. The document is closely associated with liberation theology, which means that it uses as starting point the lived experience of

millions of Christians. A problem is that it is neither as nuanced nor as refined as might be expected from another document which would have been several years in the making. But it has the advantages of being relevant to the crisis of AIDS in the current South Africa, of being familiar to many Christians, of being the fruit of ecumenical collaboration, of providing a clear hermeneutical category, of providing a contrast of differing theological positions, and finally of issuing a call to move from reflection to action.

In line with the structure of the *KD*, I will compare the theologies implicit in the ancestor cult of the African worldview, and in classical Christian theological responses, and finally offer a more prophetic theology for the AIDS crisis.

The reader will notice that in place of the “state theology” of the *KD*, I am using what I call the ancestral worldview. This does not suggest any equivalence between the two theologies. In particular, the *KD* rejected state theology as evil and deficient and, in line with the resolution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, in 1982, heretical. No such judgement is implied in my work. In fact, elements of this ancestral worldview will be taken into the proposed prophetic theology.

The areas of theology I consider most relevant to the ancestor cult and AIDS are eschatology, soteriology and ecclesiology. These form a matrix with the ancestral worldview, classical Christianity and a prophetic response as follows:

	Ancestral worldview	Classical Christianity	Prophetic Response
Soteriology: The meaning of salvation in the context of AIDS?	ancestral helpers; right relationships; preventing isolation; care of the dying	in Christ alone; many metaphors;	prevention and cure; addressing stigma
Eschatology: What does the future hold?	criteria for becoming an ancestor; structural amnesia	the Four last things; the Kingdom of God; survival of the soul; resurrection of the body	The <i>presence</i> of the Kingdom of God; cultic dimensions; assuring memories
Ecclesiology: What is the role of ‘believing’ community?	role of ritual; caring for orphans	community of saints; sacraments; “community serving humanity”	prophetic action; address gender issues; Christian “healing”

It is important to note that the prophetic response, as exemplified by the *KD*, is neither simply a hybrid of nor a plain opposition to the other two theological outlooks. It is based on the recognition that no response to any question is adequate if it remains in the abstract and theoretical realms and does not consider the effects on the lives of people who might be involved:

It is not enough in these circumstances to repeat generalized Christian principles. We need a bold and incisive response that is prophetic because it speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis, a response that does not give the impression of sitting on the fence but is clearly and unambiguously taking a stand.³⁰

The pandemic of AIDS also raises the questions of evil and suffering, or what has historically been called “theodicy.” This question might also be usefully studied from the perspectives of classical Christianity, the ancestral worldview, and a more prophetic stance. Related to the topic of salvation could be that of ‘healing,’ which might also be studied from these three perspectives. The table above is therefore not meant to be an exhaustive list of theological questions that arise in the context of the AIDS pandemic.

Each cell of the matrix above represents a potential thesis in itself. However, due to constraints of space, it is my purpose in this thesis to address only those questions concerning soteriology specific to the context of AIDS in South Africa. In a work of this size, it is not possible to deal exhaustively with two millennia of the Christian tradition on salvation. It will only be possible to give the outlines of the history of Christian soteriology.

Accordingly, in the following chapter I will consider the question of salvation in the context of AIDS from:

- 1) the perspective of the ancestor cult
- 2) a classical Christian approach
- 3) a prophetic response.

30. The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document*, 37.

Following the structure of the *KD*, I will conclude these considerations with a reflection on methodology, and a recognition of the challenge that AIDS poses across the world.