

## CHAPTER 5: AIDS AND SALVATION

### (1) Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the *Kairos Document*, the product of an ecumenical group of theologians and pastors reflecting on the deepening political crisis in South Africa in the 1980's. I applied the document's key notion of "kairos" to present day South Africa, demonstrating that the AIDS pandemic is of sufficiently grave a nature to be considered such a kairos - a moment of testing and opportunity for the Christian community, and the country in general. Analysing the content of the document, I showed that an integral feature is its critical juxtaposition of three types of theology being used by three interest groups. Finally, I showed how this juxtaposition might, in the present kairos, be applied to the question of salvation from the perspectives of the cult of the ancestors, of classical Christianity, and of a prophetic approach.

It is the purpose of this present chapter to pursue further the question of salvation in the context of AIDS using this tripartite juxtaposition. I will begin by making it clear how AIDS raises the question of salvation, and why soteriology is relevant to the present crisis. Then I will begin the study of the meaning of salvation from the three perspectives of the ancestor cult, of classical Christianity, and of a more prophetic Christian approach.

I will show how the cult of the ancestors might make a contribution of an exclusively medical nature, and how there might also be a broader meaning of salvation from the perspective of the ancestor cult. I will show how the cult might be a source of both consolation and desolation (in the classical Ignatian sense, which I will explain at that point) for people whose lives are affected by HIV/AIDS.

In tracing the history of the theology of salvation in classical Christianity, from New Testament times to the present, I will rely largely on the work of two theologians: I will use

the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to outline the history of soteriology in the New Testament, patristic, medieval and modern periods, and to consider theories of salvation such as solidarity and substitution. When I begin to look at more modern anthropologically-inspired models of salvation, I will rely heavily on the work of Antoine Vergote to consider soteriological schemes such as sacrifice and initiation.

When I examine the response to the AIDS crisis from the perspective of a prophetic theology, I will use a simple analysis of prophecy as annunciation, denunciation and prophetic action. At the annunciation phase of prophetic theology, it becomes clear that Christian ministry can and should be combined with the insights of ritual and healing in the ancestral cult. What has to be denounced are those factors which lead to the proliferation of HIV infection as well as those which exacerbate the suffering of those already affected by the virus, notably stigma and government inefficiency. Finally, in terms of prophetic action, I examine the activities of one secular organisation, and how Christian prophetic action assures the credibility of the previously stated annunciation and denunciation.

## **(2) The Meanings of Salvation in the Context of AIDS**

In South Africa, AIDS is still a terminal illness.<sup>1</sup> Even though government hospitals began routinely dispensing antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in April 2004, and though these drugs have been available to private medical patients who have been able to afford them for years, it is unlikely that the medication will reach all the people who need them.<sup>2</sup> The

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1. In many countries of the developed world, it is considered a chronic manageable condition.

2. On 1 December 2003, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNAIDS announced their "Treat 3 Million by 2005" (3 by 5) initiative. The aim of the initiative is to provide ARV's to 3 million people worldwide by the end of 2005 (See <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2003/pr89/en/> viewed on 12 June 2004.) If this goal were achieved, that means that half of the estimated 6 million people whose lives could potentially be saved by ARV's would be receiving them. The WHO webpage (<http://www.who.int/3by5/en/coverage2003.jpg> viewed on 12 June 2004) shows that in 2003, fewer than 5% of the people who require ARV treatment in South Africa were receiving these medications.

first chapter of this work concluded with a discussion of the difficulties and tardiness of the “rollout” of ARV therapy in the state medical services. Logistics and training backlogs will mean that many people, particularly in rural areas some distance from the primary medical services, will not have access to these potentially life-prolonging drugs. In the light of this discussion, it is evident that AIDS will foreseeably be responsible for the premature deaths of millions of people.<sup>3</sup>

Not only is AIDS responsible for physical death, but it is responsible for the premature “social death” of many people who suffer from AIDS infections. Such are the stigma and fear associated with AIDS, that people suffering from AIDS are often marginalised, and shunned from society. In this sense, they are treated as though they were already dead, and this exclusion from ordinary society amounts to a social death. This is particularly acute among Africans whose traditional self-identity is social. “*Motho ke motho ka batho (ba bang)*” runs the proverb: “A person is a person through (other) people.” When one is cut off from these other people, one’s own sense of life, humanity and identity are deeply affected. This isolation is thus surprising and all the more painful in communities for whom human contact and interaction are so important.

Associated with the fear of one’s own death, is the apprehension of what might happen to one’s children. In poor communities, there is no institutional provision for orphans. Traditionally orphans are taken into the homes of members of the extended family and raised as a member of the family. But when these are already overextended, it is not unusual for children to be left to fend for themselves in child-headed households<sup>4</sup> or

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3. In what follows, I will assume that the provision of ARV’s has equal soteriological significance in terms of the ancestral cult, a classical Christian outlook, and a prophetic stance. They represent the “best possible scenario” for people already living with HIV infection. Despite the difficulties associated with the drugs - the complication of the regimes and the side effects, they do have the advantage of keeping people alive and often in prolonged good health. So I will not consider separately in each case (ancestral cult, classical Christianity and prophetic response) the provision of this medication.

4. See Deborah Ewing, “Welfare,” in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 79–93.

to make a living on the streets where they are vulnerable to many forms of exploitation.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, their education is often interrupted, both during the prolonged illness of a parent and after the death of that parent.<sup>6</sup> This added concern may lead to further despair.

Finally, for people suffering from AIDS who have no children of their own, the question arises of who will remember them when they have died. One of the chief dimensions of the 'untimeliness' of death from AIDS, is that it strikes younger people, often without children. As in many Western cultures, it is a value to "pass on the family name," so, in South African cultures, fecundity is also a value. Indeed, as I argued in chapter two of this work, there is widespread agreement that the key criterion for 'becoming' an ancestor is that one have offspring. Citing Obengo, IMBISA, Michalek, Kemdirim and Erasmus, I showed that this 'juridical criterion' (Michalek) amounts to a 'cosmological duty' (Erasmus). According to the worldview, not to have fulfilled this duty causes exclusion from the company of the ancestors and implies that one will not be venerated as an ancestor.

In the light of the concerns listed above - physical death, social death, apprehension for one's orphans, and possible exclusion from the ancestors - it is not a misplaced question to ask what the meanings or promises of salvation might be in such circumstances. The question may perhaps not be articulated in terms of theological discourse, but that does not mean that there is no theological response. At this stage I will make use of the structure of the *KD* to begin to present a contextual soteriology for this

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5. On the care of AIDS orphans in Pietermaritzburg, see Margie Pretorius, "Thandanani," in *Serving Humanity: A Sabbath Reflection: The Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa After Seven Years*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1996), 206–09.

6. See Peter Badcock-Walters, "Education," in *Impacts and Interventions: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic and the Children of South Africa*, edited by Jeff Gow and Chris Desmond (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press / UNICEF, 2002), 95–110 and Catholic AIDS Action Conference Namibia Catholic Bishops, "Children, AIDS and Death," *Marfam Ties*, November 2001, 4 and Bronwen Dachs, "Children Forced to Parent in AIDS World," *The Prairie Messenger* 80 (6 November 2002): 20. These are a few of the growing number of studies on the effects of AIDS on the children of Africa.

crisis. I will compare responses coming from the perspectives of the ancestor cult, a mainstream church theology, and finally, a more “prophetic” theological response.

### **(3) Responses to the Questions of Salvation**

#### **Section One: Perspective of the Ancestor Cult**

The first type of response that the *Kairos Document* critiques is what it calls “state theology.” This is a “theological justification for the status quo.”<sup>7</sup> It was appropriate to examine the theology of the state during the years of apartheid, because there was such an explicit theology, based on an interpretation of the Exodus story in favour of the Afrikaner nation. There is no such explicit theology of the present government. I consider it justified in this case to redefine the parameters of the *KD* in order to examine the theology implicit in the cult of the ancestors, another powerfully conservative force in South African society.<sup>8</sup> This does not imply a rejection of the cult of the ancestors.

The question I will consider in this section is how the cult of the ancestors can help people with AIDS to live and to overcome any of the death-dealing aspects of the syndrome. Or in other words, how we can speak of the cult in terms of “salvation.” Firstly I will consider the strictly medical contribution of the cult of the ancestors. Secondly I will consider at greater length those dimensions of the cult that may be considered salvific for the “whole” person. Finally I will consider whether the cult of the ancestors can be considered salvific in the Ignatian sense of bringing consolation or desolation to people affected by HIV/AIDS.

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7. See The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (Braamfontein, 1985), 17.

8. I regard the cult of the ancestors as “conservative” because of the reinforcement it lends to social structures such as patrilineal inheritance, and patrilocal familial residence. Authors like Tutu and Obengo show how ancestral discourse is used to influence the morality of members of kinship groups. See Desmond Mpilo Tutu, “The Ancestor Cult and Its Influence on Ethical Issues,” *Ministry* 9, no. 3 (July 1969): 99–104 and Tom Obengo, “The Role of Ancestors as Guardians of Morality in African Traditional Religions,” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* (1991).

### (1) Medical Contribution

Traditional healers in South African society receive their healing vocation in a call from the ancestors. Whether they specialise in divination or become traditional herbalists,<sup>9</sup> their apprenticeship involves the acquisition of a traditional knowledge system. The ancestors may inspire them to develop some of their own remedies and rituals, but the bulk of their healing technique is handed on from the ancestors during their apprenticeship. Some of these traditional remedies may be used in the alleviation of various symptoms of AIDS, such as pain, intestinal infections, lesions, delirium, etc.

Medical anthropologist Edward Green writes of collaborative programmes between Western and traditional African healers in Swaziland, Liberia, Mozambique and South Africa. These have mostly worked in the direction of traditional healers eager to learn some aspects of Western medicine, and in particular in relation to the prevention and treatment of AIDS. Judging by traditional healers' theories and treatment of locally recognised STDs, Green considers this is not the area in which they can make their most significant contribution.<sup>10</sup> He sees the traditional healers as potential (secondary) allies of the 'orthodox' medical practitioners in treating AIDS, by

(1) referring STD cases or - with proper biomedical collaboration - treating cases themselves; (2) identifying, locating, and accessing the sexual partners of clients infected with STDs for the purpose of treatment or referral; (3) preventing the emergence of new STDs through the promotion of "barrier" birth control devices as well as spermicides; (4) influencing sexual behaviour in the direction of faithful, single-partner relationships; (5) influencing people to adopt safe, non-penetrative sexual practices, such as thigh sex, as an alternative to penetrative sex; (6) providing appropriate counselling and otherwise assisting in meeting the psychosocial needs of clients with HIV or AIDS as well as their family, friends and

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9. "Medical anthropologists typically divide healers into two main categories: herbalists and diviner mediums." says Matthew Steinglass, "It Takes a Village Healer: Anthropologists Believe Traditional Medicine Can Remedy Africa's AIDS Crisis. Are They Right?" *Lingua Franca*, April 2001, 32. As always, it is important not to regard these Western distinctions as describing either accurately or exhaustively the categories in which African people think. For example, some diviners may also practice as traditional herbalists.

10. See Edward C. Green, *AIDS and STDs in Africa: Bridging the Gap Between Traditional Healing and Modern Medicine* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994) (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 236.

local community; and (possibly) persuading African men to become circumcised in hospitals. . .<sup>11</sup>

I believe that if traditional healers are to have this kind of influence in the prevention and treatment of AIDS, and still be recognised as 'traditional' healers, then they will be obliged to articulate what they are doing in terms of traditional discourse. I give two such examples from the work of Laurenti Magesa in Tanzania:

Magesa recognises that Tanzanian Christians who take seriously their ancestral traditions are caught between three competing discourses in terms of the prevention of HIV/AIDS.<sup>12</sup> In the biomedical discourse, they are told to use condoms and change their sexual behaviour. In the Christian missionary discourse, they are told not to use condoms, but to abstain from sexual intercourse if it is not with one's spouse. But the third discourse - the traditional African - values sexual intercourse in terms of the kinship relationships it expresses, and of the consequent birth of children to bond the visible and invisible worlds.<sup>13</sup> Magesa says that in order to be more successful, messages about the prevention of the transmission of HIV/AIDS should be expressed in terms appropriate to traditional discourse. He begins to formulate such a message as follows:

a) The traditional Tanzanian worldview requires a personal aetiology for misfortune and disease, which is expressed in terms of witchcraft. Magesa believes that it is essential to take seriously this idea of witchcraft and to use it in a manner to prevent the spread of AIDS. He proposes the identity of sexual promiscuity with suicide, because one is killing oneself through one's own (mis)behaviour. Victims of suicide are regarded as witches in Luo society, in evidence of which, they are often denied proper burial. Thus, it would be helpful to propagate in the culture the notion that breaking traditional sexual taboos be seen as equivalent to suicide and tantamount to witchcraft. He says: "The

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11. Green, *AIDS and STDs in Africa*, 245.

12. Laurenti Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion in Tanzania," in *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, edited by James F. Keenan (New York, London: Continuum, 2000), 80.

13. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 80.

strategy here is not to deny witchcraft or to deride it as 'primitive,' but to take it seriously and use its ethical demands in the struggle against HIV/AIDS."<sup>14</sup>

b) Magesa<sup>15</sup> cites with approval, Bujo's contention that HIV transmission would be reduced if more emphasis were placed on the traditional understanding of sexuality as enhancing the life force of the community of the living, the dead and the yet to be born. Rituals of levirate marriage and assertive male sexuality would more easily be changed, says Bujo, if they were shown to be advancing death, rather than promoting life for the community. He says that concentrating on the communal dimension of sexuality would be more effective in prevention of transmission than concentrating on the promotion of condoms which manifest an individualised notion of sexuality. "A new approach to fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa is needed 'whereby [each] sexual encounter has to be viewed in its communal dimension instead of stressing a one-dimensional and individual oriented self-realization as the highest vaule'."<sup>16</sup>

While it is true that many African Christians are caught between the three discourses, as listed by Magesa, I would be surprised if expressing a message against the spread of AIDS in terms of the ancestral worldview would have dramatic results. In traditional societies taboos already exist about the role and purpose of sexual intercourse. Magesa is proposing a stronger expression of these taboos. If the taboos are already being broken, it seems to me that they do not carry the authority they may once have had.

Certainly in the case of South Africa, much sexual behaviour is governed not by African tradition, but by what is perceived as Western morality, to which many young

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14. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 82.

15. See Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 82f.

16. Magesa, "Recognising the Reality of African Religion," 83 quoting Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimensions of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1998), 187.

people aspire. Living at the interface of the Western (scientific) and the African (traditional) cultures, young South Africans are negotiating a new culture in which to live their lives. In the process, they will select among the benefits of both cultures.<sup>17</sup> The suggestion that they do not understand the biomedical explanation of disease transmission would underestimate their grasp of the disease. They are just as likely to turn to the Western medical paradigm for advice on the prevention of HIV transmission as to the African worldview. Opting to believe in the use of condoms, is certainly the path of least resistance, compared with adopting traditional mores.

Also, I believe it is a romanticisation of African tradition to try to retrieve a communal dimension of sexuality, whatever this may mean. Is it likely to be accepted by young South Africans, for whom sexual behaviour is about “self-realization?”

In conclusion, it is probably not very fruitful to look for signs of salvation from AIDS in term of traditional African healers’ role in categories normally understood by the biomedical model of healing.<sup>18</sup> It is probably more promising to look to the ancestral tradition of care for and treatment of the sick and dying for an insight into the meaning of salvation in this context.

## (2) More Holistic View of Salvation

In chapter two I showed that, depending on the degree to which the cult has been christianised, the ancestors either have power of their own right, or are operating as agents of God. In the latter case, appeal to the ancestors is conceived as asking them to intercede to the almighty God on behalf of the suppliant. Whether or not their power is perceived as coming from God, the ancestors are believed to be responsible for the

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17. Quoting Bishop Joseph Blomjous, “Development in Mission Thinking and Practice 1959–1980: Inculturation and Interculturation,” *AFER* 22, no. 6 (1980): 393–98, Aylward Shorter calls this dynamic “interculturation.” See Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 13–16.

18. This does not discount the possibility of the discovery of a wonder medication that might act as a vaccine against the HIV.

wellbeing of their descendants. It is they who remove illness or misfortune and restore blessing. They are thus the agents of “salvation” in the sense of restoring health and harmony to the family.

In the discourse on the ancestors, the word “salvation” is not normally used. However, Maimela believes that there are “signs of salvific activity in the African Traditional Religions.”<sup>19</sup> He writes that the religions have designed a variety of protective rites and rituals to “help save people from anxieties that are experienced due to life’s contingencies. . . .” This seems to be a largely psychological understanding of salvation. Setiloane has a broader understanding of salvation. For him, “*Salvation*, therefore, is when peace, order and happiness are maintained in the community. This way all live and let others live.”<sup>20</sup> Salvation has to do with the present life of a community, and is not focussed on a future life. I believe this broader understanding of salvation is appropriate within the cult of the ancestors, in the context of AIDS.

As I showed in the second chapter, the ancestors are frequently appealed to in times of crisis. They are perceived to have power to protect (and punish) their descendants. It is they who cause misfortune when they feel there has been a violation of taboo and traditional prescriptions for right behaviour. In the case of an ill person, for example, the affected people consult a diviner who confers with the ancestors to establish the source of the problem. When the cause of a malady has been ritually diagnosed, a further ritual is prescribed. During the performance of this salutary ritual, the ancestors come to the aid of the pleading family. The purpose of the ritual is often to restore right relationships with the ancestors, with God, and among the neighbours and relatives of the

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19. See Simon Maimela, “Traditional African Anthropology and Christian Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 76 Special Issue: Theological Anthropology in South Africa (September 1991): 7.

20. Gabriel Setiloane, “Salvation and the Secular,” in *Hammering Swords Into Ploughshares: Essays in Honour of Archbishop Mpilo Desmond Tutu*, edited by Buti Tlhagale and Itumeleng Mosala (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 77.

ill person. It is thus important for everyone concerned with the ill person to attend the ritual.

Ncube shows how the traditional Zulu divination and healing ritual processes might be core ingredients in the treatment of a person with AIDS.<sup>21</sup> He establishes to his satisfaction that the Zulu epistemological tools of *ukubhula* (divination) *nokuthakatha* (witchcraft) are compatible with Christian thought.<sup>22</sup> *Ukubhula* is a culturally appropriate

tool to listen to complaints of the people in sorrow and pain. It is the way people communicate their tension, anger and other frustrations health-wise, financial-wise, family-wise, etc. Thus it is the means to cope with misfortune and anxiety.<sup>23</sup>

As *ukubhula* helps in identifying the reason and the causes of illness or misfortune symbolically, so *ukuthakatha* is a code that signifies a breakdown in human relations.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the divination ritual enables people to express their frustration with sufferings, both physical and social, while the language of witchcraft is a manner of speaking of the need to restore social relations.<sup>25</sup>

Ncube maintains that since AIDS is incurable by traditional means,<sup>26</sup> it profoundly

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21. Vitus Sipho Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo* (Sickness unto Death and Rest in Peace) in Times of HIV-AIDS with a Special Reference to Zulu Concepts of *ukubhula* (Divination) *nokuthakatha* (Witchcraft)," dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (School of Theology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, supervised by Dr Stuart C. Bate, 2002), 45–53.

22. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 45.

23. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 42.

24. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 52.

25. However, it is important to remember that there is another dimension to the code of witchcraft that has the potential of being very destructive. This is the practice of seeking out the witch or sorcerer in order to punish him or her. J.D. Kriel, "Noord-Sotho-beskouinge oor Medemense as siekteveroorakende agente," *South African Journal of Ethnology* 19, no. 4 (1996): 14 says that the person thus identified is dealt with in an "appropriate manner" [paslike wyse]. Unfortunately the "appropriate" punishment inflicted is not infrequently death. This practice can neither be condoned in healing rituals associated with AIDS, nor with other situations.

Kgatla says that witchcraft discourse should be eliminated by its replacement with alternative myths, idioms, songs and riddles. See S.T. Kgatla, "'Moloi Ga a Na Mmala' [A Witch Has no Colour]: Witchcraft Accusations in South Africa," *Missionalia* 32, no. 1 (April 2004): 98f.

26. Opportunistic "prophets" have emerged in this desperate situation who claim to be able to cure AIDS, by means of faith or traditional remedies. Many of these "prophets" turn out to be charlatans, to the distress of the people who put their hope in them. For example Prophet Mahambi made headline news by claiming to have cured popular radio personality Bruce Sosibo of AIDS. The falsity of this claim was sadly established by Sosibo's death. See Felix Mgudlwa, "Bruce Sosibo Died Denying He Still Had AIDS," *Bona*, October 1996, 22,24.

challenges the traditional Zulu symbolic system of *ukubhula nokwelashwa* (divination and treatment), and consequently the notions of the ancestors and the Creator God.<sup>27</sup> As the desired remedy cannot be effected in the physiological dimension, it is thus to be effected in the social area of the patient's life. The prescribed ritual is a family affair and thus reaffirms the belonging and thus personhood of the ill person.<sup>28</sup> The name of this ritual, *inhlambuluko yegceke*, describes the desired effect of reconciliation within the family. In the case of AIDS, the ritual helps to remove misunderstandings and accusations regarding the cause of the disease. AIDS is thus fought in the spirit of the "African family of God" emphasised by John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Africa*: "care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust."<sup>29</sup>

In other aspects of the traditional Zulu care for the sick, Ncube finds dimensions of the cult of the ancestors that would be important in a Christian pastoral response.<sup>30</sup> It is important for a person to die at home, if at all possible, in order to be among the ancestors, and thus upon death not to become a wandering spirit. *Ukwenza izaba* involves observation and treatment of, and a presence to the patient, and not leaving him or her alone during the home-based terminal care. Even though people know that AIDS is incurable, there remains an *ukuthembela kowelaphayo* (trust in the traditional healer) - not for some miracle cure, but rather as a communal involvement in the care of the ill person. Finally, Ncube reports a particular ritual slaughtering as a means of preparing for death. Historically, elderly people, feeling the approach of death, would ask for a beast to be slaughtered in their honour, and the only part of the meat that they would consume would be the liver. Having done this, they were prepared for death, and everyone would be

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27. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 48. Ncube's thinking here appears to be that ancestors and Creator God are necessary components of a theodicy. The wrath of the ancestors is an explanation for misfortune or illness. If the misfortune cannot be revoked by appeasing the ancestors, then this challenges the theodicy and the necessity of the ancestors.

28. Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 46.

29. John Paul II, "*Ecclesia in Africa*," *Origins* 25, no. 16 (5 October 1995): 63.

30. See Ncube, "Towards a Theology of *ukugula, ukufa nokuphumula ngoxolo*," 60–63.

satisfied that the death was anticipated and religiously prepared for. AIDS, says Ncube, usually allows one to make similar preparations and to come to a similar acceptance of impending death.

I will now attempt to balance ways in which the cult of the ancestors might be a source of consolation and desolation to a person facing death from AIDS. I use the terms “consolation” and “desolation” not merely to describe a person’s feelings of peace and happiness or despair and depression, respectively. Rather, I use them to include the technical sense proposed by Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*. They describe a person’s movement towards or away from God which, in this situation, I associate with the task at hand of preparing for death.<sup>31</sup>

It is tautologous to describe salvation in terms of consolation, since what Ignatius means by “consolation” includes what “invites and attracts . . . to the salvation of one’s soul. . .” Thus, without reducing salvation to emotional wellbeing, I would say that a consolation that helps a person to come to terms with the finitude of his or her life, offers an increase in peace, faith, hope or love, is a movement towards God and is “salvific.”

### (3) The Cult as a Source of Desolation

Firstly, there is potentially a source of great distress for people confronted with the prospect of dying with no direct progeny of their own. In the third section of the second chapter of this thesis, I considered “Who becomes an ancestor?” All of the authors

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31. Ignatius writes:

Finally, I call consolation every increase in faith, hope and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

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I call desolation [. . .] a darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord.

See Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, translated by Louis J. Puhl (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1951), points 316f.

consulted agreed on one juridical criterion, namely that an ancestor is a person who has died leaving descendants of his or her own. Under the heading of “juridical criteria,” I cited the article by Kemdirim demonstrating the distress suffered by childless couples. There hangs over the demise of childless people the shame of “cosmological insignificance” (as I termed it) and of no future in the next life.<sup>32</sup>

Performance of the rituals of healing and receiving care from one’s family as prescribed in ancestral tradition, may help to reconcile one to one’s not having produced

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32. However, this distress may be more potential than actual, as the following conversations have revealed: In conversation with Archbishop Tlhagale on 16 May 2003, he was quite clear that people dying of AIDS without any direct descendants are not considered as ancestors. He says that they will be remembered for their youth and contribution to society as such. He pointed to all the young people who have died over the years in the struggle for liberation of South Africa. Those who are remembered on June 16, (national Youth Day, commemoration of the Soweto massacre of 16 June 1976) are acknowledged for the contribution they made to liberation of the country. Thus, for Tlhagale, it is not a disaster not to be remembered as an ancestor.

However, in conversation with some religious friends, (Xaba and Morare, both of mixed Zulu/Tswana background, August 2002) they believed that although they die childless, they will be remembered as ancestors because of the wisdom and care they have exercised during their ministry. Morare said that through a ritual process he will become an ancestor “by adoption” and considered such in his family. Both were in agreement that a deceased priest of our acquaintance is regarded as an ancestor by his (Xhosa) family.

Another religious friend, (Hlobo, of Sotho background, May 2002) in discussing the death of a common friend in her late twenties (of Pedi background), without any children, said that although she had died childless, her nieces and nephews, or the children of her cousins may consider her among their ancestors. As an elder relative to them, she would have assumed the responsibilities of a parent (feeding, clothing, educating, etc.) if their actual parents had died when they still needed help. They would have looked up to her, and she would have brought them birthday and Christmas presents, etc. So she is an ancestor to them.

The same friend recalls one particular rite when his family had to bury an uncle who died childless at the age of 22. When the coffin was being carried out of the house, members of the family went through the ritual of saying “Greet x, y, and z for us... Take our greetings to so-and-so.” My conversant associated this ritual action with the ancestor cult, and says he regards this uncle as an ancestor, even though he had no children of his own.

Now it may well be argued that these latter conversationists (Xaba, Morare and Hlobo) “are detribalised, Westernised, do not know their culture, etc.” It is true that they are urban, Christian, members of a religious order and certainly do not live their “pure” culture as it was lived by members of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

But what these conversations do show is that cultures are not static. These young men have reflected on the problem of premature death, and have come up with the solutions they suggested. Their responses indicate that the formal criterion of having one’s own children, in order to be regarded as an ancestor, is not as absolute as indicated by the authors I quoted in Chapter Two. Under the influence of Christianity, democratisation, and the notion of “God’s universal salvific will” these men have departed from a strict interpretation of what it is to be an ancestor. They appear to be merging an uncritical understanding of heaven (regarded as a state of felicity to which good souls go after death) with their concept of the village of the ancestors.

descendants. It is common for a person of one generation to call a younger member of the family, “*ngoan ’aka*” or “my child.” Thus the presence of nephews or nieces at the bedside of a person with AIDS may provide an opportunity to pass on wisdom and the lessons that the person had learnt during his or her short life. But the hard reality is, that this remains a potential source of great sadness, turmoil and disturbance - what Ignatius would have considered desolation.

Secondly, the cult of the ancestors carries with it a weight of moral implications. Ancestral tradition in South Africa dictated morality concerning sexuality and relationships between members of the opposite gender.<sup>33</sup> If the majority of cases of HIV transmission are sexual, rather than perinatal and parenteral,<sup>34</sup> then these ancestral traditions have clearly fallen into desuetude. Certainly, there is an alarming rate of rape of women, young girls and infants, as we saw in the first chapter of this work. According to tradition, men do not have right to sexual intercourse when it suits them, as they appear to presume nowadays. Young dating couples were to have intercrural sex, if they were to have sexual relations at all. If a young woman had a child outside of marriage, it was considered a shame, and the man responsible had to compensate the family of the young woman. This appears no longer to be the case.<sup>35</sup>

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33. For discussions of the ancestor cult and morality, see Letta Mosue, “Ancestors and HIV/AIDS,” *Grace and Truth* 18, no. 2 (August 2001): 28–33 and Obengo, “The Role of Ancestors,” 44–63 44–63. Mosue, in particular, makes the connection between deviation from the ancestral moral prescriptions and the AIDS pandemic.

34. *pace* Gisselquist et al. See David Gisselquist, John J. Potterat, Stuart Brody, and François Vachon, “Let It Be Sexual: How Health Care Transmission of AIDS in Africa Was Ignored,” *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 148–61.

35. There are numerous possible reasons for this deviation from traditional ancestral morality. I would rate as primary among them the ‘emasculatation’ of African men over generations of colonialism and apartheid. When men have had to take a servile and submissive role in an oppressive society, sexual relationships are one avenue for reasserting their wounded masculinity. Secondly, due to the migrant labour system splitting up families, many young people have grown up without functioning parental figures on whom to model the formation of their relationships. Thirdly, there was a change in inter-generational relations in South Africa in 1976. When young people were tired of waiting for their parents to make changes to the system of apartheid, they took the initiative with mass protests against the educational system. There was a wholesale rejection of the leadership and example of an older generation, accompanied by attempts to re-invent ethics and morality, as the need arose. This has had a prolonged effect on South African society.

Usually misfortune and suffering are interpreted as punishment from the ancestors for the breach of some taboo or the failure to perform some activity prescribed in their regard. It is likely that in these circumstances one would interpret the deviation from traditional morality as a cause for one's illness. When a person is suffering from an incurable, often protracted and debilitating illness, like those associated with AIDS, then there is plenty of time to consider what may have displeased the ancestors. Instead of having the sense that there is a strong protective power on one's side, one feels that they have withdrawn their protection as punishment for some infraction. This can lead to alienation and anger towards the ancestors and possibly despair about one's future. Again, in Ignatian terms, this is desolation.

#### (4) The Cult as a Source of Consolation

From Ncube's work, we can see that the following dimensions of the cult of the ancestors might indeed be considered consolation:

Firstly, the ritual actions of the cult locate the person suffering with AIDS at the centre of a caring, concerned social circle. This forestalls the feared social death of isolation and stigma associated with the disease. For a person whose primary sense of self is as a social being, one's identity is saved if one is not cut off by one's kin.

Secondly, the ritual actions are aimed at restoring harmony between a person, the ancestors, the family, and possibly God. The person at the centre of the ritual is regarded as effecting reconciliation in what is often a fractious situation of recrimination and tension. This implies that the death has been prepared for, and is in that sense a "good" death.

Thirdly, in offering something to trust in - in this case, the efficacy of the traditional healing methods, however limited or illusory - the cult allows people affected by AIDS to escape from despair. It is repeatedly said that *hope* is an essential ingredient in living with

AIDS.<sup>36</sup> Armed with such hope, the quality of life of a person with AIDS is likely to be better.

Fourthly, the very fact of the cult of the ancestors represents an implicit belief that life on earth is not final. It denotes that there is a transcendent dimension with some promise of fulfillment, in which one is remembered by one's family who remain alive, and in which one is reunited with members of one's family who have predeceased one. This eschaotological outlook gives a framework within which one can become engaged in one's future, and make and effect plans in bringing about the desired outcome.

Finally, in providing a ritual way of preparing for death, the cult allows the affected people to come to terms with the approaching end, and not be left with a sense of meaninglessness and futility. This search for meaning and purpose might be particularly acute for a person who is childless. The cult therefore, while confounding a person and being responsible for one source of anxiety, also provides a framework within which to work out the meaning of one's life. One can come to an understanding of the significance of one's life to one's kin and acquaintances.

For the above reasons, it is evident that the cult of the ancestors is not an unmitigated source of desolation, and that in fact it does allow people to approach death, often in very tragic circumstances, in a peaceful, reconciled manner. Achieving this "peace and quiet" of which Ignatius writes, constitutes a movement towards God or 'consolation,' and by Ignatius' definition, salvation.

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36. The San Francisco AIDS Foundation has operated since 1982, and is now considered among the leaders in the fight against AIDS. Its webpage on a "Broad Spectrum Healing Program" stresses the need to accentuate the positive factors in one's life when living with HIV/AIDS. These highlight the importance of "psychoimmunity, positive thinking, *hope*" (emphasis mine.) This hope might be directed towards a possible cure, towards a future state of rest or towards being united with one's ancestors, etc. See <http://www.sfaf.org/aids101/treatment.html> viewed on 23 June 2004. For the experience of a hospital chaplain of the necessity to live with hope in the face of AIDS, see Denis Ledogar, *Face au SIDA: Le courage d'espérer* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1995).

## Section Two: Classical Christian Response

The second type of response in the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies proposed by the *Kairos Document* is “Church theology.” This theology uses a variety of classical Christian theological constructs. Theologians and pastors have imported from other situations responses to the questions of previous generations, applying these, ostensibly in fidelity to the tradition, to the problem at hand. Thus, for example, the Kairos theologians cite the promotion of a theology of non-violence and co-operation with civil authorities as the appropriate response to apartheid repression. Theologians promoting such a response were missing the challenge that apartheid presented.

I believe that similar responses to the AIDS pandemic, claiming fidelity to the tradition, have completely missed the kairos of AIDS and may inadvertently have failed to prevent the deaths of so many young people. I maintain that this approach is misguided and unsatisfactory. I do not go as far as the Kairos theologians in condemning the Church theology of their time.

In South Africa, in the second half of the 20th Century, when I was growing up, and I dare say even today, salvation was a personal, spiritual affair. In the (white) Catholic Church we would pray with the rosary: “Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of your mercy.” In Protestant circles, I was often confronted with the question: “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour?” Thus the discourse around salvation had to do with conversion from sin and living a personal relationship with God, in order for one’s soul to be spared the punishment of hell.

While this may seem a caricature, it is not. There was no sense that salvation might have a political, civic or social dimension. While some statements of the hierarchy of many English-speaking churches decried the evils of apartheid,<sup>37</sup> it was not evident that

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

this had any link to “salvation.” This privatisation of salvation is not new or unique, and it prevails as the classical or received “spiritual” discourse. It belongs to a tradition which focuses more on mechanisms of salvation than on the social implications. In this section on the classical Christian notion of salvation, I will show how it has developed down the past 2000 years.

In the Christian context, “salvation” refers to God’s intervention in the affairs of the world through the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, we speak of salvation “in Christ.” The guiding question is *how* Christ can be said to have overcome evil in the world, of which AIDS is a very real manifestation. For Jesus’ Jewish forebears, salvation was exclusively the activity of God. God is the agent of salvation in the Old Testament.

#### (1) History of Christian Soteriology

In this section on salvation in the classical Christian sense, it is neither possible nor necessary to summarise the entire history of soteriology. It is, however, necessary to give an overview of the important aspects in the history of this central tenet of Christian theology. In order to do this, I will refer extensively to the *Theodramatik* of Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>38</sup> This is not because von Balthasar’s presentation is in any sense the best, or the most comprehensive. In fact, as Peelman notes, because von Balthasar’s soteriology “from above,” is very Christocentric and ecclesiocentric, it engages with difficulty the needs and challenges of contemporary multicultural Christianity engaged in dialogue with other religions.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it is a matter of convenience, because in some 90 pages von Balthasar summarises many of the essentials of this historical development.

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38. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory: Vol IV: The Action*, (Volume III in the German original), translated by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 240ff.

39. See Achiel Peelman, *Le salut comme drame trinitaire: La Theodramatik de Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Brèches théologiques (Montreal, Paris: Médiaspaul, 2002), blurb.

In *Theodramatik*, von Balthasar presents the history of salvation as experienced by the Trinity itself.<sup>40</sup> This is an atemporal, transcendent approach to salvation history, which does not invoke the context of the people who are engaged in the theological enterprise.<sup>41</sup> Von Balthasar's contribution is the way in which he presents salvation history as a dramatic interplay of human and divine - finite and infinite - freedoms.<sup>42</sup> Although this aspect of the work is novel, I have chosen to use the soteriology of *Theodramatik* as representative of a classical Christian approach to salvation.

However, before considering von Balthasar's writing, I would like to present one tension that must be borne in mind as we proceed in our soteriology. This is the tension between the universal and the exclusive, the general and the particular, the beneficiaries and the executor of salvation. The tension has its roots in the earliest New Testament witness to the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. These two axioms must be kept in dynamic tension:

(i) The universal: God desires the salvation of all people - the universal salvific will of God. (cf. 1 Tim 2:4 "God wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth.") Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection have universal significance, whether or not people acknowledge Jesus as saviour.<sup>43</sup>

(ii) The particular: Jesus is confessed as the saviour. He is the unique Son of God and is uniquely salvific. Salvation in Christ is definitive. Peter announces to the

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40. In itself, this is not a unique insight. For example in *The Spiritual Exercises*, the person making the Exercises meditates on the Holy Trinity looking down on the world and resolving to "work the redemption of the human race." See: Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, 101–09.

41. See Peelman, *Le salut comme drame trinitaire*, 11.

42. *Theodramatik* (1985-1987) is built on his seven-volume *Herrlichkeit* (1961-1969), a theological aesthetics, the first work in his trilogy. It is followed by the three-volume, *Theologik* (1985-1987) in which he "unpacks" the aesthetic and dramatic dimensions of theology.

43. I am aware that there is controversy over the questions of whether there is anyone in hell, or even whether hell exists. Much ink has been spilt in response to von Balthasar's *Was dürfen wir hoffen?* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1986) in which he considers hoping for the possibility that hell may in fact be empty because of the irresistible mercy of God and the superabundance of grace (cf. Rom 5:20). For a resumé of the arguments, see Avery Dulles, "The Population of Hell," *First Things*, no. 133 (May 2003): 36–41, <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0305/articles/dulles.html> viewed on 9 August 2004.

Sanhedrin when he is being interrogated about the cure of a lame man.<sup>44</sup> There is no other name by which one can be saved.<sup>45</sup> Not only is he the unique saviour, but his act of salvation cannot be repeated, as is asserted by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews: “once and for all . . . single sacrifice for sins.”<sup>46</sup>

### (a) Five Aspects of the New Testament Witness

Von Balthasar presents five “main features of atonement in the New Testament,”<sup>47</sup> all of which are closely interrelated and add to the whole understanding of salvation as drama, yet do not form a “system.” No Christian theory of salvation is satisfactory without including all of these aspects. These five main aspects of the biblical witness are:

(i) “The reconciliation with the world achieved by God presupposes that God’s ‘only Son’ has ‘*given himself up* for us all’, so that, as a result, he ‘gives us all things’ (Rom 8:32).”<sup>48</sup> This ‘giving up’ (*Dahingabe*) has an active and a passive sense. Jesus gives active and deliberate consent (Jn 10:17f.: I lay down my life . . . No one takes it from me), but he also foretells that he will be “handed over to the chief priests and scribes” (Mt 20:18 and parallels.) Hebrews has Jesus as both the “supreme high priest” (4:14) and the victim

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44. See Acts 3:1-10.

45. See Acts 4:10-12: “. . . you must know . . . that it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene . . . and by no other name . . . that this man stands before you cured. . . . Only in him is there salvation; for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.” It is noteworthy that Peter moves from the language of curing to that of salvation.

46. See Heb 10:10,12,14. The writer is using a narrative of Christ’s death as a sacrifice for sin, which supersedes all other sin offerings. The point is that it is a single unrepeatabe event. On the appropriateness of sacrificial language in talking about the salvific death of Christ, see Antoine Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ à la lumière de l’anthropologie*,” in *Mort pour nos péchés: Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour, Antoine Vergote, René Bureau, and Joseph Moingt (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976), 45–83.

47. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 240–43. The translation of the original “*Versöhnung*” has been technically rendered “atonement” but in ordinary parlance carries the weight of “reconciliation.”

48. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 240f.

of sacrifice “who offered himself, blameless as he was, to God through the eternal Spirit” (9:14).

This sacrifice was not notional, but real, because Jesus gave up his life (Jn 10:17). Using different metaphors, each with its semantic field, this has been variously interpreted as “expiation”<sup>49</sup> (Rom 3:25), “justification” (Rom 5:9), “cleansing” (1Jn 1:7). It is essential to remember this giving up was “for us” (*pro nobis*) - a recurrent term in von Balthasar’s treatment.

(ii) The notion of substitution (*Platztausch*) is also present in the witness. Christ takes or assumes our place. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake.” (Gal 3:13) “For our sake he made the sinless one sin (or a victim for sin), so that we might become the uprightness of God.” (2 Cor 5:21)

(iii) In a negative sense, this reconciliation with God can be understood as a liberation (*Freisetzung*), from slavery to sin (Rom 7), the Devil (1Jn 3:8), the Law (Rom 7:6), etc. The language of liberation evokes the language of redemption and ransoming of the Old Testament (*go’el* and *ga’al*), where it was applied to Israel and to individuals.

(iv) In a totally positive sense, this liberation is also a drawing into the divine life of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit calling out in us “Abba, Father!” assures us of our status with Christ as fellow children and heirs of the Father (Gal 4:7). God’s purpose is to enable us to share in Christ’s sonship<sup>50</sup> and knowledge of this mystery (Eph 1:5,9). We become members of God’s body (Eph 4, etc.). Any other freedom apart from that given by the Holy Spirit is illusory.

(v) “Whereas, in connection with man’s desperate plight, there are many references to ‘God’s anger’ ([ . . .]), the entire reconciliation process is attributed to God’s

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49. ἱλαστηριον refers to the propitiatory, on which the blood was sprinkled on the day of expiation. By extension, Christ is the propitiation.

50. I do not here or in any other part of this paper wish to attribute gender to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, or to any member of the Trinity. However, during the earthly Incarnation, the Second Person assumed male gender, which meant he was a *Son* of God. It is in this relationship of being a child of God that we are to share.

merciful *love* [*die erbarmende Liebe Gottes*].<sup>51</sup> The primary source of this reconciliation is God's gracious love, rather than a covenant "righteousness." God takes the initiative "for God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whosoever believes in him might not die, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

In the subsequent discussion,<sup>52</sup> von Balthasar says that none of the aspects may dominate the others, thereby reducing their significance. Together, or individually, they cannot be replaced by a more contemporary assertion which appears to be their equivalent. Nor should any tension which exists between them be lessened in the interests of an apparent synthesis. This is not an attempt to present a "biblical theology"<sup>53</sup> of salvation, but it begins with the New Testament witness and then proceeds to consider the subsequent tradition.

It should be noted here that this historical outline begins with the New Testament witness, and does not consider the Old Testament. I will return to this point later, as I think it is of significance for my consideration of soteriology in the context of AIDS.

After stating and discussing the five aspects taken from the New Testament, von Balthasar continues his historical outline of soteriology by considering the major theological constructions in the Patristic, the Medieval and the Modern periods. He believes that in each attempt to construct the theology of redemption, tension was not kept between the five aspects, and the attempt thus foundered.

### **(b) The Patristic Model**

The Patristic Period was one of defining the nature, rather than the action of Christ. Thus any soteriology was implicit in the development of Christology, rather than an

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51. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 243 I have attempted to be as gender-neutral as possible throughout this paper, and apologise for where direct citations require that I use terms like "man" to represent the entire human race.

52. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 243f.

53. For an example of "biblical theology" of Salvation, refer to Colomban Lesquivit and Pierre Grelot, "Salvation," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour (London:

explicitly worked out system. There is a variety of theologies of redemption during the patristic period, but, according to von Balthasar's analysis, they are all based on the common notion of "exchange:" God became human in order that humans might be taken up to God's place. This *commercium* construct uses all five of the aspects of New Testament soteriology, but the *Platztausch* (aspect 2) is the dominant idea of the construct, combined with human participation in the inner Trinitarian life (aspect 4.) This *commercium* construct arose in the context of the need to define Christ as simultaneously divine and human, in order that his redemption might incorporate the whole human: "What was not assumed was not redeemed."<sup>54</sup>

The Fathers are not so clear on precisely *how* the Logos effects the exchange, how he makes us present in himself. For example, the Logos only takes on the *consequences* of sin and the punishment due to sin, but not sinful nature itself. This limit of the model of *admirabile commercium* is unconscious because it is taken for granted, says von Balthasar.<sup>55</sup> However, the Fathers want to hold on to the whole realism of the Gospel, and especially to the "*pro nobis*" dimension of Christ's taking the place of the sinner before God. This is a problematic that persists in the whole of the history of theology of Christian salvation, and the Fathers cannot be expected to have solved the entire mystery.

### **(c) Medieval Models**

#### **(i) Anselm**

In this second period in his divisions of the history of soteriology, von Balthasar give primacy to Anselm's satisfaction construction and considers Thomas's christological

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Chapman, 1973), 457–61.

54. The formula of Gregory Nazianzen in response to the Appolinarians who, in the process of establishing the divinity of the incarnated Logos, maintained that Jn 1:14 meant that the Logos only became flesh and didn't take the whole human conditions of will, passions and personality, i.e. Jesus was Logos-sarx and not Logos-anthropos.

55. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 253f.

development of this model.<sup>56</sup> Von Balthasar says that Anselm was the first theologian “to develop a systematic soteriology, endeavouring to bring together motifs inherited from Scripture and the Fathers, and to integrate them.”<sup>57</sup> He says that Anselm’s satisfaction model developed in *Cur Deus homo* favours aspect 3 of the New Testament, namely, salvation is a “ransom.” The construct neglects neither God’s love as the primary motivator (aspect 5), nor aspect 1, the handing-over of the Son. The substitution (aspect 2) refers more to the fruits of Christ’s death than to the person of Christ himself. However, aspect 4 - the initiation of humans into the divine life of the Trinity - remains implicit and undeveloped. Nor does the construct deal expressly with the Holy Spirit or the Resurrection.

The driving idea behind the satisfaction construct is that God’s “external” honour, offended by the sin of humanity in disrupting the covenant between God and people, can neither be restored merely by remorse on the part of the sinner, nor merely by God’s forgiveness of the sin. Some great sacrifice is required to restore God’s honour. (All the while, God’s “internal” honour remains unassailed.)<sup>58</sup> In keeping with the necessity imposed on creation by God’s absolute truth, justice, goodness and mercy, God’s honour is restored by the nevertheless free action of the suffering human life and particularly the death of Jesus. The reality of the world imposes a life of suffering and is of no merit in itself. But, because he was sinless, Jesus did not have to suffer the punishment of death. Thus the death of Christ is an act of supererogation. Being God, Jesus cannot directly profit from this act of supererogation, so the merits of his death are applied to sinful people, thereby satisfying God’s requirement of justice, and permitting the restoration of order to creation.

Von Balthasar believes that Anselm saw the death of Christ as “exemplary” rather

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56. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 255–61 and 262–66.

57. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 255.

58. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 256.

than substitution in the ordinary sense, since no intrinsic connection is made between Jesus and the sins of the rest of humanity. On the contrary,

. . . the Innocent One who suffers death must not come into contact with the sins of the others if his work is to be effective. Christ's death is placed on one side of the scales and the sins of the world on the other; the death overbalances the world's sins because of the free-will nature and divine value of the former.<sup>59</sup>

My own problem with this construct is precisely that it is too "contextual" to have meaning for contemporary South Africa. The categories of justice, honour, offence and satisfaction, which still reflect their medieval provenance, find no natural resonance in the mentality of present-day South Africa. While a legal framework, *per se*, is not inimical to soteriology, this particular framework does not correspond to any known in our context. Further, the idea of God *requiring* punishment by death of those who have offended divine dignity, is repugnant to a nation which has long suffered the arbitrary imposition of the death penalty on people who have offended a minority political elite. This satisfaction model is therefore not useful in our consideration of the meaning of Christian hope for salvation in our context of AIDS. However, the notion of having to appease the *ancestors* for some infringement of ritual or moral taboo is not alien, and so the notion of 'satisfaction' might find echoes in the mechanism of salvation in the cult of the ancestors. But here, the ancestors are satisfied with the blood of a sacrificial animal, and do not require a human victim.

(ii) Thomas

According to von Balthasar, in the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas uses the model of Anselm, but resists "the idea . . . of a ransom-price to be paid to the 'powers' or of punitive action to appease the divine anger."<sup>60</sup> In addition, Thomas lays greater stress than Anselm on the fourth aspect of New Testament atonement, namely the participation

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59. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 260.

60. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 262.

of the saved in the divine Trinitarian life. Thomas is also more successful, in von Balthasar's opinion, at incorporating the glorification of Jesus into the scheme of the reconciliation. But, again according to von Balthasar, Thomas displays the same inability as Anselm to incorporate any inner connection between Jesus and the reality of human sin.<sup>61</sup> For Thomas, the connection between Christ and humans is that of unique Mediator, and as Head of the Body, the Church. Christ's sufferings, for Thomas, *do* have some value as satisfaction. Von Balthasar lists the value of Christ's sufferings as: i) demonstrating God's love, ii) exemplary of virtues, iii) meriting justification, iv) reminding people to keep away from sin, and finally, v) triumphing over the devil.<sup>62</sup> Thomas and Anselm both consider the interplay between Christ's freedom to accept the suffering and the 'necessity' of God arranging this satisfaction.

#### **(d) Contemporary Models**

By the contemporary period, von Balthasar means from the Reformation onwards. Models of salvation from this period concentrate either on solidarity in favour of obsolete concepts such as sacrifice, ransom and satisfaction, or on a renewed understanding of the Patristic idea of substitution that bridges the gap introduced by Anselm between Jesus and the rest of humanity. Von Balthasar suggests a synthesis of these two approaches would accord due weight to all five aspects of the New Testament witness.<sup>63</sup> However, at first glance such a synthesis does not seem possible, because the solidarity model looks primarily at Jesus' humanity and ministry, while the renewed *commercium* model concentrates on the Godhead of Jesus on the cross.

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61. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 263.

62. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 264.

63. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 266.

(i) Solidarity<sup>64</sup>

Although the term itself arrived late on the theological scene, the notion of the solidarity of God with sinful humans, in the person of the Son, has deep roots. Barth distinguishes between ‘pro-existence’ as being there “for“ others and as being there “with” others. Human beings are *with* others. In their being for others, there is an element of reciprocity, which is not the case for Jesus: “But only the humanity of Jesus can be absolutely exhaustively and exclusively described as a being for man.”<sup>65</sup> Jesus is both “man *for* God” and “man *for* man, *for* other men, His fellows.”<sup>66</sup> Jesus’ solidarity with humans lies in the very nature of God. It arises out of God being faithful to Godself:

And the fact that from all eternity God pitied and received man, the grounding of the fellow-humanity of Jesus in the eternal covenant executed in time in His being for man, rests on the freedom of God in which there is nothing arbitrary or accidental but in which God is true to Himself. God for man, participating in and making Himself responsible for him, securing for him fellowship with Himself and therefore His saving help - this whole mystery of the man Jesus is rooted in the mystery of God Himself, . . .<sup>67</sup>

Von Balthasar is concerned that some theologians, such as Küng, Kessler, Schillebeeckx, Moingt, liberation theologians, etc., see the solidarity of Jesus as no more than a “social” solidarity with the poor, his “paradigmatic fellowship with sinners” and the marginalised, of which the cross is the ultimate consequence.<sup>68</sup> Von Balthasar’s concern here is that this soteriology has ramifications in Christology. Ultimately, von Balthasar fears, we have to say with Schillebeeckx, on the basis of his exegesis, that Jesus understood his death as a consequence of his life and ministry of “tendering salvation.” “Jesus’ whole life is the hermeneusis of his death. The very substance of salvation is sufficiently present in it, which could be and was in fact articulated later on in various ways

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64. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 267–73.

65. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, translated by Harold Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, and R.H. Fuller (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 2,243.

66. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, 2,208. Italics mine.

67. Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume III: The Doctrine of Creation*, 2,218.

68. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 268f.

through faith in him.”<sup>69</sup> In my opinion, it is neither necessary to articulate a higher Christology than this, nor to posit that Jesus had some greater knowledge of the cosmic significance of his death.

Von Balthasar sees Moingt<sup>70</sup> felicitously steering a middle course between a maximalist claim - that Jesus offers himself to God as “sacrifice” for all, and a minimalist claim - that Jesus saw his death simply as his last ministry to humanity.<sup>71</sup> He falls on the side of a solidarity Christology, barely avoiding a substitution Christology. However, von Balthasar believes all these Christologies based on solidarity are trying to do justice to the *commercium* of the Fathers, no longer on the ontological plane, but rather on the level of psychology and society.<sup>72</sup>

(ii) Substitution<sup>73</sup>

Von Balthasar finds renewed and reinforced expression of substitutionary theory in the writing of Luther.<sup>74</sup> It is not, however, the exchange of humanity and divinity of which the Fathers wrote, but rather, an exchange between the sinner and Christ. According to von Balthasar, Luther takes literally 2 Cor 5:21, that God made the sinless one into sin for our sake. And not into just any sin, but Christ becomes the entire sin of the world. The Patristic image is used of Christ, made into the sin of the entire world, as a bait to hook and overpower the Leviathan, in order to release humankind from its evil powers.<sup>75</sup> In Christ is a clash of incompatible opposites, which result from his taking on the radically

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69. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, translated by Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 311.

70. in Joseph Moingt, “La révélation du salut dans la mort du Christ: Esquisse d’une théologie systématique de la rédemption,” in *Mort pour nos péchés: Recherche pluridisciplinaire sur la signification rédemptrice de la mort du Christ*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour, Antoine Vergote, René Bureau, and Joseph Moigt (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976), 117–72.

71. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 272.

72. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 273.

73. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 284–316.

74. See von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 284–90.

75. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 286f.

sinful human nature. The two natures appear to sit very uneasily with each other in the *communicatio idiomatum*.

On the other side of the *commercium*, von Balthasar detects a great flaw of Luther's system. The *sola fidei* expresses "the absolute priority of Christ's work for man over any synchronous action on man's part."<sup>76</sup> However, von Balthasar sees the synchronicity as between Christ's becoming sin and the objective change of status of sinful humanity. The *sola fide* is thus not synchronous between the act of faith and Christ's work for people. This synchronicity is made even more unlikely, von Balthasar believes, because Luther has a system of "double righteousness" and "double sin."<sup>77</sup>

**Vicarious punishment:** Other Reformers used the idea of vicarious punishment. This had made its appearance among the early Fathers, such as Origen, Victorinus Afer, Gregory of Elvira, John Chrysostom, etc. Calvin and Luther write of Christ diverting the wrath of God that was due to us, to himself. Modern Protestant systematicians like Barth, Pannenberg and Moltmann continue this theme of vicarious suffering in their writings of Christ's personal sufferings. Barth writes: ". . . He fulfils this judgement by suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves."<sup>78</sup> Pannenberg considers three theories of the "saving significance of Jesus' death." (i) Jesus' death as ransom for sin and the devil, (ii) the satisfaction theory and (iii) the penal suffering of Christ.<sup>79</sup> He says that he is in accord with Luther that the latter probably comes closest to expressing the significance of Christ's death.<sup>80</sup> In the dereliction of Christ on the cross,<sup>81</sup> Moltmann

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76. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 288.

77. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 289f.

78. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume IV: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, translated by G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 1,253.

79. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM, 1968), 274–80.

80. Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, 278.

81. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, translated by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974).

understands God to have brought into the inner life of the Trinity the entire alienation, suffering and punishment due to humanity. This theory is a timely challenge to the Greek notion of an impassible God after the ravages of the Second World War. Its value seems to me to lie as much in its contribution to the idea of God entering into *solidarity* with a suffering world as its contribution to the idea of Christ suffering vicarious punishment on behalf of humankind.

Among the modern Catholic theologians whom von Balthasar believes to subscribe to the theory of penal substitution, he cites M.-J. Lagrange, Prat, Huby and Cornely. As those who have some modified notion of Christ suffering punishment, von Balthasar cites Daniélou, Martelet and Blondel. In conclusion of his considerations of vicarious punishment, von Balthasar agrees with Galot's assertion that the biblical record is most faithfully served by a merger of the theories of solidarity and substitution: "*Il y a solidarité, mais une solidarité qui va jusqu'à la substitution: le Christ se fait solidaire avec nous de manière à faire retomber sur lui-même, en se substituant à nous, tout le poids des fautes humaines.*"<sup>82</sup> Thus there is no necessary contradiction between these two theories of salvation. They can be understood as different aspects of the same act of salvation. Indeed, as it is becoming clear, no single understanding of salvation is uniquely capable of conveying the entire sense of the mystery.

**An anthropological theory: The scapegoat.** Having considered the soteriological theories of solidarity and substitution, which come together in the notion of vicarious punishment, von Balthasar proceeds to examine René Girard's theory of the scapegoat as a vehicle of reconciliation.<sup>83</sup> He considers this a more appropriate way to try

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82. Jean Galot, *La rédemption, mystère d'Alliance* (Paris / Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), 268.

83. This theory is articulated in two works: René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) and René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde: Recherches avec J.-M. Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Grasset, 1978).

The theory results from Girard's multidisciplinary approach to psychoanalysis, ethnology and literature. The scapegoat apparently embodies a mechanism that operates in all cultures and

to understand salvation, than the ancient theories and practice of sacrifice and expiation which are alien to the modern mind.<sup>84</sup> In general I am in favour of trying to express the mystery of salvation in terms of profound anthropological mechanisms, and I see this as a step forward from the *a priori* methodology of classical theology. The task remains, however, of finding the most appropriate anthropological theory.

In essence, according to the scapegoat theory, Christ plays the cathartic role of scapegoat, diffusing the violence between God and sinners. But more than merely *being* this scapegoat, Christ's salvific role consists in his *exposing* the mechanism which necessarily remains secret in order for it to work. In revealing "the things hidden since the foundation of the world," (Mt 13:35) Jesus completely unveils this truth of human society.

Sacrifice is a rehearsal of the scapegoat mechanism - allowing people ritually to benefit from the peace which follows the sacrifice. The cross is not a sacrifice, in the normal sense because in love Jesus embraces the ignominy of the cross, thereby overturning its scandal. Williams maintains that Girard argues that even if the language of sacrifice is retained to explain the derived positive connotations of Christ's willingness to give himself for the sake of another, sacrifice should be redefined

on the basis of faith in a God of love who does not make a secret pact with his Son that calls for his murder in order to satisfy God's wrath. The suffering and death of the Son, the Word, are inevitable because of the inability of the world to receive God or his Son, not because God's justice demands violence of the Son relishes the prospect of a horrible execution.<sup>85</sup>

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religions. It is a method societies use to relieve the violence of rivalries between two or more groups. (According to Girard's mimetic theory, desires come from mimesis - copying - and result in rivalry.) A victim (the 'scapegoat') is agreed upon by the groups concerned, and this victim is then lynched, giving the groups an opportunity to vent their violence. Thus it operates as a safety valve for passions which might otherwise result in more overt violence. Apparently this mechanism is fundamental to all societies, and works to the extent that it is kept secret. Hence the title: "things hidden since the foundation of the world" recalling Ps 78:2 in which the psalmist considers God's mighty interventions in the (often violent) history of Israel.

84. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Vol IV*, 297–313 Although von Balthasar decides not to treat sacrifice as model, this work would be incomplete without some attention being paid to the practice, which pervades the cult of the ancestors. I shall therefore deal with it presently.

85. James G. Williams, "Commentary on Chapter 11: The Nonsacrificial Death of Christ," in *The Girard Reader*, edited by James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 177f.

As we see repeatedly in South Africa, the mechanism of scapegoating individuals or communities brings neither lasting peace nor resolution to the ills of society.<sup>86</sup> The scapegoat only effects an uneasy truce between antagonistic parties. Diffusing the violence is not the same as eradicating it altogether. The reconciliation effected by Christ between God and sinners is much more profound and radical, and exceeds what can be expressed by the scapegoat mechanism.

In introducing the model of the scapegoat, von Balthasar moved away from a purely biblical consideration of soteriology. Using the work of Girard, he introduced a multidisciplinary dimension to his work. The theory drew on the sciences of ethnology, psychoanalysis and literature. This accords with the synthetic model of contextual theology which I have been using throughout this thesis, an approach that uses the insights of various cultures, anthropology, political theory, literary theory, etc. to express the Christian life.

At this point I depart from von Balthasar's history of New Testament soteriology. I shall consider here two other anthropological mechanisms which are as familiar to people of Southern Africa as the scapegoat mechanism. The themes of *sacrifice* and *initiation* in relation to Christian salvation are extensively considered by Antoine Vergote. In the following, I shall rely heavily on his work, which, although dated, is not superseded in relation to the cult of ancestors in South Africa.

### **(e) Two Further Anthropological Models of Salvation**

In his essay on the meaning of the death of Christ from an anthropological viewpoint,<sup>87</sup> Vergote considers two schemes that are in common usage in South Africa, in

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86. For a discussion of the discourse surrounding witchcraft accusations, see *Kgatla*, "Moloi Ga a Na Mmala."

87. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ."

the traditions of which the ancestor cult is a formative element. He says that the death of Christ can be understood from the points of view of (i) sacrifice and of (ii) ritual initiation.

Vergote begins with a consideration of the redemptive work of Jesus represented in terms of the scapegoat mechanism, and is quick to dismiss this representation. The scapegoat, says Vergote, is a product of group pathology, a symbolic object onto which the paranoia of a group is projected, and which is subsequently lynched. Vergote maintains that Christ raised the ire of his people by opposing this institution as it was expressed in the Jewish sacrificial system, and offering a new ethic of forgiveness. But the significance of Christ's death is deeper than that of an ethical teacher opposing temple ritual. Thus, "in designating the death of Christ as a sacrifice, the Christian tradition accords it much greater meaning."<sup>88</sup> Also, the schema of scapegoat does not do justice to the significance of Christ's death.<sup>89</sup>

(i) Substitutionary Expiatory Sacrifice

Vergote notes that this schema has dominated Western catechesis and preaching on the death of Christ and on the Eucharist. However our contemporaries are "profoundly allergic" to it.<sup>90</sup> He believes that the theological doctrine of a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins is unacceptable given its underlying anthropological significance. He analyses the concept in terms of its being (i) expiatory and (ii) substitutionary, two concepts which function differently.

**Expiation.** An expiation is a gift offered to appease the wrath of an offended deity or deities. The idea in the Old Testament is *not* that the gift is a substitute for the sinner. Rather, it is symbolic and accompanies and expresses contrition for the offence. It is an

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88. "Mais il est manifeste qu'en designant la mort du Christ comme un sacrifice, la tradition chrétienne lui a reconnu plus de signification." Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 51.

89. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 52.

90. Vergote, "La mort rédemptrice du Christ," 53.

agreeable gift to God and a sign of reconciliation.<sup>91</sup>

Among other cultures, the sacrifice is offered for faults against taboos of which the spirits are guardians. According to Vergote, the clan or family, fields or livestock are automatically polluted by the breach of taboos, which have to do with the principles of life which governs the group. The effects are not only in the biological, but also in the spiritual realm, because of the extent to which the spiritual is diffused through life.<sup>92</sup> The sacrifice is necessary to satisfy the vengeance of the spirits and to restore equilibrium to the moral and natural order.

Vergote believes that much theology has been written in the light of the theory of expiation, not of broken taboos, but projecting the breach onto personal relationships with God. However, sacrifice thus understood is at the heart of neither Old Testament nor Christian reconciliation. God is not appeased with a sacrifice, but rather pardons sin in the light of the conversion and contrition of the sinner.<sup>93</sup>

**Substitution.** In the light of anthropological theory, Vergote believes that the Anselmian notion of substitutionary sacrifice makes no sense. It is never the case that the one to whom the sacrifice is being offered makes himself the sacrificial victim. If Jesus is understood to be overturning the system of sacrifice, would this not include the Roman and German legal frameworks which rest on it?

Similarly in theological terms, the image of God in this construct is of an offended feudal lord, contradictory to the image of a God of forgiveness. Vergote believes it is totally opposed to Jesus' attitude towards sinners, which is to offer them divine

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91. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 54. In his analysis of sacrifice in the Old Testament, Vergote is indebted to R. de Vaux *Les sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Gabalda, 1964).

92. Vergote's analysis of sacrifice in other ("primitive") religious systems is taken from the seminal anthropological classic by Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

93. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 56.

forgiveness if they repent, believe in him and accept the Kingdom of God.<sup>94</sup> He adds, further, that the construct tends to individualise salvation as personal and moral. I would say that this is not a shortcoming only of the substitutionary sacrifice model, but that the communal and societal dimension of our need for reconciliation has only been rediscovered with the development of theologies of liberation.

On the psychological level, Vergote also believes that the Anselmian construct is not true to the nature of God. According to psychoanalysis, we are haunted by the idea of a threatening superego god, a jealous father-figure who demands the sacrifice of our own lives as the price for his love. This is evident in the God of the Old Testament who punishes sin (Gen 3:14-19), demands the life of the first born (Gen 22 and Ex 13:2, 12-15), and requires the ritual castration of circumcision (Gen 17:9-14), which is symbolic of death. This God has the power to give and to take back life (Job 1:21), over which he asserts absolute mastery.<sup>95</sup> This is far from the loving “Abba” of Jesus of Nazareth.

Vergote says that this archaic notion of God remains despite any attempt to spiritualise or modify the notion of substitutionary sacrifice. He lists psychologists like Jung, Freud, Sauty and Lacan as regarding the notion as primitive, barbaric, and an oedipal projection. The notion also evokes Hegel’s slave-master dialectic. Vergote goes along with these views that substitutionary sacrifice is not an adequate notion to represent the saving events it is being used to explain.

**Sacrifice as metaphor.** Next, Vergote considers sacrifice as such, as the essential rite of religion. The Bible recognises two such types of sacrifice: (i) communion sacrifice and (ii) holocaust.

(i) Communion sacrifice: Generalising from his particular studies of Hindu and Hebrew sacrifice, and wider association with the writing of other anthropologists on

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94. See Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 57.

95. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 59f.

sacrifice, Mauss maintains that the object of sacrifice is for the victim to establish communication between the sacred and the profane worlds.<sup>96</sup> In sacrifice, the offering creates a ritual space, the object of which, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, is “to establish a relation, not of resemblance but of contiguity, by means of a series of successive identifications,”<sup>97</sup> which can operate in either direction. In the first stage, says Lévi-Strauss, the sacralisation of the offering makes a connection between the divinity and humans. In the second stage, the irreversible destruction of the victim breaks this connection, which the divinity then comes to fill with its equally irreversible grace. According to Vergote, the consumption of the sacrifice anticipates the people’s sharing in the divinity - which is the divine gift, since there is no natural connection between the two orders.<sup>98</sup>

This notion of communion sacrifice is interesting from our point of view. However it should not be taken as a religious universal. For example, it corresponds closely to the kind of intimate relationship that Zulus ordinarily have with the shades of their ancestors and which they celebrate on occasions of “ritual killing.”<sup>99</sup> As I showed in the second chapter of this thesis, the everyday relationship between the living and the dead is based on sharing, interdependence and mutual understanding. Thus it is not a case of the victim

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96. Marcel Mauss, “*Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (1899),” in *Oeuvres, Vol 1*. (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968), 302. He writes: “*Ce procédé consiste à établir une communication entre le monde sacré et le monde profane par l’intermédiaire d’une victime, c’est à dire d’une chose détruite au cours de la cérémonie.*”

97. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 225. Lévi-Strauss opposes this to totemism, which “is based on a postulation of homology between two parallel series . . . whose respective terms . . . do not resemble each other in pairs.” (p.224)

98. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ,*” 63f.

99. See Axel-Ivar Berglund, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976). Berglund’s authoritative insider-description work uses the terms “ritual killing” and “ritual beer-drinking” for these celebrations of communion, precisely because he wants to avoid the baggage of the term “sacrifice.” Ngubane prefers to use the term “sacrifice” for some ritual killing. Other ritual killings, such as during the stages of negotiating with a marriage, are not intentionally sacrificial, but do also constitutes moments of sharing with the ancestors. See Harriet Ngubane, *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine* (New York, 1977). These two works are discussed in part three of Bertrand Masquelier, “*Offrande mise à la mort et langage rituel: Puzzle africaniste,*” in *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, Directed by Marcel Neusch (Paris: UER de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Institut Catholique de Paris, 1994), 21–39.

opening communication between the living and the dead, as suggested by Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, because this communication exists all the time. Certain ritual killings are, however, an opportunity for the Zulus to celebrate moments of intimacy with their ancestors.

(ii) Holocaust: According to Vergote, holocaust was the Old Testament act of homage to God.<sup>100</sup> It was neither for propitiation nor for communion. The victim was burnt whole, (except for the skin which was given to the priest). The blood was spread at the base of the altar. This became the central cult of Jerusalem and was the model of the perfect sacrifice. It had two important dimensions, gratuity and, because of its taking place in the temple, globality.

Vergote groups holocaust and communion sacrifice together and compares them with sacrifice of expiation. The advantage of communion sacrifice is that it acknowledges fundamental ontological indebtedness of the creature to the creator, and is not based on the idea repairing a fault. Humans benefit from this re-effecting and intensification of the surplus of divine grace. Expiatory sacrifice is based on the notion of conversion and contrition, and its purpose is to restore the broken relationship between humanity and the divinity.<sup>101</sup> Neither of these notions is adequate, so Vergote dismisses them.

Finally,<sup>102</sup> he asks whether it is legitimate to ascribe *any* sacrificial understanding to Christ's death for the salvation of the world, apart from as an ethical example for others to follow. In response to this question, he says that the scriptures indicate that Jesus neither practiced nor taught sacrifice, nor gave his followers a sacrificial rite. Only on the eve of his death did he celebrate a final meal, which his disciples instituted as their sacrifice. On the contrary, Vergote says, Jesus' words apply the meaning of the sacrifice to himself and by his actions he substitutes himself for the sacrifice. He eminently

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100. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 65.

101. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 65–67.

102. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 67–69.

achieves what sacrifice is designed to effect in other religions, namely, bridging the divide between God and humans.

Vergote says that it was not the *death* of Jesus which replaced sacrifice, but his *life*.<sup>103</sup> By a life totally offered and dedicated to God, Jesus was also open to the divine gifts. Thus he bridged the divide in his person, which action was realised most intensely in his death. So in the sense that it was the ultimate expression of this life, his death was also a sacrifice. But as soon as we say this, we have to qualify, that it was not sacrifice with its former meaning.<sup>104</sup> It is better to say that *he is* what the sacrifice meant to effect. As the Holy One of God, he did not need to be sacrificed (*sacrum + facere* = to be made holy). Rather, he made sacrifice redundant and forever changed the religious order. Therefore, if we use sacrificial language of Jesus at all, it must be so qualified that it is clear that the dissimilarities outweigh the similarities.

Vergote says that if sacrificial language has any virtue at all, it is in at least raising the notion, in order for it to be quashed, of an angry God demanding the death of a Son.<sup>105</sup> That is, if one does not believe that God already quashed this notion by refusing the death of the son of Abraham.<sup>106</sup>

I believe that in our South African context the language of sacrifice should be used in relation to Christ only in order to deny in the strongest possible terms that God requires sacrifice as the ancestors do. The point must be made in no uncertain terms that God does not derive pleasure from the destruction or suffering of any creature - animal, plant,

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103. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 68.

104. See Heb 10:8-10: "First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). *Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.'* He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (NIV)

I acknowledge that the entire argument of this chapter of Hebrews describes the salvific effect of the death of Jesus in specifically sacrificial language. But verse 9 (in italics above) makes it clear that the sacrifice of blood has been replaced by a sacrifice of obedience to the will of God. That is, a sacrifice of death is superseded by a sacrifice of life, which is of a completely different nature.

105. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 68f.

106. See Gen 22.

or least of all, human. Using sacrificial language in relation to Jesus has great potential for causing confusion, because of the currency of sacrificial practice towards the ancestors. As Vergote has shown, Christ made sacrifice redundant, so in a context where it has a live set of connotations, it is better to keep any sacrifice out of the Christian sphere. It is profoundly confused thinking to suggest that the Eucharist is a “sacrifice” akin to that offered to the ancestors.<sup>107</sup>

(ii) Initiation

Vergote uses a second anthropological scheme to describe the redemptive death of Jesus Christ, namely, ritual initiation. Ritual initiation is a familiar action in the coming of age process of several (not all) of the ethnic groups in South Africa. This makes Vergote’s scheme more accessible, and therefore more helpful, to people searching for the meaning of salvation from the scourge of AIDS.

As a general principle, Vergote maintains that Jesus’ death has salvific meaning only because it has human meaning, and this is to be found in the anthropological scheme of initiation.<sup>108</sup> The human Jesus was bound to die, since only God is immortal. In Jesus’ death there is the same spiritual finality which is in every human death. Vergote sees Jesus’ death as a paradigm for an ascent towards a transformed existence which is expanded and regenerated by accepting the negativity of suffering and self-abandonment. This scheme is familiar to societies which have rites of initiation, such as Christian baptismal rituals. Vergote proceeds by bringing together his reflections on mysteries of initiation, the meaning of life and death in psychoanalysis, the cross as a liberating

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107. See, for example, Rebecca Sexton, “Animal Sacrifice to Become Part of Roman Mass?” (2002), [Http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/2594/paganism.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Plains/2594/paganism.htm) viewed on 2 December 2002. This article reports that Archbishop Tlhagale sees a place for ancestral sacrifices to take place at a Catholic Eucharistic liturgy. I believe this is not a useful avenue for inculturation, because it can only be retrogressive for Christianity, which exults in the fact that Christ has abolished the old covenant with its cultic baggage.

108. See Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 70.

paradigm, and finally, death to sin.<sup>109</sup>

**Mysteries of initiation.** In this section, Vergote uses the work of Mircea Eliade<sup>110</sup> to present a generalised description of ritual initiation. Many ancient cultures have rites of initiation which lead members from childhood into adulthood. In these rites the members are introduced to what constitutes full humanity. One of the mysteries imparted is that life is only fruitful through death. Beings must die in order to regenerate and pursue life. The initiates are made to experience this mystery in some way, by undergoing an ordeal of some sort in which they die to their former selves, in order to be reborn as adults worthy of belonging to humanity.<sup>111</sup> Neophytes are initiated into the mythology of the society and named as living members of the community with the right to participate in its religious mysteries.

This scheme is well represented in the gospels which record Jesus teaching that his death will be the introduction of the fullness of life.<sup>112</sup> In the Christian tradition, this death on the cross has been iconicised as the tree of life planted in the centre of the world, representing life mediated through death.

**Life and death in psychoanalysis.** Next,<sup>113</sup> Vergote considers the psychoanalytic

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109. See Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 71–73, 73–75, 75–76, 76–80, respectively.

110. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, translated by Philip Mairet (London: Harvill Press, 1960). He uses Chapter VIII in particular, on "Mysteries and Spiritual Regeneration."

Eliade writes: (p.208f.) "At different levels and in various contexts we find the same initiatory schema comprising ordeals, tortures, ritual putting-to-death, and symbolic resurrection. . . . [T]he mystery of spiritual regeneration consists of an archetypal process which is realised on different planes in many ways; it is effected whenever the need is to surpass one mode of being and to enter upon another, higher mode; or, more precisely, whenever it is a question of spiritual transmutation."

I am very wary of the wholesale inclusion of such psychoanalytic reasoning into anthropology and from there into theology. However, at this stage my purpose is merely to record Vergote's argumentation.

111. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 71.

112. See Jn 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

113. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 73–75.

symbolism that he considers to be the foundation of many cultures. He believes that psychoanalysis is rediscovering the scheme of life and death in the initiation scheme. For example, when a child is being separated or weaned from its mother, it undergoes a certain kind of death to a previous life, which is necessary for its personal survival. According to psychoanalysis, this traumatic experience becomes the matrix for all subsequent painful experiences.<sup>114</sup> Every transformation involves loss and suffering. It is necessary to give up ideas of omnipotence and immortality in order to develop mutual relationships. This is formulated in the evangelical counsel: "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, will save it."<sup>115</sup> Freud makes of it an adage: "*Si vis vitam, para mortem*" ("If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death.")<sup>116</sup>

The importance of psychoanalysis is that it can prepare one to face death in a culture in which it is so removed from the centre of life. More important than the *how* of Jesus' death is the fact *that* he died. Psychoanalysis helps us to concentrate less on the violent nature of the death of Jesus, which removes it to a certain extent from daily experience, and more on his death as the moment of destiny of the human Jesus. Jesus confidently assented to a human death with its uncertainty, in order to be reborn as a source of life for all people.

Vergote sees the value of psychoanalysis in articulating this "nodal truth of human existence"<sup>117</sup> not only of ancient cultures. It can give us a way of understanding the cross,

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114. For example, see M.D. Faber, *New Age Thinking: A Psychoanalytic Critique* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1996). In the movements he analyses, Faber traces back all New Age thinking to the battle of a child to negotiate the traumatic separation from its mother.

115. See Mt 16:25 and parallels.

116. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death: (II) Our Attitude Towards Death (1915)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957), 14:300.

Freud states this as a variation of the adage: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.

117. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 75: "*la vérité nodale de l'existence humaine*."

that is neither triumphalist nor intellectualist, taking suffering and death seriously, but not as the ultimate defeat.

I am very wary of the assumptions of symbolic universalism, stating that what applies in Western psychoanalysis can be imported wholesale into the analysis of vastly different cultures. I consider this one of the methodological shortcomings of Vergote's present work. I think psychoanalysis is an extremely subjective 'science' and it is highly context-specific. Vergote does not seem to take this into account in finding in psychoanalysis some universal truths.

**The cross as a liberating paradigm.** Vergote says<sup>118</sup> that many people who have undergone ordeals during rites of initiation, speak of a new life.<sup>119</sup> This language bears a natural affinity to the language of the cross, which has become the Christian paradigm of new life. Of course, this defies logic and normal experience, but rings true with the insight that it is necessary to work through the negative in order to come to a new plane of existence.

We must beware, says Vergote,<sup>120</sup> not to believe that the living Jesus had foreknowledge or certitude that there would be a positive outcome to his death. He had worked through any illusions of immortality, so the ordeal of the cross was a real, and not some pseudo-trial. His attachment to the will of God did not render him invulnerable to ordinary human death.

Vergote concludes this section saying that as a symbol of Jesus, the cross remains enigmatic, representing the contradictions of death and exaltation:

The cross is a liberating paradigm, because, on it the paradigmatic person of Jesus manifests human and religious truth. As a sign of contradiction, the cross

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118. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 75f.

119. Eliade says, for example, "Initiatory death is thus a recommencement, never an end." See Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, 224.

120. Vergote, "*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*," 76.

which does not mask the exaltation, tears us from our mystifications; our contradictory illusions are broken on it.<sup>121</sup>

**Death to sin.** Jesus integrated the law of death into his life, trusting that God would give him an abundance of divine life.<sup>122</sup> He did not give in to the sin of trying to make himself equal to God.<sup>123</sup> He was “the sinless one,” and “dead to sin.”<sup>124</sup> He knew that his mission as herald of the Kingdom of God would displease the religious authorities and lead to his eventual execution. He accepted this consequence of his submission to the will of God. “He did not seek to elude this death, trusting, even in the darkest moments, that the Father would remain faithful to him and save him from failure, despite appearances.”<sup>125</sup> He did not trust in some symbolic general human truth about life coming from death, but rather trusted in God’s power to renew his life.

At this point theology goes beyond any anthropological scheme of renewal of life in rites of initiation. Christians claim that God did something unprecedented in raising Christ from the dead. Not even Jesus expected such a turn of events. Christ became the exemplar of new life for a community, a new life that bears witness to the power of God and faithfulness to the vision of the Kingdom of God. This vision has God at the centre and in Jesus’ life, the vision not subject to blurring by the distortions of sin. That is, Jesus did not break his relationship with God by seeking a position which was not his due.<sup>126</sup>

Vergote understands<sup>127</sup> that according to the scheme of initiation, new life requires

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121. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 76:

*“La croix est paradigme libérateur parce que, homme paradigmatique, Jésus y manifeste la vérité humaine et religieuse. Signe de contradiction, la croix ne masque pas après coup l’exaltation, nous arrache à nos mystifications; nos illusions contradictoires se brisent sur elle.”*

122. See Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 76f.

123. See Phil 2:6.

124. See 2 Cor 5:21 and Rom 6:10.

125. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 77.

126. According to Vergote, sin effects a rupture of one’s covenant with God. See Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 78.

127. Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 78f.

detachment. But sin is attachment to what is ultimately illusory. As long as we remain attached to the illusions and their consequences in any area of our life, we are not free to embrace the new life.

The scheme of life and death in rites of initiation is taken up by Paul when he describes the effects of Christian baptism. In going into the water, the initiate dies with Christ to sin, and emerges from the water “dead to sin, but alive for God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, what in anthropological terms is explained with a scheme of life and death in rites of initiation, has become in Christian thinking, a scheme of sharing new life with Christ. As Christ is considered to have life of a different order, so those who share this life are considered to have a similar life. The cross is the symbol of this new life, because it represents the unending task of freeing oneself from one’s illusions, in order to share more deeply in the life of Christ.

Thus, for Vergote, the scheme of initiation is the best scheme with which to understand the redemptive death of Christ. Drawing on deep-seated anthropological and psychological ideas, it represents the necessity of consenting to die in order to be born to a deeper humanity. It does not depend on a perverse image of God who derives satisfaction from the destruction of any creature, as the sacrificial scheme does. Nor does it rely on the myth of an uneasy truce in the hostilities between God and humans, as the scapegoat scheme does.

Vergote also notes<sup>129</sup> that the absence of a single system to explain the mystery of salvation does not detract from the mystery itself. There is an overarching order to the many models, which all claim Jesus Christ as the unique mediator of that salvation. Vergote continues that Jesus’ *death* is only one aspect of the redemptive mystery. This mystery can also be approached in terms of Jesus’ *life* as representing the *rapprochement*

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128. Rom 6:11.

129. See Vergote, “*La mort rédemptrice du Christ*,” 80–83.

between God and humanity, a life which replaces the sacrificial scheme of the former religion.

**(f) Conclusion of History of Soteriology**

In the previous pages, I have considered the meanings of salvation as they have been expressed in classical Christianity. I have used von Balthasar's *Theodramatik* as a basic text for the history of soteriology. The reason for this choice of text was that the *Kairos Document* articulates what its authors call "church theology," that is, relatively widely accepted and uncontroversial mainstream theology. Using von Balthasar's text, I expressed five aspects of the New Testament witness that ought to be in any Christian soteriology. I then traced the history of soteriology through the patristic, medieval and modern periods, concentrating on the dominant models of each.

Having outlined this history, I used the work of Antoine Vergote to illustrate two schemes of salvation which have anthropological bases. The first, the sacrificial scheme, was shown to be quite unsuitable for the modern mentality, and particularly for the situation of AIDS in South Africa. The second, the scheme of death and rebirth in rites of initiation, was seen as more fitting for a society which is familiar with celebrations of rites of passage. Christian theology applies this scheme to a new dimension of death and rebirth "in Christ" and thus to sharing in his life - a reality given the name salvation. These models are fairly uncontroversial, although not "classical" in the sense that they date from after the Second Vatican Council and might thus be considered a "contemporary" approach to soteriology. They use "classical" or pre-critical anthropological schemes, which have certainly been superseded.

Having shown that there are numerous approaches to Christian soteriology, I will now demonstrate that no single satisfactory notion encompasses what is meant by salvation in Christ. In particular, I will argue, that it is not sufficient to reduce salvation to a

'spiritual' state which bears no concrete relationship to specific circumstances of the lives of the 'saved.' I will do this in what I am calling a "lemma," or proposition that I take as self-evident before I consider some 'real-life' meanings of salvation in the context of AIDS in South Africa.

(2) Lemma: Salvation Is Not a Single-dimensional Spiritual State

In its *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith expresses the concern that liberation theology appears to be reductionist. The CDF notes that some theologians of liberation appear to reduce salvation to a political process, namely the struggle for justice and freedom.

To some it even seems that the necessary struggle for human justice and freedom in the economic and political sense constitutes the whole essence of salvation. For them, the Gospel is reduced to a purely earthly gospel.<sup>130</sup>

In the next paragraph, this tendency is identified as "the temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel." The concern of the Congregation is thus to retain the "spiritual" dimension of the Gospel. Christ is our liberator in so far as he "has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind."<sup>131</sup> Thus, for example, the Exodus, the seminal liberating action of God in the Old Testament, was not primarily the freeing of a people from slavery. Rather, its significance lies in the fact that it was God's action of choosing a people with whom to establish a covenant and cultic relationship.<sup>132</sup>

I believe it is important to transcend this false dichotomy between the "secular" and the "spiritual" realms. One must realise that each pervades the other and that a situation of poverty, humiliation, rejection and oppression is not conducive to spiritual wellbeing.

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130. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City, 1984), IV.4.

131. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *"Theology of Liberation,"* IV.2.

132. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *"Theology of Liberation,"* IV.3.

On the other hand, it is the task of Christians to infuse the “secular world” with a “spiritual” dimension, more in line with a vision of the Kingdom of God.

It is important not to think of salvation as coterminous with or equivalent to liberation. But in a context of repression, it is difficult to make sense of salvation if it does not include the reality of liberation. Conversely, salvation is not equivalent to being cured of AIDS. But in the context of enormous suffering wrought by HIV/AIDS, it makes little sense to speak of the saving activity of God without some notion of being saved from the threat of impending death.

As important as it is not to reduce salvation to earthly liberation, it is equally important not to reduce salvation to some transcendent event of the immortal soul surviving death, or of the resurrection of the dead at some eschatological moment. I think the AIDS pandemic presses us to recover some of the early Old Testament language of salvation.<sup>133</sup> This language expresses less developed ideas about salvation than the idea

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133. Ramón Martínez-de-Pisón Liébanas, *L'au-delà* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1993), 37–60, usefully traces for us the Old Testament development of the idea of personal retribution. I will follow in this footnote, what Martínez de Pisón writes in Chapter II, entitled “*Héritiers d'une grande promesse.*” Initially members of the Jewish nation identified with the nation. Having life meant being a member of the people who were in communion with the liberating God they had experienced in the Exodus. Losing one's life prematurely, not leaving offspring, or not being buried with one's ancestors was considered a curse, which would confine one to Sheol. According to Martínez de Pisón, there was an almost mathematical relationship between sin and punishment. The God of justice rewards the good and punishes the evil, as was evident in so many Old Testament events. This recompense was often tied up with the fortune of the whole nation. Individuals would share the punishment or reward of their parents or ancestors, and perhaps not immediately. Some had the insight that the whole people should not suffer for the sins of one or a few individuals, such as David in 2 Sam 24:17. (“It is I who have sinned, I who have committed a fault. But what has this flock done? Let your hand be on me and my family.”) So gradually, the fates of the individual and the nation were separated from each other. There was often a delay in the expected retribution, which led Prophets like Jeremiah to promise that God's retribution would be “in a short time.” This hope for divine retribution was projected into the future onto a messiah figure. By the epoch of the Wisdom writers, it was evident that the equation of retribution did not always apply. The book of Job is a meditation on the problem of the suffering of an innocent person. Qoheleth displays a cynicism with the idea of divine justice, because the just seem to suffer and the evil rewarded. So he says that in Sheol, the evil people will not be able to continue their ways. Daniel, 2 Macc. and Wisdom convey the notion that the expected divine retribution is postponed until a resurrection from the dead. By the time of Jesus, this faith in the resurrection of the dead was commonplace, and was the

of an immortal soul receiving post-mortem retribution. It articulates the hope that God will 'save' the petitioners from much more immediate concerns than the perdition of their eternal soul.

Some examples from the Old Testament may show what I mean here: God is called upon to deliver Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib, which God duly promises to do through the mouth of Isaiah.<sup>134</sup> In a similar vein, by the hand of his servant David, God saves Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.<sup>135</sup> Chapter 10 of the book of Wisdom describes how the wisdom of God directed history from the creation up till the Exodus, saving Lot's wife (10:6), Noah (10:4), God's servants (10:9), Jacob (10:10-12), Joseph, (10:13f.), etc. A brief perusal of the book of psalms shows that they are peppered with the pleas of people in various situations of peril. There are pleas for God to "Save us" (12:1), to judge in favour of the poor (9,10), to protect the innocent person from enemies (17, 18, 22, 25, etc.), to preserve the petitioner from fear (27), to save the oppressed (31). There are laments of individuals (69, 70) and of the nation (79, 85). There are also psalms of thanksgiving for the salvation that God has rendered (30), of praise for God's being a refuge in all dangers (107), etc.

Clearly these passages in the Old Testament are the reflections of believers who had experienced God's powerful intervention in their lives, and hoped to experience it again. They considered these interventions to be God's acts of salvation. Reflection on similar experience of God's saving action should be recovered in our context of reflection on AIDS. It is this kind of reflection that I propose to do in this context.

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subject of disagreement and debate. For example, he is asked to settle the question of to which of the seven brothers the widow will be married at the resurrection. Thus, by the time of Jesus, God's action is seen as operating on the individual, and God's definitive judgement is a post-mortem experience. Salvation is thus removed from the everyday and projected into the future.

134. See 2 Ki 18:30-35, 19:34 and 20:6.

135. See 2 Sam 3:18.

### (3) Examples of Salvation from AIDS

In Christian tradition the saving activity of God, achieved through the resurrection of Christ, has been expressed in many different metaphors. No single narrative has received privileged status as the preferred way of speaking of salvation. As Schüssler Fiorenza writes, redemption “cannot be reduced to a single notion”, and this surfeit of narratives represents a richness, rather than a difficulty. It is the task of theology of redemption to “underscore the diversity of these symbols, images and categories[.]”<sup>136</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, to examine whether among this richness anything specific can be said about salvation in the context of AIDS.

Examples that I consider are healing illness, raising the dead, engagement in community and a new spiritual life. It will be noted that not all of the examples cited are South African. Specifically, the examples of engagement in community and a new spiritual life are taken from the experiences of people living with AIDS in North America and Europe. I believe these areas are open to further reflection in South Africa. This is not because they are not lived experiences,<sup>137</sup> but rather because there is not much theological writing on them in the specific context of AIDS.

#### (a) Healing Illness

In an article<sup>138</sup> that deals principally with practice in the confessional about the use of condoms in spousal relationships, Bate follows Arthur Kleinman<sup>139</sup> in distinguishing between *disease* and *illness*. The former refers to “organic malfunction” and the latter to “the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease.”<sup>140</sup> This distinction

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136. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 849.

137. On the contrary, community and spirituality are noted dimensions of life in South Africa.

138. Stuart Bate, “Differences in Confessional Advice in South Africa,” in *Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention*, edited by James F. Keenan (New York, London: Continuum, 2000), 212–21.

139. Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980).

140. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 218.

allows Bate to distinguish further between “curing disease” and “healing illness.” The former applies to “the establishment of effective control of disordered biological and psychological processes” while the latter applies to “the provision of personal and social meaning for life problems created by sickness.” AIDS has aspects of both disease and illness, particularly the socially constructed stigma associated with the sickness. Bate says of this stigma that “people who contract HIV go through a process of cultural and social isolation which is in many ways more ‘sickening’ than the clinical symptoms themselves.”<sup>141</sup>

For a number of reasons, the most obvious of which I believe is the simple question of competence, Bate sees it as the task and vocation of Christians to concentrate more on healing than on curing people with AIDS. As “cultural and religious healing is fundamentally a question of care and prayer in an accepting human environment”<sup>142</sup> it is incumbent on Christians to establish this kind of environment. This, Bate says, can be done by setting up structures such as “counselling, group therapy for HIV positive people, and family-based care of people with AIDS.”<sup>143</sup> Such work is evangelisation because it helps people to live healthier lives confronting the culture of silence and fear associated with AIDS. I would relate this to another publication of Bate’s from the same year, which is not specifically about AIDS, but which lends meaning to the mandate to raise the dead.

### **(b) Raising the Dead**

Elsewhere Bate says it is important to interpret Jesus’ mandate to his disciples to raise the dead in a way that is intelligible for our present context.<sup>144</sup> In modern scientific

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141. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 218f.

142. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 219.

See also, the published version of Bate’s doctoral dissertation: Stuart C. Bate, *Inculturation and Healing: Coping-Healing in South African Christianity* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1995).

143. Bate, Stuart, “Differences in Confessional Advice,” 219.

144. Stuart Bate, “Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate for the Global Context,” in *To Cast Fire Upon the*

culture, the text would be interpreted with difficulty in a clinical sense. However, this is not what Jesus had in mind. He did not expect the apostles physically to give life to deceased people. "His mission is about saving, rescuing and restoring human life. This, then, is the sense in which the mission to raise the dead should be understood."<sup>145</sup> Bate says the life that Christians offer to our contemporaries is helping them to find restored identity and belonging in a world marked by the deadness of anomie, and in which they are increasingly alienated from village, family, tribe and community. Thus his understanding of the mandate is of restoring life to people suffering from what I call "social death" of stigma, isolation and indifference experienced by many people living with AIDS. We consider this in the following point:

### **(c) Engagement in Community**

Samson's thesis<sup>146</sup> is instructive in this regard. Samson shows that an essential ingredient in psychological adapting to life with HIV is through the development of a spiritual life.<sup>147</sup> The spirituality of which he is speaking is not a restricted focus on a private or personal relationship with God, but also includes relational intimacy and the search for meaning. In developing a spirituality of this kind, a person finds focus and is able to renegotiate his<sup>148</sup> or her priorities and expectations of life. This constitutes coming to terms with (and to a certain extent, overcoming) living with HIV. In developing this spirituality, a person with HIV:

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*Earth*, edited by Teresa Okure (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000), 42–56,

[Http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-](http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm)

[A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm](http://home.worldonline.co.za/~20058871/Matthew%2010-A%20Mission%20Mandate%20for%20the%20Global%20Context.htm) viewed on 17 June 2004.

145. Bate, Stuart, "Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate." No page number given in WWW text.

146. André Samson, "*L'expérience de la spiritualité dans le contexte de l'adaptation psychologique à la maladie chronique et potentiellement mortelle: Une étude phénoménologique de sujets homosexuels et vivant avec le VIH*," Ph.D. thesis (Faculty of Education Sciences: Laval University, 2001).

147. Samson, "*L'expérience de la spiritualité*," 34–45.

148. Samson was writing exclusively about homosexual men with HIV/AIDS.

(i) develops a belief which sustains an effort to adjust to his or her infection with HIV

(ii) modifies his or her perception of being infected with HIV and imprints a new dynamic on his or her existence

(iii) lives a fulfillment of his or her Being.<sup>149</sup>

We see thus, the value of being part of a caring community. The person with HIV does not want to curl up on his or her mat and wait to be overcome by inevitable death. Engagement in an active community, or a circle of activity, is important. The four subjects in Samson's study overcame the inclination to despair by engaging in charitable or volunteer work as a means of directing their energies outward and towards building up a supportive community.

Hardy's book<sup>150</sup> is based on interviews with partners of homosexual men who are living with or who have succumbed to AIDS. From these interviews, Hardy shows that communities are essential support structures for people living with AIDS, and those who are close to them. In his fifth chapter, "Communities of Support," he considers the roles of family, friends and religion in providing support. He concludes with a summary of the value of community:

We might not find a concrete answer to these questions [of suffering and death] other than that everything is to be lived as consciously as possible; and we can do that only if others are there with us in the process. Here is the very heart of community and what it means to live in the presence of the sacred.<sup>151</sup>

#### **(d) A New Spiritual Life**

Many people living with AIDS attest to how their condition has awoken in them the desire and resolution to live a more spiritual life. At the very least, living with AIDS

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149. Samson, "L'expérience de la spiritualité," 191–203.

150. Richard P. Hardy, *Loving Men: Gay Partners, Spirituality, and AIDS* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

151. Hardy, *Loving Men*, 128.

confronts a person, perhaps for the first time, with the reality of his or her mortality. That person may embark on a search for the meaning of life and death, and begin to live more consciously the meaning he or she has found.

Hardy also has a broad understanding of what is meant by spirituality.<sup>152</sup> It permits of no duality between an immaterial “spirit” and a physical body. In fact, a good spirituality affirms the body, life and human experience. It may be purely humanist or it may involve religious faith, which implies mutual relationships with God, others and creation.

The title of Thomas Montfort’s book<sup>153</sup> “*AIDS: the vaccination of truth*” shows that the illness confronts one with the truth of one’s being. In fact, Montfort goes further than simply being “vaccinated” against falsehood. He writes this book with some evangelical zeal, the purpose of which is to educate other young men not to accept the lies he perceives to have brought him to his current state. These include the normality of homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, the breakdown of the family, pedagogical neutrality, reliability of the condom etc. In his third chapter, “*Le SIDA: un chemin de résurrection*”<sup>154</sup> he shows three ways that might be considered salvific in the context of AIDS: (i) education in chaste love, (ii) a new political orientation and awakening and (iii) solidarity with people who have AIDS.

In a similar vein, we read how the diagnosis of AIDS brought Dominique Morin to a spiritual conversion.<sup>155</sup> From being an anarchist with terrorist potential, he begins a slow moral transformation to become a witness to the Gospel. In the first chapter of his conversations with Béatrice Caux he describes how his greatest journey was the movement from despair to hope.<sup>156</sup> AIDS also brought him to the ultimate questions of

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152. See chapter 1 of Hardy, *Loving Men* entitled “Spirituality: Journey of Enfleshed Life.”

153. Thomas Montfort, *SIDA: Le vaccin de la vérité* (Paris: F-X de Guibert, 1995).

154. Montfort, *SIDA: Le vaccin de la vérité*, 71–83.

155. See Dominique Morin and Béatrice Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin: Des ténèbres au Royaume* (Paris: F-X de Guibert, 1997).

156. Morin and Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin*, 15–29.

meaning, which he frames in terms of love, the title of his second chapter: “*Le sida au carrefour du sens: ‘une invitation à réinventer l’amour’*.”<sup>157</sup>

### Section Three: The Prophetic Response

The third type of response in the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies is what the *Kairos Document* calls a “prophetic theology”. The *KD* says that it is not enough “to repeat the generalized Christian principles” and it calls for a prophetic response that “speaks to the particular circumstances of this crisis.”<sup>158</sup> It is important to note that the *KD* works toward a prophetic response. That means, that such a response is never final or definitive. It is a work in progress, responding to the exigencies of moment.

In this section, I will consider those aspects of the response to the AIDS crisis in South Africa that I regard as prophetic. I will examine the prophetic responses to the AIDS *kairos* under the three headings rendered by a simple analysis of the prophetic task as (i) annunciation, (ii) denunciation and (iii) prophetic action.

#### (1) Prophecy

At the outset of this section, it is important to state what prophecy is not. It is not predicting the future, as it is represented in some media and popular parlance. On the contrary, prophecy is very related to the present. In the Old Testament, prophets arose in times of crisis, when there were impediments or obstructions in the relationship between the people and God. The message of a prophet concerns the here and now, and

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157. Morin and Caux, *Le SIDA a fait de moi un témoin*, 31–84 Another example of a diagnosis of HIV infection bringing a person to a more spiritual approach to life was aired on the programme *3rd Degree* on e-tv in South Africa on 1 July 2003. One young man interviewed said his spiritual journey began when he learnt that he was HIV-infected.

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

confronts people with the need for real choices they must make in their attitudes towards God and their fellow human beings. What is true, is that there was often an eschatological dimension to the message of the prophet, which might be interpreted as a foretelling of the future.<sup>159</sup>

Considering the ministry of some of the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, the prophetic task is accomplished through annunciation, denunciation and symbolic action. It is the mission of prophets to announce without compromise the message of God, to denounce what is unacceptable, and to deliver this message through symbolic actions. The prophet does not speak his or her own opinions, but is given the words of God.<sup>160</sup>

As the message of the prophet is not universally well received, this often makes the calling of a prophet a source of suffering. The Old Testament records instances of prophets reluctant to receive this mission,<sup>161</sup> but who discovered that God's charge is ineluctable.<sup>162</sup> They are compelled, driven to announce the message of God to their contemporaries. Jesus is aware that a prophet is not always welcome (or is even despised) in his home town.<sup>163</sup> More specifically, the message of the prophet is unwelcome, because it has the potential to challenge people and disturb their comfort. The graphic example of the fate of a prophet is the death of John the Baptist.

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159. For example, the visions of First Isaiah, are often expressed in the future tense. "It will happen in the final days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will rise higher than the mountains and tower above the heights." (Is 2:2).

160. See for example, Moses receives instructions from God for his mission: Ex 3:10, "I am sending you to Pharaoh, for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." and Ex 3:16, "Go, gather the elders of Israel together and tell them . . ."

Similarly Jeremiah receives his instructions from God: Jer 2:1, "The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, 'Go and shout this in Jerusalem's ears: . . .'" Thus it is not on his own whim that a true prophet embarks on the mission.

161. See, for example, Ex 4:10-17; Jer 1:4-10; Jonah 1, etc.: the reluctance of Moses, Jeremiah and Jonah to accept their prophetic calling.

162. See, for example, Jer 20:7-9. In this case the prophet is vindicated against those who would persecute him because of the message he bears. See Jer 20:10-18.

163. See Mt 13:58 and parallels.

In order to communicate the message of God with which they are entrusted, prophets may resort to the use of allegory,<sup>164</sup> symbolic action<sup>165</sup> and mime.<sup>166</sup> Ezekiel is the most obvious example of a prophet whose actions convey symbolically the message God had for the people. If a prophet is to be at all credible, there must be a congruency between his or her actions and the message he or she is conveying.

In the context of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, there is the need for prophetic voices to announce the Good News of salvation, to denounce the stigma of AIDS and failures in the provision of care for people affected by the disease, and to engage in symbolic action to show God's love and concern for these people. In this section I will consider some of these prophetic voices. I will review a recommendation that elements of ancestral tradition be incorporated into the Christian ministry of healing in order to enhance the efficacy of this ministry. I will also consider the need for stronger denunciations concerning many aspects of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. Finally I will illustrate by means of one example the type of prophetic action that is called for in the present context.

## (2) Announcing the Good News

### **(a) The Value of Ritual and the Sacrament of Healing**

Indigenous rituals are founded on the accumulated experience, knowledge and wisdom of generations. These rituals have been designed to be effective - to work - to achieve the aim for which they have been devised. A community is likely to be affected by its local rituals, which are expressed in the idiom of the people who have devised them.

Often the aims of indigenous ritual differ from those of the Christian sacraments which have also been modified over generations to be more efficacious. Concerning what

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164. See Ezek 16 and 17.

165. See Ezek 37:15-28.

166. See Ezek 12:1-16.

is done in times of illness, the aims of the cult of the ancestors are expressed in terms of reconciliation between the individual, the family and the community of the living and the dead, and healing of the afflicted. The aims of the sacrament of anointing of the sick and the dying are expressed as follows:

Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and, under the pressure of temptation, perhaps weakened in their faith.

This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support.

The sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick: by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. Thus the sick person is not only able to bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it. A return to physical health may follow the reception of this sacrament if it will be beneficial to the sick person's salvation.<sup>167</sup>

The sacrament of anointing is often accompanied by that of reconciliation, and on occasions of grave illness, by simple absolution. The purpose of these is to effect reconciliation between the individual, God and the community - remarkably similar terms to those in which the aim of the ancestral rite is expressed.

Ncube's proposal (which I considered earlier in this chapter) for the treatment of people suffering with AIDS, insists on the efficacy of ancestral healing ritual through social and familial reconciliation. This is not clinical curing, but the healing of relationships with the family, God and the ancestors. It re-integrates a person in a circle of relationships which will sustain and accompany him or her for the final years, months or days of his or her life. As I showed when I was considering Ncube's description of the ritual of healing, the ancestral ritual considers the health of the person in his or her social context. It is essential for the family and near neighbours to participate in the ritual, in order that the afflicted person believe in their good disposition. The purpose is to restore social harmony between the living and the dead.

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167. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *The Roman Ritual: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), 21.

The Christian sacraments of the sick, which are the closest equivalent to the ritual of healing, when they are celebrated, are often performed perfunctorily, reading from books translated from a foreign tongue, occasionally with no deep appreciation of the context and culture in which they are being celebrated. Often, again, there are no representatives of the family present, and it is a very private affair, with the priest offering the ill person the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. The way the latter sacrament is celebrated is, again, very privatised. With the priest representing both God and the Church, or faith community, there is no need for the presence of other members of the family or community.

Since the traditional African celebration of the ritual of healing is more communitarian, and is celebrated in the presence of the people with whom harmony and reconciliation are being sought, it has the potential of being more salutary than the private sacrament. This is crucial because of the stigma associated with AIDS and the recrimination and denial that accompany a diagnosis of HIV infection. There is much “work” (= ‘*mosebetsi*’ = ‘ritual’) that needs to be achieved.

Ncube is not alone in calling for a more communitarian approach to the sacraments of healing. Moshoeshoe has also proposed a modification of the Roman Rite,<sup>168</sup> which calls on the whole congregation to lay hands on the sick person (or if there are too many people, to extend their hands over the sick person) and pray for him or her in silence. He also suggests that a sign of peace be exchanged, to wish the sick person recovery and good health. If this part of the ritual were performed “meaningfully,” I believe it could initiate a reconciliation between the person with AIDS and the community to which he or she belongs.

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168. See Letsie Moshoeshoe, “Healing Rite,” in *The Church and African Cultures: Conference Papers*, edited by Mohlomi Makobane, Bongani Sithole, and Matheadira Shiya (Lumko, Germiston: Mazenod Institute, 1995), 86–90.

**(b) Naming the Affliction**

At a conference on responsibility in a time of AIDS, Ncube develops the work he did for his MA thesis. He takes what might be considered a “prophetic” stance in saying families should avoid the traditional ways of explaining this particular illness, and call AIDS what it is: a result of human error, and not of some mystical origin. Repeating the advice of Skhakhane<sup>169</sup> that communities should avoid “pseudo-diviners and faith healers,” he says that it is better not to have recourse to the ministrations of a diviner if this will result in accusations of witchcraft and cause further division in an already fractious situation. Witchcraft accusations are a means of exculpation, whose purpose is to take the blame off the person suffering misfortune. However, the blame is then often unjustly projected onto a member of the family or near neighbours. This is not conducive to the overall harmony and reconciliation of a community.

However, HIV/AIDS results in [?from] a situation where there has been human error, and there is nothing mystical in its causation. Thus the accusations and suspicions should not create such a scene, rather, the infected person should somehow own up and admit that there has been a damage that is irreparable and the affected community should give support to the person suffering.<sup>170</sup>

Further, Ncube suggests a more open forum for the sacrament of reconciliation, particularly where there have been accusations of witchcraft. At the least, the suspicion should be remedied in a public manner in order to put an end to speculation and accusations. This requires that the pastor be more involved in the life of the family, and that there be a greater openness than currently exists in private, individual celebrations of the sacrament of reconciliation. Such practice would imply a shift in the gravity of salvation celebrated in the sacrament. The focus is less on forgiveness of personal sins and more on reconciliation of a community with God, with itself, and with its ancestors.

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169. Jerome Skhakhane, “Catholics and Southern African Traditional Healers,” *Grace and Truth* 16, no. 1 (April 1999): 7f.

170. Vitus Siphon Ncube, “Responsibility in Inculturation: The Healing Ministry in a Zulu Context,” paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 103.

In his response to Ncube's paper, Sipuka advises that the practice of *inhlambuluko* (reconciliation) be developed at greater length to concentrate on the dimension of repentance.<sup>171</sup> He says that *inhlambuluko* would help "the infected to own up, . . . the families (*sic*) members to let go of their anger and prejudice against the infected, the one who infect (*sic*) others to repent."<sup>172</sup> This, also, would be useful in helping to overcome the stigma associated with AIDS, as it would require people to break the silence, and to name the illness for what it is.

Sipuka asks rhetorically: "Given the effects politics, economy and modernization have on society, is it realistic to appeal to values for which the environment is no longer conducive?"<sup>173</sup> He is clearly expecting the negative answer: No, we should not appeal to traditional values as the basis for *inhlambuluko*. Clearly the fear of breaking (sexual) taboos *per se* no longer commands the adherence it once did in more traditional society. *Inhlambuluko*, I therefore suggest, should focus on repentance for the harm one's action has brought to the community rather than on the brute fact of breaking a traditional taboo, looking rather at the *effect* of one's having contracted and possibly transmitted HIV/AIDS. This represents a shift from deontological to teleological (consequentialist) moral evaluation. Such a shift will be necessary for *inhlambuluko* to have contemporary relevance. I wonder whether a Catholic priest<sup>174</sup> arguing for a shift to a more teleological understanding might apply this same logic in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation: "I confess not to having broken the sixth commandment, but to having

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171. Sithembale Sipuka, "A Response to Vitus Ncube's Paper," response to paper presented at conference on Responsibility in a Time of AIDS, Johannesburg, 5–7 February 2003 in *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern Africa*, edited by Stuart C. Bate (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2003), 120.

172. In dealing with AIDS, Sipuka cautions against the use of traditional cultural categories which may be out of date due to cultural changes. But I believe that I have established satisfactorily in the second chapter of this work, that the cult of the ancestors is alive and well, and is a factor not to be overlooked in understanding and dealing with AIDS in South Africa.

173. Sipuka, "A Response to Vitus Ncube's Paper," 119.

174. Fr Sipuka is the rector of St John Vianney Seminary - the national seminary for the training of diocesan priests in South Africa.

exposed myself or another person to HIV/AIDS and consequently brought hardship on our respective families.”

### (3) Denunciation Where Necessary

The second prophetic task is to denounce unambiguously whatever adds to the suffering of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, as this is clearly against the will of God.<sup>175</sup> I divide these considerations in two: Firstly, to denounce the way in which so many people in South Africa are infected with HIV. Secondly, to denounce the exacerbation of their suffering because of official neglect and the stigma still associated with the infection.

#### **(a) Means of Infection**

Firstly, it is necessary to examine and denounce those conditions which make it so common that HIV is transmitted. The prophetic task is to denounce whatever avenues are due to human agency. I see this as relevant to soteriology, because it is a matter of prevention rather than cure of untold suffering. Much of the classical Christian soteriology I considered above focuses on therapeutic salvation in the sense that it understands Christ to have come to remedy a disordered situation. It could be summarised in the line from the Easter Proclamation of the *Exultet*: “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!” A prophetic soteriology would prefer to prevent the fault of Adam from occurring in the first place.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I examined the most common ways in which HIV is transmitted. These were sexual, parenteral and perinatal. After much prevarication, the

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175. As the chosen people returned from exile to the Promised Land, they were exhorted to “[c]hoose life, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him . . .” (Deut 30:19f.) This is surely the offer that God would be making to South Africans as they return from the exile of centuries of racist rule.

government has eventually proceeded with the administration of antiretroviral drugs to women who are giving birth in hospital. This will hopefully have the effect of cutting MTCT by one third. The recent work of Gisselquist et al.<sup>176</sup> has highlighted the necessity of added vigilance in the prevention of parenteral transmission of the virus. Notwithstanding their important work, the primary vector of HIV transmission remains sexual. It is in this area that there is need for a prophetic denunciation of those factors which endanger the lives of thousands of people every day.

(i) Issues of Gender

It is necessary to condemn in no uncertain terms gender-based violence which puts women at risk of contracting HIV. The need for this condemnation is made clear in studies like that of Dunkle et al.<sup>177</sup> They conclude their paper:

Overall, this study confirms that women who have experienced partner violence or who are currently involved with controlling male partners are at increased risk of HIV infection, even after their own risk behaviour is taken into account. We postulate that abusive men are more likely than non-abusers to be HIV positive or to be infected with transmissible cofactors such as HSV-2 which render women more vulnerable to HIV infection during subsequent exposure. . . Ultimately, addressing problems of gender-based violence and HIV will require broad community and societal level transformations that challenge entrenched cultures of violence and male-dominant norms of gender relations.<sup>178</sup>

This challenge must be heard and acted upon by members of churches who are in a position to effect changes in “male-dominant norms of gender relations.” It should be taken to the heart of the churches as institutions whose voices and actions still wield much influence in South African society. The more visibly the dignity of women is recognised and valued in the churches, the more credible will be the witness of churches in many other areas of teaching of salvation.

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176. Gisselquist, Potterat, Brody, and Vachon, “Let It Be Sexual.”

177. Kristin L. Dunkle, et al., “Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV Infection in Women Attending Antenatal Clinics in South Africa,” *The Lancet* 363, no. 9419 (1 May 2004): 1415–21.

178. Dunkle, et al., “Gender-Based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV,” 1419f.

The cult of the ancestors also rests on assumptions of male supremacy, when for example, only male ancestors are regularly honoured and remembered.<sup>179</sup> In some cases, those ancestors who cause trouble, are considered to be on the female side of the family.<sup>180</sup> Thus there is a gender imbalance at the root of some cherished notions regarding the ancestors. It is indubitable that this imbalance (a) is the fruit of and (b) has effects on “male-dominant norms of gender relations.” In this light there is an imperative to challenge certain assumptions of male supremacy inherent in some aspects of the cult in order to prevent the transmission of HIV.

It may be argued that this is interfering with a cherished dimension of traditional culture, or is an imposition of Western culture. I would argue in return that no dimension of culture is sacrosanct or above challenge, particularly when it affects the lives and health of millions of people.

At the very least, it is incumbent on churches and followers of the ancestor cult to denounce any gender-based violence as totally unacceptable in any form. The attitude of entitlement that some men have towards sexual relationships cannot be allowed to continue. The rape of women and children should not be tolerated under any circumstances.<sup>181</sup> It is not enough to pay lip-service to the denunciation of these two forms of violence. They should be severely sanctioned as a deterrent to others.

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179. See Nise Malange, “Discriminated Ancestors,” *Agenda: A Journal About Women and Gender* 13 (1992). She writes: “in the Nguni or Xhosa culture women are not brought back home as ancestors. The custom is only for men (male) and the only thing done for women is the unveiling of a tombstone if it has been erected.”

180. W.D. Hammond-Tooke, “The Aetiology of Spirit in Southern Africa,” *African Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 159.

181. Oswald Hirmer, “Letter on HIV/AIDS to All the Faithful of the Diocese of Umtata, Easter 2001,” in *Speak Out on HIV & AIDS: Our Prayer is Always Full of Hope*, written by Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar (Nairobi: Paulines, 2004), 71. Bishop Hirmer writes: “In the name of Jesus I call on such people and command them: ‘Do not become an instrument of the devil by abusing innocent children.’”

## (ii) Distribution of Condoms

As I discussed in the first chapter, the strategy of the government against the spread of AIDS has been the A,B,C campaign to **A**bstain, **B**e faithful, use a **C**ondom. The SACBC strongly affirms the first two pillars of this strategy: abstinence and faithfulness within marriage. But they have raised a prophetic voice denouncing the government's wholesale distribution of condoms as the third pillar to slow the spread of HIV infection.<sup>182</sup> Informed, obviously, by the deontological reasoning of *Humanae Vitae*<sup>183</sup> which affirms *Castii Connubii*,<sup>184</sup> the only normal legitimate sexual intercourse countenanced by the conference is between spouses and is open to the possibility of procreation.<sup>185</sup> Adding

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182. See 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.

The message is strongly opposed to the belief that using condoms to prevent the spread of HIV makes sexual intercourse moral. In fact, "The promotion and distribution of condoms as a means of having so-called 'safe sex' contributes to the breaking down of the moral fiber of our nations because it gives a wrong message to people," which message the bishops proceed to analyse.

183. Paul VI, "*Humanae Vitae*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 60, no. 9 (30 September 1968): # 11f.

teaches: "The Church . . . teaches as absolutely required that *in any use whatever of marriage* there must be no impairment of its natural capacity to procreate human life.

"This particular doctrine . . . is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act."

I use the translation in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: More Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1982), 397–416.

184. Pius XI, "*Casti Connubii*," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 22, no. 13 (31 December 1930): # 54ff.

teaches: "Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.

"[T]he Catholic Church . . . through Our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated of its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin."

I use the translation in *Five Great Encyclicals* (New York: Paulist Publications, 1939), 77–117.

185. However, the message allows that in the case of serodiscordant spouses:

"The Church accepts that everyone has the right to defend one's life against mortal danger. This would include using the appropriate means and course of action.

"Similarly where one spouse is infected with HIV/AIDS they must listen to their consciences. They are the only ones who can choose the appropriate means, in order to defend themselves against the infection. Decisions of such an intimate nature should be made by both husband and wife as equal and loving partners."

It appears that in this case the bishops concede the legitimate use of some barrier method of prevention of the transmission of the virus, even though this may render the conjugal act closed to the possibility of procreation. What is left unsaid is most revealing.

teleological reasoning to their deontological arguments, the conference also questioned the efficacy of the condom as a prophylaxis against HIV transmission. The devices may be faulty or wrongly used, and thereby lead to the spread of AIDS.

I am neither qualified nor competent in the area of moral theology, and have not studied sufficiently the details of the traditional teaching of contraception. Furthermore, this vexed question warrants a thesis in itself. However, from what practice I have had in the sacrament of reconciliation, it seems that the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* has not been “received” in the sense of accepted by the majority of Catholics. I don’t believe I have ever had a penitent confess to the use of artificial means of birth control. Accordingly, I wonder how advised the conference is to try to promote in South Africa a teaching that is almost universally regarded as outdated, and if not frankly wrong, then at least “too heavy a burden to bear.”<sup>186</sup> The fact is that the virus is continuing to spread through sexual intercourse, between spouses and otherwise, and the condom, while not 100 percent efficacious as a barrier, at least offers a large measure of protection, according to mainstream medical opinion.<sup>187</sup>

### **(b) Exacerbation of Suffering**

There are various aspects of the pandemic in the country that make it worse than necessary for the people who are already infected with HIV or suffering from full-blown AIDS. These aspects, too, should be unambiguously denounced.

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186. See Mt 23:4 and parallels.

187. I would note here that there is no unanimity among medical practitioners about the efficacy of condoms as a barrier protection against the spread of HIV. I believe the arguments are not always entirely objective, and are often fuelled by ideology. However, consensus appears to indicate that when the devices are properly used, they prevent the transmission of the virus in at least 90% of cases.

## (i) Government Inefficiency

In a similarly prophetic vein, the SACBC has denounced the delays in making ARV treatment available, and says that it would be tragic if so many people suffered because of delays caused by red tape and political point-scoring. Money earmarked for the treatment of people with AIDS is not reaching the intended projects. Orphans and sick people are not receiving their due grants because of bureaucratic inefficiency and indifference.<sup>188</sup> The bishops also note here that “[s]econd only to the State, the Catholic Church is the largest provider of home based care for the sick, of palliative care for the dying, and of care and support for AIDS orphans.” So, while they denounce governmental tardiness and indifference, they also commit themselves to continue to work as partners of the same state agencies.

## (ii) Stigma

An enormous amount of suffering from AIDS is due not to the symptoms of the illnesses associated with the syndrome, but to the social isolation of people who have the disease. As I mentioned repeatedly in the chapter on AIDS, there is great stigma attached to the disease.<sup>189</sup> There are many causes for this stigma: (i) its association with death; (ii) its association with sex; (iii) lack of knowledge.

These three factors are gradually becoming less significant. As a culturally-constructed reality, stigma changes with the cultures. As more and more information becomes available about HIV infection, and ordinary people have access to this information, some of their attitudes may change. For a start, as drugs slowly become available that are able to prolong life, the automatic and immediate association of AIDS

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188. See SACBC, “Catholic Leaders Call for Greater Cooperation Between State and Church in Assisting People with AIDS,” Press statement (2004), [Http://www.sacbc.org.za/2004aids.htm](http://www.sacbc.org.za/2004aids.htm) viewed on 28 July 2004.

189. See for example, Carol S. Goldin, “Stigmatization and AIDS: Critical Issues in Public Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 39, no. 9 (1994): 1359–66. The seminal work on stigma and AIDS was Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1989).

and death may possibly diminish. The association of AIDS and sexual activity will and should remain, because, as the conversation between Brewer et al.<sup>190</sup> and the WHO/UNAIDS<sup>191</sup> shows, AIDS is primarily a sexually-transmitted disease. The disease is forcing society to examine its attitudes towards sexuality, and to confront some of the taboos associated with talking about sexual activity. The churches are involved in all three of these areas: medical treatment and care for the dying; discussing relationships and teaching life skills;<sup>192</sup> passing on of knowledge.<sup>193</sup>

But there is a fourth factor contributing to the stigma of AIDS, and this falls directly within the purview of the churches and those who are associated with the cult of the ancestors. This is the association of AIDS with punishment from God or the ancestors for behaviour that has deviated from the traditional prescriptions.<sup>194</sup>

It is not clear that the cult of the ancestors can easily break this association of AIDS with the punishment of the ancestors, since compliance with the prescriptions of the cult seems to be linked with fear of the wrath of the ancestors. It will be necessary to portray the ancestors in a more loving, caring light (as indeed some do,<sup>195</sup>) in order to say that the ancestors do not punish deviant behaviour by bringing death on those who do not

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190. Devon D. Brewer, et al., "Mounting Anomalies in the Epidemiology of HIV in Africa: Cry the Beloved Paradigm," *International Journal of STD & AIDS* 14 (March 2003): 144–47, [Http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf](http://www.rsm.ac.uk/new/std144intro.pdf) viewed on 2 April 2003.

191. WHO / UNAIDS, *Expert Group Stresses That Unsafe Sex Is the Primary Mode of HIV Infection in Africa* (Geneva, 2003, 14 March), [Http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html](http://www.unaids.org/whatsnew/press/eng/hivinfections140303%5Fen.html) viewed on 9 April 2003.

192. For example, the SACBC sponsors "groups such as 'Youth Alive' which promote 'Education for Life' through workshops and programs inspired by the mottoes 'True Love Waits' and 'Choose Life'." See SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

193. For example, the chaplaincy of Catholic tertiary students in Johannesburg was involved in going around to schools in the mid-1990's with students talking about AIDS and its prevention and consequences.

194. See Stuart C. Bate, "Good News in a World of AIDS," *Trefoil* No. 264 (2002): 40 and Stuart C. Bate, "Good News for AIDS Myths," *Missionalia* 30, no. 1 (April 2002): 96.

195. For example, Aylward Shorter, "Conflicting Attitudes to Ancestor Veneration in Africa," *AFER* XI, no. 1 (January 1969): 29, indicates that the relationship people have to their ancestors is one of piety (or filial devotion). Quoting an example from Uganda, Shorter writes that despite their ability to send mortal sickness "the lineage spirits are seen as essentially loving relatives, good and exemplary people, who are irrevocably committed to the well-being of their lineage and its continuance."

comply with the prescriptions. Also, as more people begin to understand the disease as caused by a virus that attacks the immune system, making them vulnerable to other infections, then perhaps the association of AIDS with the punishment of the ancestors will be diminished.

Similarly, Christians should emphatically denounce the notion that God is punishing the person with AIDS for some sin. In a letter to his diocese, Hugh Slattery of Tzaneen wrote: "The people themselves and not God are responsible for their actions therefore for getting AIDS. We shouldn't blame God for allowing people to misuse their freedom and get hurt as a result."<sup>196</sup>

The idea of God punishing a person runs contrary to the Gospels. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells him that "God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved."<sup>197</sup> Thus it is not God's plan to condemn or judge people. Nor should it be the task of the followers of Jesus to pronounce judgement on the behaviour of others. Jesus was very clear on this. He said "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."<sup>198</sup> He also told those who were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery that the one who was guiltless should be the first to throw a stone.<sup>199</sup> But he told the woman to go and sin no more. Thus, he distinguishes between the sin and the sinner, and does not condemn the sinner, but instructs him or her to change his or her lifestyle.

The teaching of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, among others, has denounced the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS. For example the SACBC encourages people living with "this killer disease":

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196. Hugh Slattery, "HIV/AIDS: A Call to Action: Responding as Christians," in *Speak Out on HIV & AIDS: Our Prayer is Always Full of Hope*, written by Catholic Bishops of Africa and Madagascar (Nairobi: Paulines, 2004), 58.

197. See Jn 3:17.

198. See Lk 6:37.

199. See Jn 8:8.

We encourage your families and communities to accept you with love and to stand by you. We urge them not to abandon you but to continue Christ's mission of mercy, compassion and love. The Church loves you, welcomes you and reaches out to you in many ways.<sup>200</sup>

In the final analysis, the prophetic task of announcing and denouncing is given credibility in action. There has to be a congruence between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, or between the words and actions of a prophet. It is to this final aspect of a prophetic soteriology that I now turn.

#### (4) Prophetic action

##### **(a) TAC: The Treatment Action Campaign**

Before considering specifically Christian ways of engaging in prophetic action, I offer one example of an organisation that has been involved in civic action on behalf of people with AIDS in South Africa.

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is a civic organisation founded in Cape Town in 1998 by Adurrazack (Zackie) Achmat and others. The campaign has initiated and led many protests against the government inactivity on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS. It has lobbied for the importation and sale of cheaper generic ARV's. Members have imported at their own expense consignments of generic ARV drugs from Brazil, in contravention of South African trade regulations.

In a widely publicised move, Achmat announced that he would stop taking his ARV treatment until the government undertook to provide the same medication to everyone suffering from AIDS and who would benefit. His 'martyr' action won him wide respect from many within and outside the campaign, particularly when it became evident that his health was declining dramatically. He ended his "drugs strike" in August 2003, and the government announced its plan to begin the five-year rollout of affordable ARV's for

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200. SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

everyone in November of that year. While not the sole reason for the government's decision to provide the medication, Achmat's strike was certainly one element that helped to mobilise public pressure for the drugs, and perhaps to shame the government into being more proactive.

In a campaign to combat the stigma of HIV infection, members wear T-shirts emblazoned with the motto "I am HIV positive." On occasion Presidents Mandela and Mbeki have also worn these T-shirts, against their better sartorial judgment. The idea is that when respected leaders as well as ordinary people are not ashamed to associate themselves with the disease, it loses some of the stigma attached to it, making life more liveable for those with the virus.

The TAC is not a faith-based organisation, and is ecumenical (in a secular sense) in its approach.<sup>201</sup> Although begun by homosexual men living with HIV, it is open to anyone affected by the pandemic. This is reminiscent of the coalitions formed during the struggle for political emancipation, which saw alliances of civic, religious and political organisations.

### **(b) Christian Prophetic Action**

Although the writers of the *KD* were all members of churches, they encouraged their followers to participate in broad-based civic anti-apartheid campaigns, so that the churches did not become a "Third Force" acting in parallel to the mass democratic movement. Likewise in the AIDS crisis, church leaders "call on small Christian communities, prayer-groups, sodalities, priests, religious and pastoral workers, to join hands with all people who are engaged in the struggle against AIDS."<sup>202</sup> I believe it is pointless to establish independent parallel ecclesiastical structures, if ultimately the bulk of the funding for these structures will have to come from state coffers.

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201. Achmat is a Muslim, for example.

202. SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

The churches have a particular contribution to make in the present crisis, just as they did during the struggle for liberation. Then they had to retain an independent voice in order to criticise, for example, the violence of the uprising, and the lynching of those accused of being government collaborators. In the present *kairos* the churches need to retain a critical distance from the government and the activist campaigns, in order to decry the perception of the provision of condoms as an adequate line of salvation in the crisis. The bishops' *Message of Hope* expresses this in the terms of St Paul: remaining unspoilt like bright stars offering the Word of life to a corrupt people.<sup>203</sup>

But while the churches remain critical in their stance, they also provide untold support to people suffering from the consequences of the pandemic. In their hospitals, hospices, clinics, counselling services, orphanages, schools, home visiting, and ministry to the dying and the families of the deceased, they bring "Christ's healing ministry to the most neglected and forgotten."<sup>204</sup> It is this engaged action that renders credible the denunciation and annunciation of the Christian prophetic message. If Christians were not involved at the heart of the crisis, their voice from the sidelines would be unheeded and not worthy of attention.

The question remains whether the churches can or should do more in combatting the AIDS crisis, given the enormity of the problem. The danger exists that AIDS might become the single preoccupation of churches. During the time of apartheid, the struggle for freedom and democracy took an enormous toll on the spiritual and psychic energy of members of the churches. While this struggle was a preoccupation and exclusive focus of so many people, it cannot be said that churches focussed on this struggle to the complete detriment of its other ministries. Similarly, while the struggle against AIDS is compelling the churches to redirect resources both spiritual and material from other ministries, it

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203. Phil 2:15f.

204. See SACBC, *Message of Hope*.

should not force the churches to neglect their services of Christian education, pastoral care, the formation of community, sacramental ministry, etc.

On the contrary, the battle against apartheid elicited great energy and creativity from so many lay Christians, and saw them exercise roles of great responsibility and leadership. May the same be true of the battle against AIDS. Such action may lead to renewal of the life of the churches and the way we celebrate the paschal mysteries of life and death, the seed falling in the ground and dying in order to produce new life.

The Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus state:

The service of faith and the promotion of justice constitute one and the same mission of the Society. They cannot, therefore, be separated one from the other, in our purpose, our action, our life; nor can they be considered simply as one ministry among others, but rather as that ministry whereby all our ministries are brought together in a unified whole."<sup>205</sup>

I believe that this mission statement is not exclusive to the Society of Jesus, but is a worthy manifesto for the entire Church of Christ. In South Africa, the mandate to promote justice did not expire with the attainment of democracy. But to this mandate, we should now add "the battle against AIDS." Thus, prophetic action with regard to AIDS is not just related to the other ministries of the church, but can be a uniting, motive force. The battle against AIDS takes place in our evangelising, our teaching, our health care, our formation of communities, our sacramental life, our care of refugees and orphans, etc. And yet, the apostolate of the Church should not be so closely identified with the battle against AIDS, that when it is won, we are left wondering what the Church is to do.

#### **(4) Conclusion to Chapter**

In this chapter I have shown that salvation has particular meanings in the context of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa. It does not refer only to the provision of ARV

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205. Society of Jesus, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 61. This is a reflection on 30 years of experience of Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society, which, in 1975, first made the integral connection between the service of the faith and the promotion of justice.

medication, although this is an important facet of what salvation could mean. People suffering from AIDS also need to be “saved” from the social death of isolation, and from the worry of what is going to happen to their orphans if they succumb to the disease. Finally, they need some reassurance that there will be some memory of them, even if they do not fulfil the normal criteria of being counted among the ancestors.

I used the tripartite juxtaposition of theologies exemplified in the *Kairos Document* to compare the soteriology implicit in the ancestor cult, the explicit soteriology of the classical Christian approach in this crisis, and a more focussed prophetic approach to salvation in the same context.

Thinking of salvation in terms of the ancestor cult, one is immediately aware of the culturally appropriate methods of caring for and treating people suffering from infection. This approach includes the use of local medicines and remedies. It sees persons in their entire social context and does not focus only on the treatment of physical symptoms. The ritual processes developed over generations aim to reconcile an ill person with the family, the ancestors, close friends and neighbours, in order to achieve the *summum bonum* of social harmony. I examined the ways in which the cult might foster greater peace and acceptance of one’s condition, and therefore, in terms of Ignatian spirituality, consolation or salvation. I also looked at how the cult could be responsible for the converse, but concluded that overall, the cult is an aid toward salvation.

When I considered the classical Christian approach to salvation in South Africa, it was evident that this is not particularly context-reflective. People who use this approach try to apply understandings of salvation gleaned from previous generations of Christian theology, which seldom offer solutions to questions raised by the precise questions of salvation in the context of AIDS.

Using the *Theodramatik* of Hans Urs von Balthasar, I traced the history of soteriology from biblical times through the patristic, medieval and modern periods. I then

considered a pair of anthropological models of salvation which can now be regarded as classical post-Vatican II soteriology. None of these really brought us a fuller understanding of the meaning of salvation in the local context.

Finally, I began to develop a more prophetic approach to the question of what might be involved in salvation in the particular situation. I affirmed a closer harmonisation of the Christian rites of pastoral care of the sick and the ritual performance of the cult of the ancestors. This would require the Christian pastoral care worker to have a more intimate knowledge of the suffering family.

Secondly, the prophetic approach relies on an analysis of what spreads the pandemic, and how suffering is exacerbated. The message of salvation considered avoidance of the spread of the virus, through greater respect for the status of women and their say in reproductive rights. In this context it was also necessary to consider the vexed question of the distribution of condoms as one approach to curtail the spread of the virus. A prophetic theology involves the denunciation of an attitude of entitlement to sexual intercourse, of the rape of children, of the tardiness of the state's response to the pandemic, and of the stigma attached to AIDS.

In a final, more positive light, I considered that activity which lends credibility to the Christian proclamation of salvation. The churches express God's love and healing care in concrete terms, as a core component of all our ministries. This prophetic action lends legitimacy to the churches' prophetic voice, denouncing those factors which add to human misery and suffering and announcing the saving activity of God.