

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have begun a systematic reflection on the topic of Christian salvation in the context of a pandemic of calamitous proportion in South Africa. AIDS struck the country in the final stages of South Africa's emergence from a political system that had oppressed the majority of the people since the early colonial period. While it has been recovering from the effects of political colonialism, the "New" South Africa has had to face another grave threat to the hoped-for prosperity and normality. The purpose of this thesis has been to identify what local spiritual resources are available that might be crucial in dealing with the pandemic.

(1) Contents of the Thesis

In the *first chapter* of the work, I considered the proportions of the AIDS crisis, and showed that the pandemic has not yet slowed down. With more than 5 million people infected with HIV, and the numbers of infections growing daily, the death rate has not yet overtaken the rate of new infections, as it has in other African countries where the pandemic is more advanced. Actuarial projections estimate that 6 million people will have died of AIDS by 2010, and there will be 1 million sick people in the country. (These are without the intervention of ARV medication, whose effect will only be felt slowly.) This number of deaths will have social and economic effects unlike any seen during the worst days of apartheid. There will be millions of orphans, fewer professional people like teachers, nurses and doctors. Many homes will be headed by children, and many others will have grandparents caring for an entire generation of their grandchildren, as the middle generation is lost to AIDS.

I showed that HIV is transmitted mainly by sexual contact, although the incidence of parenteral transmission is probably vastly underrated. I showed that there are social factors that make the transmission of HIV so common. These include the proclivity for

'dry sex,' the fact that some parts of South African are non-circumcising, the re-use of blades in various traditional settings, the legacy of a poor baseline health, the migrant labour system, etc.

The high rate of sexual transmission takes place in a society in which the contribution and importance of women is insufficiently appreciated. One thing the pandemic has done, is to compel society to begin to question its assumptions and attitudes towards women. But until women have a stronger position in gender politics, and can negotiate obvious things like the use of condoms, they will remain very vulnerable to infection. Similarly, children will continue to be victims of exploitation, although the majority of HIV-positive children are infected perinatally.

I showed how the recent, but gradual distribution of ART in hospitals will make a difference to the prognosis of people with HIV, and is already cutting the rate of transmission of the virus from mother to child. Much hope has been invested in this medical breakthrough.

But AIDS does not only present medical and social problems. It provokes much reflection among theologians, pastors and ordinary members of the churches. Mentioning some of these reflections, I divided them rather arbitrarily under the three headings of systematic, ethical and pastoral theological questions. It must be remembered that they are all related, and that no solution to the problems can be taken in isolation. With that caveat, this work considered one of these questions in a more extended way, namely the question of salvation within the context of the pandemic and cult of the ancestors.

The *second chapter* of this work introduced one of the deeper dimensions of South African society. The cult of the ancestors cannot be overlooked as a source of profound religious experience and is inextricably bound to the identity of so many South Africans. With the aid of a number of contemporary authors, I demonstrated that many people, including Christians, relate to their ancestors in a religious way that goes beyond grasping at any straw that may be available in a time of crisis.

The cult of the ancestors cannot be reduced to a definition, but this did not prevent me from using the definition of Fortes as a framework on which to build a description of the cult. This was more from the perspective of an outsider than of someone who practices the cult.

I showed that there are traditional understandings of who does and does not become an ancestor. But as cultures change in interaction with others, these criteria of membership are not hard and fast. In particular, there are some people who consider that the cult may “soften” to admit to the world of the ancestors, people who have suffered untimely death, without children of their own.

I showed that the cult of the ancestors is an integral part of a worldview which is essentially social. The world is populated by persons, by God, the ancestors, and for some groups, spirits. It is these personal agents, rather than invisible forces or microbes which cause misfortune and blessing. Thus, it is of supreme importance to maintain harmony between all members of this extended causal society. Upsetting social harmony is regarded as the ultimate fault. From time to time, the ancestors are compelled to punish a person for the breach of a taboo or the neglect of social obligations. In cases like this, the ancestors need to be appeased by some sacrifice or offering.

Of course, being exposed to Western scientific method and “modern” reasoning, many South Africans do not subscribe to the entire worldview of which the ancestors form part. But that does not prevent them from performing some of the requirements of the cult.

In the *third chapter*, I examined the history of the relationship between the cult of the ancestors and western Christian missionary expansion in Southern Africa. I used the Basotho as a case study, because Sesotho is a language and culture with which I am familiar. The purpose of this work is to locate the present status of the cult in its historical background, and to show how the cult is enjoying something of a revival, even among Christians. It is therefore an important element of any contextual theology. The chapter began with the observation that it is impossible to offer a description of the cult before the

advent of the missionaries.

The history was divided into two distinct phases. From the earliest days, there was an all-out effort to suppress the cult of the ancestors among African Christians. It was perceived as unchristian and evil. African Christians were forbidden, under pain of excommunication, to participate in the consumption of beer, traditional dancing, rites of passage, traditional marriage and healing rites. These were seen as endangering the salvation of the Christians, but were also the social occasions on which the ancestors were venerated. In the Catholic Church, catechisms associated the cult of the ancestors with devils and the veneration of the ancestors as breach of the first commandment. Christians were rather to have recourse to the cult of the saints. It is evident that the missionaries were products of their times, and had a benevolent attitude towards the Basotho, but were in no doubt that African tradition was inferior to Western, and that it was inherently savage and evil.

In a second phase of the history, I noted a change of attitude in official documents concerning African traditional religion. Shortly before the Second World War, the cult of the ancestors was permitted in China, Japan, and importantly for our study, Congo. In the latter half of the twentieth Century, there was a succession of papal documents, culminating in *Ecclesia in Africa*, recognising the value of the cult as a force of social cohesion and moral injunction. Again, reflecting their time, these documents appeared within the context of changing attitudes towards Africa, and the gradual political (although not economic) decolonisation of the continent. The Second Vatican Council recognised the value of indigenous cultures as potential vehicles for evangelization, and the council fathers also realised the shift in demography of the Roman Catholic Church towards the younger church.

This changing in the official attitude towards the cult has been enthusiastically taken up by Christians in South Africa. In the name of inculturation, there have been more or less enlightened attempts to incorporate the cult into liturgical celebrations. There has

also been an explosion of reflection and writing on the place of the cult in Christian life. This work contributes to that explosion by examining how the cult of the ancestors can be helpful as an aid toward salvation in the face of AIDS.

Having considered at some length in the previous three chapters, the context of South Africa and the crisis posed by AIDS, and the cult of the ancestors and its historical survival of the onslaught of missionaries, it was necessary to demonstrate how these two realities might be related to one another. The *fourth chapter* served as a methodological bridge. I introduced the *Kairos Document* as template or pattern on which I shaped reflections of the cult and the AIDS crisis. I noted that the *KD* has strong associations with liberation theology, witnessing an introduction of critical thinking into theology, and focussing on concerns that are immediate to the lives of the people involved. A *kairos* is a time of crisis, of testing and of opportunity, for society in general, but also for the churches.

The *KD* critically juxtaposed three types of theology which were used in South Africa during the period of apartheid. These are state theology, Church theology and prophetic theology. The first two were seen as failing to respond to the needs of ordinary people in the apartheid crisis. State theology served the interest of maintaining the racist, totalitarian, capitalist status quo with theological arguments. Church theology, principally of the English-speaking churches was cautiously critical of the state and reproduced tried, safe theological formulae from other contexts to engage in questions of non-violence, reconciliation and justice. Prophetic theology, on the other hand, was at the service of liberation, and helped people to find relief from their current oppression, using the Scriptures to find signs of hope and using tools of social analysis to denounce the tyranny.

Having introduced the structure of tripartite juxtaposition in the fourth chapter, I applied it in the *fifth chapter* to the current context. I showed how the notion of *kairos* is appropriate for the present situation, and how the situation challenges the churches to renew their pastoral care and ministry. In pursuit of an understanding of what “salvation”

might mean in the AIDS crisis, I tried to find the meaning of this notion in each of the three theologies.

In place of “state theology,” of the tripartite juxtaposition, I considered the implicit soteriology of the cult of the ancestors. If by the Christian notion of salvation, we mean having a felicitous afterlife, then this would be the equivalent of becoming a member of the ancestors, in the cult. But the notion of salvation also has more immediate relevance, in the quality of care the cult of the ancestors offers to people who are ill. The ultimate good of maintaining social harmony requires that people affected by AIDS be reconciled with their family, neighbours, ancestors and God. This puts them at the centre of a ritual process which requires that the condition be named for what it is. The practice of the cult can thus bring about a greater sense of peace and reconciliation to one’s circumstances.

The second theology in the juxtaposition is what I called the “classical Christian” approach of the mainline churches. There are several such understandings of salvation, all of which naturally centre on the death and resurrection of Christ. Tracing the history of the development of Christian soteriology, I focussed on a few of these traditions of salvation. They were found to be concerned primarily with the mechanism by which the life, death and resurrection of Christ implicate the life of a follower in a salvific way. My estimation was that while these were more or less good theories, using the worldviews of the eras in which they arose, they were rather remote from the experience of the present.

I introduced a lemma by which I showed that just as salvation cannot be reduced to political salvation, nor can it be reduced to a hope for eschatological fulfillment. So the Christian notion of salvation must have some reference to the here and now. Western Christians with AIDS have reported more immediate experiences of salvation by applying to their lives the classical themes of healing illness, raising the dead, life in community, and coming to a deeper spiritual awareness. I believe that these would be other good avenues to explore in the development of a South African theology of AIDS.

The final theology in the juxtaposition, is what I called the “prophetic approach.”

The core of this is an understanding of prophecy as announcing Good News, denouncing whatever causes suffering, and engagement in action that speaks of the love of God. I showed how the cult of the ancestors challenges those who are celebrating the Christian sacraments of healing and reconciliation to do so in a manner that involves more directly the community for whom the sacraments are being celebrated. The need for salvation should be approached in a holistic manner, and not directed merely at restoring right relationship between an individual and God.

I showed that it is part of the prophetic task to denounce factors which cause the disease to spread, and factors which exacerbate the suffering of those already infected with HIV. In particular, patriarchal assumptions need to be challenged, and, where it exists, the recourse to the condom as the first line of defence against AIDS should be challenged. It has its place once the options of abstinence and fidelity within marriage have been excluded. It is also necessary to denounce the tardiness of the government to provide effective, directed medical care and leadership. But fortunately this is being dealt with.

The final aspect which exacerbates suffering is the stigma attached to AIDS. Christians should never use the language of God punishing people with AIDS. The stigma is best defeated by the example of compassionate and dedicated care of people who are suffering from AIDS. When people affected by AIDS receive such care and know that their orphans will not be neglected, they are enabled to die in peace as members of a social unit. This prophetic action speaks louder than words.

During the writing of the thesis, it became apparent that I could equally have followed the approach of Bevans's Praxis model of contextual theology. In particular, using the *Kairos Document*, with its roots in the struggle for political liberation, I have become aware of the systemic nature of HIV/AIDS as a disease of the poor. It mostly affects the poorest in any society, including in affluent countries. Once they are infected, their poverty is exacerbated by the inaccessibility of sound medical treatment, the loss of

employment, their social isolation, the need to receive care from children or aged relatives, and a host of other factors. My enquiry into salvation in the South African context has made it obvious that political liberation is not the equivalent of salvation. Indeed, there is still a road ahead before all citizens share the benefits of the “New” South Africa.

(2) Future Challenges

HIV is spreading more rapidly now in Asia than in Africa. We read about India, China, Thailand, Russia, etc. as the next frontiers of AIDS, while the pandemic in Africa is out of control. In all of these regions of the world, people have ancient religions, wisdom and healing traditions, all of which are resources that can and should be harnessed to cope with the crisis of AIDS. In each culture, the roots of hope and reconciliation must be found if Christian ministry is to communicate a message of salvation which has any bearing on the lives of the people involved.

Without wishing to be grandiose, I believe that this present work might serve as an example of how it is essential for Christians to take cognisance of the spiritual traditions of people in regions affected by the pandemic. In other contexts, people have different traditional approaches to illness, death, and the formation of community. It is important to regard these traditions in a historical light without passing judgement on whether they are good or evil. The fact is that they represent generations of accumulated wisdom, and are engraved more or less deeply on the soul of different people.

I have been aware during the writing of this thesis that it is being conducted by an individual who does not share the religious practice he is trying to account for, and who is presently at two continents' remove from the disastrous situation. This distance lends some perspective and hopefully objectivity to the work. It has certainly enabled me to proceed with maximal dispatch and minimal interruption.

But by its nature, contextual theology requires some degree of insertion in a

community. It was clear that *KD* was the work of theologians and pastors in collaboration and consultation with a receiving faith community. As for this present study, I have tried to be faithful to the people for whom my concern had me begin this study in the first place.

I believe that I am answerable both to an academic community, and to a wider community of believers, and hope that validation of this work will come from both of these constituencies. Validation from the academic community would consist in the judgement of my peers that this work makes a contribution to knowledge, is original and is publishable. Validation from a community of faith would be the affirmation that it speaks some of the truth of their experience, and that it helps them to find some signs of hope in a loving God in their situation.

APPENDIX: ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TEXTS

1. A. Gaughran, *Katekisisima ea lekhotla le leng* (Bloemfontein: Express, 1888), 45.

P. Libe tse fapanang le religione ke life na?

K. Libe tse fapanang le religione ke superstisione, idolatria le sacrilegium.

P. Idolatria keng na?

K. Idolatria ke ho sebeletsa sebopuo se seng ka hlonpho e tsuanelang

Molimo a inotsi.

P. Ba etsang sebe sa Idolatria ke ba fe na?

K. Ba etsang sebe sa Idolatria ke bahetene bao, ba reng ba habo ba shueleng ke balimo.

...

P. Superstisione keng na?

K. Superstisione ke ho kholoa hobane mathla a teng ho libopuo, le ho liketso, le ho mantsue a mang, e mpa mathla ao a sa ka a behoa ke Molimo.

P. Libe tsa superstisione ke li fe na?

K. Libe tsa superstisione ke ho hlatsua ka nyoko, le ho bôlla, le ho upella, le hu [sic] phatsa ho hong, le ho laola, le roala lithatho, le tse ling tse ngata tse etsoang ke bahetene.

2. Ferdinand Krüger, "*Das Recht der Sotho-Chuana-Gruppe der Bantu in Südafrika*," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin, Dritte Abteilung: Afrikanische Studien* 38 (1935), edited by Diedrich Westermann (Berlin), 98f.

Der Sotho kennt einen Schöpfergott, dem er keinen Eigennamen gegeben hat. Er, der Schöpfer des "Unten" und des "Oben", ist auch die letzte Ursache des Todes. Weil er deshalb zu fürchten ist, scheut sich der Sotho, seinen Namen auszusprechen. Das Formen seines Namens würde ihn, den unendlich Fernen, gegenständlich machen und den Tod dessen, der Gott rief, herbeiführen. So gibt es nur sehr wenig Gebete aus alter Zeit, in denen dieser Schöpfergott bei gewissen Gelegenheiten angerufen wird. Im religiösen Leben des Volkes spielt er keine Rolle.

...

Die wichtigsten Vertreter des Geisterreiches sind für den Sotho aber die Ahnengeister. Sie sind die Götter, von denen in der Hauptsache sein Wohl und Wehe abhängig ist. Angebetet werden die bedeutendsten verstorbenen Häuptlinge, insonderheit der letztverstorbenen, die in den heiligen Hainen, in denen sie beerdigt sind, wohnen. Außerdem verehrt jede Familie die Familienahnen, die im Rinderkraal beigesetzt sind.

3. Bernard Mohlali, *Tseleng ea Leholimo, Tumelo e Katholike, Katekisisima 3* (Maseru: Archdiocese of Maseru, 1991), 259f., 264f.

479 - Motho o nehela lintho tse bopiloeng hlomphe kapa tšebeliso e tšoanelang Molimo a inotši ha a etsa joang?*

Motho o nehela lintho tse bopiloeng hlomphe kapa tšebeliso e tšoanelang Molimo a inotši:

1. Ha a khumamela ntho tse bopiloeng kapa litšoantšo tsa tsona: ke sebe sa idolatria;
2. Ha a batla ho tseba tse patiloeng kapa tse lahlehileng ka mokhoa o sa tšoanelang, joaloka ho laola: ke sebe sa bonohe;
3. Ha a tšepa, kapa a tšaba lintho kapa mekhoa e itseng, ho feta tekanyo, joaloka hoja e e-na le matla a ho mo thusa kapa a ho mo hlahisetsa kotsi athe ha e na 'ona: ke libe tsa tumela-masaoana (superstisione).

480 - Ea susumeletsang batho ho etsa sebe sa idolatria; bonohe le tumela-masaoana ke mang?*

Ea susumeletsang batho ho etsa sebe sa idolatria, bonohe le tumela-masaoana ke Satane, eo e leng sera sa meea ea rona, ea ipatileng ka tlas'a mekhoa, meetlo le lihlare tse tse e thetsang batho ka tsona, ka ha "o leshano, 'me ke ra-leshano." (Jo. 8:44).

481 - Liketso tsa tumela-masaoana tseo Satane a atisang ho thetsa batho ka tsona ke life?*

Liketso tsa tumela-masaoana tseo Satane a atisang ho thetsa batho ka tsona ke: bothuela, boloi, lebollo, liretlo, litaola, meupello, lithakhisa, ho phatsa, ho thaleha ngoana moroalo, lithato le tse ling tse ngata. (Deuteronomo. 18:9-16)

*482*** - Lithuso tsa 'mele le tsa moea tseo mokriste a li hlokanang o tla li fumana joang?*

Lithuso tsa 'mele le tsa moea tseo mokriste a li hlokanang, o tla li fumana ho Morena Molimo ka Lisakramente, lisakramentale, lithapelo le likeletso tsa batsamaisi ba meea.

...

487 - U hlomphe 'me u rapela Mangeloi le Bahalaleli ka baka la'ng?*

Ke hlomphe 'me ke rapela Mangeloi le Bahalaleli hobane ke metsoalle ea Morena Molimo, basireletsi le barapelli ba ka.

*488*** - Na u tšoanetse ho hlomphe Masalla a Bahalaleli na?*

E, ke tšoanetse ho hlomphe Masalla a Bahalaleli, hobane ba se ba le leholimong, 'me 'mele ea bona e ne e le tempele tsa Molimo.

*489** - Na u tšoanetse ho hlomphe litšoantšo tsa Morena Jesu Kriste, tsa Maria Movirigo le tsa Bahalaleli?*

E, ke tšoanetse ho hlompha litšoantšo tseo hobane li nkhopotsa Morena Jesu Kriste, Maria Movirigo le Bahalaleli.

4. Bernard Mohlalisi, *Katekisima ea bakatekumena le ea bana* (Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre, 1975), 19f.

***88 - Na re ka khumamela Maria Movirigo, Mangeloi le Bahalaleli na?**

Che, e ka ba sebe ho ba khumamela, hobane ha ho nehoe libopuoana hlomphe e lokelang Molimo feela.

***89 - Na re tšoanetse ho ba hlonepha na?**

E, re tšoanetse ho ba hlonepha, haholo Maria Movirigo, e leng 'M'a Molimo le 'M'a rona.

90 - Na re tšoanetse ho ba rapela na?

E, re tšoanetse ho ba rapela, hobane ba nehlole matla a ho re thusa.

91 - Na re tšoanetse ho rapela litšoantšo tsa bona na?

Che, ha rea tšoanela ho rapela litšoantšo, hobane ha li utloe.

92 - Na re tšoanetse ho li hlonepha na?

E, re tšoanetse ho li hlonepha, hobane hlomphe ea rona e isoa ho Jesu Kriste le ho Bahalaleli ba tšoantšitsoeng ho tsona.

***93 - Libe tse fapaneng le molao oa pele ke life na?**

Libe tse fapaneng le molao oa pele ke ho khumamela melimo ea litšoantšo, ho hlomphe lintho tse halalelang, le tumelo-masaoana.

94 - Ho hlomphe lintho tse halalelang ke'ng?

Ho hlomphe lintho tse halalelang ke ho tlotlolla Molimo kapa lintho tse halalelang, kapa batho ba inehetseng Molimo.

*** 95 - Libe tsa tumelo-masaoana ke life na?**

Libe tsa tumelo-masaoana, ke mekhoha ea bohedene, joaloka lebollo, litaola, meupello, hlatsuo ea nyooko, lithakhisa, ho phatsa le e meng e mengata.

5. Pius XII, "Allocutio ac officialibus Pontificiarum Operum Missionalium," *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 36, no. 7 (28 July 1944): 210.

Il Missionario è Apostolo di Gesù Cristo. Egli no ha l'ufficio di trapiantare la civiltà specificamente europea nelle terre di missione, sibbene di rendere quei popoli, che vantano talora culture millenarie, pronti ed atti ad accogliere e ad assimilarsi gli elementi di vita e di costumanza cristiana, che facilmente e naturalmente si accordano con ogni sana civiltà e conferiscono a questa la piena capacità e forza di assicurare e garantire la dignità e la felicità humana.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

ACAPSM	African Catholic Priests Solidarity Movement
AIC	African Independent Church, or African Initiated Church, or African Indigenous Church
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
CAR	Centre for Actuarial Research
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CI	Christian Institute (of South Africa)
CPHA	Canadian Public Health Association
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Institute of Contextual Theology (Johannesburg)
IDU	Intravenous Drug User
IMBISA	Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa, (includes the episcopal conferences of Angola; São Tomé e Príncipe; Botswana; South Africa; Swaziland; Lesotho; Mozambique; Namibia and Zimbabwe)
<i>KD</i>	<i>The Kairos Document</i>
MRC	Medical Research Council
MTCT	Mother-to-Child Transmission
OMI	Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
PEMS	Paris Evangelical Mission Society (<i>Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris</i>)
PMS	Pontifical Missionary Society
SA	South Africa
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, (includes the bishops of South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland)

SANBS	South African National Blood Service
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, based in Geneva, Switzerland
VTC	Voluntary Testing and Counselling
WHO	World Health Organisation

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