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ABOUT ST AUGUSTINE COLLEGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The idea of founding a Catholic university in South Africa was first mooted in 1993 by a group of academics, clergy and business people. It culminated in the establishment of St Augustine College of South Africa in July 1999, when it was registered by the Minister of Education as a private higher education institution and started teaching students registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is situated in Victory Park, Johannesburg and operates as a university offering values-based education to students of any faith or denomination, to develop leaders in Africa for Africa.

The name 'St Augustine' was chosen in order to indicate the African identity of the College since St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was one of the first great Christian scholars of Africa.

As a Catholic educational institution, St Augustine College is committed to making moral values the foundation and inspiration for all its teaching and research. In this way it offers a new and unique contribution to education, much needed in our South African society.

It aims to be a community that studies and teaches disciplines that are necessary for the true human development and flourishing of individuals and society in South Africa. The College's engagement with questions of values is in no sense sectarian or dogmatic but is both critical and creative. It will explore the African contribution to Christian thought and vice versa. Ethical values will underpin all its educational programmes in order to produce leaders who remain sensitive to current moral issues.

The College is committed to academic freedom, to uncompromisingly high standards and to ensuring that its graduates are recognised and valued anywhere in the world. Through the international network of Catholic universities and the rich tradition of Catholic tertiary education, St Augustine College has access to a wide pool of eminent academics, both locally and abroad, and wishes to share these riches for the common good of South Africa.

Preface

The First International African Spirituality Conference was held on January 17-18, 2006 at St. Augustine College, hosted by St Augustine College's Department of Theology and the Spirituality Association of South Africa (SPIRASA) and was attended by 85 people. The origins of the conference can be traced from the minutes of St. Augustine College Academic Board meetings of 2003, where the need for an International African Spirituality Conference was noted. The planning of the conference was done by the St Augustine College Department of Theology and the Spirituality Association of South Africa (SPIRASA). This relationship gave birth to a working committee: Professor Dr. Celia Kourie, Dr. Rodney Moss, Dr. Christo Lombaard, Rev. Jeremy Jacobs and Mr. J.T. Modise. They met for the first time in March 2005 at St Augustine College of South Africa and in this meeting Mr. J.T. Modise was mandated to organise the 2006 Conference.

Our point of departure was to establish the dynamic presence of African Spirituality and its contextual relevance to society. We recognised its existence, experiential dynamism, and distinctive contribution, that is, an actual way of being in the world. We held that African Spirituality in South African society is diversely manifested by different cultural groups. Our major objective was to evoke the vision for regenerating the wealth and health of African spirituality, intelligence and ethics. Another objective of the conference was to celebrate the distinctive contribution of African Spirituality against slavery, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, communism, apartheid, genocide and corruption. We believed that through the conference such goals would be achieved. We maintain that African Spirituality is holistic. This view was endorsed by Prof. Maake Masango, who stated:

> "In short, passing on of knowledge or wisdom creates a world of *Ubuntu* (humanness) among African people. This is a type of spirituality that forces one to internalize African values as a way of life. In other words, African Spirituality is holistic, it impacts on the whole society, socially, economically, politically as well as among people – hence it contributes in the building of a nation".

At the opening session of the conference, Professor Dr. Edith Raidt, President of St Augustine College of South Africa, welcomed the delegates and remarked on the ground-breaking character of the conference. She noted that it was the first of its kind in which scholars, academics and individuals involved in various facets of spirituality participated.

The conference covered aspects of African heritage and spirituality, and how African Spirituality fits into a global context. It also explored the role women have played historically in expressing African spirituality, for instance, through mourning rituals, a meaningful response to HIV/Aids and their struggles to reclaim their space, and many pastoral challenges, such as pastoral care. The mystical possibilities of African spirituality and its role in the continent's cultural regeneration were also discussed and how African Spirituality shapes African communities towards *Ubuntu.*

At the conclusion of the conference an International African Spirituality Committee (IASC) was formed to further promote the development and growth and the study of African Spirituality in all its manifestations. It is imperative to regenerate the wealth and health of African spiritual, intellectual and ethical living in Africa.

Aspects of African Heritage and Spirituality

JOHN MBITI

INTRODUCTION:

In this presentation, I examine some aspects of spirituality in traditional prayers of African Religion. Spirituality belongs to people's identity as individuals and as communities. They formulate and employ the prayers within their physical, cultural, and social life situations. To that extent, it is a largely communal spirituality, a mirror of past generations, a response to the contemporary situation, and an anticipation of subsequent generations. This spirituality is earth bound. Howbeit, as it merges with Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, it is making modification towards heaven.

AFRICAN RELIGION IN BRIEF:

Traditional spirituality is the fruit of African Religion. It is found in all areas of this religious heritage. For this reason, we make a brief sketch of African Religion, to keep it in the background as we analyse its spirituality.

1. African Religion is the religious life of the indigenous peoples of Africa and Madagascar. It is deeply rooted in our languages, customs, traditions, histories, cultures, and worldviews. Beginning from time immemorial, African Religion evolved gradually, as people went through life, reflecting on their experiences and the mysteries of nature. It is communal in origin, practice, and self-propagation. It has no founder like Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, or Mohammed.

2. African Religion has no written sacred scriptures. It is preserved in oral forms, rites, and symbols. These include our more than 2000 languages and dialects, stories and oral histories, thousands of myths and legends, millions of proverbs and wise sayings, multitudes of rituals and ceremonies, an assortment of artistic expressions and symbols, sacred places and objects, values and customs, names of people and places, and oral texts such as prayers and ritual

invocations. Elders (both women and men), together with persons that perform official religious duties, are custodians of knowledge and traditions. These include priestesses, priests, traditional doctors, diviners, oracles, ritual elders, (some) rulers, rainmakers, seers, griots, and other local specialists.

3. African Religion is strongly monotheistic. Its commonest and most central feature is the concept of God, as the Creator and Upholder of all things. The belief in God is the central element and force that holds African Religion together. All other aspects may differ, from people to people, but on the concept of God, the peoples of Africa are knit together. In every language and society, there is a (word) name for God. I have collected some 1700 such names and conceptual descriptions of God in our languages. For example:

Akamba (Kenya) call God	Mulungu,
Akan (Ghana)	Nyame
Bacongo (Angola & Congo)	Nzambi
Baganda (Uganda)	Katonda
Banyarwanda (Rwanda)	Imana
Basuto (Lesotho)	Molimo
Bavenda (South Africa)	Mwari
Chagga (Tanzania)	Ruwa
Chewa (Malawi)	Mulungu
Dinka (Sudan)	Nhialic
Ila (Zambia)	Leza
Oromo (Ethiopia & Kenya)	Waqa
Yoruba (Nigeria)	Olodumare
Zulu (South Africa)	Unkulunkulu

Additional concepts portray God's nature, activities, and relation to the world. God is a personal and spiritual being, invisible and eternal. Some concepts depict God in human (anthropomorphic) terms and activities that make it meaningful for people to relate to God in a human way. These terms depict God as Parent, Father, Mother, Grandfather, Friend, Saviour, Shepherd, Healer, Protector, Guardian, King, Ruler, Master, and Judge. People also attribute ethical terms to God, such as Loving, Patient, Generous, Kind, Just, Perfect, Holy, Dependable, Good, Merciful, Compassionate, and Caring. They relate to or worship God through praying, singing, dancing, making sacrifices and offerings, dedications and invocations of blessings. Formerly, there were many

sacred places, temples and communal shrines, but their numbers diminished considerably in the twentieth century. African Religion has no physical representations of God, and any would-be such representations would be regarded to be sheer folly with which the community would have no dealings. These traditional concepts are very fertile ground for a strong spirituality, in which God is the final point of reference. People incorporate these concepts into their spiritual aspirations. They do not exercise spirituality in a vacuum. It is God-oriented, and God is its finality.

African belief in God is community knowledge and faith. The individual acquires this knowledge as he or she grows up. For that reason, the Akan of Ghana say, in a proverb that, "You do not teach a child about Nyame (God), the child knows God 'automatically'". God is part of people's identity as human persons, and they relate to God accordingly. No individual can undermine this communal faith by way of questioning it, or denying the existence of God. Therefore, in traditional society, atheism has no meaning and no place.

4. There are other spiritual beings, created by and subject to God. Some are personifications of natural objects and phenomena, such as mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, earthquakes, eclipses, thunder and lightning. The world and Nature are full of life, both biological and mystical. In addition, people hold that the spirits of the departed continue to exist after death. All this means that people are very conscious of the spirit world, and they live in relationship with that invisible world. It is indispensable to their spirituality.

5. African Religion acknowledges a mystical power created by God. People use this power for good ends as well as in the form of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. For example, some will use it to find favour in the sight of their partners or male-female friendship; others will use it to help them pass examinations, or to win political election, or to locate a lost item. Some individuals are also said to use this power to cause sickness, misfortune, failure, and even death. The people believe much of all this, and so they act accordingly.

   There may not be a convincing rationale about what this mystical power can do, for better or for worse. But belief in its existence exerts tremendous power upon the thinking and action of the people. It is an integral element of the worldview in many communities, being modified as may be needed. It strengthens the

moral fabric of society and plays a major role in the practice of traditional medicine. For example, in diagnosing a particular illness, the traditional doctor and diviner, will point the finger to the use of this mystical power by someone in the family, neighbourhood, business or political arena, as the case may be. The doctor asks not only "What caused this person to have stomach ulcers?" but also, "Who caused this person to have stomach ulcers?" Western medicine, with all its great wonders and achievements, approaches sickness or accidents largely from the question of "**how** is it caused?" Traditional African medicine asks not only how but primarily also **who** caused the problem. Perhaps we need both approaches, especially in tackling diseases like Malaria and Aids and modern accidents. At any rate, this mystical power is taken up in people's spirituality.

6. African Religion is strong in the area of moral and ethical values that uphold relationships in the community, and its spirituality embraces these values. They include: justice, peace, reconciliation, respect towards institutions and older persons, love, helpfulness, hospitality, kindness, forgiveness, care of children and the weaker members of society, care of elderly family members, hard and honest work. Society uses its values to discourage, eradicate, or punish such evils as theft, murder, witchcraft, evil eye, backbiting, cheating, pride, disrespect, laziness, and what people consider to be abnormal sexual acts. God watches over the moral life of the community, society, and humankind. Many of these values constitute the basis for traditional laws and customs. Community life is the most prominent expression of traditional values. It is in this context, that the basic philosophy of African Religion can best be appreciated: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."

7. African Religion affirms and celebrates life. For that reason, key moments in individual life such as birth, naming, initiation, marriage, death, and funeral ceremonies may be marked with celebrations. This strengthens community cohesion, and serves the needs of the persons concerned. Spirituality is very much at work here, accompanying the life's journey from before birth to after death.

8. African Religion sees and treats marriage as a religious duty that, under normal circumstances, everyone is obliged or expected to fulfil. The bearing of children is the central focus of marriage, and no efforts are spared to ensure that there are children in each marriage. Children knit the community into a vast network

of relationships both close and distant. Ideally and in effect, the family never dies; only its members do. Spirituality is put into action first and foremost within the family context.

9. People commonly hold the belief in the life after death. They often observe elaborate funeral rites. Life in the hereafter is more or less a carbon copy of the present. The departed retain their human characteristics and the living dead are still part of their earthly families. They may appear to the living in dreams, in waking, or through divination, particularly in connection with major family events. The next world is inhabited by spirits and located in thick forests, or remote places, or underground, or on mountains. African Religion depicts the universe in two intertwined parts: the visible and the invisible. It's spirituality embraces both worlds.

10. In the course of its history, African Religion has encountered other religions, especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam. However, in recent centuries both Christianity and Islam have rapidly exerted their presence on the African soil. This has happened in some cases through political and military conquest, or strong missionary expansion (largely with the help of local converts). This encroachment has altered the religious landscape and the changes are still taking shape.

    In its turn, African Religion has also crossed the oceans through forced (slaves) or voluntary migration to the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. Even more numerable are the millions of Africans abducted and kept as slaves by Arabs in the Middle East and within Africa. That has been going on over many centuries and continues even to this day. The enslaved persons carried their traditional religion with them. In the course of time it took on new forms and expressions, as it met these other cultures and religions.

11. Historically, African Religion predates both Christianity and Islam. Even though statistically it is on the third rank today, it continues to thrive behind the scenes of outward Christianity and Islam. This happens through integration with them, and by adjusting to the modern life, both locally in Africa itself and overseas especially in the Western Hemisphere and western Europe. In the case of persons' conversions to these and other religions, it retains a strong presence below the public surface. People do not go empty handed into the Church or the

Mosque – they take their traditional spirituality with them, consciously or mainly unconsciously. This enables them to embrace and adjust to Christianity or Islam, or even to reject them, since many elements from traditional religion are the same as or similar to those of these later religions. Traditional spirituality merges readily into Christian spirituality and perhaps, to a less extent also into Islamic spirituality. Aspects of it are parallel to the spirituality of the Jewish Bible. In any case, it facilitates the absorption of Christianity (and to a less extent Islam) by the people. Using the Bible in the context of a traditional worldview reaffirms and approves of many elements of traditional life. The fact that people do not give up their spiritual heritage upon conversion indicates that it belongs essentially to their identity – it has shaped them and they have generated it.

SPIRITUALITY OF DEATH

Can we speak of a spirituality of death? I contend that there is an enormous amount of spirituality connected with the phenomenon of death. This is the case with all religions. In various ways, death dominates people's spirituality, since spirituality is bound up with their entire life and identity. African Religion has much to say about death.

We give a sketch of people's explanations of the mythological origin of death. They depict death as a religious phenomenon in origin and face it as an occurrence with a multiplicity of religious dimensions.

There are thousands of myths explaining the origin of death. Most of them agree that in the primeval period, in one form or another immortality was the order of the day. The people either did not die; or, if they died, they rose again. If they grew old, they were rejuvenated and became youthful again. Or else, God took them back to God just as they were. But, something happened and death came into the world. The commonest set of myths is that in which God sent a message of immortality to mankind but somehow, that message failed to reach people in time.

One variation says that God sent the chameleon (or another messenger like the lizard, toad, hare, goat or sheep) to inform people that they would live forever, or that they would rise again upon dying, or become youthful when they grew old. On the way, the messenger stopped to eat, play, or sleep. Meanwhile God dispatched another message to the effect that men may die. The second messenger went swiftly, came to the people, and delivered his or her message before the first message arrived. Some variations of this myth say that

God sent only one message with immortality to man, but the messenger forgot the exact wording, or changed the message, or else he/she was maltreated by people on arrival, for which reason he/she cursed them.

With its many variations, this myth puts no blame on either God or man for the coming of death into the world. Instead, a third party is responsible, and people legitimately hate the messenger that brought about this tragedy into the world.

Another set of myths that occur in the region of Madagascar, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zaire, presents the first persons as being given several bundles out of which they had to choose one. Inadvertently, they chose a bundle that contained death. And when they opened it, death came out and remained with them ever since. In another version, it is told that God gave men only one bundle that contained death, and warned them never to open it. But overcome by curiosity, our first ancestors nevertheless opened the bundle and lo, out came death.

Between the great lakes and in Congo DR there are myths that connect death with sleep. Accordingly, persons did not know death at the beginning. God forbade them to sleep. But, in defiance of this prohibition, they fell asleep and death overtook them. Or the messenger of immortality arrived only to find nobody waiting for his/her message. Otherwise, death took advantage of their state of being asleep and invaded their lives. Thus, death came partly as a result of man's fault, and partly in connection with a natural process of falling asleep.

In this same geographical region, we have other myths that connect death with reproduction. Men were originally immortal, but they did not have children, or they were not allowed to bear children. They, however, gained sexual knowledge, bore children and thereby invited death into the world. This motif sets life and death versus each other. The love of bearing children is sharply contrasted with the sequence that death follows the propagation of life. It was not wrong to have children, and if death was the price, then the first persons chose to pay it and get children.

Westwards from the Sudan up to Mali and in the eastern half of Madagascar there is another set of myths according to which men actually desired to have death. This burning desire for death came from weariness of life, or the burden of troubles. Or, they feared that unless something was done, the entire world would become overpopulated beyond capacity. In this case, death came as a great relief to men: it made them glad. Under those

circumstances, immortality was not necessarily a good thing. Therefore death cannot be regarded as evil since it saved mankind from misery.

There is a variety of other motifs in African myths about the coming of death. Some depict a divine test and man's failure to pass that test. Some present death as God's punishment to persons for corrupting existing morals or upsetting the prevailing order. Others portray persons as disobeying God's commandments or rules, for which God punished them with death. There are myths in which death is personified into a being or an animal that escapes from being hunted down, or that otherwise attaches itself permanently to men.

From this brief sketch of African myths of the origin of death, we see that in the majority of cases persons were not the immediate or direct cause of death. This may have been an animal that brought the wrong message, or came late with the message of immortality. Otherwise, it was an unlucky choice, or connected with a natural inclination like procreation, sleep, and curiosity. Whatever explanations, whether today people are conscious of them or not, there is a clear link between God, people and death. This is where a spirituality of death comes into operation.

Very dynamic forms of spirituality have evolved, by means of which people endeavour to come to terms with death. This spirituality is directed at: keeping death at bay, facing death, dealing with death, accepting death as inevitable, and looking beyond death. The struggle with death goes on everywhere and it is primarily a spiritual struggle. For example, there are thousands of prayers and invocations in facing death. There are elaborate rituals of burying the dead and people put a lot of effort into them. There are innumerable activities to comfort and accompany the bereaved families. Everywhere the belief thrives, that life goes on beyond the grave, and the living maintain contact with the departed who are thought to be in spirit form.

God is very much at the centre of the spirituality of dealing with death. God is mightier than death. Death evokes hopelessness and defeat. But people look to God and thereby look beyond death because it does not have the final word. God evokes hope in the face of death – the hope of healing the sick person, the hope about the dead person as being taken or cared for by God, and the hope of being reunited with the departed who are in the beyond. African Religion does not entertain a heaven or hell, rewards or punishment after death. Therefore, its spirituality has little or nothing to say on this concept that otherwise has now gained ground through some Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions.

Traditional prayers illustrate many points about the spirituality connected with death. The prayers are windows into the spirituality that produces such sentiments, whether or not everyone in the particular region recites them. In one prayer from the Ovambo in Namibia, we hear people addressing God directly. They regret it that death struck "too soon." They extend their tenderness towards the departed and ask God to provide water, food, and warmth for the dead person. And since the world of the departed rubs shoulders with that of the living, the people also request the departed to "prepare a place for us." They reach out for the fellowship that binds the living and the departed.

> "God, you have called too soon. / Would it were not today! / God, you have called too soon! / Give him water, he has left without food; / Light a fire, he must not perish."

And then, addressing the dead person:

> "Prepare a place for us, / In a little while we shall reach, / Let us reach each other."

In the Congo DR, when faced with death, people call upon God, weighing the goodness of creation over against the sorrows of death. This prayer even stretches the imagination to the very beginning of creation, and wishes that God had another plan for the people. They confess their sadness. Spirituality is a great channel of letting out grief and bewilderment from death.

> "O great Nzambi [God], what thou hast made is good, but thou hast brought a great sorrow to us with death. Thou shouldest have planned in some way that we would not be subject to death. O Nzambi, we are afflicted with great sadness."

A funeral recitation among the Pygmies also in the Congo DR reflects on the inevitability of death, and yet God above is ever present. The people appeal to God, to hear their state of despair and darkness. The recitation is done by the whole group. This is a good illustration of the communal nature of traditional spirituality. It is a very beautiful litany, with its dynamic rhythm, powerful imagery, and use of vivid symbolism.

"LEADER: The creature is born, it fades away, it dies,
And comes then the great cold.
GROUP: It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.
LEADER: The bird comes, it flies, it dies,
And comes then the great cold.
GROUP: It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.
LEADER: The fish swims away, it goes, it dies,
And comes then the great cold.
GROUP: It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.

LEADER: Man is born, he eats and sleeps. He fades away,
And comes then the great cold.
GROUP: It is the great cold of the night, it is the dark.
LEADER: And the sky lights up, the eyes are closed,
The star shines.
GROUP: The cold down here, the light up there.
LEADER: Man is gone, the prisoner is freed,
The shadow has disappeared.
GROUP: The shadow has disappeared.
LEADER: Khmvoum [God], Khmvoum, hear our call!
GROUP: Khmvoum [God], Khmvoum, hear our call!"

From these few prayers we see some prominent elements of spirituality: God is very central, death is inevitable and devastating. But in the darkness of death there is the light of hope. As the Pygmies describe it: "The cold (of the night, it is dark) down here, the light up there." The two worlds – the visible and the invisible are made to stand side by side. Yet there is open communication between them, and people freely address the invisible world.

Communication with the invisible world is directed not only to God but also to other spiritual beings, especially those connected with families. This has wrongly been termed, and ridiculed by ignorant Western writers, as the so-called "Ancestor Worship." There is nothing like that. It is just a dimension of the overarching spirituality that recognizes the invisible world. People address that world in personal terms that are in accordance with their awareness. They believe that physical death is not the final end of persons. They perform rituals and make invocations that affirm this belief. Here is one funeral address that illustrates the issue. It comes from South Africa, but I have not been able to identify among which people. People speak to the departed of the family, as if they were still alive here. They air feelings that they would also express among the living. This is surely not worship, at least not for the Africans – and we are the ones that best can judge that kind of relationship.

> "You, my forefathers, you have congregated here today. Do you not see this? You have taken him with you. I am alone now, I am dead. I implore you, who are so far, since he has gone back to you, let us remain in peace. He has not left us with hate. Let us weep softly over him, in peace. Let us help each other in our pain, even his wife's parents."

This invocation brings out tenderness in the face of death, such as captured in the appeal: “Let us weep softly over him, in peace,” and “let us help each other in our pain.” It appeals for the spiritual value of peace – among the people left behind, and between the departed and the living. It promotes solidarity to soften and heal the soreness of bereavement: “Let us help each other in our pain.” There is grief but it is ameliorated by the awareness that the forefathers and foremothers, are assembled with the living. People are not unduly troubled because there are no unresolved feelings of hatred between the departed and the living. A member of the community has died, but the family holds together, shares the pain and moves to overcome the death. This prayer could be called a pastoral consolation.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAND

Land is the biggest physical heritage of African peoples. It is featured in thousands of myths about the original creation of persons. It is our livelihood from the start to the end. Some communities have personified the earth as a divinity and subsequently perform appropriate rituals in recognition. It is to be expected, that in course of time, many aspects of the spirituality of the land have evolved. We take a few examples to illustrate this wide variety.

The Lozi in Zambia use the following prayer to dedicate the seeds before sowing them in the fields. It begins by invoking God as the Creator of all things. The people humble themselves before God, acknowledging their weakness versus the absolute might of God. It pleads with God to bless the seeds and the implements that the people will use in working in the fields. They admit that, even the ability to work comes from God. The prayer betrays the profound trust of a child towards the parents – and indeed, people regard themselves as the children of God.

> “O Nyambe [God), you are the creator of all. Today we your creatures prostrate ourselves before you in supplication. We have no strength. You who have created us have all power. We bring you our seeds and all our implements, that you may bless them and bless us also so that we may make good use of them by the power which comes from you, our creator.”

The Dogon of Mali feel so close to the invisible world, that they first greet God and the departed, before presenting their supplication at sowing time. Their prayer is straight forward. The people are very confident. They confess God as the One that brings about growth, the One that gives someone a life partner and children, and provides rain. God is both the Provider and the

Protector of life. With a very strong symbolism, the prayer pleads for rain. The people feel so sure of getting God's help, that they personify the millet yet to grow and speak to it: "Millet! Come!" The prayer also mentions other needs in the community: finding a wife, getting children, protection against thorns and snakes and sickness (from the wind).

> "Oh God! Receive the morning greetings! / Ancestors! Receive the morning greetings! / We are here on the chosen day, / We are going to sow the seed, / We are going out to cultivate. / Oh God! Cause the millet to germinate, / Make the eight seeds sprout, / And the ninth calabash. //
>
> Give a wife to him who has none! / And to him who has a wife without children / Give a child! / Protect the men against thorns, / Against snake-bites, / Against ill winds! //
>
> Pour out the rain, / As we pour water from a pot! / Millet! Come!"

The Didinga in the Sudan have an extensive prayer at the sowing season, in which they personify and address the earth, the forests, and the rivers. This personification of objects is a spiritual device, in order to speak to them and forge a close personal link with them. The priest offers this prayer on behalf of the people, asking that the land be kind and generous to them, that the trees do not hurt anyone when they fall, and that the rivers fertilize the ground. The prayer pleads for harmony between people and nature – earth, trees, rivers, and seeds. Man has to handle the earth with care and great respect, so that in return the land provides bountifully for persons. Persons can hurt the earth, and the earth can hurt them. Therefore, harmony is necessary for mutual benefit. Yet, the land, the earth, is more powerful than persons and the latter should deal with it in a humble spirit, pleading with it to: "Be gentle and give us plenty from your teeming plenty." The people promise to be grateful afterwards, making generous offerings. They depict the earth like a nursing mother. What a beautiful picture! The land and the whole earth deserve to be approached with humility:

> "Be gentle and give us plenty from your teeming plenty!"
>
> **"O Earth**, wherever it be my people dig, be kindly to them. Be fertile when they give the little seeds to your keeping. Let your generous warmth nourish them and your abundant moisture germinate them. Let them swell and sprout, drawing life from you, and burgeon under your fostering care; and soon we shall redden your bosom with the blood of goats slain in your honour, and offer to you the first fruits of millet and oil of sesame, of gourds and cucumbers and deep-mashed melons.

"O trees of forest and glade, fall easily under the axe. Be gentle to my people. Let no harm come to them. Break no limb in your anger. Crush no one in your displeasure. Be obedient to the woodman's wishes and fall as he would have you fall, not perversely nor stubbornly, but as he directs. Submit yourselves freely to my people, as this tree submitted itself to me. The axe rings, it bites into the tough wood. The tree totters and falls. The lightning flashes, its fire tears at the heart of the wood. The tree totters and falls. Before the lightning the tree falls headlong, precipitate, knowing neither direction nor guidance. But the woodman guides the tree where he wills and lays it to rest gently and with deliberation. Fall, 0 trees of forest and glade, even as this tree was fallen, hurting no one, obedient, observant of my will.

"O rivers and streams, where the woodman has laid bare the earth, where he has hewn away the little bushes and torn out encumbering grass, there let your waters overflow. Bring down the leafy mould from the forest and the fertilizing silt from the mountains. When the rains swell your banks, spread out your waters and lay your rich treasures on our gardens.

"Conspire together, O earth and rivers: conspire together O earth and rivers and forests. Be gentle and give us plenty from your teeming plenty. For it is I, Lomingamoi of the clan Idots, who speak, Keeper of the clan lands, Warden of the Forest, Master of the clan."

At harvest time, many African peoples used to celebrate with rituals, offerings, and prayers. As with sowing rituals, this practice continues to diminish. Nevertheless, it contains insights into the spirituality of thanksgiving to God, and dedication of the harvest for the health and welfare of the people. We illustrate with a litany of praise to God, from the Gikuyu people in Kenya. It acknowledges God as the One that gives rain, harvest, health, and peace. As is often the case in other parts of Africa, it is a community prayer involving everyone, just as the harvest is for everyone. The people express their praise to God, and ask for protection from harm, for persons and domestic animals, so that all "may enjoy this season's harvest in tranquillity." Health, peace, tranquility, harmony, and happiness – all are important elements of spirituality.

"LEADER; Mwene-Nyaga (God), You who have brought us rain and have given us a good harvest, let people eat grain of this harvest calmly and peacefully.

PEOPLE; Peace, praise ye, Ngai (God), peace be with us.

LEADER: Do not bring us any surprise or depression.

PEOPLE: Peace, praise ye, Ngai, peace be with us.

LEADER: Guard us against illness of people and our herds and flocks, so that we may enjoy this season's harvest in tranquillity.

PEOPLE: Peace, praise ye, Ngai, peace be with us."

Two proverbs from the Lugbara of Uganda summarise adequately people's feelings of attachment to the earth and the land. Their sentiments are applicable all over Africa: "The earth is the mother of all"; and "The earth opens its mouth for all." This is to say that the land feeds us all and buries us all. People's attachment to the land is sacred, it provides for our life and for our death. Their spirituality is directed towards these poles.

SPIRITUALITY OF LIFE AND HEALTH

People focus a great deal of spiritual activities on the areas of health and maintenance of life. Many prayers address these concerns of existence. We take up a few illustrations.

There are those prayers that are directed towards the welfare of life covering the day, the month, the year, and always. Here is one from the Samburu people in Kenya. It begins with a declaration of faith, yet submitting to the will of God. It goes on to affirm with full confidence that God will save, guide, and be with the people day and night. The prayer uses symbols that are full of meaning in the life of the people, such as long rains, fragrance, support in difficulties (burdens), fertility, shepherd, and flood. It pleads with God to *"come and hit us with your blessed wind, flood us with your waters."* Both the wind and water are strong symbols of life. With full trust in God, the prayer ends beautifully: "And God said: *'All right!'*" After such a prayer, one can without fear, go into the day, the months, the years, and the whole of life, knowing that God has given a guarantee that all will go well. Then, the "Alright" of God is life in fullness.

> "May God agree with us! / Yes, my God, you will save us; / Yes, my God, you will guide us, / And your thoughts will be with us night and day. / Grant us to remain a long time like / The great wing of rain, like the long rains. / Give us the fragrance of a purifying branch. / Be the support of our burdens, / And may they always be untied, / The shells of fertility and mothers and children. / God be our safeguard, also where the shepherds are. / God, sky, with stars at your sides / And the moon in the middle of your stomach, / Morning of my God that is rising, / Come and hit us with your blessed wind: / Flood us with your waters. / And God said: 'All right'. " {A. Gittins, ed.: *Heart of Prayer. African, Jewish and Biblical Prayers*, Collins, London 1985, pp. 39 f.}

In the rhythm of the day, there are also evening prayers. For example, the Dinka in the Sudan pray,

> "Now that evening has fallen, / To God, the Creator, I will turn in prayer, / Knowing that he will help me. / I know the Father will help me."

This is a simple prayer and yet it is full of meaning. The person recognises the working of God in nature, and turns to God in a personal way. The person confesses God as the Creator and the Father. This second attribute is a personal link with God. Therefore, the person turns to God in prayer, bringing out his or her full faith that God will help like parents do with their children. The person regards God as Father, Parent, Source of being, and herself or himself as a child of God.

Among the Banyankore in Uganda, a woman head of the family squeezes the leaves of a local tree (omuhiire – physalia minima) over the fire in the house, and offers a prayer in the morning. It is concerned with moral-spiritual purity at the start of the day. She asks God to "let her home smile in good fortune." She has an open heart towards others: "I always wish good health to others." She has no malice towards them. That is a very important point in African communities where witchcraft is often a scourge, said to derive from ill wishes towards others. But the woman here wants to be morally upright before God and the neighbours. The fire over which she squeezes the leaves, is the central part in the house and hence in the life of the family. It cooks food for the family, it gives warmth, it provides light, it may be used to prepare medicinal herbs, or to process metal. Probably the smoke from the leaves acts like incense. Smoke from the fire in the house keeps away some insects that attack people and others that destroy grains. Here, the woman is in charge of the fire – to light it, to keep it burning, to provide firewood for it, and to use it for providing food for the family. The fire is a symbol of family life. It has power. It is also a spiritual link. She prays for the welfare of the whole family and even for the community, around the fire.

> "Let me smile in good fortune; / Let my children smile in good fortune; / Let my home smile in good fortune. / I do not eat what is not mine. / I do not steal my neighbour's goods. / I always wish good health to others. / I am never in debt. / He who hates me is unjust. / I am always smiling in good fortune."

Sickness is a daily experience in African life. As we can expect, there are many prayers for healing and help in times of sickness. They are addressed to God as the Source of life, as the Creator, as Father-Mother (Parent) of people, as the ultimate Source of help. But some may mention the departed (living-

dead) of the family, asking them to assist in pleading with God. The departed are in the invisible world – the spiritual world, so to speak. People's appeal is directed to that other world, and whoever is in it may be requested to join the living in seeking help to heal or save the sick, or to give children to persons without them, to protect against harm or misfortune. The prayers are addressed to the community of the invisible, mentioning God as the central figure, but some are free to mention other beings besides.

The following prayer from the Luguru in Tanzania is a good illustration of elements of spirituality concerning health and healing. It opens by addressing God as Father who is everywhere present, in heaven and earth. The persons confess with humility that they are innocent children. They are using medicinal herbs (roots) for treatment, but they know that healing comes only from God. They also know that God, "the Conserver" may allow sickness to strike. At the same time, they acknowledge that persons may also cause sickness (through witchcraft, evil eye, poison, curse, etc.). The prayer covers all possible causes. It goes on to address the departed so that they, too, may help. They are part of the family, the family of God's children. The person saying this prayer on behalf of the family or community might be an elder, or a traditional doctor. He / she spits a mouthful of water upon the sick and the family. In many societies, people use the spittle as part of the act of blessing, like at the end of this prayer.

This is a very tender and human prayer, making a strong and humble appeal for help. It links strongly the visible and invisible worlds. People feel close to God who is "in the heavens and below." They also feel one with the departed: "our grandparents… and all ancestors, males and females, great and small." Through this payer, people pour out their heart, naming their needs, making an appeal to the spiritual realm, and pleading for mercy.

> "You, Father God, / Who are in the heavens and below; / Creator of everything and omniscient; / Of the earth and the heavens; / We are but little children / unknowing anything evil; / If this sickness has been brought by man / We beseech you, help us through these roots. / In case it was inflicted by you, the Conserver, / Likewise do we entreat your mercy on your child. // Also you, our grandparents, who sleep in the place of the shades, / We entreat all of you who sleep on one side. / All ancestors, males and females, great and small, / Help us in this trouble, have compassion on us; / So that we can also sleep peacefully. // And thus do I spit out this mouthful of water! / Pu-pu! Pu-pu! / Please listen to our earnest request."

Like in all societies of the world, the passing on of human life is very important. It is to be expected that many prayers are directed towards the bearing children and their welfare. We consider a prayer from the Banyarwanda of Rwanda, in which a childless woman expresses what can be called a spirituality of anguish. She wrestles with the perennial question: "Why am I suffering, why are we suffering, when God is there?" It is the universal question about suffering through both explainable and unexplainable causes. This prayer is called *Intimba: Heart-Heaviness.*

> "I don't know for what Imana (God) is punishing me. / If I could meet with Him I would kill Him. / Imana, why are you punishing me? / Why have you not made me like other people? / Couldn't you even give me one little child, / Yo-o-o! [Woe is me!]. / I am dying in anguish. / If only I could meet you and pay you out! / Come on, let me kill you! / Let me run through with a knife! / O Imana, you have deserted me! Yo-o-o! [Woe is me!]"

The woman that utters this prayer has a strong belief in God, which we mentioned to be characteristic of African peoples everywhere. For that reason, she turns to God as the last resort. She agonises frightfully over her condition of being childless. She might get a medical explanation, as to why she cannot bear children. She might get a mystical explanation, as to which person may have bewitched her. But this does not take away her agony, her anguish. She wants to know why God has put this upon her, while God gives babies to other women. She interprets it as "punishment" but she feels that even if that is the case, it is unfair. Her faith in God is so strong, that God is tangible. She challenges God in a way that not many people would dare to do: "If only I could meet you and pay you out! Come on, let me kill you! Let me run through with a knife!" She expresses feelings like those of Job in his suffering – yet without losing trust in God.

This is a very painful expression of spirituality, addressing a universal concern. It is a pouring out of anguish mixed with anger before God. The woman confronts God directly in a very daring manner. She opens up her innermost being, so that her naked spirit stands face to face before God. She speaks most personally to God. In addressing God, she moves from the third person to the second person, to a direct confrontation, shooting one question after another. Many times, she uses the word **"You"**: "Why are **you** punishing me? Why have **you** not made me like other people? Couldn't **you** even give me one little child?" She drives God to a corner, so to speak. But God is invisible, yet present: "If only I could meet **you** and pay **you** out! Come on, let me kill

you! Let me run through with a knife! O Imana, **you** have deserted me! Yo-o-o! [Woe is me!"

We cannot get away from the spirituality of anguish – for individual lives, families, or even nations. It equips us with **boldness** to speak to God. We pour out anguish before God, in hope and trust that God will step in and act, perhaps not always according to our expectations. Often God responds in greater ways than we imagined. Some years back I wed a couple – the wife is Swiss, the husband is Sudanese. For a long time they had no children. They prayed and prayed to have a child – perhaps like the woman in this text. God answered their prayers and gave them twins! A childless Nigerian couple living in America prayed and prayed to get children. Then between 8 and 20 December 1998 the wife Nkem Chukwu gave birth to eight babies (octuplets), seven of which have survived[1]. The Lord does not often give an eightfold answer to prayer, but He gives surprises when we call upon Him in our personal or even national anguish. The recent history of South Africa is a classical testimony of God hearing the anguished prayers of the people and responding to rescue them.

SPIRITUALITY OF JOY, PEACE AND HOPE

Like in other parts of the world, African life is riddled with causes of anguish, like sickness, natural catastrophes, social and political disasters, economic disparities, and a variety of injustices. Africa would have every reason to be or to look gloomy, miserable, unsmiling and even weeping. But this is really not the case, at least on the surface. African peoples know also the values of joy, peace, and hope, and endeavour to cultivate them in practice. Africa knows both to weep and to smile[2]. It has developed techniques of suffering, surviving, and smiling.

From the Baluba in the Congo DR, we get an example of exuberant spirituality, the spirituality of joy. In this prayer-song, persons respond towards God with all the power available to them. They are not asking for anything from God. They are expressing their joy in the sight of God. The drum vibrates in the depths of the body – it agitates the inner person to break out in praise of God. Man has a spiritual component and can respond to God. The drum on the African scene is a symbol of joy, the rejoicing that involves the whole person and the community. The drum calls upon the community to take action – dance, sing, move, be jubilant, and formerly to go to war (unfortunately). There are also talking drums – sending messages, communicating. In this prayer-song, the

drum assists the individual to sing praises to God, to send a message of jubilation to God, to say that the persons are happy.

In a wider application, the drum draws our attention to the fact that there are many occasions for joining in giving thanks, exultation, and praise to God "who gives us all good things." This is a comprehensive appeal. It reminds people that all good things come ultimately from God, even the fruit of our labours.

The song puts the "good things" into three categories: "Wives" symbolise the human persons in the family, in the community, in the nation and in the world. This category calls upon all, to exult God for our own creation and the creation of fellow beings.

"Wealth" is mentioned here as a symbol of the material dimension of life, the fruit of people's technology and culture. People are summoned to "sing a song of praise to God" for the material things, from the smallest to the biggest, whether it be our homes, our financial wealth, our countries and all their beauty, our cultural heritage, our technological achievements, our role in the world. All these are cause for "Striking the chords upon the drum" in praise of God.

"Wisdom" is used here to symbolise that aspect of life that deals with ethics, morals, values, knowledge, abilities, dreams, and hope. Values of society are necessary – love, trust, peace, justice, honour, helpfulness, and just laws that sustain society. This dimension is also necessary for the maintenance of life, both internal and international. The text invites that we "Strike the chords upon the drum" in praise of God for creation, material items and values that uphold that life for society and nature at large.

> "I shall sing a song of praise to God: / Strike the chords upon the drum. / God who gives us all good things. / Strike the chords upon the drum. / Wives, and wealth and wisdom. / Strike the chords upon the drum."

Even when faced with difficulties, the Dinka in the Sudan pray with joyful confidence. They consider themselves as children of God, and that makes them satisfied and sure. Praying assures them that they have no reason to fear. Their hope rests in God, that God will not kill them. To the contrary, God will ever keep them. That is their joy and their hope.

> "… We are the children of our Maker / And do not fear that he will kill us. / We are the children of God / And do not fear that he will kill us… / In the time of privation / I will not fear / Because I have prayed and prayed. / The word of the Lord will not be mocked, / His good word will ever keep thee."

A prayer of the Barolong (Botswana and South Africa) recorded in 1843, shows the hope that overcomes personal adversity. It is from a man who is going to sleep hungry. He has hope that God will grant him to find and kill even the smallest animal – as that would give him enough to eat and survive. He waits in hope, to go into the next day. His hope is in God, his and "Father of (his) ancestors."

> "God of our fathers, I lie down without food, / I lie down hungry, / Although others have eaten and lie down full. / Even if it be but a polecat, or a little rock-rabbit, / Give me and I shall be grateful! / I cry to God, Father of my ancestors."

The next three prayers express joyful gratitude to God at the birth of children. One of the cardinal descriptive names of God among the Akamba is Mumbi, which means Creator. The concept of God as Creator is found all over Africa. In this prayer, the people have no words to express their joy. The birth of a baby is really "a great benefit" to them. It is a great honour to them – a living blessing from the Creator of all things. They address God directly, and acknowledge that God made the child and gave it to them.

> "O Mumbi (God, Creator), / You who have created / All human beings, / You have conferred / A great benefit on us / By bringing us this child."

The Pygmies dedicate their newborn to God, acknowledging God to be the powerful Creator. Using vivid symbols of tree and fruit, they compare the baby to a "fresh bud", thus anticipating new growth, new hope for the parents and the community. They speak of the baby as "new fruit" and the parents as "the ancient tree." They give back to God what God has given them. This is an expression of profound joy and gratitude. Towards God, they feel to be in a family situation, in which they see themselves as God's children.

> "To you, the Creator, to you, the powerful, / I offer this fresh bud, / New fruit of the ancient tree. / You are the Master; / We are your children. / To you, the Creator, to you, the powerful, / Khmvoum (God), Khmvoum, / I offer this new plant."

The Banyarwanda in Rwanda and Burundi, express their joy and gratitude, singing a lullaby to the baby, but at the same time addressing God. The prayer brings together three parties: God, the mother, and the baby. The mother addresses both God and the baby. She acknowledges God as the Giver of children. The prayer (lullaby) is full of joy. She would fall down and worship God in gratitude, if she were to "meet him." She prays for little babies. Mothers share the babies with God, because the babies come from God. Her hope for the baby lies in "God who gave you to me, / May he also bring you up for me." She

puts her hope in God, to bring up her baby. To that end, she asks God to give her "cows and little babies" abundantly.

> "Hush, child of my mother, / Hush, hush O my mother! / Imana (God), who gave you to me, / If only I could meet him, / I would fall on my knees and pray to him, / I would pray for little babies, / For little babies on my back. / You came when the moon was shining, / You came when another was rising, / Hush, hush O child of my mother! / That we share with Imana, God, / God who gave you to me, / May he also bring you up for me… / Hush, Imana gave you to me; / Hush, hush, I will pray to you, God, / You will give me cows and little babies, / And then you will give them increase." {A. Gittins, ed.: *Heart of Prayer. African, Jewish and Biblical Prayers*, Collins, London 1985, pp. 107 f.}

Peace is one of the most important pillars of spirituality. Indeed many of the prayers point towards the granting of peace upon individuals, families, fields, animals, peoples, nations, and nature at large. Peace is harmony. It is good health. Peace is welfare of the family. Peace is supply of rain, good harvest, security, and freedom to move and live. God is the ultimate Giver of peace. People want to go through life peacefully, in tranquillity, protected from harm to themselves, their animals, fields, and countries. Peace is life in good health, safe from witchcraft and ill-wishes, from natural disasters and human attacks on the physical, social, religious, economic and political order. Peace is that state of life, that God approves saying, as the Samburu often indicate at the end of their prayers, "All right!"

We take a few prayer examples. In a night prayer, the Samburu of Kenya ask God for absolute peace of mind, body, and spirit. The peace that comes from God that "saves" and "hides" them in God's hands, where they are safe. They ask God not to go to sleep or get drowsy. They ask to be attached to God's caring and secure hands. They ask this for themselves, their children, the people, and their animals that are their chief livelihood. Peace means approval by God – that is, God accepts them with love and care: "God, look on us with a countenance that is happy." They have peace when God is happily with them. They want to go to sleep, knowing that God will keep their land productive, and supply them with full life. They also commit themselves in life and death, trusting that whether dead or alive, they will be at peace. God is at work among them, and all is well.

> "God, save us. / God, hide us. / When we sleep, God do not sleep. / If we sleep, God do not get drowsy. / Tie us around your arm, God, / like a bracelet. / Guard us now, my God, guard us and save us. / God, guard for us our little ones / both people and

beasts, / whether awake or asleep. / God, look on us with a countenance that is happy. / Hit us with the black cloud of rain like the long rains. / God, give us your waters. / God, give us what we ardently desire in regards to children, / and to cattle. / God, do not make our land barren. / God, give us places where there is life. / God, divide us fairly into dead and alive. / And God said; 'All right'." (Gittins, op. cit., p. 157).

In a dynamic prayer, the Ga of Ghana proclaim peace and happiness. Rain is a symbol of peace. The supply of food and drink is peace. The departed give peace when they are content with the living. God as Father gives unending peace. With peace comes happiness for all.

"Exalted! Exalted! Exalted! / Ho, priestly people! / Let Bleku [rain] give peace. / Meat, meat, Water, water, / Let blessings bless; / Masses of food!//

Hail, hail, hail! / Let happiness come! / Are our voices one? / Let Grandfather Sakuma give peace. / Let Akpitioko give peace. / Let Otshiama give peace. / Let Awudu, the Almighty, give peace. / Let Father, the God of rain, give peace. / Hail, hail, hail! / Let happiness come!"

The Ewe of Ghana and Togo make petitions for universal peace. This is symbolised by the "gourd cup" coming into harmony with "the vessel." Peace means agreement among people. Peace means erasing evil words, divisive words, hurting words, and threatening words – in the family, in the community and among nations. It is a struggle to achieve that, and to keep the evil words buried away in the forest. The survival of all needs peace.

"May peace reign over the earth, may the gourd cup agree with the vessel. May their heads agree and every ill word be driven out into the wilderness, into the virgin forest."

CONCLUSION

African spirituality comes from our traditional heritage. It has no conclusion as such. It is an ongoing part of life, supporting life, sustaining life, giving meaning and direction to life. African Religion asserts that there are the visible and invisible worlds. Spirituality is the element that links these two. It is the indispensable pillar of African Religion. It has therefore, been at work as long as African Religion exists. As indicated in the introduction to this presentation, the core feature of this traditional religiosity is the belief in God. Consequently, spirituality points to and derives from this central element. The few prayers we have used here are illustrative of people's commitment to God as their Creator, their Parent and they as the children of God. Therefore, people look to God, when faced with questions of death and life, when relating to the

land, when considering health matters, in times of joy and adversity, in search for peace and in the propagation of life. All areas of people's lives seem to have a dimension of spirituality, even if at times people may not recognize that spirituality immediately. The term spirituality is an academic designation and people do not consciously speak of it as such. They live with and by their spirituality, within their total life environment.

Expressions of this deeply rooted spirituality are affected by historical changes and geographical factors. Therefore, we cannot expect spirituality to be uniform or to remain intact. The outward religious landscape has radically changed since the nineteenth century, especially with the expansion of colonial rule, Christian missionary work and later the spreading out of Islam. Sociological changes also affect the expressions and exercises of spirituality. Fore example, whereas the spirituality of African Religion is based on rural life, it is not easy to transfer it in toto to the rapidly expanding urban life. Some traditional spirituality merges with, or becomes Christian spirituality, but I do not know how far that may be the case when it encounters Islamic spirituality. In any case, traditional spirituality seems to be open for religious encounter or dialogue. The religious (spiritual) vocabulary remains fundamentally the same, and African Religion has prepared it. The needs of the body, soul, and spirit remain the same. For Christians, the drastically new element is the Person of Jesus Christ and they infuse Him into their spirituality.

One of the cherished items in traditional African life is the blessing. It takes on many forms and serves many purposes. Blessings are for prosperity, happiness, peace, security, protection, fertility, and all kinds of good things in life. There are farewell blessings, good night blessings, blessings for journeys, for hunting, for work, for solution to problems, for happy marriages, for finding favour in the sight of a senior person, etc. on personal and family levels. For example, parents may bless their children to have long lives or to be fruitful, to pass examinations, or to travel safely. Other blessings are directed to the community or the nation, as the case may be. It is assumed that ultimately God executes the intentions of the blessings. But within the family of the living and the departed, the latter may also be expected or requested to bless the living. The name of God is often invoked, though it may simply be implied in the blessing without mentioning it. Normally, it is a person of a "higher status" or an older person that invokes blessings upon others. Sometimes ceremonies or rituals may accompany the dispensing of blessings, or they may be granted informally as the occasion may deserve. The spittle or sprinkling with water

(and other mixtures), is used upon the hands, face, or other parts of the body of the person being blessed, as outward symbols to accompany the oral blessings. The one giving the blessings may also put her or his hands upon the head, shoulders, hands, or other parts of the body of the recipient.

We also wish to complete this presentation with a universal blessing, from which the title derives. The blessing originates from the Ga people in Ghana. It asks for happiness, for success in working (digging a well), for the supply of food, for the welfare of the town, for religious officials, and for the fertility of women (heads of the family). It asks that people be protected from misfortunes and be filled with happiness – which means peace. If there is harmony, then happiness follows. This is an open-ended blessing in time and space, for individuals, families, communities, nations, and the whole humanity. We are lucky to have a share of the blessing.

> "Hail, hail, hail! Let happiness come! / Our stools and our brooms... / If we dig a well, may it be at a spot where water is. / If we take water to wash our shoulders may we be refreshed. / Nyongmo give us blessing! / Mawu [God], give us blessing! / May the town be blest! / May the religious officials be blest! / May the priests be blest! / May the mouthpieces of the divinities be blest! //
>
> "May we be filled going and coming. / May we not drop our head-pads except at the big pot. / May our fruitful women be like gourds / And may they bring forth and sit down. / May misfortunes jump over us… / Hail, let happiness come! / Is our voice one? / Hail, let happiness come!"

NOTES

1. The couple, Iyke Louis Udobi and Nkem Chukwu gave their eight children (six daughters and two sons) traditional Igbo names, that have spiritual meaning. These are: girl born 8 December 1998 Chukwuebuka Nkemjika ("God is Great"); others born 20 December 1998: girl Chidinma Anulika ("God is beautiful"); girl Chinecherem Nwabugwu ("God thinks of me"); girl Chimaijem Otito ("God knows my way"); girl Chijindu Chidera ("God has my life"), died 27 December; boy Chukwubuikem Maduabuchi ("God is my strength"); boy Chijioke Chinedum ("God is my leader"); girl Chinagorom Chidiebere ("God is merciful"). There are shorter versions of the names. One can find parallel concepts about God in the Bible. In a media interview after the birth of the children, the mother said, "God has been my provider and He will continue to provide for me and the babies." The couple said, ""We want to honor God and celebrate his gifts to us in the

names we give our eight children. The names we have given our children symbolize the strength, guidance and grace we know God will give them throughout their lives."

2. The Toronto Star on Monday, 29 December 2003 published an article by Jonathan Power, that asserted: “The World Values Survey, an inter-university study, recently reported that Nigerians are the happiest people in the world. The survey ranks only some 20 of 62 countries surveyed. Canada's ranking isn't listed but it's above the United States (16th) and Britain (24th) while Russians are ranked the unhappiest. The survey, which has studied happiness since 1945, finds it has not increased in Europe and North America even though the societies have become wealthier. The desire for material goods, it concludes, is ’a happiness suppressant.’" Other surveys give different result!

**Except where otherwise indicated, all the prayers cited here come from: John S. Mbiti, The Prayers of African Religion, SPCK London and Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York 1975*

African Spirituality and Pastoral Theology

AMON EDDIE KASAMBALA

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we undertake to deal with the influence of an African spirituality and cosmology on the way African people understand life and formulate God-images, and how this challenges the practice of pastoral ministry in Africa. We shall work with a presupposition that states that the effectiveness of doing pastoral ministry in Africa depends much on a deliberate accommodation of an African cultural understanding of life as well as reckoning with an African world-view (s)[1]We contend that this cultural understanding of life, among the African people[2] is embedded within a framework of an African spirituality. Thus the following basic questions form the core arguments of this paper:

- How is pastoral ministry informed by the way African people understand, God, life and human relationships? (An attempt to defining an *African spirituality).*
- In what way is the pastoral ministry among African people influenced by their understanding of the cosmic life-force, the living dead (ancestors) and ancestral spirits? (An attempt to defining the composition of an *African cosmology*).
- How are God-images defined within an African spirituality and cosmology? (an attempt to define a theological ethos in understanding spirituality and cosmology).
- And most importantly, how does this understanding influence the doing of pastoral ministry in Africa? (outlining a challenge for the practice of pastoral ministry in Africa).

The Scope of this Paper

This paper is being presented within the limitation of the practice of pastoral ministry from an African pastoral ecclesiological context. In order to maintain the focus of this paper, pastoral ministry shall be understood as

forming an integral part of a practical theology that embodies a wider perspective of the ministry of care. In his essay, "*Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*", James Lapsley (1983:167) argues that pastoral ministry, collectively known as pastoral care forms a part of the subdiscipline in practical theology. For this reason, Lapsey finds it convenient to define pastoral theology as "the study of all aspects of the care of persons in the church in a context of theological inquiry, including implications for the other branches of theology" (1983:169). With this definition in mind, we shall use the term pastoral ministry to depict an epistemological dimension of pastoral theology and pastoral care within the context of practical theology.

From a more African perspective, pastoral care, as part of practical theology, takes a different stance in that it denotes a process of "*accompanying*" somebody on their life journey of faith. This process of "*accompanying*" is also a process of **being present** (representation) with somebody in his/her times of difficulties, sorrow, pain and suffering. To an African person, pastoral care encompasses the care of life within a given context of a community. Thus an effective pastoral ministry is that which takes place in a community setting rather than a one-roomed office. The approach to pastoral care then, is more on a *communal* level rather than on an individualized Rogerian client-centered approach to pastoral ministry.

The Importance of this paper for an African Spirituality

The relevance of this paper for a conference on African spirituality could be highlighted by the following:

- It brings to light the richness of an African spirituality and cosmology for pastoral ministry, and how the knowledge of such could enrich both students and professionals that are trying to engage in a cross-cultural ministry in Africa.
- It creates an awareness on how the practice of pastoral ministry could reckon with different ways in which God concepts (God-images) impact people's lives during their moments of joy and suffering.
- It attempts to create new interest in African spirituality that could make up for the re-definition and re-framing of pastoral ministry by students and professionals within and outside the African continent.

AN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

Presently, a lot of attention is being given to the study of 'spirituality' within the circles of academic research in Africa. One of the reasons for such an interest could possibly be attributed to the quest for meaning and significance in people's lives as they begin to define themselves dialectically not only as humans (*an anthropological dimension of life*), but also as spiritual beings (a *theological dimension of life*). Another reason could also be that from an African perspective, 'spirituality' covers the whole range of things other than humans, making it even more difficult to understand its composition.

One of the African theologians and scholars who has dedicated quality time to the study of spirituality in an African context is Patrick Kalilombe.[3] In his essay, "*Spirituality in the African Perspective*", Kalilombe (1999:213) helps us to be cautious when trying to define an African spirituality because "on one hand there should be no pretension to claim that what constitutes such a spirituality is exclusively African, and on the other hand, we are not affirming that all Africans necessarily live this spirituality". However, he also observes that in defining an African spirituality we should do it by "examining the way of life and following up those attitudes, beliefs and practices that animate people's lives and help them to reach out toward super-sensible realities" (1999:216). Once this consideration is taken; according to Kalilombe, an African spirituality will be centralized by "human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life this side of the grave" (1999:219). In this case, and following up Kalilombe's understanding of spirituality, an African spirituality could be described as consisting of African people's attitudes, beliefs and practices as they strive to reach out toward the super-sensible realities: God, the spirits, and the invisible forces in the universe. According to Masamba ma Mpolo, a scholar from DR Congo, this reaching out towards the super-sensible realities "incorporates all dimensions of human and cosmic life" (1994:16) among African people.

In addition to Ma Mpolo's assertion, it could also be argued then, that an African spirituality will refer to the way African people have undertaken to view and understand the physical and spiritual world around them. This understanding will incorporate a socio-cultural, philosophical, political, and religious setting of African people. Thus Danie Louw, a Professor of theology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa puts it this way: "*an African spirituality refers to certain common cultural traits and philosophical*

paradigms that reflect a general mindset, belief system or life approach" (2002:74).

Meanwhile, in his book, "*In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral care and Counseling",* Emmanuel Lartey, a Professor from Ghana now based at Columbia University Seminary, argues for a spirituality that accommodates a "human capacity for relationship with self, others, world, God, and that which transcends sensory experience, which is often expressed in the particularities of given historical, spatial and social contexts, and which often leads to specific forms of action in the world" (1997:113). In Lartey's view, spirituality could as well be defined by a "characteristic style of relating" (1997:113-123), which he categorizes into <u>five dimensions</u>:

(1) **Relationship with *transcendence*:** In this sense, spirituality generally refers to the apparently universal human capacity to experience life in relation to a perceived dimension of power and meaning which is experienced as transcendent to our everyday lives, although such transcendence is often and certainly may be experienced in the midst of our everyday lives. The response and relationship with transcendence is most often mediated through particular cultural expressions within a given religious tradition's system of symbols.

(2) **Intra-personal (relationship with *self*)**: The manner of the relationship we have with ourselves is an important aspect of our spirituality. In traditional Christian teaching much stress has been laid upon self-denial and abnegation. Healthy relationships with self require variable responses to particular characteristics of self.

(3) **Interpersonal (relationship with *another*)**: The dyad is the starting point of the corporate. To be able to cultivate an I-Thou relationship with another person in which mutuality, respect, accountability and friendship are sustained is indeed a spiritual task.

(4) **Corporate (relationships *among people*)**: The solidarity of belonging through participation is the mark of being. In traditional African society ritual commemoration is a binding force which expresses the communality of spiritual bonds which tie people together. Spiritual movements are often sustained through the rituals in which members participate.

(5) **Spatial (relationship with *place and things)***: The primary metaphor of existence is spatial and not temporal. Spirituality is deeply rooted in all

that surrounds human life; the earth and the universe, the spirit and matter. The fundamental symbol of life is a *circle*, which signifies creation, tribe, clan and family. The circle is seen to be an egalitarian rather than hierarchical symbol.

The foregoing outline of Lartey's five dimensions of defining spirituality could be helpful for our understanding of an African spirituality, especially when compared to *other 'spiritualities'* in different contexts of the world. From the five dimensions, what stands out though, as extremely important for our discussion, is Lartey's emphasis on corporate (relationships among people) *dimension*. The key to our understanding an African spirituality lies in a corporate understanding of human life within a physical and spiritual existence. For African people, this understanding is therefore to be found in *solidarity* and *participation* of all humans in the events and liturgies of life.

Consequently, it should be underscored at this point that at *the very centre of an African spirituality lies the core-issue of relationship*. For the African people, spirituality has to be communal and incorporate. To this effect, Bellagamba (1987:107) argues that a spirituality that does not incorporate all people, their events, their richness, their hopes and concerns, cannot speak to Africans who are fundamentally communal and relational. In an African spirituality, a sense of humanity is only interpreted within the understanding of the whole community. To embrace an African spirituality also entails an understanding of harmony in interpersonal relationships: "*muntu ungumuntu ngabantu/motho ke motho ka bantho*[4]*"* – roughly translated as: a person is a person through other people. When a person separates him/herself from his/her extended family, that person then, in as far as the African community is concerned, is no longer considered to be part of the 'whole'. And according to John Mbiti[5] (1990:2), it is understood that a person cannot detach him/herself from the religion of his/her group, for to do so is to be severed from his/her roots, his/her foundation, his/her context of security, his/her kinship's and the entire group of those who make him/her aware of his/her own existence; and to be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture.

This argument is alluded to by Kalilombe when he writes:

> …for traditional Africans, humanity is first and foremost the community. In the first place comes the extended family based on blood Kinship or on affinity through marriage, and then the clan, the tribe or the nation. Kinship and affinity create a

> special kind of bonding within which mutual rights and duties are exercised unconditionally. Individuals acquire their basic identity through these relationships, and they enjoy the feeling of security in life as long as the exchange of these rights and duties is guaranteed. It has often been said that where Descartes said: "I think, therefore, I am" (cogito ergo sum), the African would rather say, "I am related, therefore, we are" (Cognatus ergo sum). In African spirituality, the value of interdependence through relationships is higher than that of individualism and personal independence (1999:220).

How then is an African spirituality shaped? What influences the making and formation of an African spirituality, in terms of cultural values and traditional norms of relationships within the African community? What is the important factor(s) underlying the understanding of an African spirituality? Could we possibly speak of an *African cosmology?* What are the major features of an African spirituality?

Features of an African Spirituality

When dealing with an African spirituality, one is confronted with the fact that it is composed of different features. These features cover the religious, social, and spiritual life of the African people. Since African people are hierarchical in their view of life (world-view) and in the way they relate, the features of an African spirituality also demonstrate this kind of hierarchy. This hierarchy is important in an African world-view because it illustrates the dualistic reality of an African spirituality namely:

- Level one: the **Upper level** of spirituality and,
- Level two: the **Lower level** of spirituality.

The Upper level of spirituality incorporates, the position of God and the spirits (this also includes ancestors) while the Lower level of spirituality includes: human beings and nature. In Mbiti's book, '*The Prayers of African religion'* this kind of categorization of an African spirituality has been termed *"spiritual realities"* (1975:4). It would suffice, at this stage, to briefly illustrate each of these *spiritual realities:*

Level One: The Upper Level

God. Within an African spirituality, God stands in the upper level. God is the supreme being *(Umkulunkulu[6])*, the creator *(mulengi[7])*, the sustainer of the universe *(musungilili wa vyose[8])*, the final authority of all things, the

"overlord of society who has power of life and death" (see John Pobee 1979: 46). Therefore, God "emerges as the clearest and most concrete spiritual reality" (Mbiti 1975:4). Furthermore, "God is seen as the great ancestor, the first founder and progenitor, the giver of life, the power behind everything that is" (see Laurenti Magesa 1997:35).

As a supreme deity, God is all encompassing as the one who creates and sustains; he is up and above heaven as well as down below the earth. As much as he is present in the lives of African people, he also maintains a "distance" from his subjects. This "distance" follows the hierarchical nature of the African understanding of authority, and it does not necessarily mean the absence of God in human life. God will not be bothered by small issues affecting the African family; however, like a village chief, he can intervene and arbitrate on bigger issues and problems of the African community.

The Spirits /Ancestors. In an African spirituality, the spirits belong to what is commonly termed as the world of the invisible. This includes divinities, nature spirits, and the spirits of the dead commonly known as ancestors. These hold a central area of the invisible world. For this reason, Kalilombe's assertion stresses an important point to be noted by all of us:

> The centrality of the conception of the spirits of the dead follows logically on the fact that African spirituality assumes that the center of consideration is the Community of those present relationships, on which even the wider expressions of neighborhood, clan, tribe, or even nation are modelled (1994:125).

Apart from God, the African people have positioned the spirits/ancestors on the first level, not necessarily because the ancestors are equal to God, but that they are intermediaries whose work is most valued. In Ogbu Kalu's words, "a brand of social anthropologists argue that, indeed, Africans conceive of a High God but, in daily cultic ritual, this God is remote or hidden. The ancestor deputizes" (2000:55). The rationality behind this belief is that the African people perceive time as cyclical: life moves from birth to death, through the ancestral world to reincarnating birth. The ancestral world is a mirror of the human world. John Pobee (1979:46) argues that by virtue of being part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, ancestors are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and do influence it for good or for ill. It is this feature – the world of spirits and ancestors that connects an African spirituality to an African cosmology.

Level Two: The Lower Level

Human beings. An ontology of being human is of utmost importance within an African spirituality. Human beings are at the centre of activities within the 'creation drama' of a supreme God. And it is important to note that an African spirituality is based on the centrality of human beings presently living in the concrete circumstances of life, this side of the grave. This life consists of their attitudes, beliefs, and practices as they strive to reach out toward the super-sensible realities: God, the spirits, and the invisible forces of the universe.

Among African people, human beings are always defined within existing relationships with other beings, namely; God, the spirits, ancestors and nature. The human being within an African world view should be visualized as a centrifugal force emanating equally complex selves capable of inter-permeating within the person and permeating the selves generated from other personal centrifuges (see Taylor 1963:49). According to Akechukwu Ogbonnaya (1993:121)[9], human beings are believed to have been created by chi-be-ke, the creator God who also is the great spirit or the world's over soul. Ogbonnaya observes that at the time of birth this great spirit *chukwu* gives to each man/woman a part of the divine nature called Chi which becomes the spiritual double of the *ma* throughout his life.

Gabriel Setiloane (1986:15) takes this argument further by stating that our understanding of human being and human personality within an African spirituality explains the interplay which takes place when people come into contact with one another or live together. The essence of being is participation in which humans are always interlocked with one another. The human being is not only 'vital force', but more: 'vital force in participation' (1986:14). Hence Pobee's (1979:49) assertion:

> A man is a compound of *mogya* (blood), *sunsum*, also *ntoro* (spirit) and *kra* (the soul or individual personality). The *mogya* he inherits from the mother; it symbolizes his material aspect. The blood makes him a biological being; it gives him status and membership within the lineage, and obligations as a citizen. The *sunsum* and *kra* make a spiritual being…It is important to emphasize that by virtue of the *sunsum* he belongs to his father's kinship group…Truly he exists because he belongs to a kinship group.

In sum, it can be argued that from a perspective of an African spirituality, a human being is also regarded not only as a purely material or physical being,

but also as a psychosomatic unity in view of the soul within him or her (see also Kudadjie & Osei 1998:33).

Nature (Creation). According to an African world-view, nature is a gift from God to humankind. Hence, the African people find a lot of connections with nature. Through nature, African people are connected to the divine and the invisible world, whereby they share in mystical powers not ordinarily available to those presently alive. According to Magesa (1997:73):

> Human love and fertility, for example, are not simply symbolized by the fertility of the earth; instead, they are deeply imbedded in the earth as it receives the rain and the seed and produces vegetation and crops for human consumption. Thus they offer up their vital power for the life and fertility of human beings. It follows, then, that in a real and immediate sense the sterility or fertility of the earth affects the fertility of the human community. So water and air are not only symbolic of, but are, in fact the purity of the Divine.

The African traditional medicine man/woman (herbalist) uses the trees and animals of nature as 'chemical particles' for the making of his/her medication. The African peasant farmer is attached to the land for his/her produce and wealth. Therefore, the land, water, vegetation and animals form an integral part of an African spirituality. The creator, God, gave them to humans as a token of kindness. For this reason human beings are in charge of all that goes on in the physical nature. The spiritual nature, consisting of the invisible creatures and spirits, is controlled by the ancestors on behalf of the creator *(mulungu)*. The meaning of all this is that "*nature and persons are one, woven by creation into one texture or fabric of life, a fabric or web characterized by an interdependence between all creatures"* (Magesa 1997:73).

However, it should be noted that this does not imply that African people worship nature, but that they give respect for what nature is – a creation of God and gift to humans. Thus Magesa further observes:

> This living fabric of nature – including people and other creatures – is sacred. Its sanctity does not mean that nature should be worshipped, but does mean that it ought to be treated with respect" (1997:73).

In sum, we can therefore categorize the features of an African spirituality into two orientations:

- The conviction that the community of the living is involved in a dramatic struggle between life and death, and the outcome of this struggle depends on how successfully the human community can avail itself of the help of the

invisible world (mostly, the spiritual world – the world of ancestors and the departed spirits). For this reason two elements, then, animate African spirituality: "First, the consciousness that individuals and the community are committed to an ever-present struggle against menacing evil if life is to be worth living; and secondly, that in this struggle, the decisive key is the availability of assistance from the invisible"[10]

- The conviction that the struggle between life and death is not pursued alone in isolation, but that it is in and through the community that the fight can be carried on effectively. This factor stresses the fact that an African spirituality "relies on the spirit of community, on cooperation rather than open competition, on sharing and redistribution, rather than on accumulation or individualistic hoarding"[11]. And this community is conceived of in terms of 'family', that is, in terms of kinship and affinity relationships whereby ideally, duties and rights are exchanged unconditionally.

To conclude, it is essential that those trying to engage in pastoral ministry in Africa should have some knowledge on the composition of an African spirituality, and how it is lived in daily life by African people. Without this awareness, those who engage in pastoral ministry among the African people would always find it difficult to minister to them because, in most cases, it is very difficult to separate the beliefs of the people from the way they actually live. It is important to understand that the uniqueness of an African spirituality is that it is embedded in every sphere of nature and human life.

AFRICAN COSMOLOGY – AN AFRICAN 'SPIRITUAL ETHOS OF LIFE

When referring to an African cosmology we are implying the way the African people have incorporated in their lives the 'mystery of the unseen', and the beyondness of human life. An African cosmology could also refer to the way the African people have related to cosmic 'powers' and 'life-forces'. In Ma Mpolo's words, the African cosmology is perceived and lived as one composed of seen and unseen spirit-beings. They constitute life-forces which constantly interact with, and thus influence the course of human life for good or for ill (see Ma Mpolo 1991:23).

Hence the point that Louw (1998:78) makes: "for the African, life is a continuum of cosmic, social and personal events. When one breaks society's moral codes, the universal ties between oneself and the community are also broken". Moreover, it could be argued that an African cosmology forms an

integral part of an African spirituality. For an African spirituality, as well as an African cosmology, is based on the assumption that life is influenced by relationships between human beings, the visible and the invisible life-force. And that these relationships are basically ambiguous: they can be beneficial or harmful, life-giving or destructive, good or bad, reinforcing or weakening, auspicious or misfortunate.

For this reason, we can as well define an African cosmology within the confinement of an African spirituality. An African cosmology is the way in which African people perceive life as consisting of the unseen beings (departed spirits and ancestors), the supernatural and natural, the spiritual and physical life-force.

A Schemata and Content of an African Cosmology

At this stage, it is essential to outline what really characterizes an African cosmology. In Mbiti's[12] view, an African cosmology can be defined by what he terms an '*African cosmological thought*'. According to him, an African cosmology depicts a schemata of African beliefs about everything as can be reflected in the following classification:

- God as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and substance of both human beings and all things.
- Spirits being made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men and women who died a long time ago.
- Man/woman including human beings who are alive and those about to be born.
- Animals and plants, or the reminder of biological life.
- Phenomena and objects without biological life.

Kalu (2000:56) also asserts that the schemata of an African cosmology could possibly be reflected in three dimensions:

> Africans operate with a three-dimensional perception of space (cosmic life-force) (emphasis mine): the sky, the earth (land and water), and the ancestral spirit world, which is located under the earth… Each space dimension is imbued with divinities (principalities), territorial spirits (powers), and a host of minor spirits (localized to specific professions, places, and objects – for instance, a river, a hill, a stone, and so on).

For African people, religious beliefs and cultural traditions have extrapolation in their world-view of the cosmic life-force. Kudadjie & Osei's observe:

> "Fundamental to the African's understanding of the cosmos is the belief in the orderliness of the universe in which all events are caused and ultimately explicable" (1998:38).

And in this cosmic order, African people believe that human beings are not left alone to face the miseries and vicissitudes of life. Their religious inclination makes them believe that they can relate to God directly through prayer and sacrifice, as well as indirectly through the gods and ancestors, and appeal for help.

A schemata of an African cosmology could also be classified in what Buys (2000:12-14) terms "the Dynamic world-view of Africa". In this case a schemata of an African cosmology is composed of eight elements which could also be used to define an African world-view, namely;

1) **Plurality of Spiritual beings:** The African world-view emphasizes a plurality of dynamic (powerful, spiritual) beings that determine the daily lives of the whole extended family group, the clan or the tribe. There are evil spirits and powers, which are controlled or kept at bay by the influence of benevolent spirits. Examples of such good spirits are the deceased ancestors who can help a person or community in its struggle against many natural forces and evil or bad spirits. On one side of the benevolent spirits there is a long hierarchy, starting with the immediate ancestors, in climbing order, until the good creator God is reached.
2) **Holistic creation:** An essential unity, balance and interdependency exist between all parts of creation. This unity of all parts of creation is in balance, between man, animal and nature, in one giant holism. Disruption of this fine balance in creation can result in catastrophe for the whole community.
3) **Human holism:** In the African view of human beings, there is a total absence of any form of categorization of life. The sacred things (the holy and the supernatural) are never separated from the rest of human life. The sacred and supernatural things are never placed in different categories from the secular things (e.g. economy, politics, science, art, etc. as is the case in Western society.

4) **Semi-fatalism of religious interpretation**: All parts of human life are controlled by spiritual forces. This often results in a semi-fatalist world view. Life is controlled by powers from outside human existence, which allow no room for private initiative or self-enrichment or development. The purpose of religion is mostly to control the influence of evil forces on our lives.
5) **Centrality of humans**: In the community of the living and the dead (present and past) humans are the central focus of creation. The creator God has departed from earth and is far removed from humans. Therefore, the creator God is not directly involved with humankind- and not nearly as important for humans' daily existence as the ancestors, who have an immediate concern with their living family members.
6) **Cosmic struggle between good and evil**: The task of religious activity, therefore, is rather to ward off evil from humankind and to re-establish the right balance between evil and good forces in nature and daily living by manipulating "spiritual powers". This is done by means of prayers and rituals.
7) **Utilitarianist nature of African Traditional Religion**: Good powers are available to control and discharge evil powers. For this reason spiritual leaders who possess supernatural powers are seen as the true spiritual leaders, in contrast with those who only preach a message of faith, but have no real effect on the lives of people. This trend in African Traditional Religion (ATR) is what is described by the term, "Utilitarianism".
8) **Concept of time and history in Africa:** The past is the focal point for the present – not the future, as is the case in Western society. Firstly, in an African cosmology, the view of history is seen as a cyclic movement, that is, running parallel to the ebb and flow of natural events. In animal life there is birth, growth, maturity and death. Life in an African village is determined by each of these life transitions (rites of passage). A day can be divided into sunrise, midday, twilight and night. In a year there are four seasons succeeding one another. The same things recur eternally in the course of human history. Secondly, the traditional African view of time within an African cosmology is different from the Western concept of time. African time does not move forward, but "backwards", into history. Time is something that man himself creates and uses as and

when he needs it. Time happens. Events provide time. No events, no time! Time is not your master; rather you are the master of time, that is, naming specific times of great effect, imprinted on the memory of the tribal community (the year of harvest *(chaka chamasika)*, the year of the birds, the year of the lion).

The preceding discussion on an African cosmology leaves pastoral ministry with a number of challenges namely;

- Where life is perceived as consisting of the unseen beings, the supernatural and the natural life-force, pastoral ministry must always try to engage these perceptions with an informed view of how God has related to us through Jesus Christ and in the power of his Spirit to transform human life.
- Effective pastoral ministry within an African cosmology will always reckon with the ideals of affinity relationships that go beyond humans to the world beyond. And strengthening these relationships would bring healing not only to existing relationships between human beings, but also with the invisible realities.

What cements these relationships in an African cosmology? Who are the key players in this African 'drama of life'? Could we talk of the ancestors as key players?

The Role of Ancestors in an African Cosmology

Ancestors *(ambuyafwi*[13]*)* play a very important role in an African cosmology (see Turaki 1999:34). *Ambuyafwi* form an integral part of an African cosmology. They have "such a tremendous influence on the daily life of most Africans that some Western anthropologists and theologians wrongly supposed that they are worshipped" (Berinyuu 1988:8). Most African people believe strongly in the presence and influence of ancestors in daily life. So much so, that they do things, often unconsciously; to reflect such a belief but they do not worship them as gods.

In his book, "*African Religion and Philosophy*", Mbiti (1969:83) helps us to understand what defines ancestors *(the living-dead)* within an African traditional society when he writes:

> The departed of up to five generations are in different category from that of ordinary spirits... They are still within the Sasa period, they are in the state of personal immortality, and their process of dying is not yet complete. We have called them the

> living-dead. They are the closest links that men have with the spirit world…the living-dead are bilingual: they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to whom they are drawing nearer ontologically…they are guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics and activities…they are the best group of intermediaries between men and God: they know the needs of men, they have 'recently' been here with men, and at the same time they have full access to the channels of communication with God directly, or according to some societies indirectly through their own forefathers.

In retrospect, ancestors, according to the traditional African understanding, are those people (already departed) who, while they were still alive, played a very important role in the lives of people. And now that these people are dead, they have taken a different role in their special place (usually heaven) to care for and guide those that are still living daily. This special role has made them become intermediaries between human beings and God. Hence, in certain parts of Africa, Jesus is known as the 'great caring ancestor'.

The role of ancestors in an African cosmology is defined by the services they continue to provide to the traditional African society. They are regarded as real members of the family even though they are departed (Mwewa 1977:17). They are regarded as watchmen/women over their people so as to offer protection either from bad luck, evil people (destroyers of clans) or evil spirits in the cosmic life (see also Magesa 1997:77-81). They are regarded as protectors from various calamities in the land, and they continuously give protection to people of the clan while on a journey to some strange place. They help in hunting and farming episodes by blessing the hunter and the farmer to be successful in their endeavors. They talk to the 'great one' about the welfare of African society and the pending prayer requests made on behalf of the living. They understand fully what is going on, "they share preoccupation and projects of the living members, and are intimately interested in what is going on" (Kalilombe 1999: 225).

Simon Mwewa[14] (1977:15-18), in his doctoral dissertation, *"Traditional Zambian Eschatology and Ethics confronting the Advent of Christianity"*, gives an elaborate outline of what qualifies a person to be on the roll of ancestors in a traditional African society:

- **Founders of clans are regarded as ancestors**. Through their initiative and efforts for the good of their people, they unified their kinsmen. They made them aware of their common ancestry and goal. They approved or

disapproved certain customs and norms in their communities. They showed a positive will that these ways of life be transmitted to their future generations.

- **The tradition sets a very high value on procreation**. Through posterity, the clan has no fears that will be wiped out from the land of the living. Those people who bore children are included in this group of the forefathers.
- **Those people who lived good lives and died in their ripe old age** are among those commemorated as forefathers. People look up to them as a source of inspiration for good living in their community. Witches, murderers, and people who commit suicide and those who died of lightening are never commemorated and no one is named after them. There is fear that their namesakes might meet the same fate as their predecessors.
- **Those who were skilled in some worthwhile profession** are also looked to as ancestors. These include people of good counsel, farmers, hunters and *Nga'nga* (doctors and healers).

To sum up - to qualify as an ancestor, one has to be highly esteemed by the people of his clan. It is established among the African people that the title of ancestry is only given to a person (s) when the whole clan of that particular ethnic group have given their approval. In other words, before one is 'crowned' ancestor, certain conditions such as the ones discussed above must always apply. There is no short-cut to ancestry; one has to live a full and good life among the people so that when they pass on, they continue to serve their people from a different world.

What then is the connection between an African spirituality and an Africa cosmology? Are there things that are common in these important attributes of the African beliefs? Could we possibly talk of an existing interplay between the two belief systems?

AN INTERPLAY BEWTEEN AN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND COSMOLOGY

As can be seen from the discussion above, cosmology within an African world-view is an integral part of an African spirituality because, in this world-view, there is no separation between the physical /material world and the spiritual/cosmic world. It is usually difficult to differentiate between an African spirituality and cosmology for the two are embedded deeply within the systematic ontology and nature of African people. Hence we argue for a

meaningful interplay between an African spirituality and cosmology. This interplay can usually be explained by the concepts of God (God-images) which the African people use to express their spirituality and understanding of the cosmic life. It would therefore be appropriate to give an overview of the relation between the different kinds of God-images found among the African people and the way these are expressed to depict an existing spirituality and cosmology.

GOD-IMAGES IN AN AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND COSMOLOGY

In most pastoral care situations in Africa, people are confronted with different ways of experiencing and understanding God. These experiences and understanding of God by people are what we shall '*God-images*' in this article. According to Louw, (1999:1) God-images refer to the way people understand and experience God in terms of their human ideas, needs and expectations. Louw[15] argues further that God-images could also refer to the many different ways in which humans portray God through metaphors, and are thus connected to symbols that are expressed in rituals and liturgical events.

Howe (1995:111), in his book, "*The Image of God: A Theology of Pastoral care and Counseling"* attests to the fact that God-images are 'symbols' which make God present to us. God-images are inevitably expressions of the nearness and remoteness relation of God to people's lives. And sometimes, such expressions of God are positive *(appropriate)* or negative *(inappropriate)* depending on the experiences that people have gone through in life.

Appropriate God-images are those concepts of God which provide a helpful experience and understanding of God in the lives of people, and *inappropriate* God-images are those concepts which distort people's understanding of God, therefore resulting in people having a distorted *(pathological)* faith. Subsequently, Cavanagh (1992:80) argues that

> "a significant percentage of problems that people bring to ministers is caused, or at least is contributed to, by unhelpful perceptions of God (*inappropriate* God-images)" (emphasis mine).

Moreover, it should be noted that what Cavanagh refers to here as unhelpful perceptions of God; are usually as a result of negative experiences, such as pain and suffering which people have undergone in life.

In the context of this paper, we can contend therefore, that God-images refer to the experiences and understandings of God by African people within their own context. God-images embrace the African traditional stories, symbols, metaphors, parables and riddles about the African experience of the divine (God) and the cosmic life-force. God-images (either *appropriate or inappropriate*) are formed as a result of different experiences of people within a given context (in this case, the African context). And that such experiences take place within a cultural setting and understanding of the African people.

The Influence of an African Culture on God-images

Culture, within the African context, is a relative term with different facets. In the context of this paper, and in referring to an 'African culture' we mean; symbols, customs, rituals, liturgical events and traditions (all together) that constitute the way African people live and relate to each other and to the cosmic realities. An 'African culture' can also mean the values of African people that give meaning to life as a whole within an African community. It should be noted, however, that the uniqueness of an African culture within an African traditional society lies in the whole aspect of relationship and communality. For Mbiti (1990[2]:31), "to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community" (see also Setiloane 1986:9). Outside a meaningful relationship (within a community), a person is not a whole person, but an alien and stranger to human life and the cosmic life-force.

Culture, within an African understanding, can also be reflected in the plural - 'African cultures' - because of the diversity of values and traditions we find among the African people. 'African cultures' play a role of maps which present an African world-view and value assumptions or certain implicit theories about Africa and the world that are transmitted from generation to generation in many different ways. Could it be that the experience of God by the African people is highly influenced by such a world-view? How then are God-images formed among the African people?

God-images are formed within a cultural setting of the people because "culture is a human reality, and that any given group of people is shaped and conditioned by such a reality in its different manifestations" (Okure 1990:59). Subsequently, God-images among the African people are not only formed

within an African cultural setting, but are also influenced by the same. We would agree with the argument that Louw (1999:2) gives when he states:

> God-images are influenced by contexts and are continuously being shaped by cultural environments, social issues, psychological needs and existential experiences. God-images are not shaped merely by doctrine and confessions. God-images can change and correlate with vital existential needs. In terms of the current demand for a *theologia Africana* God-images in Christian theology should reckon with both the nature of African spirituality as well as existential needs within the context of Southern Africa.

It is important also to note that God-images are expressed through the metaphors that African people have found comfortable to depict their belief system and the way they live and interact with one another, nature and God.

COMMON GOD-IMAGES AND METAPHORS IN AN AFRICA CULTURE

One can find common God-images and *metaphors*[16] that depict the cultural understanding of God among the African people. God-images and metaphors such as father, mother, shepherd, companion and friend express the communality aspect of an African life. We shall describe each of these in detail in order to create an understanding of how the African people perceive God in daily life and how this eventually influences their formation of their concept (s) of God.

God as a Father

When God is *father* (Ciuta *dada*[17]) then God is understood as the one who relates to people just like a natural father would do in a home setting. It may also imply that God, as *Ciuta dada*, provides a sense of security within the communal life of the African family. Thus, the image creates a sense of protection and security in an African family. For Mbiti (1969:49), *the sense of God's fatherhood is needed and experienced most in times of need, such as danger, despair, sickness, sorrow, drought or calamity*.

Since the kind of cultural anthropology we find among the African people is one which puts emphasis on human relations, it also means that there is a longing for protection from the perceived evil forces that exist within an African cosmic life-force. Protection from evil forces *(cosmic powers)* can only be realized when an African person chooses to stay within the boundaries of the family unit *(communality)*. Outside the family unit, a person is exposed

to the infliction and oppressiveness of the 'powers' and 'forces' of life. And in most cases the father metaphor of God becomes an important symbol of protection within a given family unit.

The *'father' image of God*, unlike in the Western and Northern continents, is not as contentious a notion or concept to the traditional African people because its 'hermeneutical' epistemology is derived from the context of a community life within an African cultural anthropology. And while the use of a father image of God may arouse negative associations, especially to those who have negative experiences with patriarchal domination, it is important to understand that many African ethnic groups still give respect to its meaning and usage. The reason why the *'father' image of God* is at home amongst most African people (and tribes) is simply because of the sense of protection and security it provides to the African family.

God as a Mother

However, it should be mentioned here that some of the African people are very much at ease with the mother *(Ciuta mama*[18]) concept of God, mostly, because a number of African people share a matrilineal[19] descent. When God is mother, then it implies that God relates to his people in the same way as a natural mother does to her family. The mother image of God provides a sense of care, love and security in terms of nurturing to all members of an African family unit. It is evident enough that the mother image of God is not only used among the African people with a matrilineal descent, but also among those with a patriarchal background as can be seen in Mbiti's (1988:49) argument below:

> The **image of mother** also carries with it the idea of cherishing and nursing, and it is used even in patriarchal societies. We cannot draw conclusions therefore that the image of God as father is confined to patriarchal societies, and that His image as Mother is confined only to matrilineal societies. In both cases, these images are used figuratively, to convey the idea of God originating all things, and caring for all things (particularly mankind).

God as Shepherd and Companion

Images or metaphors of God such as the shepherd *(Mulisya*[20]) metaphor, depict the compassionate and loving care that God (the shepherd) has for the people. Similarly, the companion *(wakwenda nayo*[21]) metaphor carries the notion of somebody who cares and plays a role of a very close friend in one's

life. A companion metaphor is mainly used by the African people in their understanding of God's involvement with human life. African people believe that God accompanies them everywhere, and he is always ready to help, especially in times of pain and suffering. Thus the shepherd and companion images of God are used to depict the caring and companionship of God in human life – which in most cases is interpreted as a pilgrimage.

God as Friend

The image of God as friend *(Mubwez*[22]) is mostly used to show that God can be trusted. It is an "image which shows great confidence in God" (Mbiti 1975:47). The African people believe that there is a place in God's 'heart' which accommodates the notion of friendship, and therefore he can be counted on in times of difficulties. "Because he is their friend, they can speak to him or with him as freely as they wish" (1975:48).

To conclude, we can therefore contend that for the African people, there is always a sense of relationship, communality and continuity in all the God-images and metaphors listed above. For this reason, the formation of such God-images is always influenced by an African cultural understanding – the understanding of human life by African people, without which all images imposed on African people will become obsolete and invalid to the African context.

GOD-IMAGES IN A PASTORAL CARE SITUATION IN AFRICA

Arising from the foregoing discussion on God-images in an African context, and when applied to a pastoral care situation in Africa, it can be stated that God-images point to the way people intend to express their experience and understanding of God in their daily lives. It can also be argued, as in the words of Louw (1999:2) that;

> "The undergirding supposition and assumption is that, despite changes and flexibility, God-images in the Christian tradition are inevitably linked to and determined by the durable and fundamental theological notion of the faithfulness of God".

God-images link the African people to God especially in times of pain and suffering.

A pastoral care situation therefore, provides an opportunity for people to tell their stories on how they understand and experience God's involvement in

their lives, more especially in moments of sickness, sorrow and suffering. The pastoral ministry of the Church in Africa will be enriched by allowing people to express themselves with the God-images they are used to. In doing so the Church will help, in the process of a pastoral assessment, to determine whether people are holding on to appropriate or distorted images of God. The pastoral ministry of the Church in Africa should be sensitive to the fact that God-images are also connected to different ways in which African people describe God through metaphors, traditional events and symbols. For the African people, God's love *(Chitemwa)* and faithfulness *(Chigomezgo)* are expressed through the use of God-images, which in most cases have become part of their religious metaphorical expressions within a given African spirituality experience.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has therefore helped to highlight the need for a pastoral ministry to understand the influence of an African spirituality on the formation of God-images by making the following observations:

(1) Pastoral ministry in Africa will be helped greatly by accommodating an understanding that all life among the African people is influenced by an African spirituality. Therefore, pastoral ministry should at all times embrace the core issue of an African spirituality and cosmology that emphasizes communality and relationships. A good pastoral assessment of God-images will always take place within existing relationships of an African spirituality.

(2) Pastoral ministry in Africa should be sensitive to the fact that God-images are also connected to different ways in which African people describe God through metaphors, traditional events and symbols.

(3) To make a proper diagnosis of God-images used by African people, pastoral ministry should undertake to understand the use of metaphoric expressions and concepts, which form an integral part of the way African people express themselves about the significance of God's nature and character.

NOTES

1. An African world-view (s) in the context of this article, will refer to the way African people understand their existence as embracing their cultural values, norms and traditions (se also Nxumalo 1979: 27). It is important to underscore that the African cultural views propagated in this paper could also apply to different groupings (even those outside the African continent) that pursue an intercultural communication in pastoral theology.
2. The term "African People" shall be used in a homogenous sense to include people in Africa who share similar values, norms and cultural traditions. It should be noted, however, that while Africa is a big continent with diverse "African cultures" it also has a harmonious celebration of a sense of communality across the board, and this makes African unique – a world-view based on communal values. Although the paper tends to use examples and anecdotes mostly drawn from the Southern part of Africa, it also speaks for most cultures in the other parts of Africa.
3. Patrick Kalilombe is a Malawian national, an outstanding scholar and writer in the Roman Catholic Church tradition. His theological essays have received wider publication in international theological journals and books.
4. A local vernacular language (Sotho), mostly used in the Southern part of Africa.
5. John Mbiti has been described as a "living legend" of African philosophy and religious studies. He has published widely, and has spoken at many internal conferences throughout the world. Currently he is based in Switzerland where he lectures at the University of Bern,
6. A concept of God in Zulu, one of the major South African languages.
7. A concept of God in one of the Central African languages.
8. Another concept of God in Central African languages.
9. Ogbonnaya writes from a Ghanaian experience of an African spirituality, see his paper, "Person as Community."
10. See Kalilombe (1994:128)
11. Kalilombe (1994:128)
12. See also Peter Paris 1995:28
13. Ambuyafwi – a Malawian Tonga term for ancestors. This term us used with great respect. Nobody still living and alive qualifies to use the ambuyafwi title. It is a title given, with great honours, to those that played a great role in society before they died. Now that they are dead they are in fact still living because their role in society continues – the role of being custodians of the African family.
14. A Zambian anthropologist and sociologist.

15. See Louw 1999:1.
16. Louw (2000:49) in his book, "Meaning in Suffering" discusses the use of metaphorical language in pastoral theology. He states that a biblical metaphor can be used as "a figure of speech in the theological vocabulary to present, comprehensively and meaningfully, the unknown (revelation) in terms of the known (creation)" (See also McFague 1982:43).
17. Ciuta dada, a very common expression and concept of God as father among the Tonga and Tumbuka speaking people in Malawi.
18. Ciuta mama, a common expression of God as mother among the Tumbuka speaking people in Malawi
19. Most Churches in Africa have a mixed composition of African people, some come from a patriarchal; background, while others have a matrilineal origin.
20. Mulisya, a term used for shepherd among the Tonga and Tumbuka speaking people . The term Mulisya depicts someone who feeds and cares for the sheep
21. Wakwenda nayo, a tumbuka term for companion, literally meaning "someone I walk with in a journey".
22. Mubwezi, a "friend" image of God among the Tumbuka and Tonga speaking people.

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Mystagogy in Primordial Spirituality as Perspective for African Spiritualities

JOS HULS

In order to study African Spiritualities, primordial spirituality is essential. Primordial spirituality has to do with the basic elements of human life, such as: birth and death, marriage and family, health and illness, the course of life etc. In order to contribute in focusing on African spiritualities, I would like to present a phenomenological approach of studying spirituality. This approach does not define beforehand what spirituality is, but tries to observe the phenomenon itself, as it occurs in human life. In this respect the divine human relationship is essential.

First of all I am not an expert in African spiritualities, I am an expert in mysticism and mystagogy. The mystical tradition focuses especially on the personal divine-human relationship, where doctrine and dogmatic formulations are of secondary importance. Therefore, those from the tradition often came into conflict with the hierarchic authorities of the church. But in their focus they can help us to discover the essence of spirituality without being bothered by cultural differences.

The scientific study of spirituality is characterized by two extreme positions.

On the one hand we see the formal objective approach describing the phenomenon in its exteriority, but not daring to describe the inner horizon or divine human relationship, which is at the center.

On the other hand we see an approach determined by theological presuppositions. They judge the validity of spiritual phenomena by dogmatic criteria. In my experience of the mystical tradition, I have learned that the only criterion for our judgment is the divine human relationship itself: the way it is expressed and the way it involves the listener.

I became aware that the main focus of most of the mystical writers is mystagogy. By this I mean the process of becoming aware of the divine-human relationship. In most cases, a mystical writer does not want to present his or her personal experience, or to present a theory on it, but wants the reader to become aware of one's own divine-human relationship. This mystagogic perspective could make a contribution to the study of African spiritualities, because it focuses on the divine-human relationship in a more experiential way. This may be valid in different cultural contexts. In mystagogy it is not so much the description of the difference in content which is important, but the underlying event of the encounter with God which encompasses these differences.

Every culture has its own way of expressing the divine-human encounter and in this way underlines aspects of this encounter by highlighting them. This means that every culture brings to light other aspects of the divine-human relationship. This is the essence of the phenomenological approach to spirituality. By studying the different perspectives in which the divine-human relationship takes shape, we become aware of the richness of this phenomenon.

I will present three paradigms from the mystical tradition which can be of interest for the focus on primordial spirituality. These paradigms must be considered as examples of how the phenomenon can be studied from a mystagogical point of view, and are not meant as a distinctive framework.

Firstly I will present the example of Beatrice of Nazareth, a Dutch mystical writer of the twelfth century, who was part of a new popular movement of that time, the so called 'pious women". She considers 'desire' as the nucleus of the divine-human relationship.

The second paradigm will be Thomas à Kempis and the theme of inferiority.

The third paradigm will be Dag Hammarskjöld and his struggle with friendship.

These three examples are paradigms of western Christian spirituality, but as paradigms they could easily be transposed to the field of African spiritualities.

BEATRICE OF NAZARETH

The *Seuen Maniren* of Beatrice of Nazareth (1200-1268) is a mystical treatise describing the complete mystical journey in seven "ways."[1] Considering the maturity of the work, it seems out of the question that it might be a work

from Beatrice's youth. It almost certainly must have been written by someone who had acquired a general knowledge of the human person's spiritual journey through personal experience. Such a synthesis only comes to consciousness late in life. The text was probably written during the time that Beatrice lived in Nazareth, thus after 1235. I proceed from the hypothesis that it was written around 1250.

The historical context of the *Seuen Maniren* is probably spiritual direction. In this treatise, the general knowledge of the spiritual journey functions as a powerful mystagogical insight, clearly meant to be channeled into spiritual direction. It is obvious that the treatise is not intended for beginners.

I presume that she wrote this text for people who had already made a good bit of progress in the interior life and who wanted to gain insight into the foundations of the spiritual process. This could have been her sisters in the monastery, but considering the existing contacts with the *mulieres religiosae,* it could also have been people outside the Cistercian Order.

The noun *manire* means "way" or "manner."[2] This is primarily an expression of the tension between created nature and the essence of God, which exceeds all that is created. Minne as the essence of God is *wiseloos*, without any "way", without any *manire;* but Minne is effective in the human person in different ways or manners.

Our life in its created nature is bound to a specific form and, in this sense, is quite concrete. It takes place in a specific form or *manire.* At the same time, life is something we receive every minute, every second, from The Life. Our life doesn't come from ourselves. We don't make our own life. Rather, we live because we receive life from beyond. That in itself is a great mystery. We can't fathom it. We can't see what's behind our heart. There's an intimacy in our life, the immediacy of which is so mysterious that all words fall silent. Of ourselves, we have nothing, but we receive life from The Life. The Life which, as the essence of God, is *wiseloos,* takes on flesh and blood (form) in our concrete life.

The same goes for Minne. In itself, in its immediacy, Minne is wiseloos, but it makes itself felt in our life in a specific way or manner. Minne can have different "faces" without making us feel like we're talking about a different Minne. The same Minne can have different manners or "facial features."

Secondly, the word *manire* expresses a tension between form and dynamic. Whenever Minne or God is effective is us, we notice it, not because we suddenly see God, but rather because of the change we undergo. We're not

the same anymore. This can happen suddenly or it can happen very slowly. Often we only notice it after the fact. Looking back, we see that our life has changed, that we've been transformed by the vicissitudes of life. This is the way in which God is active in our life. God makes Himself felt in our life as dynamic without our having to understand it, to grasp it, or even to feel it.

A *manire* of Minne isn't static. As form, it is simultaneously dynamic. It is a form that changes us. This is what is meant by "encounter" when we speak of spirituality as a dialogical process.[3]

Encounter doesn't really have much to do with "seeing" the other; not much needs to happen on that level. Fundamentally, encounter has to do with change or transformation. The Other transforms us, precisely by reaching all the way into our very essence and touching us where we have no defenses.

> The first Way is a desire
> which proceeds from Minne as dynamic activity.
> It has to rule in the heart for a long time
> before it can overcome all resistance.
> It has to work potently
> and with ingenious dexterity,
> and it has to increase powerfully in this life.

The opening sentence of the first *manire* is very important for Beatrice. This is obvious from the fact that it's repeated three times in this *manire.* This is quite significant because, in the *Seuen Maniren*, there are hardly any real repetitions. It gives the impression that Beatrice is trying to convince us that it's really true that a desire exists which has its origin in Minne.

The reason for such a compulsive need to persuade her readers could possibly be the fact that "desire" is an ambivalent concept. Not all desires proceed from Minne. A whole lot of desires proceed from needs, e.g. from self-preservation. Our desire for food is necessary, but we wouldn't say that it proceeds from Minne. The same goes for the desire to be somebody in society or to have a certain social status. These desires proceed from ourselves, not from Minne. Such an ambivalence with regard to desire can lead to the tendency to view desire in all circumstances with suspicion.

For Beatrice though, desire is a dynamic which should be positively interpreted, in spite of this ambivalence. Minne reveals herself in us as desire. But the question is: what kind of desire is Beatrice talking about here? For at the same time we notice that this desire is placed in the context of 'resistance'

(wedersaken), that is, the adversary or the devil. Desire 'has to rule in the heart for a long time before it can overcome all resistance' (*lange int herte regneren, eerse al die wedersaken verwinnen mach)*. It's the desire of Minne which frees us from our resistance.

How can we visualize this? The desire of Minne has to be distinguished from the desire proper to our own logic, which is always directed towards an object we want. The desire of Minne, on the other hand, is a desiring aroused by our being touched by God. Suddenly there's a hole in our life. We feel the emptiness of our competitive, consumeristic behaviour. We feel as if we are busy filling up our own emptiness with things that cannot fill this emptiness.

This experience is a breakthrough to the realization that we ourselves are not the centre of our existence, that we are being deeply, personally touched from somewhere beyond. Traditionally, this is called "vocation." We are touched by a desire exceeding all that we ourselves, in ourselves, can long for or desire. We have to understand "vocation" here in the broadest possible sense. It doesn't have to do with a vocation to the religious life in the narrow sense of the word, but rather with the realization that we, in our self-organization, are shutting ourselves up in ourselves, and that we really only come to life when we see ourselves as we are seen in the eyes of the Other. The Other calls us in Minne out of ourselves and our own self-organization. The desire of Minne then, as distinguished from our own desires, is situated in the realization that the Other desires us. The eyes of the Other draw us out of ourselves and make us long for total submission in Minne. Thus, there's a fundamental passivity in the desire of Minne: in our desire, we're led by the Other who desires us. Minne has to rule in our heart for a long time before she conquers all the resistance of our self-preservation, before we let ourselves be moved by her without resisting.

An important point in the opening sentence of the first *manire* is that Beatrice proceeds primarily from the dynamic activity of Minne. Minne works effectively in us as desire, and she has to rule in our heart for a long time before she has overcome all resistance. This is significant because, when we reason, we begin with ourselves as human persons instead of with Minne: the human person is taken up with his journey in search of God and, to some extent or other, he exerts his energy in this direction. Beatrice, however, presumes from the very beginning that this desire is set in motion by Minne herself. Desire is what Minne effects in us, and her dynamic activity frees us from our 'resistance' *(wedersaken)*. Even though Beatrice is describing a very personal activity in

which one can only say “I” ("I desire"), she simultaneously regards it as passive. Our desire originates in our being touched by Minne, who wounds us with her infinite desire. We are taken up in a desire which is the desire of the Other in us, even though it is a desire welling up out of our own essence. In our desire, we are loved by the Other (Minne) who frees us from ourselves *(wedersaken)*. Here, Beatrice employs a form of spiritual direction in which the most personal (namely, our being touched, or our desire) is seen against the background of the dynamic activity of the Other who loves us and desires us. That is why the Other wants to free us from everything which keeps us stuck.

In this sense we can compare the desire of Minne with the intimacy of a heartbeat. Our heart beats. That is our life. But at the same time, we do not make our heart beat. Our heart receives life and our heart makes us live. Whenever it stops beating, our physical life stops. If we view this as more than simply a biological fact, it is a great mystery. Our life comes from Life. We cannot fathom it. We only see the consequences - namely, that our heart beats and that we live. Through this phenomenon, we become aware of the fact that life itself, before all else, is a receiving. We have not made our life, we receive it in our heartbeat. From the very beginning, our life occurs in total passivity. There is nothing about ourselves that we, of ourselves, can do. Everything is given to us every minute, every second. Before all else, our life flows forth from a love which we cannot fathom. Before we can do or say anything at all, we are gazed upon in an unconditional gift of love which is our life. However self-evident life may seem to be, it is given to us out of love, without our having to do anything at all for it.

In the same way, no matter how much we may experience it as our desire, the desire of Minne is also a desire aroused in us by the Other. With our own reason, we cannot understand it. This desire sets us off on a journey to the land of our origin, to Minne, from whom we are created, from whom we live. The desire of Minne is Beatrice's feminine guide who leads us to a destination lying in total surrender to Minne. There, we are freed from all the *wedersaken* which hold us back from giving ourselves completely over into the possession of Minne.

According to Beatrice, the dynamic activity of the desire of Minne is itself a driving force. With its own dynamism, it goes dexterously to work. By yielding to the desire of Minne, we are ingeniously led along our spiritual journey. Minne confronts us with what we need at this moment. As spiritual

director, Beatrice proceeds in quite a unique way. What she is really saying to us as readers is, "Live from your heart, live from your deepest desire, because it will lead you further. Do not worry about it. Your desire functions quite ingeniously in this matter." But this does not mean that nothing is asked of us from our side. Beatrice simultaneously indicates her concern for our activity by her use of the verb "must," which is powerfully present in this stanza. Our activity, however, does not lie in concentrating on our own dynamism, but rather in really beginning to live from the desire of Minne. Only in this way can Minne transform us in herself.

The essence of traditional Cistercian spirituality is the awareness that we are created in the image and likeness of God. This is not just a doctrine, it is a way of life. Because it is our nobility, we have to become aware of it in our own life.

We are so loved by God that God wants to clothe us with His own nobility. And this is not reserved for just a specific group of people. In its unconditionality, it applies to everyone. Every person is created in the image of God. We are put together in such a way that we have the potential to reflect the image of God. That is why we are created in His likeness.

We are called to lose ourselves in Minne, the love of God, through our receptivity and, in so doing, to become a pure mirror of Minne, just like Jesus.

For Beatrice, the desire of Minne is the feminine guide in this total transformation in God. In our desire for genuine Minne, she brings us to the point of walking in the footsteps of Christ. This orientation towards the Other is, in itself, quite beautiful. But what she is really aiming at is that we, in this desire for the Other, also become aware of the Other's orientation towards us, the Other who loves us and desires us and who wants to transform us in His image and likeness. The desire of Minne, seen as the desire of the very essence of our being, is simultaneously the desire of Minne for us. The desire present in the first *manire* certainly proceeds from Minne because, in this desire, we're oriented towards the Other who desires us and who wants to transform us in Minne into the image of Minne.

THOMAS à KEMPIS

An important area of tension pervading the Imitation of Christ in its entirety, is that between on the one hand the external and visible reality which we may perceive and to which we may hold on, and on the other hand the

invisible reality of God permeating this external reality. From the beginning of the first book until the ending of the last one, Thomas is pointing out that we have to look through the things and not should be fixated on the outside, although this may be rather beautiful or impressive. In fact he starts his first book as follows:

Imitating Christ and despising all vanities on earth

(1) HE WHO follows Me, walks not in darkness, says the Lord.[4]

(2) By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart.[5]

(3) Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ.[6]

Thomas is not experiencing the reality of the world as darkness, but he claims that we are unable to see the light of this world. This light becomes visible in Jesus, but just as the disciples were deaf and blind for the reality from which Jesus was living - although they were able to perceive everything with the naked eye - we are likewise unable to perceive what is real. The reason of this blindness is that we are not really open for God, but are using the reality in the first place to safeguard ourselves. This insight does not mean a moral judgement. Thomas is not speaking about the distinction between good and bad people, but he is reflecting on persons who are conscious that they are in some way touched by God and therefore want to be related to Him more intimately, i.e. to be more devout. These people Thomas is addressing. He confronts them with the problem of our blindness. For however much we want to get acquainted with God, we can only know Him by engaging in a relationship with Him. Therein, we enter into the intimacy of the relationship with God, the more we get to recognize that our attachment to our social and material securities (i.e. the world) will make us blind to this hidden reality which pervades everything.

The way to arrive at a personal relationship with God consists for Thomas in the portrayal of Christ (imitatio Christi). Although the imitatio Christi has a material side, we have to understand it most of all as a means to interiorize Christ. Literal following or imitation may be an important aspect of this, but is certainly not enough. In order to get at an intimate understanding of Christ, we will have to enter into the invisible interior of his existence. We may do this by meditating and ruminating on his life and his words in such a way that we will acquire a taste for the relationship with God which pervades his life but which as such is not apparent. For this reason his love for Christ and for God are interchangeable for Thomas. Who will be able to perceive through the exterior

signs of Christ's life his heart, will be aware that God is the invisible centre of his existence and that we have to confide ourselves in the same way unconditionally to God? Thomas says at the end of the first chapter:

(20) Try, moreover, to turn your heart from the love of things visible and bring yourself to things invisible.

(21) For they who follow their own evil passions stain their consciences and lose the grace of God.

The tension between the visible and invisible things is not that between the natural and the supernatural, but refers to the preoccupation with oneself. Because as human persons we are vulnerable beings, we are for the most part directed by the logic of our survival instinct. We want to safeguard ourselves and our own position. For this purpose we use our environment. Although sound self-interest is not bad, for Thomas it is empty and vain, because it imprisons us in our own perspective. The more we try to get a hold on the people and the world surrounding us, the more they will be only seen in their meaning for us and not longer in their own independence. That is to say we no longer consider the reality freely and we are afraid of any intrusion which may injure our position. For this reason, Thomas wants to ease us away from the attachment to the visible and the material. The more we dare to surrender ourselves to the dynamics of God's love in us - and may become in this sense more inner and free from ourselves - the more we will be able to contemplate the reality in its divine mystery.

The second book is explicitly devoted to the theme of inferiority. The inner man enters his heart searching for the Kingdom of God and to provide a space for Christ.

On the inner contact

(1) The kingdom of God is within you, says the Lord[7].

(2) Turn, then, to God with all your heart. Forsake this wretched world[8] and your soul shall find rest.[9]

Also in this book the interiority of the pure surrender to God is at odds with our propensity to keep a firm grip on everything which by means of the exteriority of the concrete and visible reality seems to give a better sense of security. Thus, Thomas continues:

(4) Learn to despise external things, to devote yourself to those that are within, and you will see the kingdom of God come unto you.[10]

The third book deals with Holy Communion. This sacrament has a high value for Thomas, because the Love of God for men is here expressed. For this reason this sacrament has to be received through inner love:

(25) Yet surely in the presence of Your life-giving Godhead no unbecoming thought should arise and no creature possess my heart, for I am about to receive as my guest, not an angel, but the very Lord of angels.

(26) Very great, too, is the difference between the Ark of the Covenant with its treasures and Your most pure Body with its ineffable virtues, between these sacrifices of the law which were but figures of things to come and the true offering of Your Body which was the fulfillment of all ancient sacrifices.

Communion is for Thomas the fulfilment of all sacrifices. Though, this does not mean that receiving Communion purely externally would be enough. Communion does not operate out of itself, but operates to the extent that it will be encountered as the reality of God. So we may gather also in this context that Thomas considers Communion in the field of tension of exteriority and interiority. Communion is an external sign of the sacrifice of love which comes about in an invisible way in front of our eyes. It is therefore in the first place a reality of encounter which brings us to awareness.

(30) Many people travel far to honour the relics of the saints, marvelling at their wonderful deeds and at the building of magnificent shrines. They gaze upon and kiss the sacred relics encased in silk and gold; and behold, You are here present before me on the altar, my God, Saint of saints, Creator of men, and Lord of angels![12]

When we speak of experience, most often this means the experience of something new. We want to see or to visit something because we did not see it yet.

In this way we may gape in admiration at shrines which overawe us through gold and silver. For Thomas, experience does not refer to the experience of something exceptional, but means that we may experience ordinary life contemplated beyond its external aspect in its divine depths. In the same way, the sacrament of the Communion does not become more special because it is celebrated with great pomp and circumstance, but because we may see in the simplicity of this sacrament the here and now of the loving reality of God. Therefore Thomas mentions in this context the blindness of our heart. We are unable to see the miracle which happens right before our eyes. As a result we want to exchange the reality that is, with something different or more.

(43) Oh, the blindness and the hardness of the heart of man that does not show more regard for so wonderful a gift, but rather falls into carelessness from its daily use![13]

The last book which deals with inner consolation also finds itself in the same field of tension between interior and external things. Thus Thomas writes in the first chapter of this book:

(2) Blessed is the soul who hears the Lord speaking within her, who receives the word of consolation from His lips.

(3) Blessed are the ears that catch the accents of divine whispering, and pay no heed to the murmurings of this world.

(4) Blessed indeed are the ears that listen, not to the voice which sounds without, but to the truth which teaches within.

(5) Blessed are the eyes which are closed to exterior things and are fixed upon those which are interior.

(6) Blessed are they who penetrate inwardly, who try daily to prepare themselves more and more to understand mysteries.

(7) Blessed are they who long to give their time to God, and who cut themselves off from the hindrances of the world.[14]

The tensions which Thomas describes between interior and exterior, worldly and celestial, transitory and eternal, sensual and spiritual and the like get across to us as dualistic. However the question is whether this impression is caused by Thomas or is the result of our own dualistic way of thinking in reading Thomas. Thomas is speaking in opposites, but these opposites meet mostly a mystagogic purpose and are not meant to divide the world in two.

Just as many mystics like him, Thomas is aware that he lives in world permeated by God. This divine reality is not separated from our reality, but is the Reality of our reality. As is indicated by the opening lines of the *Imitatio,* we are however blind to this reality permeated by God. For Thomas this blindness means the end of the line. Because this awareness is lacking, we think that we ourselves are the cause of our existence. As a result we become obsessed by the logic of our self-preservation. We do not want to go down nameless, and therefore we want to take up a position and to protect ourselves against any offences. Through this attitude we reduce yet the reality to a means for our own ends. Imprisoned in the images of our own projections we lose the capacity to meet reality as it really is.

For Thomas the term "exterior" means the whole world which keeps us imprisoned in the images of our own projections and desires. These images prevent us to enjoy the world as it really is. For this reason, we have to become "interior". This does not mean that we should keep aloof from the world at a material level. The difference between "interior" and "exterior" is not that between a life in a monastery and a life outside of it. Even people who withdraw into a monastery, may do this purely out of exterior grounds. Activities which as such are good and interior - such as *lectio divina,* liturgy and so on - may once more become "exterior". This means that they may become ends in themselves and are no longer means to confide ourselves to God deep down. Therefore interiority does not refer to something that may be objectified as specific forms of behaviour. It is not so that something may be "interior", but we become "interior" when we are conscious to be related to God in the things we are doing.

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD

An important aspect of the field of primordial spirituality is friendship. Within western culture friendship is seen as something that happens spontaneously and cannot be organized. Friendship differs from marriage, because it does not have a purpose in itself. Dag Hammarskjöld former Secretary General of the United Nations in the period 1953 to 1961, had never been married. Partly because of that, friendship was very important for him, but it was also his personal school of spirituality in which he learned the real meaning of love in the divine human relationship. After his tragic death, his diary was published. This diary is, in my view, a mystical work that describes his dialogue with God. In this diary we find the following note concerning friendship:

> Perhaps a great love (friendship) is never returned. Had it been given warmth and shelter by its counterpart, perhaps it would have been hindered from ever growing to maturity. It 'gives' us nothing. But in its world of solitude it leads us up to summits with wide vistas (54)

This diary note is often seen as a proof of Dag Hammarskjöld’s difficult love life. He was never married and it is probably because of that reason that some people were questioning his heterosexual proclivity. Although I never found a clue for that, during my research in the archives of the Royal Library of Stockholm, it is evident that in the forties and fifties of the last century this

would have caused major problems, especially for public figures like Dag Hammarskjöld.

More significant, however, is the context of his diary, which bears the title Markings. This diary is - as he himself explains in a letter to his friend Leif Belfrage - an expression of his dialogue with God. Therefore the text does not only signify that Dag Hammarskjöld is a lonely man, but that for him friendship is a spiritual journey in which he discovered the real meaning of friendship.

A friendship or a relationship can be seen as the reciprocal love of two persons. This love is spontaneous and born in freedom. But we all know that beyond this formal description lies hidden a world that is closed to the eyes of our objectivity. To associate with someone is a process in which we gradually open ourselves to the secret world of the other. In this intimacy we become aware that there is a difference between our longing to be close with the other and our longing to encounter the Reality of the other or the human being behind the surface.

The first dimension in friendship is the drive of our needs. We want to be loved and to have significance in the eyes of the other. Though this is one of the basic needs of the human nature, as a need it is strongly self-centered. The other is not only someone we enjoy freely, but he or she is a necessity, we need the other in order to survive and to make our own world complete. The more we think or feel we are dependent on the other, the more we want to buy his or her attention with the tokens of our love. Dag Hammarskjöld became aware that this drive to possess the other in order to feel secure is in conflict with the essence of friendship, because it imprisons the other in the projection of our desire. We want the other to be an image of what we wish the other should be and are afraid of the real face behind this image.

This brings us to the second dimension in friendship, which has its origin in the other. The other shocks us and makes us aware that his or her reality cannot be reduced to something of ourselves. This shock of the other who breaks through the images of our own projections, is what I would like to call the encounter of the other. As long as in our relationship the other is only met as an affirmation of our expectations, there is no encounter in the real sense of the word. But when the other shocks us and we become aware that there is a difference between the hidden reality of the other and the image of our expectations, a voyage of discovery can start.

For Dag Hammarskjöld friendship is a kind of loving fidelity to the other, in which this ongoing process of encounter can take place. Touched by the hidden reality or divine space of the other, we gradually become aware that the purpose of the friendship is not the fulfillment of our needs, but the love for the other as other. Therefore the text of Markings does not express a disappointment in friendship as such. For Dag Hammarskjöld, however, it is not the element of finding shelter in the arms of the other, but the element of being thrown upon one's own resources in confrontation with the other, that opened for him the real meaning of friendship.

Friendship is a way in which our love matures from an attitude in which we live by our own needs, to an attitude in which we enjoy the otherness of the other as a glimpse of Gods presence. In another text Dag Hammarskjöld expresses this tension as follows:

> Every deed and every relationship is surrounded by an atmosphere of silence.
>
> Friendship needs no words - it is a solitude delivered from the anguish of loneliness.

Silence is for Dag Hammarskjold not the absence of noise, but the Reality beyond the projections of our longings and needs.

This is the reality of God which only becomes visible when we, reduced to silence, learn to listen to the reality as it is in its innermost being and not as it appears to us from our point of view. Who acts out of silence, will not be guided by his own wishes and desires, but will empathise immediately with the other. Therefore friendship does not need words. Words are only stopgaps in order to explain one self and to eliminate the misunderstanding. But the person who really has learned to listen to the heart beyond the words, knows from the inside what is going on inside the other one.

I know, this sounds idealistic. I can imagine that you think that the one who forms such a picture of friendship will certainly be disappointed. Because which friendship or relationship will correspond to this description? And yet Hammarskjöld does not cherish in this regard an ideal which he would like to impose on other people, but he puts into words a slowly growing insight which more and more will give colour to his life, also in politics. Silence plays an essential role in this respect. If we really want to become a human person, then we will have to pursue the route of silence. However, this silence is not the silence of peace and quiet we are looking for assiduously, but the silence which confronts us with the nakedness and vulnerability of our human existence. At

this point all traditions disappear and we can no longer return to what we had learned. Then it is no longer possible to hide ourselves behind others. We will have to give a personal answer with regard to the vital questions we are confronted with. This silence means for Dag Hammarskjöld a dialogical space. It confronts us not only with our anxiety for death as the ultimate solitude of every human person, but silence takes us also to a life beyond anxiety. This is a life of love, where we - beyond the voice of our own desire - learn to listen to – that which comes up to us from beyond.

As long as we do need the other one for our own purpose and think that we cannot live without him, so long - owing to the voice of our own desire - we will be unable to really listen to the other person as he is in himself.

Dag Hammarskjöld does not consider this image of friendship viewed apart. Friendship is for him illustrative for our relationship with God. So he speaks in 1951 about a dream which is etched into the mind far deeper than the witness of the eyes.[15] This dream tells about the confrontation with silence which in fact made him lose everything. At the end, he can do nothing else but become silent with the night, because it becomes too dark to find the way back.[16] Whatever might have caused this dream, it describes in a perfect way how -bearing the silence and the anxiety provoked by it - he is brought at the frontier[17] which made him - beyond everything he hoped for – to look at reality with new eyes.

> Now. When I have overcome my fears - of others, of myself, of the underlying darkness: at the frontier of the unheard-of.
>
> Here ends the known. But, from a source beyond it, something fills my being with its possibilities.
>
> Here desire is purified and made lucid: each action is a preparation for, each choice an assent to the unknown.
>
> Prevented by the duties of life on the surface from looking down into the depths, yet all the while being slowly trained and moulded by them to take the plunge into the deep from which arises the flagrance of a forest star, bearing the promise of a new affection.
>
> At the frontier.[18]

Mystics know more than anybody else that we as humans are governed by anxiety. We want to protect ourselves and try to safeguard ourselves in every possible way. Nevertheless it is exactly this self-concern which prevents us from allowing ourselves to fall into the infinite space of God. The basic anxiety

in this regard is our fear of death. Death shows us that we cannot safeguard life and that nobody may consider life as his property. For this reason, Dag Hammarskjöld is saying that we have to become friends with death[19]. The reality of death forces us to be aware of the fact that we are not at the centre of our life, but that we are only guests in a life that is much bigger than we are. In this way the confrontation with death accompanies us to the space where we have nothing more to lose. There we become free, because nothing can be robbed from us anymore. It is there that - beyond all the illusions we anxiously were hanging onto - we break loose from the other one as object of our desire and we learn to love him as he really is.

> When you have reached the point where you no longer expect a response, you will at last be able to give in such a way that the other is able to receive, and be grateful. When Love has matured and, through a dissolution of the self into light, become a radiance, then shall the Lover be liberated from dependence upon the Beloved, and the Beloved also be made perfect by being liberated from the Lover.[20]

Whether it is about God as the inscrutable secret of the reality, or about the human person as the mirror of His reality, in all circumstances the mystic knows that only the silence of death may have the capacity to really free him from himself. Therefore he is not looking for consoling words which will sing him to sleep or tell him that everything is not as awful as thought. Unable to live with an illusion, he chooses therefore the night of the denudation above everything that is not God himself.

It is a beautiful image of the Lover and the Beloved, which Dag Hammarskjold uses in this text. Indeed, this image shows explicitly the dialogical structure of love. When we dare - through the silence purified - to lose ourselves in the eyes of the other person and in that sense dissolve, the other one can be born in us as the love of our essence.

CONCLUSION

The three mystical authors belonging to three different historical periods agree on one point, which is to say that the way of faith can only be covered by entering into a personal relation with God. Therefore they are mistagogues. They lead us into the interiority of the divine-human relationship. Without this relationship faith will remain merely on the outside and we will not get through to its essence. Sure, this sounds like stating the obvious, but in the Christian tradition many people have grown up with the idea that faith would be to

embrace a truth. No matter how important the doctrine of the Church is, mystics show that there always exists a tension between what is presented to us from the outside and what eventually, from the inside, is fully endorsed by personal experience. Therefore faith is not something we may learn. On the contrary, a process of interiorisation is always needed, wherein we will understand what is proclaimed in the tradition, proceeding from our personal faith relationship. As a result, the schools of spirituality cannot be separated from the primordial spirituality. Each of these three mystics is considering the primordial spirituality as a way of consciousness-raising, which is gradually opening us for the immediacy of God's countenance.

- For Beatrice of Nazareth, it is the dialogical structure of the desire of love (mine), which purifies us gradually and strips from us all forms of resistance.
- For Thomas à Kempis, it is the way of inferiority, which makes us ever more fully aware that through the projections of our own desire we lose sight of the reality as space of encounter with God.
- For Dag Hammarskjöld, it is the way of silence, which through the confrontation with death brings us to the freedom of having nothing to lose.

Although all three of these paradigms derive from Western Christian culture, this tradition as such is not the centre of interest for each of these authors. As mystagogues they are guided by the divine-human relationship and the process of transformation of the human person provoked by this immediate impact. This brings them to sometimes be at odds with this tradition, which indeed mediates the relationship with God, but as mediation never can replace the personal relation with God. Common to the way all three paradigms show, is that they want to bring all of us beyond images. Only when we get separated from our social, cultural and psychological images, will we be able to meet God as He really is. In this way, all these routes of denudation bring us to the common ground of all religious expression, in whatever culture or time it will be situated.

Therefore, I think that mystagogy is an essential part of the study of spirituality. We are not describing and analyzing some interesting object, 'out there'. The study of spirituality is impossible if we want to keep ourselves out of range. In his academic approach the researcher of spirituality has to become conscious of his own spirituality as it is lived concretely. So he really becomes

the subject of his own research. He understands that he has to articulate this growing consciousness in order to interiorise definitely his spirituality. To the same extent that he gained an insight into the spiritual process that takes place in him, he will be able to discern properly the forms of spirituality occurring to him and the life stories of other people which present themselves as objects of research. Our own relationship to God is inevitably implicated in our capacity to do research on spirituality. Mystagogy implies that insight into our own lived spirituality is integrated in our academic way of amassing knowledge. Research in spirituality is not so much based on knowledge of facts and technical expertise, but on phenomenological description, comparison and evaluation of perceived forms and processes of spirituality. The researcher maps out spiritual forms and processes, and designs models of spiritual experience and ways of promoting these models. He discerns possibilities of growth and the occurrence of ambiguities, stagnation of the process or even regression. Spiritual discernment is developed and sharpened by means of paradigms and cases. Research in spirituality and especially mystagogy reads reality as a spiritual 'text' which has to be interpreted. The competence to discern the phenomenon of spirituality will also offer the possibility to promote these spiritual processes of transformation.

Therefore mystagogy considers the spiritual phenomenon not only as an object in reality, but takes into account also personal experience, our way of perceiving reality and thinking about it. Insight into our own lived spirituality, into the forms of spirituality which constitute the personal context, and into the personal spiritual journey with the processes of transformation taking place in our life, constitutes a first step towards the capacity to perceive spirituality in objective reality, to trace and describe it, and finally to interpret this phenomenon. In this way research in spirituality contributes to the development of strategies of action which might enable people to become aware of their own spirituality, to deepen it, re-evaluate and renew it in a creative way. Thus, mystagogy guarantees the reciprocal relationship between the subjective experience and the growing consciousness on one hand and the phenomenal reality on the other hand. Mystagogy reads and describes phenomenal forms, interprets these phenomena and their contexts, and finally uses this insight to accompany the spiritual journey of communities and individuals. Research in spirituality requires that we continuously design procedures which may help to

accompany, structure and deepen in a critical way the lived experience of groups and individuals.

For the very reason that each culture is characterized by this tension between tradition and the personal relationship with God, I am greatly interested in how similar processes of interiorisation take place in African spiritualities. How do these spiritualities look at death, illness, desire, friendship, relationships and so on? How are these realities used as ways of encounter with God? How are people initiated in their tradition and where are they brought beyond the images? All these questions are highly interesting from the point of view of spirituality and during this congress I hope to be - and already am - stimulated with new ideas.

NOTES

1. Jos Huls, De weg van de Minne [The Minne-Journey] I-II, Louvain, 2002
2. Latin modus, maneries.
3. Kees Waaijman, Spirituality, Forms, Foundations, methods, Leuven 2002, pp.550-551
4. John 8, 12
5. Eph. 4,18
6. Book I,1
7. Lk 17,21
8. Cf. Joel 2,12 and 1 Sam 7,3
9. Book II, 1
10. Book II, 1
11. Book 111, 1
12. Book III, 1
13. Book III, 1
14. Book IV, 1
15. Markings, London-Boston 1988, 76
16. Ibid, 77
17. Ibid., 77-78
18. Ibid., 77-78
19. Ibid., 35: There is only one path out of the steamy dense jungle where the battle is fought over glory and power and advantage – one escape from the snares and obstacles you yourself have set up. And that is – to accept death.
20. Ibid., 78
21. Ibid., 37: The road to self-knowledge does not pass through faith. But only through the self-knowledge we gain by pursuing the fleeting light in the depth of our being do we reach the point where we can grasp what faith is. How many have been driven into outer darkness by empty talk about faith as something to be rationally comprehended, something "true"

Primordial Spirituality

KEES WAAIJMAN

One of the most important aspects of the magnificent reference work *World Spirituality* [1] is the attention editors have paid to the indigenous spiritualities. Five volumes of this 25-volume reference work are dedicated to this important spiritual phenomenon all over the world: Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania and the three Americas (South, Central, and North America). This attention is new. Normally people, even scholars, look to the phenomenon of spirituality from the perspective of the dominant schools: the Hinduistic, Buddhistic, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. They do not pay attention to the indigenous spiritualities which are mostly oppressed and at the same time absorbed by the dominant spiritual schools.

In this article I would like to explore the indigenous spirituality present in the Bible. In his study *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion* Rainer Albertz unfolds this field of indigenous spirituality in the Middle East by analyzing proper names, narratives, and prayers. This area, not created by or oriented on the official spirituality of kings, priests and prophets, is present in books like Genesis, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Psalms. I will explore this type of indigenous spirituality in the Bible. Perhaps it can help us to understand the indigenous spirituality in Africa. It may offer the adequate partner in the inter-spiritual dialogue between biblical and African spirituality.

'Indigenous' means: native born, originating or produced naturally in a country, not imported[2]. Not imported spirituality! This hits the bull's eye. Not imported, but originating naturally in a country, like the spirituality of the Aboriginals in Australia, the Native Spirituality of the Indians in North America, the Celtic Spirituality in Europe, the traditional spiritualities in Africa, and so on.

I prefer to use the word 'primordial'. Etymologically this word comes from the Latin *primus*, what means 'first', and *ordiri*, what means the original set up of a weaving pattern, and therefore: 'to begin'. 'Primordial' means, existing from the very beginning, like the primordial soup or the primordial fireball. Originally it points at the earliest stages of growth, the primeval stages of creation and development.

In this sense one can speak, for instance, about a 'primordial awareness', meaning the unfolding of innate knowledge which arises in us by entering the inner core of existence (*liangzhi)*, the spiritual exercise that brings us to the root of *Dao*, the Way.[3]

Another example: in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* Pope Benedict XVI speaks about 'the primordial human phenomenon which is love'.[4] At a conference, just before the release of his encyclical, Benedict called love a 'primordial word, an expression of the primordial reality'.[5] The primordiality of this phenomenon is precisely the ordinary human 'search for love' as an integral part of 'the complex fabric of human life'.[6] The Christian school of spirituality should not destroy this primordial love, it simply 'intervenes in the search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it'.[7]

I understand primordial spirituality as a way leading us to deeper understanding of such processes as birth, education, love, relationships, dwelling place and death. Primordial spirituality is a way towards the inner core of our creation and growth. On behalf of this primary process I speak about 'primordial' spirituality.

In this article we will enter the primordial spirituality of the Bible, as expressed in names, narratives, and prayers. We will visit the Nomadic families of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Lea and Rachel, moving around from Mesopotamia via Canaan into Egypt, and vice versa (see Gen. 11:31-32; 12:4-5; 27:43; 28:10; 29: 4; Gen. 24 and 29-31). We will share their life span experiences; between birth and death, we will listen to their genealogical concern: education as survival. We will join their journeys alongside the deserts. We will share their community life, taking shape in mutual solidarity, mercy and compassion.

BIRTH

Proper names give us insight in the primordial spirituality of indigenous communities. This is particularly the case in biblical spirituality.

In the oldest biblical traditions it was the mother who cried out the name over her child (see Gen. 4:1, 25; 16:11; 21:6-7; 29:30; 35:16-20; 38:1-5). She placed the child's coming-into-being under the influence of the Mighty One: He gathered the child *(Cain)*, my Mighty One helped the birth process *(Eliezer)*, He opened the womb *(Jephtah)*, He caused the mother to give birth *(Molid)*, He gave life *(Nathan)*. The mother seals the birth process with the imposition of the

name which this child will read right down to its source: built by Him *(Bunah)*, He forms *(Yetser)*, God is the maker *(Elpaal)*. By marking her children with these proper names, the mother from their earliest beginning brings them into contact with the Mighty One who sustains their life. The Mighty One surrounds them as an aura.[8] That is the reason why they call him 'mighty'.[9] God is the sustaining Life force, the blessing who bestows fertility: 'The Mighty One has granted me offspring' (Gen. 4:1). When the childless Rachel wants a child from Jacob, he answers: 'Am I perhaps in God's place?'(Gen. 30:2). The mighty One opens the womb (Gen. 29:31; 30:22), but can also close it (Gen. 36:2).

The father also initiates his child into this primordial relation to God. Repeatedly we encounter the phrase 'the Mighty One of my father'. This phrase does not mean: 'the Mighty One who is the strength of my father', but above all: 'the Mighty One in whom I have been initiated by my father'. In the ancient song of Moses we read:

> My strength, my song, o God!
> He was my salvation.
> This is my Mighty One,
> him will I praise,
> the Mighty One of my father,
> him will I extol (Exod. 15:2).

My 'Mighty One' occurs in this verse as parallel to 'the Mighty One of my father'. This means: my father has initiated me into the primordial relation to his Creator that latter became my Mighty One.

My Mighty One is intimately interwoven with the process of my birth. Accordingly, in many proper names the personal relation to the Mighty One is built in: my Mighty One delivers from the womb *(Elishuah)*; my Father knows *(Abuda)*; my Father is good *(Abitob)*; my Brother supports *(Achishamech)*. The Mighty One is intimately associated with my coming-into-being; he is *my* Mighty One.

> Yes, You drew me out of the womb,
> you entrusted me to my mother's breasts.
> On your lap I was stretched out from birth,
> from my mother's womb you have been my Mighty One (Ps.22:10-11).

My Mighty One, like a midwife, brings me out of the womb. She puts me safely by my mother's breasts. On her knees I was born: 'You have been my

security from the time of my birth; on You I have relied from the womb, from the time I was in my mother's womb You have been my helper' (Ps. 71:5-6). My mighty One has brought me from my mother's womb into an unprotected world. From now on She herself is like a mother's womb around me. My Mighty One is the Strength of my life, my vitality, as near to me as my heartbeat, my breathing.

It is important to see the primordial relationship with the Creator, in which the mother and the father initiate their child, as a primordial process, to be developed by the child. This we can see in a primordial prayer like psalm139. In a very ancient fragment of this psalm[10] we notice the process.

Yes, you acquired my kidneys,
wove me together in my mother's belly.
I want to thank you,
because I am awesomely exceptional
– peculiar are your makings
and my soul feels it extremely!
My strength was not hidden from you,
when I was made in secret,
embroidered in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw me – still a ball of yarn;
in your story were written
all the days, formed before
even one of them was there (Ps.139: 13-16).

This prayer follows the lines of the primordial growth by going back to an ever deeper past. First the kidneys are mentioned, brought together in my mother's belly. Then going back, my hidden strength has been made in secret, but not hidden for him, for he embroidered me in the depths of the earth. There I was seen – still a ball of yarn – seen by my creator written in his story and formed in his hands, before even one day was there. And in the midst of this way going back we notice a breakthrough of awareness: 'My soul feels it extremely' – primordial awareness par excellence.

DEATH

To understand the primordial spirituality of death we will read the story of Sarah's death and burial. The story of the end of Sarah's life is told as follows: 'Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years, this was the length of

Sarah's life. And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is Hebron) in the land of Canaan' (Gen. 23:1-2). Dying is viewed as the completion of years ('sated with life', Gen. 35:29). Life is 'the fulfilment of days' (2 Sam.7: 12; Exod. 23:26). Dying is letting go one's life (Gen. 25: 8; 35: 29), 'lying down to sleep with the ancestors' (Gen. 47:30; 49:29, 33), 'gathered to his or her relatives' (Gen.25:8; 17; 35:29). The gathering place of the dead is the underworld. Hence people spoke of the gates of death (Ps.9:14; 107: 18; Prov. 7:27). They went down into the depths of the earth (see Ps. 49). But even more primordial than descending to the underworld is the union with the dust of the earth: 'You are dust and to dust you shall return' (Gen. 3:19). This return to the dust is the lot of all humans (Num. 16:29). 'You turn human kind back to dust and say: Turn back, you children of the Earthling!' (Ps. 90:3; see Ps. 49:14). The dead are again dust, that means they are again completely in the hand of God as they were 'before even one of our days was formed'. Death reveals our unconditional dependence of God.

After the death of Sarah 'Abraham came to lament over Sarah and to weep for her' (Gen. 23:2). Abraham entered the tent where Sarah stayed and performed the lament for the dead which had its original setting in the family[11] and is described by two verbs: to lament and to weep over. The lament is a ritual in which effusive expression is given to one's grief. The ritual consisted in beating one's breast (Is. 32:12) and uttering brief cries: 'Alas! Alas!' (1 Kgs.13: 30; Jer. 34:5). The lament is accompanied by weeping; the mourners shed tears of sorrow. The lament and the weeping were part of a complex of rituals of self-abasement: fasting, rending one's clothes, going about in sackcloth, shaving oneself, and throwing dust on one's head. People removed from their bodies all elements of human splendour (clothing, hair), reduced the vitalities of life (weeping, fasting), and approached the dust of death (lying down on the ground; sprinkling dust and ashes on their heads) in order in this manner to become one with the lamented dead. The lament interiorizes grief by bodily admitting death into one's own life. But the primordial dynamic of this interiorization goes deeper. Grief is aimed at making space for new life. 'Often mourning is emphasized so much that no hope seems to be in sight (e.g. Jer. 4:28; 14:2; Lam. 1:4; 2:8; Joel 1:9ff.); but in many passages it is obvious that behind the mourning lies the silent expectation that a change will follow observance of the mourning customs (Num. 14:39 – in vain, to be sure; Ezr.10:6; Neh.1:4; Est.4:3; 1 Sam. 15:35en 16:1 are also to be understood on

the basis of this concept)'.[12] This change is expressed in the biblical word 'consolation'*(macham)*. Consolation or comfort really influences the situation. In the case of an irreversible event like death, 'comfort' liberates a person from his or her affective preoccupation. It brings one's mind into a new relation to reality.[13] 'To be consoled' is to experience 'the restoration of inward equilibrium'.[14]

After one's inner life has been unsettled by death, it is restructured by the mourning ritual. That is consolation or comfort. After he had grieved over Sarah, weeping and lamenting, 'Abraham rose up from the face of his dead' (Gen. 23:3). Rising up 'from the face of the dead' is a dialogic occurrence: Abraham permits his beloved dead to depart into the land of the dead and he himself returns to the land of the living. The dead person and the surviving person release each other from the intimacy of the vis-à-vis relation which is characteristic for primordial spirituality and specifically for marriage spirituality. We are told three times that Abraham and his dead removed themselves from each other's face: 'Abraham rose from the face of the dead (…), from the face of the dead (…), so that I may bury my dead out of my face' (Gen. 23:3, 4, 8). This farewell ritual makes visible the fact that death is an event which touches the depths of intimacy.

After purchasing a burial place in the field of Machpela in Hebron (Gen. 23:4-18), he buried his wife Sarah (Gen. 23:19). The words 'to bury' and 'burial place' serve as key words in this chapter (12 x). Solemnly with loud lamentation, the dead was carried to her grave. Relatives, friends and acquaintances accompanied the dead as they performed the rituals of self-abasement (striking their breast, sprinkling dust on their head).[15] To bury a person is to bring a person to her grave, an event accomplished in the circle of the family. This act is performed at the burial place, also called one's 'eternal home' (Eccl. 12:5; cf. Ps. 49:11). Being buried meant to come home, to be gathered to one's ancestors (Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29), to be gathered to one's place of origin.[16] A burial was primarily a return to the community of origin. Also Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah and Jacob were to be buried in Sarah's grave (Gen. 49:30 ff.; 50:13).

LEARNING FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

Between birth and death life unfolds its course. Genealogically speaking, this is the life span of one generation. But genealogies tell also how, despite the

vulnerable transitions, life was passed on from generation to generation. Central here is the parents' concern that their children would survive. The spirituality of upbringing was a spirituality of survival. This remains the case when nomadic life passed over into the settled life of agriculture. As we listen to the proverbs – which were primarily passed down within the family communities [17] – we are struck by the deep concern with which parents instilled into their children that they should be build up their family and not break it down by quarrelling, adultery and laziness. More than 380 proverbs evince a direct impact of the parents' will upon the will of the children.

> Hear, my child, your father's instruction,
> and do not reject your mother's teaching (Prov. 1:8).
> Hear, my child, and absorb my words,
> that the years of your life may be many (Prov. 4:10).
> My child, be attentive to my wisdom,
> incline your ear to my insight (Prov. 5:1).

Thus winding through the book of Proverbs there are hundreds of appeals, questions, invitations, admonitions, warnings, commandments, prohibitions, motivations, and exhortations. [18] The persuasive language is sustained by genealogical concern. [19] The parents try to make their children strong in preparation for the future, so that they may survive. Those who listen to the hundreds of proverbs with which children in ancient Israel were raised become familiar with the most important problem areas into which family initiated a new generation.

The proverbs which concern the *economic* sphere score high (about a third of them). The children have to learn to take care of their family (Prov. 11:29; 12:17, etc), their fields (Prov.12:11; 13:33, etc.), their cattle (Prov. 12:10; 14:2; 27:23-27), and the personnel (Prov.29:19-21). The family is ruined by laziness (Prov. 6:6:11; 10:4-5; 26:13-16, etc.), addiction to drink (Prov. 20:1; 23:20-21, etc.), despondency (Prov. 12:25; 13:12, 19, etc.) and dishonesty (Prov. 14:5, 25; 17:8; 15, 23; etc.).

The second problem area concerns *relations* (similarly about a third of them): no slander and backbiting (Prov. 11:13; 18:19, etc.), no pride and mockery (Prov. 6:17; 14:20-21). Especially quarrelling must be avoided like a plague: 'To start strife is like cutting a dam, so stop before the quarrel bursts out' (Prov.17:14; see 6:12-15; 10:12-14, etc.).

The third area concerns *marriage* (almost 20%). A solid relation with the wife of your youth is the foundation of the family: 'House and health are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from God' (Prov. 19:14). The wife is the foundation of the family (also cf. Prov.11:16, 22; 12:4; 18:22; 30:16, 19, etc.). Fornication rots the foundation of the house (Prov, 2:18; 6:26; 7:24-27). 'He who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth' (Prov. 29:3).

The final area of upbringing concerns a person's *community duties* (more than 10 percent of the proverbs). Young people must gain insight into the well-being of the broader community. They must be a truthful witness (Prov. 14:5, 25; 17:8, 15, 23, etc.); put up security for the weak; do not bear false witness (Prov. 6:19), nor allow themselves to go in the area of wrath and blackmail (Prov. 11:15; 14:30; 15:18, 28; 17:18; 20:16, etc.).They must keep faraway from crime: theft (Prov. 29:24), and criminal assault (Prov. 1:10-19; 4:14-19, etc.).

What may be the primordial dynamic of education? If I understand the proverbs well, the primordial dynamic of learning is aimed at the good (tov). The good is a mixture of virtue,
which consists in safety (Prov. 1:33; 2:7-9, 21; 3:23-26), prosperity (Prov.3:13-18; 8:18, 21, etc.) and peace (Prov.3:17).[20] The good is life itself (Prov. 3:2, 16, 22; 4:10, 13, 20, etc.), a thriving tree, located by a spring, bearing abundant fruit (Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 15:4, 24).

The atmosphere of the good is appropriated by an attitude of awe and fear (Ps.34:9): an obedient and tactful feeling for God's creation; no defamation, no lying, no collaboration with injustice; promoting the good, pursuing peace and mutual respect (Ps. 34:12-15). Awe and fear are the principles of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; 4:7; 8:22; 9:10).[21] Wisdom initiates the new generation into primordial unfolding of the good: God. God is the soul and sculptor of the good. When a youthful person stands in awe of good, that person stands in awe of God (Ps. 34:9-15). Awe teaches a person to read life down on the level of the good in light of God: 'The experiences of the world were for Israel always divine experiences as well, and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world'.[22] God is the center of creation, the origin of good, the father of wisdom, the soul of the house, the source of fertility, the giver of the life-partner, decision in battle, the helper before the court. Awe leads us into the awesome reality of God (Prov. 14:27; 15:33; 22:4; Eccl 3:14).[23]

MIGRATORY LIFE

Now we leave the genealogical level and we enter the migratory life of the nomadic communities in the Middle East. If a person reads through the Genesis stories in a single sitting, she discovers how often people pulled up stakes and left a given area: Abraham moved away from Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen.11:31), from Haran (Gen.12:4-5), from Shechem (Gen.12:8), from Canaan (Gen. 12:10), from Egypt (Gen. 13:1), and so forth (Gen. 13:3; 20:1). In fact 'he journeyed from one stopping place to the next' (Gen. 13:1-3). The same is true of Isaac end Jacob (Gen. 26:17-23; 28:10; 29:10; 31:22; 32:1; 32:9; 42:2-3; 46:1). The reason for this nomadic lifestyle is an economic one.

The nomadic life depends on the small stock of sheep and goats. For the maintenance of this small stock good grazing ground is indispensable. In the dry season such grazing ground can be found on the margins of fruitful agricultural land. In the rainy season nomads migrate deep into the steppe. This alternation is what defines the life of nomads.

The life of nomads finds its material centre in the tent *('ohel)*:[24] several strips composed of sheepskins are held by a wooden pole in the center and widely extended on the sides by cords and pins. The entrance was screened off by a curtain (Gen. 18:9-10). When the nomads moved to new grazing ground they folded their tent to pitch it elsewhere. The tent is literally their way of life.

A very important moment in the life of the nomads was the moment they left the grazing grounds in the desert to return to cultivated land, at the start of the dry season. This moment of departure was marked by the transition ritual *pesach:* people stood ready to leave, 'loins girded, sandals on their feet and staff in hand' (Exod. 12:11; cf. v. 33, 39), performed the blood rite (Exod. 12:7; cf.v. 22) and ate the meal (Exod. 12:8-9). Eating the meat served to give people strength for the journey. The blood rite was performed to protect the inhabitants of the tent for the destroyer *(maschchith).*[25] In these departures God took the initiative (Gen. 12:1) and promised assistance to his faithful: 'I will be with you *('ehye)* and keep you wherever you go and bring you back to this land; no, I will not leave you' (Gen. 28:15; cf. v. 20; Gen.15:7; cf.24:7; 26:3; 31:13-18; 35:1; 46:1-7; 48:15, 21.) Here we hear already the Name revealed to Moses: 'I am with you, yes I am with you' *('ehye 'asher 'ehye;* Ex.3:14). With this name on their lips the Israelites left Egypt, the house of slavery.

When nomads entered new grazing grounds, they performed a ritual of arrival, which can be described as follows: Abraham pitched his tent, set up a

stone as altar, and called out the name JHWH (Gen. 12:8; also see 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). This description contains three moments. (1) The tent is pitched. By this action the community makes itself present: the family now 'dwells' here. Entering the centre of the tent, the members of the community become identifiable: their faces become visible to each other. (2) A stone for sacrifice *(mizbach)* is erected and a sacrificial animal *(zebach)* is slaughtered. By jointly eating the animal in the presence of the Mighty One, the participants strengthen communion with one another as well as communion with the Mighty One. (3) They call on the Mighty One with the name that fit the arrival: 'Be present here! Protect this dwelling place. Drive out the forces which threaten life'. This is the original meaning of the Name YHWH: 'May He be present. May He let his face shine upon us. May He assert his power here'.[26] With this name on their lips the Israelites entered the new grazing grounds in Canaan.

COMMUNITY

Life in the genealogical context of an extended family and within the framework of the tent as the permanent center of a migratory lifestyle calls for a close-knit community. It is for that reason that in the family stories of *Genesis* we hear much about mutual relations: between man and woman, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

In order to gain deeper insight in the primordial depth of these mutual relations the nomadic families performed their community rituals. For instance rituals of greeting: life affirming gestures vis-à-vis another person (Gen. 27:29; 33:11). Or eating the meal: an event in which community comes to expression. We note this when guests are received (Gen. 18:6-8; 19:3; 24:33, 54) and when agreements are made between families (Gen. 31:44-54). Or telling stories: affording insight into the migratory areas, familiarizing people with the genealogy of the family and initiating the young into God-consciousness. The field of tension between conflict and reconciliation constitutes one of the most important narrative structures. The entire story of Jacob and Esau, for exemple, is organized around that field of tension (Gen. 27:33). Within this complex as a whole the quarrel between Laban and Jacob (Gen. 29-31) is played out. And within that story there is the confrontation between Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:29-30:24). All these tensions call for reconciliation: a kiss (Gen. 33:4-5) or a process of reconciliation (Gen. 31:48-54).

The ritualization of community both expresses and interiorizes the primordial spirituality of being born together with other human beings. We will sketch two paradigms of community life in more detail: marriage and compassion.

MUTUAL SOLIDARITY IN MARRIAGE

In *Genesis* we are told twice about the creation of man (Gen. 1:26-28 and 2:4-25). In the first account is the climax of all the work of creation of human beings 'and the Mighty One created the Earthling as his reflection, as the reflection of the Mighty One created he them, male and female created he them' (Gen. 1:27). The husband-wife relation is the embodiment of the God-human relation established in creation. Husband and wife, in their vis-à-vis relation, are the adumbration of the vis-à-vis which God creatively calls humans. This vis-à-vis stands paradigmatically for all those other communal forms: the relation between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, and so forth. All these forms represent the fundamental form of our humanity before God. Human beings are created in the image of God-and-man as a communal being: 'as humans with humans'.[27]

In the second creation story (Gen. 2:4-25) it takes a long time before the Earthling becomes male-and-female. A garden already existed; animals were already there; all these animals had already received their names (Gen. 2:18-20). But Adam is still alone. There was still no 'help which fit him' (Gen. 2:18-20).[28] In this translation Adam is interpreted as the fundamental form the woman has to 'fit'. It is however a question whether the Hebrew word *neged* has been correctly understood in this translation. Buber translates: 'I want to make for him a help, a counterpart'. In Buber's translation Eve becomes Adam's partner. But we have to take still one more step: 'Together with the mutual help, there is mutual correspondence, the understanding in word and answer as well as in silence, which builds up life in common'.[29] Eve is someone who interprets Adam. In Eve Adam has a hermeneutical counterpart: someone who draws attention to him and reads him. Indeed this one, is the one before him who can help him arrive at the deepest level of self-understanding. At this point the creation of the Earthling as a vis-à-vis is completed.[30] The primordial power of love between husband and wife transforms them into a single personal love-community.[31] In this community a man and a woman open up to each other unhindered: 'And the Earthling and his wife were both naked and were

not ashamed' (Gen.2:25). The nakedness of the vis-à-vis interprets the primordial immediacy through which a man and a woman discover each other (Gen. 4:1-25).[32]

MERCY AND COMPASSION

Every community is vulnerable: someone becomes ill, someone is marginalized or excluded, a wife loses her husband, a child his parents, someone has been mentally molested, sexually abused, drought or floods have taken their toll. In all these situations routine falls short: something special is called for: mutual solidarity, mercy and compassion.[33]

Mercy is *spontaneous kindness*, not restricted to certain relations or specific patterns. It functions between husband and wife (Gen. 20:13), between friends (1 Sam.20:8), between host and guest (Gen.19:9), between family members (Gen. 47:29), between kinsmen (I Sam. 15:6) and so forth. It can well up between people everywhere: in a friendly gesture, a smile, a conciliatory word, a helping hand, a generous welcome, an attentive ear. Mercy means abundance: good measure, pressed down, running over. Mercy is prepared to do favors. Abraham, afraid he will be murdered by lustful men who want to take Sarah as wife, asks her to do him a favor: 'Do me a favor: at every place to which we come, say of me, he is my brother' (Gen.20:13). Jacob asked Joseph his son for the favour of a good burial (Gen.47:29). Favor forgets itself in reaching out to the other. A mother gives her child 'a direction in the spirit of kindness' (Prov. 31:26), which is to say: she hopes with all her heart that her child may find happiness. Mercy is giving love, welling up spontaneously in the heart and streaming out abundance.

Compassion is *tenderness, set in motion by the other*. A mother is moved to tenderness by her child (Isa. 49:15); a father is inwardly moved to tenderness toward his son (Ps. 103:13). A person would have to be very hard 'not to be moved to tenderness toward the fruit of the womb, and not pity the children' (Isa. 13:18). When the sons of Jacob appeared with their youngest brother Benjamin before their brother Joseph, Joseph could no longer control his tears: 'With that, Joseph hurried out, for his tender heart burned for his brother Benjamin and he looked for a place to weep. So he went in another room and wept' (Gen. 43:30). This attack of tenderness touched him where his tears were located. At seeing Benjamin, that is where he got warm. The tenderness triggered the inmost, the womb (see Isa. 63:15). To Hebrew ears, this is self-

evident, for in *rechamim* (visceral tenderness) the word womb *(rechem)* is implied.[34]

Once the tenderness has been unleashed it can no longer be stopped. Joseph could no longer control his tears. All the grief that had for so long been held back now flowed outward without restraint. The rice of tenderness is sustained by the basic feeling that the other belongs to the human community. On account of this deep sense of connectedness, it touches a person immediately when a child cries, an orphan cries out for help, a widow begs for assistance. Their weakness cuts us to the heart, for they, like us, belong to the same community.

Mercy and compassion go hand in hand (Zech. 7:9; Jer.16:5; Hos. 2:21; Dan. 1:9; Isa. 63:7; Ps. 25:6; 40:12; 51:3; 69:17; 103:4;106:45-46; Lam.3:22). Mercy springs from the spontaneous will to do good; compassion is triggered by the need of the other; mercy shows itself in the sovereign will which prompts the person to give from within: tenderness is the divine weakness of our heart: we cannot restrain ourselves. Both are marked by abundance, the abundance of a blossoming dogwood tree in the spring.

CONCLUSION

I tried to show that primordial spirituality should be understood as a program of interiorization of indigenous realities. It is not enough to have indigenous stories, prayers or names. We have to deepen out these stories, to enter into these prayers, to understand these proper names. We have to transform indigenous spirituality into primordial spirituality, a process of interiorization which brings us in deeper contact with our createdness. The primordial spirituality in the Bible may be a help to explore this area.

NOTES

[1] An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest (Ed. E. Cousins), New York, beginning 1985.

[2] Etymologically deduced from indo- = in, and gignere = to produce.

[3] See Tu Wei-ming, Self-cultivation in Chinese Philosophy, in Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Ed. E. Craig), London-New York 8 (1988), 622-625.

[4] Deus Caritas Est, Rome 2006, 4.

[5] P.Hampson, Making sense of Love, in: The Tablet 28-01-2006, 4.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] V. Maag, Der Hirte Israels, in V. Maag, Kultur, Kulturkontakt und Religion. Göttingen-Zürich 1980, 111-144.

[9]'El (variants: 'Elohim, 'Eloha, 'Elah) goes back to the root 'wl or 'il, having as its basic meaning: power, might, strength. The same root 'wl or 'il also underlies the words for 'tribe' and 'tribal leader'.

[10] See: C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, Minneapolis 1984, 26, 36,125, 204.

[11] C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11 (BK I/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983, 456.

[12] Ibid., 47.

[13] H. Simian-Yoffre, nchm, in: ThDOT IX (1998), 340-355.

[14] Ibid., 349.

[15] K.Koch, qeber, in: TWAT VI (1989), 1153.

[16] Ibid., 1151; 1153-1154.

[17]G. von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, London 1972, 15-23; D. Morgan, Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions, Oxford 1981, 30-44; I. Höver-Johag, thob, in ThLOT II (1997), 486-495.

[18]Cf G.von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, London 1972, 15-23; 74-96; J. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, London 1981, 38; G. Liedke & C. Petersen, torah, in ThLOT III (1997), 1415-1422.

[19] G. von Rad, ibid., 40-41; J. Crenshaw, ibid. 38.

[20] G. von Rad, ibid., 62-65.

[21] G. von Rad, ibid., 53-73.

[22] Ibid., 62.

[23] Ibid., 190-195.

[24] See Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament I, under bayit, house, 232-236 (E. Jenni). Also cf. K. Koch 'ohel in TWAT i(1973), 128-141.

[25] R.deVaux, The Early History of Israel, London 1978, 367.

[26] YHWH is the 3rd person singular imperfect of the verb hayah which means 'being there, making one's present felt'. See K. Waaijman, Betekenis van de naam Jahwe, Kampen 1984, 35-47.

[27] C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, Minneapolis (MN) 1974, 229 ff.

[28] The majority of the exegetes agree that in reference to 'help' we must not primarly think of help in working or help in begetting offspring but assistance in a general sense. See C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 227.

[29] Ibid., 227.

[30] Ibid., 232.

[31] Ibid., 234.

[32] M. Buber, Recht und Unrecht. Deutung einiger Psalmen, in: Schriften zur Bibel (Werke II), München1964, 987.

[33] See H. Stoebe, chesed in ThLOT II (1997; H. Zobel, chesed in ThLOT V(1986), 44-64 See also H. Stoebe, rchm in: ThLOT III (1997), 1225-1230; H.Simians-Yofre & U. Dahmen, rchm in: TWAT VII (1993), 460-477.

[34] To Stoebe the etymological connection is self-evident (H. Stoebe, rchm, in ThLOT III (1997), 1226). To Kronholm this only partly explains its meaning (T. Kronholm, rechem in: TWAT VII (1993), 477-478). Aside from the etymology, however, the connotative proximity between the two terms resulting from high level of assonance is undisputed, certainly in poetic texts.

African Spirituality and the Regeneration of Africa

MATHOLE MOTSHEKGA

Introduction

The African-centered Paradigm for Moral Regeneration

Pixley Isaka Ka seme and John Langalibalele Dube, founder members of the African National Congress (the "ANC") envisaged a new Africa with more spiritual and humane societies. Seme, in particular called for a generation of Africa and the creation of a new and unique civilization for Africa and Africans. Both leaders were profoundly influenced by the products of the lodges of Prince Hall, founder of the African American Masonic Movement which catalysed the formation of both the Ethiopian and Pan African Movements.

Marcus Garvey a leading product of the Masonic Movement remains a leading exponent of Ethiopianism and Pan Africanism. Garvey exercised a profound influence on the founder of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League, which included *Lembede, Mandela, Bopape, Ngubane, Nkadimeno and Sisulu.* The founding President (Lembede) of the ANCYL, like Garvey, embraced the philosophy of an holistic world-view and its underlying humanist philosophy as well as its inherent values of equality, freedom and justice for all.

In his exposition of African holism and humanist philosophy, Lembede distinguished between the individualism of the West and the holism of Africa which sees both the visible and invisible order and one and sees every individual as an integral part of this Oneness (or Unity). As such, every individual has an obligation towards the welfare of the whole society. This philosophy had a profound influence on Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest statesmen of the 20th century.

In his address to the Ethiopian Movement (14 December 1992) Mandela sketched the history of the Ethiopian church Movement and its influence on the formation of the African National Congress.

Mandela traced the links between the Ethiopian Church Movement and the ANC and the struggle for National Liberation in general back to the 1870s when the products of missionary education observed and recorded that missionaries played a role in the accelerated dispossession of African lands and their natural resources from the 1880s onwards. They also noticed that the sons of the missionaries and magistrates were responsible for the enforcement of racially -discriminatory laws.

The collaboration of missionaries with the colonizers called for a response from the African people in general and African spiritual leaders in particular. The response took a political form on the one hand and a theological form on the other. The political front manifested itself as various provincial African political associations and newspapers during the last 30 years of the nineteenth century. On the spiritual front the African clergy sought to free themselves from the fetters of white missionaries by establishing African Independent Churches.

The Independent African Church Movement reached its peak with the establishment of the Ethiopian Church of South Africa by Mangena Mokone in Marabastad, Pretoria in 1892. The fundamental basis of the Ethiopian Church Movement was the African-Centered interpretation of the Bible and the recognition and application of the African Culture and traditions in the church. The fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian Church Movement were self-worth, self-help, self-reliance, equality, freedom and justice for all.

These tenets forced the Ethiopian Church to move beyond spiritual matters. It drew the advocates of Ethiopianism like a magnet to the growing Pan-African political movement which culminated in the formation of the ANC in 1912. It is in this sense that Nelson Mandela, former state President of the Republic of South Africa, traced the seeds of the formation of the ANC to the Ethiopian Church Movement of the 1890s.

Nelson Mandela, like the founder of the Ethiopian Church Movement, attached great significance to African Cultural Heritage. He recognized and acknowledged African Traditional religion as one of the aspects of the African Cultural Heritage. He noted that African traditional religion was increasingly recognized for its contribution to world peace and that it was no longer despised and seen as a superstition which had to be superseded by superior forms of belief. Mandela singled out the philosophy of Ubuntu as the contribution of

African traditional religion to the spiritual heritage of the human family that is being acknowledged.

The Ethiopian Church shared these tenets with the Pan African Movement. These tenets remain critical in the current efforts to decolonize both the state and the church. The decolonization of the church, in particular, demands a return to the Hermetic roots of the belief systems which were defined as paganism and banned. It appears that the banning of sabism (i.e. primal African traditional religion) threw away the baby with the bath water. This paper examines the ancient African roots of Sabism (i.e. African Spirituality) and its potential contribution to the Moral Regeneration Movement.

BACKGROUND

The founders of the Ethiopian and Pan African Movement were inspired by the discovery that Lord Khem or Thoth-Hermes, son of Ptah, who invented writing and the sciences, was an indigenous African from North East Africa. The Khemetic (or Hermetic) sciences saw spiritual and physical realities as two sides of the same coin.

The establishment of Catholicism as a state religion of the Roman Empire and the missionary campaigns of the Church during the Dark Ages against Hermetic sciences and religion, forced the Sabian (i.e. indigenous African) religion underground. During the European Renaissance, however, Hermetic sciences and religion with pre-Greek roots resurfaced. The Hermetic literature translated by Ficino contained sacred sciences of ancient African (both Ethiopian and Egyptian) origin.

During the second half of the fifteenth century one finds renascent scholars striving to heal the schism between secular and spiritual religions. For instance, Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno appealed to the Pope to reunite orthodoxy with the Hermetic spirituality. Although these appeals were not heeded, there remained forces within and outside the Orthodox establishment, which pursued Hermetic spiritual sciences. These forces included the Freemasons and Rosicrucians. Through them the spiritual traditions of Africa became the bedrock of Western civilization.

The founders of Ethiopianism and Pan Africanism were inspired by Hermeticism which they encountered in particular, in the Freemason Movement. Thus these leaders, notably Marcus Garvey, Pixley Isaka Ka Seme and Nelson

Mandela recalled the glory of Ancient Ethiopia and Africa and, in particular, its spiritual and material achievements.

The newly independent African States, however, did not explore this cultural heritage and consider its relevance to the challenges facing Africa today. This paper examines the spiritual aspects of this heritage in the light of the cosmology of the people of Black Africa.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD OF THE SABIAN RELIGION

The cradles of African civilization in Norm East Africa include *Akacham or Achum* (now Axum), *Ya-Amun* (now Yemen), *Meroe* (or Saba), *Napata*, *Phalaka* and *Dendera*. These are the early cities of the land of *Khem* also known as *Ta Shema*. The primal civilization of North East Africa is, therefore, known as Khemetic civilization.

The Khemetic (or Hamitic) civilization is based on Sabian (i.e. astral) spirituality which is embodied in the Zodiacs of *Meroe*, *Dendera* and *Matendere*. The *Matendere* zodiac was found 10 miles outside Zimbabwe. The Khemetic or Sabian culture and religion is contained in The Table of Ham also known as the Emerald Table of Thoth-Hermes and the Book of the Divine Light *(Pert em Heru).* The three zodiacs mentioned above are substantially identical. For the purpose of this paper the Zodiac of Matendere will be analyzed in comparison with the other two.

The Zodiac of Matendere

The city state of Matendere was one of the ancient and medieval BaRozwi settlements. The BaRozwi were a ruling dynasty of the people of the sun *(Bakhalaka).*

They came to be known as the Great magicians *(BaRozwi)* because of their great knowledge of sacred science which enabled them to make rain and destroy *(Ku-Rozwa)* their enemies. They derived their powers from the Goddess of Heaven and Earth *Mwari wa Denga or Mohale wa Ledatja.*

The BaRozwi were descendants of *Tovera* (now Thobela), a national hero who led them when they migrated from ancient Ethiopia on the Upper Nile. More specifically they migrated from the provinces of *Dongola* and *Naphtah* (now Kordofan) in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The Tovera dynasty descended from the Napatan and Meroitic dynasties of Ancient Ethiopia.

Like the Bakongo and other western, central and southern African communities, the BaRozwi inherited the Sabian Culture of ancient Africa (including Ethiopia, Yemen and Egypt). The Sabian culture and religion is embodied in the zodiacs of *Dendera, Meroe and Matendere*. The descendants of *Tovera (notably Mambiri, Murenga and Chaminuka)* brought this Sabian cultural heritage to Maphungubwe, Great Zimbabwe and other Southern African city states.

The Material culture of Southern Africa

Excavations conducted at Great Zimbabwe by Sir John Willoughby brought to light a great number of articles including crucibles, phalli, bits of excellent pottery and fragments of soapstone bowls. One of the most interesting articles he discovered was a piece of copper about six inches in length, a quarter of an inch wide, and an eighth of an inch thick. The article was covered with one of the triangular Zimbabwe designs and buried some five feet below the surface, almost in contact with the east side of the wall itself.

Mr. R.W. M Swan, a cartographer and surveyor, made other investigations relating to the construction of the Zimbabwe temple. At the confluence of the Lotsani and Limpopo River, Mr. Swan found two sets of ruins and several shapeless masses of stones not far from a well-known spot where the Limpopo is fordable. Both ruins were of the same workmanship as the Zimbabwe buildings. The courses were regular, and the battering back of each successive course and the founding of the ends of the walls was cleverly done.

The walls were built of the same kind of granite and with holes at the doorways for stakes as in Zimbabwe. Perhaps most importantly, Mr. Swan established that the radius of the curves of which walls were built was equal to the diameter of the Lundi temple or the circumference of the great round tower at Zimbabwe. He then proceeded to orientate the temple, and as the sun was nearly setting he sat on the center of the arc from where he found that the sun descended nearly in a line with the main doorway. He also found that a line from the center of the arc through the middle of the doorway pointed exactly to the sun's center when setting at the winter solstice.

On the Northern side Mr. Swan found two sets of ruins in the Lipokole hills, four near Semalali and one actually 300 yards from the mess-room of the Botswana Border Police at Motloutsi camp. Mr. Swan visited only a few ruins

that he heard of in the area and managed to fix the radii of two curves at the Motloutsi ruin, and four curves at those near Semalali, and he found that all of them were constructed on the system used at Great Zimbabwe.

On the Msingwani river further north Mr. Swan found seven sets of ruins. He measured three of the curves here, and found them to agree precisely with the curve system used in the construction of the round temple at Zimbabwe, and all of them were laid off with wonderful accuracy. On his way to Fort Victoria, Mr. Swan took accurate measurements of the small circular temple about 200 yards from the Lundi river. He recorded that the door of this ruin is to the North and the other 128° and a fraction from it so that the line from the center to the sun rising at mid-winter bisects the arc between the doorways, (see J. Theodore The Ruined Cities of Mashonaland, Vol 5, Books of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, 1969 pp X -XIII).

The mass of evidence as to the curves and orientation of the Zimbabwe and related ruins show that the builders of Zimbabwe temples were learned in geometry, astrology and astronomy. Zimbabwe culture, like its Maphungubwe progenitor, derived from the meroitic (or Sabian) culture and religion which was also based on the astral sciences.

The Meroitic (or Sabian) culture at Great Zimbabwe found further confirmation in the BaRozwi zodiac discovered 10 miles distant from Zimbabwe. This is the zodiac of Matendere that is analyzed below in comparison with the zodiac of Dendera.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ZODIAC OF MATENDERE

One of the most interesting findings in Bokhalaka was a wooden platter found in a cave about 10 miles distant from Zimbabwe.

Reproduction of the Zodiac of Matendere

Mr. Noble, the clerk of the Cape Houses of parliament preserved the zodiac of Matendere. In his description of this object Mr. Noble stated that

> "In the center of the dish, which is about 38 inches in circumference there is carved the figure of a crocodile (which was probably regarded as a sacred animal) or an Egyptian turtle, and on the rim of the plate is a very primitive representation of the zodiacal characters, such as Aquarius, Pisces, Cancer, Sagittarius, Gemini, as well as Taurus and Scorpio. Besides these there occur the figures of the sun and moon, a group of three stars, a triangle and

four slabs with triangular punctures (two of them being in reversed positions), all carved in relief, and displaying the same rude style of art which marked the decorated bowl found by Mr. Bent in the temple of Zimbabwe. A portion of the rim of the plate has been eroded by insects, probably from resting on damp ground. Altogether, the relic presents to the eye an unquestionable specimen of rare archaism, which has been remarkably preserved through many centuries, probably dating back even before the Christian era."

Previous observations by Mr. Swan established that the builders of Great Zimbabwe and related ruins used astronomical methods and observed the zodiacal and other stars.

The crocodile in the centre of the zodiac of Matendere is a symbol of the Word *Umbe or Ham* of the Great God *Tapa or Pata* popularly known as *Rah.* The *Umbe* is also called *Hamptah.*

The shrine of the God *Ptah* is situated at Shambe, South of the Nuba Mountains in the ancient Ethiopian province of Naptha (now Kordofan) in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

The crocodile *Zambe* is a variation of the turtle called *Haramanuba (or Khepera)* the first physical manifestation of the sun *(Ra)* God. The remaining eleven zodiacal signs are the different manifestations of the sun. In each sign of the zodiac the sun takes the name of a different God. The twelve gods are called *lion (Bondorp)* gods, children of the Great Mother *(Mwari)*, Queen of Heaven and Earth. Besides these fixed stars there are the sun, moon and five planets. These seven celestial bodies are called the *Kabiri*, also known as the sons of *Rah*.

The three stars in the zodiac of Matendere are the three stars of the Orion (Urhana) belt known as *Makolobena (i.e. the three pigs of Luonde).* The pigs represent the primordial trinity comprising:

Usar	+	maat	+	Ra	=	Usarmaatra
Mena	+	maat	+	Ra	=	Menmaatra
Nuba	+	maat	+	Ra	=	Nubmaatra
Usara	+	(m)usasi	+	Hara	=	Spiritual Trinity
Osiris	+	Isis	+	Horus	=	Spiritual Trinity

The primordial trinity *(Usarmaatra)* generated the triune spirit and the four elements symbolised by the four slabs. The union of this triangle and the four slabs constituted the Benben stone. The four slabs also represent the four cardinal points or the two equinoxes and two solstices, corresponding to the four children *(Kheru) of Horus.*

The zodiacs of Matendere and Dendera are anchored on the Sabian cosmology which places the pole star at the apex of the cosmos. The pole star *(S'ba)* is also called *Hathara,* the goddess of *Punt.* This goddess is the mother *(Hat)* of the solar *(Hara)* principle. The first emanation of *Hara* (i.e. the Divine Light) is called *Harana (or Arhana),* which ranks as the spiritual father symbolised by the three stars of the Orion (Urhana) belt. This means the spiritual father is a triune principle.

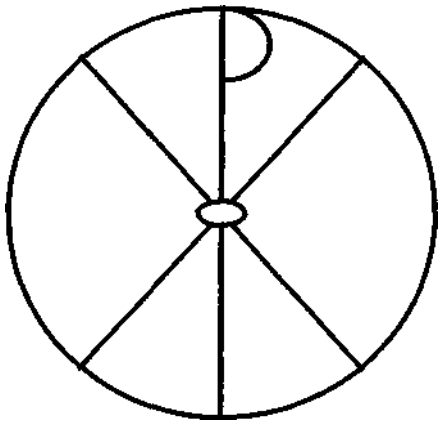
The Sinus (Saba) star is the first physical manifestation of the spiritual mother *(Kore or Man),* also known as *Sabanvadatja*. There is a small star called Sinus B *(Nakana)* which takes 50 years to orbit Sinus *(Naka)* A. These two stars represent the Great Mother *(Mwari)* and child *(Hara or Kara).* The principles of Divine Motherhood *(Musasi)* and child *(Kara)* became the cornerstone of the solar cosmology and Ancient African (including Ethiopian and Egyptian) divine kingship.

The Celestial Divine King

The spiritual child *Hara* is the first Divine King who succeeded *Usara,* his father, who was killed by *Sethe*, a brother. The God *Hara* came to be known as the Bull Tara of Heaven, which found expression in the solar Kara emblem.

The Solar Emblem

Fig A



This emblem embodies the primal trinity comprising:

The father principle

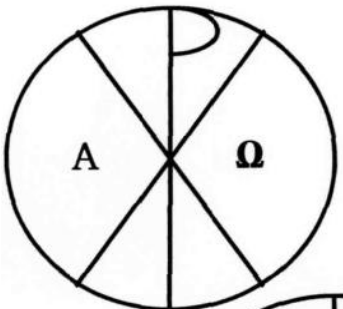
The mother principle

The child principle

The trinity emanated the life-force  *(Akhet)* popularly known sa IAO, Hahu or Jah.

The union between the Solar *(Hara)* principle and the life-force (IAO) came to be known as IAO (*or Jah*) *Abakara or Abaraka*. This god also came to be known as *Ra Harakhte* or *Yooshoo Nyambe.* This God is symbolised by the wheel of light.

Symbols of the Wheel of Light



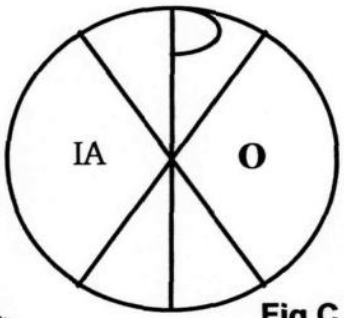


Fig C

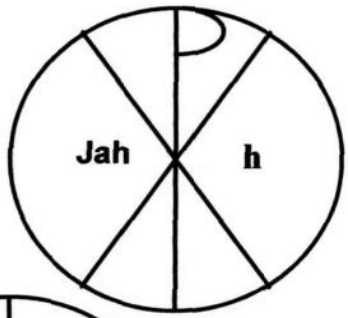


Fig D

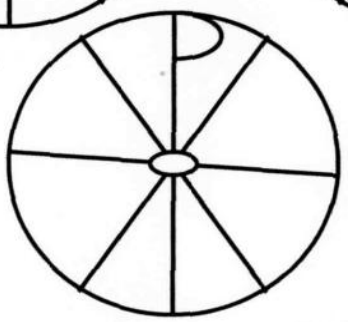


Fig E

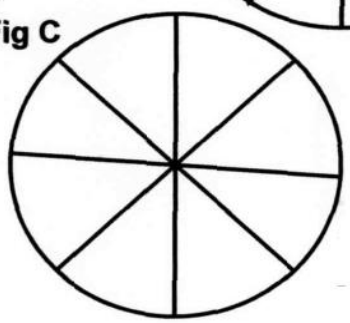


Fig F

The wheel of light consists of the eightfold *(Khnum)* principle anchored on the ninth Atum principle. These nine principles are called the *Ennead Pauti* which emanated from the God *Ptah*. The sum total of Ptah and its emanations constitute the Decade Amun that came out of nothing.

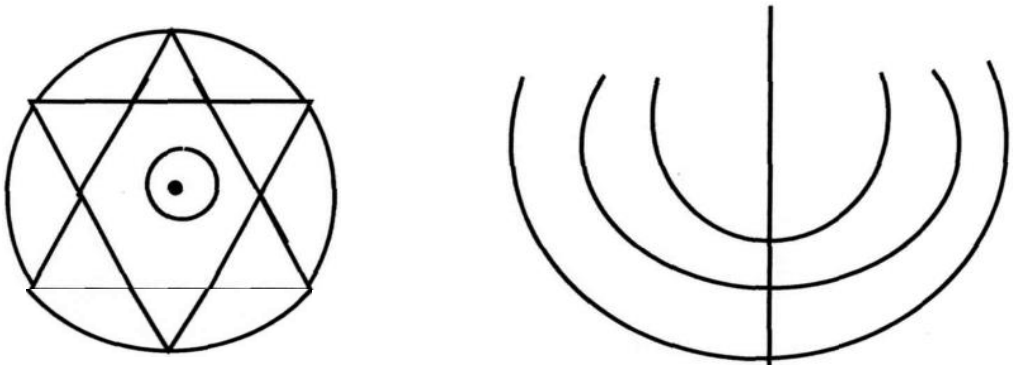
The concept Amun consists of ten ultimate principles of being:

A	+	m	+	u	+	n	= Amun
A	+	m	+	e	+	n	= Amen
1	+	2	+	3	+	4	= 10

God *Amen* is the ancient African God whose temple was discovered below the sphinx of Gesu in Egypt. The round (or oval) temple of Gesu is the model of the present day synagogues, cathedrals, and mosques.

The wheel of light generated the four rudders, and fourteen staircases of the ladder of heaven or chain of being. This ladder consists of the seven Pleiades or circumpolar *(Khelemela/Menrah)* stars and the seven outer planets *(Kabiri).* The Pleiades and the planets manifested themselves respectively as the Nutra and Mara principles, which are substantially the same.

The Nutra/Mara Monograms



The Nutra/Mara principles are also symbolised by a seven-headed snake or a crown with seven rays.

THE MIRROR OF HEAVEN AT GREAT ZIMBABWE

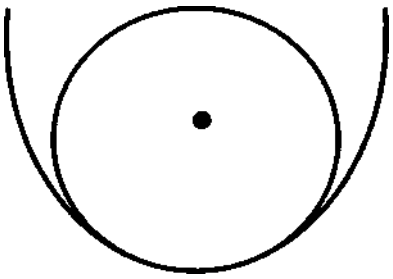
The Sabian religion practiced at Great Zimbabwe found one of its first expressions in the worship of the solar (gara) principle. The evidence of this solar religion is evident in some architectural features and decorations of the temples themselves, and in the many images of the solar disc *(Akhet)* which were found in the temples along with the other symbols of Solar *(Ra)* and Lunar *(ma)*, in short *Mara/Mwari* worship. The Mara or Mwari principle is the androgynous principle underlying solar energy.

The solar and lunar principles also determined the times and seasons for special spiritual and cultural ceremonies. The appropriate time for the greatest of these festivals of solar worship at Great Zimbabwe was at mid-summer when the sun (Ra) was most brilliant and its rays most energetic. This event took place during the summer solstice on the 25th of December.

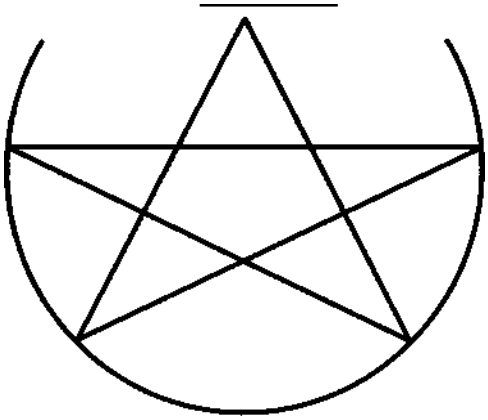
At Great Zimbabwe, therefore, the means were provided for determining the time of the summer solstice (25 December) and the side of the temple, which faced the rising sun at this period of the year, was adorned with decorations symbolical of fertility. The solar (and lunar) temples in Southern Africa not only honour the celestial gods, but also provided the means for observing the passage of the seasons and of fixing the limits of a tropical year, and thus provided the elements of a calendar.

The life-force *(Akhet)* which is generated by the lunar cycles is symbolised by the solar disc or five-pointed star. The relationship between this life-force *(Akhet)* and the lunar mother *(ma)* is symbolised by a solar disc or five-pointed star mounted on a lunar crescent.

Solar disc on a Lunar Crescent



Five-pointed star on a Lunar Crescent



The physical manifestation of the life force *(Akhet)* is symbolised by a baboon *(Soko)*. The divine baboon *(Soko)* symbolises more specifically, the word *(Mbe)* of the Divine Light *(Kara)*, in short, *Mbekara or Mberaka*, popularly known as *ThauThau-Harama* (i.e. the personification of the intelligence of God *Ptah*).

The sacred creation of Mbekara is the earth *(Tamara)* which is symbolised by the cube.

The earth is also called T*amera, Kumara, or Samara.*

The relationship between the solar disc, divine word, and the earth is symbolised by a baboon carrying a lunar crescent, mounted by a solar disc, squatting on the earth which is symbolised by a Cube *(Kaba).*

The Baboon

The life-force *Akhet* is the beginning *(IA/Ja)* and End *(o/h)*, in short, *IAO* or *Jah*. The *Akhet* (i.e. life force) symbolized by IHS while the Divine Light (Kara) is symbolized by the solar ☧ monogram. The relationship between the life-force and the Divine Light became the symbols of the spiritual son of God called IHS☧

The spiritual son of God is also known as *Ra Harakhte, Ucharakhte, IAO (or Jah) Abakara (or Abaraka), or Yooshoo Nvambe*. These divine names were adapted by different spiritual traditions and used as names of God.

Every individual has a direct relationship with God and gods. These relationships are governed by a moral code of laws called Negative Confessions. These moral laws are derived from the ladder of Heaven or Chain of being.

THE NEGATIVE CONFESSIONS

Each and every human soul is derived from the Bull of Heaven *(Hara/Kara)* and descends into the human body through the 14 staircases of the ladder of heaven or chain of being. Each of the 14 staircases of the ladder or chain has 3 moral laws and 3 judges or guardians of the law. Every soul that descends through these 14 staircases is implanted with 42 (3 X 14) moral laws. During its sojourn in the physical body the soul must abide by these 42 moral laws.

Upon death (i.e. separation of the soul and the physical body) the soul ascends the 14 staircases and faces trial by the 42 judges. Only souls which are found not guilty by the judges are transfigured into light and become one with God.

The possibility of transfiguration into light and becoming one with God shows that every individual is potentially a God. There are three stages or paths for union with God. These paths show the importance of ancestor worship in African religion. There are four spiritual hierarchies of being.

- First, the human body which is the house of the divine light and life that emanated from the Bull of Heaven;
- Secondly, the parents and grandparents who brought this human body into being;
- Thirdly, the fourteen gods or messengers who are intermediaries between God, nature and humanity; and
- Fourthly, the Godhead itself.

The soul that desires to see God must abide by moral laws, which govern all four hierarchies of being. This means that honoring ones ancestors and rendering devotional services to the phases of the moon and the sun is part of duties of the soul that wants to become God. Above all, such a soul must abide by the 42 moral laws.

In the Sabian religion the visible is conceived as the counterpart of the invisible creation. Sabism does not consist of a mere belief in a life beyond the grave, but the tracing out of the path whereby the just soul, when the portal of the tomb is lifted up, passes through the successive stages of initiation, of illumination, and of perfection, necessary to fit him for an endless union with Light, the Great Creator.

The individual has to go through these three stages of spiritual development during this life in preparation for a similar process after the death of the physical body. The house of Light that we call heaven is divided into three divisions, the *Rastau* (i.e. the territory of initiation), *Aahlu* (the district of illumination), and *Amenti* (the secret home of the hidden god). The great Pyramid is the earthly house of initiation, which prepares initiates for the final initiation after the death of the physical body.

THE TEMPLE OF INITIATION

The great Pyramid of Gesu contains various parts which were used for initiation into the mysteries of *(M)usasi* (Isis) and *Usara* (Osiris). The underlying philosophy of this initiation was that the death of the physical body released the soul to the Celestial sphere for Reunion with the great One (*Usara* i.e. the son of the sun). This idea of immortality was found in an inscription on the coffin of Ammu, buried in the sacred city of Abate (Greek Abydos) The inscription reads:

"Thou hast not gone dying; thou hast gone living to Osiris

Now thou hast found the words of order, the mystery of The secret Places."

The secret scroll containing the doctrines of immortality contain an account of the stages traversed by the flesh being loosed. It passed through stage after stage of spiritual growth. These stages are:

- The entrance on light (i.e. enlightenment)
- The instruction in wisdom
- The second Birth of the soul
- The initiation in the well of life
- The Ordeal of fire (hell)
- The justification in judgment

This initiation continues until the departed soul is illuminated in the secret truth and adorned with the jewels of Immortality, and able to become indissolubly united with the Light. This initiation requires an understanding of time and being embodied in the African Calendar.

THE AFRICAN CALENDAR

Ancient Africans used both the moon and the sun to fix the calendar They used, therefore the Lunar and Solar Calendars. These Calendars are embodied in the Zodiacs of Matendere and Dendera discussed above.

THE LUNAR CALENDAR

The planetary universe is divided into 12 divisions, which correspond to the 12 divisions of the astral universe. The former is the microcosmos and the latter the macrocosmos. The two universes constitute the macro-microcosmic order comprising 24 divisions of heaven which are divided into 3 parts consisting of 10 units (decans) each. Each division of the universe (Zodiac) consists of 30 (3x10) decans while the 12 divisions of heaven consists of 360 (30 X 12) decans. At the centre of the African Zodiacs there are:

- The Bull of Heaven *(Kara)*
- The four children *(Kheru)* of the Bull of Heaven
- The seven cows of Heaven *(Het-Heru)*
- and seven outer Planets *(Kabiri)*

These planets include the moon *(ma/Maja)* and the Sun *(Ra)* or the Union *(Mara/ Maria)* of the two. The Hosts of Heaven *(S'ba Aau)* in paragraphs 1 to 3 are enclosed by the planetary universe which constitutes the boundary between the visible and the invisible universe.

The invisible universe consists of seven Pleiades or circumpolar *Khemela/ Menrah)* stars which orbit the Bull (Tara) of Heaven. Together with the Bull the seven cows of heaven constitutive the wheel of Light. The seven planets and seven stars constitutive the paths of the fourteen messengers of the Bull of Heaven. These fourteen gods (i.e. messengers) are children of *Mwari* (i.e. the union f the moon and the sun) which brings the total number of the days of a lunar month to 30.

COMPUTATION OF THE LUNAR MONTH

The moon *(ma)* and the sun *(Ra)* are a couple. Both of them traverse the 12 houses of heaven taking 30 days in each. The conjunction of the two planets in each of the 12 signs procreates life on earth .Hence the character of every living thing is determined by the dominant house of heaven during its birth.

On each of the 14 days of the waxing moon, the union of the moon and the sun *(Mara)* generates one messenger God. From the new to the full moon the goddess *Mara/Mwari* generates 14 messenger *(Bondoro)* gods. These gods (or angels) are the intermediaries between the goddess *Mwari,* the ancestors and humanity.

From the 15 to 28 of the waning moon, the 14 messenger gods which descended into the sublunary world (from 1 -14 of the waxing moon) ascend to heaven to refill their energy before the commencement of the new lunar cycles. The two dark days of the Lunar month are added to 28, bringing the total number of days of a lunar month to 30.

In theological terms it means that God *(Ra)* is the One that divides itself into two (*ma+ra*) which, in turn, emanates the solar (P or Ra) principle that is divided into fourteen parts to nourish the earth, humanity and all living things. Thus the son of the sun (*P or usar-apa*) is born during the dark moon and cut into fourteen pieces during the first half of the lunar month. From 15 to 28 of the month, the 14 parts die and become reconstituted during the two dark days of the moon. The sun *(Ra)* and the planets', Venus *(Mara)* and Mercury *(Kara)* came to symbolise the physical manifestation of the spiritual trinity.

COMPUTATION OF THE SOLAR CALENDAR

The solar calendar is based on the concept of the black Madonna *(Saba/Mwari)* and the child *(Hara / Kara).* The former is symbolized by the planet Sinus (Saba) A and the latter by Sinus (Hara) B. These two gods are represented by the twin towers in the Zimbabwe temple and the monoliths in

temples of ancient Ethiopia and Egypt The Solar calendar is primarily based on the motherhood and sonship of God.

In June, the star Sirius *(Saba)* appears before Sun *(Ra)* rise marking the beginning of the inundation of the Milky Way, which represents the Celestial river. The water of this river  represents the great mother (*Mwari)* who gave birth to the Sun *(Ra)* God which, in turn, emanated the light child (*Ihy / Hahu)* in July. The Phenomenon described here established the Sirius (Sabian) cycle which is the foundation of the solar year. In other words the solar year is based on the concept of a spiritual mother *(Mwari)* and child *(Gara).* The light child *(Ihy/Akhet)* together with the Divine Light *(Hara)* which emanated it, constitutes *Harakhte (Xpakhte)*. Thus the concept *Mwari* (mother) and *Harakhte* (i.e. light and life) represents the Black Madonna (Sirius A) and the child (Sirius B).

From the one predawn rising of the Sirius star to the other takes 365% days. This period constitutes the solar year. The light child *(Hahu/Ihy)* emanates from the Sirius *(Saba/Mwari)* star which created the ten gods of first time known as the *Neteru* who inhabit the city of the sun called *Annu*. The birth of these gods was celebrated by Candlemas (i.e. feast of lights) in August.

The Lunar and Solar Calendars embody the process of spiritual and physical evolution which culminated in the physical manifestation of time and being .At the physical level this evolutionary process is embodied in the agricultural cycles based on the seasons of the year.

SEASONS OF THE YEAR AND SPIRITUAL FESTIVALS

The African year is divided into three seasons of four months each. These seasons are called *Shema. Akhet and Faro.*

The Shema Season (May - August)

The 1 May is sacred to the Great Mother *(maia/ma)* who corresponds to the Secret Being or Absolute Darkness celebrated on this day to honor the great Mother symbolized by the Chevron designs at great Zimbabwe. On the 25 May the Canopus *(Kanuba)* star appears, symbolizing the birth of the Divine Word *(Khem/Shema)* out of the great mother who appears as the black cow *(Musasi)* of heaven. This Divine Word *(Khem/ Shema)* is also symbolized by a bull *(Tara).* Thus the black cow *(Musasi)* and bull *(Tara)* established the first principles of motherhood and childhood.

In June the great Mother (Ma/Mala) appears before dawn as the Sirius *(Saba/ Mwari)* A and B. Here Sirius is the mother *(Mwari)* and Sirius B the Child

(Ra). In July the child *(Ra)* is the sacred fire that emanates the light child *(Hahu/Ihy)* which transfigured itself into the ten gods *(Neteru)*, which inhabit the city *(Annu)* of the sun during the month of August. The birth of the gods brought the first season of the year to an end.

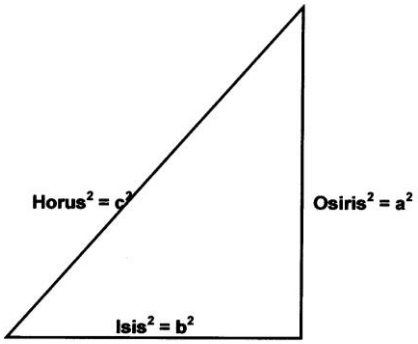
The Akhet Season

In September the three stars of the Orion *(Urhana)* belt appear, marking the beginning of the Akhet Season. This is the seeding or ploughing time. The stars of the Orion *(Urhana)* belt are followed by the Bull *(Tara) or Usar-apa)* and seven cows of heaven in October. The three stars of the Orion *(Urhana)* belt ushers the African New year. These three stars symbolize the spiritual

- Father *(Osiris)*
- Mother *(Isis)*
- Child *(Horus)*

The African New Year, therefore, is a spiritual holiday commemorating the primordial trinity. The emblem of the trinity is the right angled triangle. This triangle gives expression to the law of squares which says the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides.

The law of squares



The law of squares means that:

a^2	+	b^2	=	c^2
$Osiris^2$	+	$Isis^2$	=	$Horus^2$
$Mind^2$	+	$Thought^2$	=	$Words^2$
$Spirit^2$	+	$Soul^2$	=	$reason^2$
$Thauthau^2$	+	$Maat^2$	=	$Kara^2$
Ka^2	+	Ba^2	=	$Chat^2$
M^2	+	U^2	=	Ntu^2
M^2	+	u^2	=	ndu^2
M^2	+	o^2	=	tho^2
M^2	+	u^2	=	thu^2
M^2	+	u^2	=	tu^2
M^2	+	u^2	=	$munhu^2$
$Father^2$	+	Mother	=	$Child^2$
3^2	+	4^2	=	5^2
9^2	+	16^2	=	25
		25	=	$\sqrt{25}$
		5	+	5

In this law the number 25 represents the 25 spheres of being while the number 5 represents the five constitutive principles (i.e. elements) of being.
In this number 25

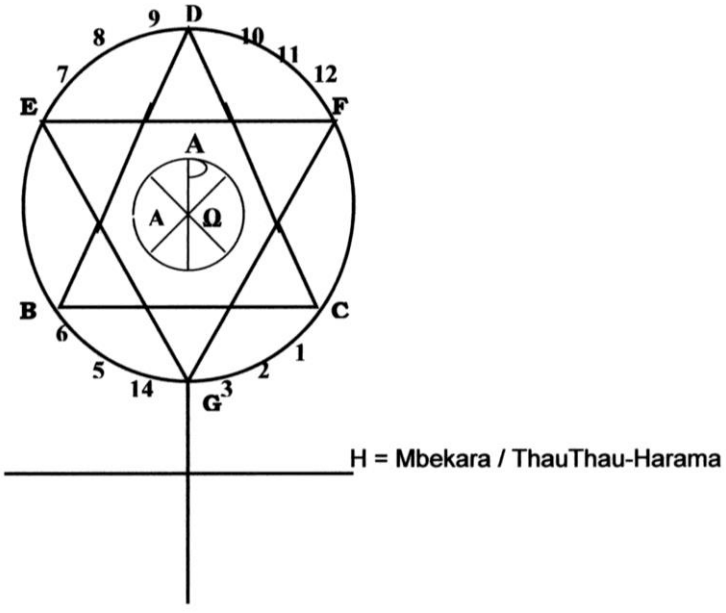
3 = the trinity
10 = ten planetary gods (i.e. gods of the city of the sun)
11 =12 astral gods presiding over the 12 signs of the Zodiac
25

The number 22 (10 +12) represents the great mother *(Kore/ Mari)* of the solar *(Hara)* principle, which comprises the five constitutive principles.

In the five principles the fifth principle also found expression in the number seven. In the Zimbabwean temple the relationship between the great mother *(Kore/Saba)* and the child *(Hara)* found expression in the ratio between the diameter and the circumference 22/7 = 3.14 .In this ratio 3 = trinity and 14 = the 14 messengers (angels) of God. The number 14 also represents the seven Pleiades or circumpolar *(Khelemela/Menrah)* Stars and seven outer planets *(Kabiri)* which constitute the ladder of Heaven or Chain of being. These 14 gods operate through 24 elders *(Bondoro)* who govern the 24 hours of the day.

The relationship between the trinity(3), fourteen(14) messengers and twenty-four) elders is symbolized by the ANKH Monograph which represents the life concepts

The ANKH Monogram



In this monogram the letters (A-G) represent the *Kabiri* while the number (1-12) represents the 12 elders presiding over the twelve houses (Zodiac) of

Heaven. The letter H represents the Word of the Divine Light (*Mbekara)* and the Intelligence *(ThauThau-Harama)* of the First Cause *(Rah).*

The Divine Light or intelligence emanated the earth (*Tamara)* which is symbolized by the Cube *(Kaba)*. The month of October is a holy period during which the spiritual life manifests itself. .During November this month nature is reborn, plants grow, and animals give birth, in preparation for the incarnation of the human spirit itself.

The incarnation of the human spirit starts during the December Dark moon (i.e. union of the moon and sun) called *Mara* or *Mwari*. This union culminates in the birth of the son of the sun *(Usara)* during the full moon of December. The God *Usar-apa* also known as *Khem* or *ThauThau* incarnates on the summer solstice (21-25 December) when the sun has reached its fullest strength in the heavens.

This newly born baby is called the (u) light *(Chara)* and the life *(Akhte).* In short, *Ucharachte* (or Eucharist). The Eucharist is the first fruit that symbolises the first Celestial and Terrestrial lion *(Tau, Simba and Kapha)* King. This king remains in seclusion for 12 days (25 December to 6 January) for purification or purgation by water. This rite of passage came to be known as baptism.

In Ancient African temples the 6 of January was the public manifestation of the lion *(Bemben)* King. This feast came to be known as the *Timkat* (Abyssinia) Epiphany (Western Christianity), and the feast of Tabernacles (Judaism). During the Period December to January African communities held first fruits festivals. The Divine rulers and their priests made sacrifices to their ancestors (Both family and royal), 14 messenger gods, 24 astral elders , the God of the North and South poles (P) who holds together the four quarters of the earth.

The Faro Season (January - April)

The period January to April represents the harvest *(Faro)* season. This is the time for harvesting and enjoying the fruits of the earth. The fruit that is harvest is the divine king *(Faro)* who is killed during Easter when the sun *(Ra)* enters the house of Aries (*Kara* i.e. the ram headed man). Here, the sun is crucified and cut into pieces to symbolically feed humanity. This dying God is described as the lamb of God who nourishes the world.

The resurrection of this God is marked by the erection of the May Pole and celebration of the fire ceremony.

The Divine ruler and his priests ascend the holy mountain after fasting and other purification rites. They spent days praying and making sacrifices to God and Gods after having ordered all people in the community to extinguish all fires.

They return from the mountain with a new fire which is distributed throughout to regional and local leaders. This ceremony also renews the rulers' loyalty to the divine order and the people's loyalty to the ruler.

The African Calendar has both spiritual and agricultural functions. The imposition of foreign calendars and religions on Africa and concerted efforts to obliterate the African spiritual traditions, languages, rites of passage and the cultural heritage in general have degraded and dehumanized the African.

CONCLUSION

Ancient Egyptians derived their Hermetic Sciences and philosophy from the Ethiopian Brotherhood called the Followers of Horus, The Falcon God. This legacy of Ethiopia to Egypt became the bedrock of human civilization which catalysed the development of modern religions and sciences the world over. The problems facing spiritual, civic and political institutions in Africa today could be dealt with effectively by applying the tenets of this Hermetism which were banished as Paganism.

Hermetism provides a sound basis for the interfaith movement and could bring out the unity of reconciliation of religious conflicts which plague the world. The current piece meal transformation of the church in Africa in the name of inculturation is destined to fail because it does not address the fundamental theological questions which separate the African from the Western Christian Church. It is suggested that a new theological curriculum and discourse be initiated which starts with the Hermetic tradition from which Moses, Jesus and Mohammed drew most of their teachings.

The existing church infrastructure could be transformed to infuse the universal Hermetic tradition and be turned into both Spiritual and Community Development Centres.

African Spirituality that Shapes the Concept of Ubuntu

MAAKE MASANGO

INTRODUCTION

The great gift that God has given African people is the spirit of *Ubuntu* (humanness). This concept of spirituality is as old as the beginning of creation of the human race. Bhengu actually suggests that:

> " This concept began when man (sic) was declared human, especially when the divine goodness was instilled in him - then man embraced the concept of *Ubuntu* (humanness)." (Bhengu, 1996:64)

In other words, *ubuntu* is part of humanity. In fact one grows up with this concept from childhood, especially in an African village. As the process of growth continues, one is allowed to pass it on to other human beings. In short, it is passed on from generation to generation. It would not be wrong to say that a human being is nothing but humanness or *umuntu* (a person) as it is shared in an African language. This concept of *umuntu* manifests itself in the image and likeness of God in each individual person of the human race. The book of Genesis captures the above concept in a most beautiful way.

> " So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;
> male and female he created them." (Gen. 1: 27)

In an African village this image is compared to *ubuntu*, which is also connected to spirituality that forms values and good character among human beings. This concept was there from the beginning of time, and never stopped existing within the circle of the human race. The author is able to trace this concept through well-known ancient philosophers, mentioned in ancient writing by Hermes. Some appear in science and in theology, for example, for years Pythagoras studied African philosophy in Egypt under the high priests named Sochts and Onuphis. These African philosophers taught him great concepts about the "inner values and concepts of humanness," which was a gift given to human beings by God. Koka actually noted that these concepts were based on the hermetic doctrine of "*Macro – a microcosmic theory of creative Emanations.*" (Koka, 1999:13) These concepts were connected to the spirituality that began

shaping the African people. As the process continued to develop, African people connected it as a way of life. Later on Thoth - Hermes (Egypt) further developed the idea as a process of human personality and called it "*Buntu* or *Ubuntu*".

Broodryk shares insights that are worth quoting:

> "The above theory held that as a human being, like the cosmic *Monad (Atum*/Creation - God) first into *Ntu (Nut) - Ra* (Two in one); secondly into Triad (Three in one = *Mundu*) and lastly into a Fourfold principle - which is fountainhead of "nature and Primal Image of Gods" - according to Thoth - Hermes - who was referred to as the "Personification of the mind of God". (Broodryk, 2002: 2)

He - (Thoth - Hermes) taught that human personality, *Buntu / Ubuntu* consists of a triad and the fourth principle which consists of, in figures, 3+4 = 7- that explains why the figure 7 is the most important figure in the life of a human being. It is a symbol of a "Perfect man." This doctrine was also studied by Plato who was a pupil of Pythagoras. He followed his masters, as well as the two Egyptian priests who taught him for twelve years and finally took this theory and concept to Europe. The summary of their developed theory was now shared in the following way:

> " God (Supreme God) did not only endow man (sic) with his "Goodness", but also, equally inseminated this divine element into all human beings." (Savory 1988: 29)

The above statement reminds the author of the connection between creation (image of God) and the gift of life (Breath breathed in human beings), which brings us closer to the concept of *Ubuntu*, that leads us into deep African Spirituality. The question to ask is, what is spirituality?

CONCEPT OF AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY

The theme of spirituality has become a common interest in modern life currently evidenced both at popular and scholarly levels. This theme is heard on radio and television. It is also shared in Seminars, Conferences (such as the one we are attending) Universities, classes, course work and curricula. People are re-visiting this concept, especially in our country. Why? Is it because of the legacy of apartheid, which made us concentrate on the liberation of the people during the struggle? Now that we are facing a new democracy, we need to re-visit this theme in order to rebuild the country - hence we need to re-examine this concept, especially the concept of *Ubuntu*. In the new democracy people are in need or are searching for a deeper meaning of life. The question to ask is, is the Church or are religious institutions able to address the spiritual hunger that is experienced by the nation of South Africa? It is also interesting that many African people are tracing

their African roots. This journey is traced through name changing from English to African names. It is also analyzed through changing city names such as Pretoria to its original name Tshwane, Louis Trichardt into Makhado etc. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note that whites are now learning these concepts by adapting to these changes, while others are getting angry. Radio 702 and other stations share these new ideas that have developed since the new democracy. The Church on the other hand is also struggling with these changes, in liturgy, prayers, hymns etc. Churches had to start addressing these changes that are taking place. As a result of these changes, our denomination had to deal with overtures sent to the General Assembly.

In 1989 one of our white Churches approached the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa regarding the issue of Spirituality and ancestor veneration. Our white counterparts saw the above concept as a cult, which led Africans into idolatry. This raised serious debates at the Assembly. As an African I need to remind the reader that the question of spirituality and ancestor veneration, as a cult, became crucial to African delegates. African people centered the arguments on respect for the dead. It is important to note that the respect for the dead and so-called 'veneration' constitute one of the common features of African liturgies, but bears only a slight resemblance to our cult of the dead, especially for those who live a Christian life. When a Christian dies, it is believed that the person is with the Lord in Heaven. Our whites need also to know that in African lives there are two notions that developed as a result of Christianity, i.e., the concept of dualism became part of our lives. There are those among Africans who live a Western as well as an African life. In other words, African delegates started sharing about the process that developed during colonial days, which divided people into notions of those who are good and those who are bad. This concept of dualism continued as missionaries taught their own way of life. At one stage, we had graveyards divided into two parts, one for Christians, another for non-Christians or non - believers. In other words, those who live a good life are regarded as role models who shape good life in the community. The point was missed that the concept of ancestor worship has a great connection with the notion of '*Ubuntu*.' There is a great belief among Africans that if a person lived a good life and dies (divine life), that person is believed to be with God in Heaven. There is also a belief that the person lives in another world (eternal life) - hence when they were buried, food and other important items were provided and were buried with the person. Therefore, when you speak to God you cannot talk directly to him, because you are not his equal. In other words, you share your problems, happiness

or any other difficulties through a mediator to a higher God. The concept of authority comes into play; for example, when you connect the above process with the concept of '*induna*,' (spokesperson) or spirits, you will begin to understand the world of communication among African people. Mbiti reminds us that:

> "In the African view of the universe, the spirits fill up the area between man and God." (Mbiti 1977: 76)

This concept can be a beneficial contribution to understanding the world of communication among Africans, especially when analyzing the process of Hierarchy. Therefore, you can only speak to a King through a spokesperson. Returning to the concept of hierarchical structures, (ancestors) you can only speak to God through ancestors or mediators, especially the good ones who lived life to the fullest, i.e. good role models who also shared their good behaviour with others in the village. Let us now analyze the issue of death, which will help us to develop the concept of spirituality that leads to *Ubuntu*.

DEATH OF GOOD ELDERS

Generally speaking, not everybody becomes an ancestor in an African life. For example, those who lived bad lives can never be considered as ancestors when they die. In Africa (as mentioned before) death does not represent the end of human existence, but rather a change in its status. The notion of death creates a solution of continuity between the living and the dead - a solution marked by the difference on the scale between the "creditors" (the dead) and the "debtors" (their heirs). Belief in the existence of spirituality or spirit is widespread throughout Africa. Mbiti says that:

> "It is a natural consequence of the strong belief in African Religion that human life does not terminate at the death of the individual, but continues beyond death. It follows, therefore, that there must be myriads upon myriads of human spirits. Many of them appear in legends, myths and folk stories; others are spoken about in normal conversations among people; and some possess people, or appear to people in visions and dreams, or evening open."(Mbiti 1977:70)

The African world has a ‘distancing’ between the world of the living and the dead. Note that this process of distancing begins even before the last breath of the elderly has been breathed out. We are now entering the area of deep human spirituality through the process of death. In certain villages, elders become ancestors as they reach the prime of their lives. They become spiritual advisors to the young ones. They start sharing their spiritual gifts or insights while alive, and then proceed when they pass on to the other life. At that point of passing to

another world, some other villagers believe that ancestors share the image and likeness of God. Abimbola, when analyzing the above process, says:

> " It is important also to note that not all dead people automatically attain the status of ancestor. Death is not always a requirement for it.... The notion of ancestorship implies the idea of selection, before any other consideration to a social model based on the idea of exemplification, in the strictest sense of the word... the good elder becomes an image of God when he dies." (cited in Olupona, 2000:11)

In other words, an ancestor is someone who has reached a great age and maturity in life. Who during his/her lifetime has acquired a vast experience of life, including deep spirituality. At this point they will begin to share their experiences and their rich spiritual life with others.

This process starts in the prime of life. There are certain expectations of a good elder, especially during their last stages of life. His/her death must conform to the rules of the village or society to which he/she belongs. Awolalu (one of the articles cited in Olupona's book) shared a good explanation about the death of an elder. He says:

> "Death by ill 'reputed' disease (such as leprosy) or by accident (especially if provoked by lightning) means exclusion from the village (society) of the ancestors." (Olupona, 1991:106)

The above quotation illustrates that position, maturity and deep spirituality in the life of an elder plays an important part in forming a good person. In other words, living a good life as well as sharing your good values with others creates a good personality that will remain within villagers even when you have died. In short, the passing on of knowledge or wisdom creates a world of *Ubuntu* (humanness) among African people. The reader will now understand why there is a deep reverence or respect for the dead (ancestors) by African people. I need to emphasise that only those who have lived a good life, are respected. One will understand why they are able to guide Africans through dreams. Villagers believe that the society of these glorious dead represents a perfect community, unlike the society of the living, where we find good people and bad people, pure and impure people, handsome and ugly people etc. The above world introduces us to a concept of dualism, which is only experienced by the living, while the dead, especially good ones, experience goodness alone. Mbiti summarises this issue by saying:

> "In the land of the dead, contradictions, tensions, opposition are exempted" (Mbiti, 1990:36)

Zahan (article cited in Olupona) continues to say that:

> "The world of the ancestors is one that is free of antitheses and violence, because it resides in a slow time. Ancestors can, of course, becomes incensed and they are even susceptible to suffering." (Olupona, 2000:11)

Returning to the overture of whites in the Presbyterian Church: they understood the world of ancestorship as a cult or idolatry, and thus missed the development of spirituality that was connected to this concept, especially by those Africans who were Christians. If they understood this world and how it operates, they would not have approached the general assembly. Once again in an African community, a good ancestor is regarded as close to God or a supreme being. Therefore, an African person will always talk or communicate with a King via *indunas* or mediators. With the above facts in mind let us now analyze how African values are shaped in the village or community.

AFRICAN VALUES

The concept of *Ubuntu*, connected to good ancestorship, shapes a way of living that respects human beings, life, the elderly, as well as the community. At this stage, one is able to live with other people in a respectable way. It is a common saying among Africans, that it takes a whole village to raise a child. This is a type of spirituality that forces one to internalize African values as a way of life. In other words, in an African community a person is expected to be in relation to others, actually, a child could be disciplined by any adult in the village. I am aware that I will be accused of abuse in this world where human rights are respected more than community rights. In an African life you cannot live alone. Mbiti emphasizes this point by reminding us that, in the village:

> " The individual does not exist alone except corporately." (Mbiti, 1969:109)

In other words, a way of life, (which I call "spirituality"), is lived in a community with others. Donkor on the other hand says:

> " The individual is not only a physical being, but a spiritual and a divine individual, who lives with other human beings." (Donkor, 1997:8)

It is interesting to note that in the world of the African, the paternal (spiritual) and the Godly (divine) attributes of the individual are fully explored within the community. It can never be lived alone. In South Africa, the Nguni tribe shares another element of life that shapes a human being, through a powerful proverb. "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" meaning “a person is a person because of other people”. Growing up in the village, I discovered and came to appreciate that I am a communal being, nurtured and shaped by the ethos of other villagers. It took the whole village to form my own spiritual life. This process formed and continues to

form my own moral and ethical responsibility. I also became aware that in the western world people had to respect the privacy and the space of an individual, as well as that of other people. In an African community one is surrounded by lots of people, tribes and kinsmen and women. The other concept that continues to shape African spirituality and values, is rites of initiation in the context of transformation during maturational processes. This process enriches people to share their experiences with others. In short, the rites of passage such as circumcision, marriage and burials are good examples, which shape the process of growth that leads to the socialization and integration of a person into communal living. The aim of these rites of passages is to develop a good person who would live harmoniously with others. Setiloane affirms the above by saying that:

> "In African thinking, it was as a community of men, women, children and animals that people came into being.... Shaping children in order to learn to live with others in the community." (Setiloane, 1986:13 - 16)

The above statement is important because it emphasizes how a community shapes, nurtures and cares for the spiritual upliftment of people within a village. African people are by origin and nature communal people. They live in company with others, and share concepts of raising children together. Therefore being in relation to others, or belonging, represents the essential characteristics of being truly human. Hence, African people have no private faith or private spirituality. In other words, their faith and spirituality is communal.

CHALLENGES

With the above in mind one needs to share also that the world has changed, and continues to change. For example, we are experiencing violence and abuse within African communities. As we face these challenges of women and child abuse, we are forced to re-examine where the concept of *Ubuntu* broke down. In other words, we need to analyze the way we are raising our children in today's society. Is the village failing or has it collapsed? Digging deep into the African concept of spirituality will help us in rebuilding the nation to its original way of living and respecting each other as we did before. The above challenges of abuse and violence within South African society are deeply rooted in the yearning for understanding that we have in relation to other human beings. Pato is helpful in sharing the following insights about these challenges. He says:

> "These challenges help us to dig deep into African wisdom and spirituality. They also help us to re-examine our problems, and then meet the challenges that face us in South Africa."(cited in Kourie and Kretzschmer, 2000:96)

As modernism presents us with new challenges, Africans are forced to re-examine their faith and lifestyle – the original village life style. Our community has broken down; hence these problems of abuse and violence are emerging. We need to examine or analyze the social structures of our communities, tracing where the blockages occur, especially those of violence and abuse. We further need to ask the question, why are we experiencing these problems? I realized that the whole of life is viewed as religious from birth up to death. The whole of the process of life is spiritual, i.e., from the beginning when a child is born, named, going through circumcision, confirmation to man or womanhood, marriage, work, dying and burial. All these stages are sacred and develop one's spiritual personality. Through this process a lot is expected from our elders, especially in rural areas. Magesa had this to say:

> "As repositories of sacred traditions, the elders are bound by higher moral imperative-accountability to their eternal predecessors, the ancestors." (Magesa, 1979:155)

These great expectations, not only from the community, but also from the ancestral world are enforced upon you as you grow. As people accumulate experiences they are expected to pass them on to the next generation, before death. The reader needs to be aware that the author is talking only about good elders. Those who have lived and led an unethical life on earth - are pronounced guilty, and excluded from ancestorhood at death. In other words, they have misled others and did not play a prominent role in shaping the spiritual personality of other villagers. Mbigi and Maree state that:

> "Their challenge then is to build into the spirit of *Ubuntu*, a new dimension of citizenship to villagers." (Mbigi and Maree, 1995:8)

The expectation of elders is that they live a good life that will eventually influence others to develop their own spiritual personality - and thus become good citizens, good neighbours as well as fellow kinsmen. This is what is missing in the urban areas of South Africa today. This is perhaps the missing link and dimension of *Ubuntu* in post-independent South Africa, a link that has been destroyed, either by a legacy of apartheid or a western civilization. One can certainly understand why we have such a high rate of abuse and violence in our society. We must return to the basic way of life of *Ubuntu*, in order to rebuild the community. We must continue building on the collective spirit of *Ubuntu* and harness it for the productivity and competitive purpose of building the nation. As we cultivate this new spirit of *Ubuntu*, we need to harness it in order to manage the challenges of reconstruction and development. African spirituality that connects to *Ubuntu*, leads to team building, which will help form new values that will shape a generation that will work for peace. Mbigi and Maree once again say:

> "This spirit of *Ubuntu* will also help us to find a new identity which will transcend the ethnic divisions that haunt the African continent." (Mbigi and Maree, 1995:9)

As we strive towards unity, it is in the spirit of *Ubuntu* with its emphasis on working together, and respecting human dignity, that we can find our way forward as a continent. After addressing these problems faced by the new generation, then we can celebrate our global citizenship, where we can be both tribal and cosmopolitan.

CONCLUSION

African spirituality is holistic; it impacts on the whole of life. It is not considered an individual affair, because it is expressed in all levels of society, socially, economically, politically as well as among people - hence it contributes to the building of a nation. Pato identifies it in the following way:

> "African spirituality is identified as reflecting the wholeness of life, and is important in harmonizing life in all its fullness." (cited in Kourie and Kretzschmar 2000:3)

In short, African spirituality has to do with the concept of nation building and the integrity of creation. In that life, everyone is involved in rebuilding spirituality in the lives of others - ancestors are also involved in this process. Kappan further says that:

> "Contemporary spirituality impacts on the totality of life, it is non-dualistic, it does not posit a bifurcation between the secular and the sacred. It encompasses the entire life of faith, which includes body, mind (and soul) as well as the social and political dimensions." (Kappan, 1994:33).

The above highlights the concept of spirituality, which is ecological, manifesting sensitivity towards and solidarity with, the earth. It is regarded by Africans not as an object of subjugation, but as a mother and symbol of the divine. The connection with the whole of nature is therefore important, maturing it instead of dominating it. In closing, life in an African village is connected to that entirety God created. African spirituality is a gift that we have in the continent, and we can thus share it with the rest of the world.

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