HEART OF DARKNESS:

A deconstruction of traditional Christian concepts of reconciliation by means of a religious studies perspective on the Christian and African religions

by

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Heart of Darkness

I chose the title of my thesis, "Heart of darkness" deliberately to challenge and deconstruct the Western notion that African religion and philosophy are somehow primitive or at most of limited significance to the rest of the world. In his novel bearing the same title, Joseph Conrad's main character, Marlow, sets off into the "heart of darkness" of Belgian Congo, only to realise during his journey, that lightness and darkness have been somehow inverted: darkness brings about enlightenment and whiteness death and despair. I believe that African religion and philosophy can similarly lead us to enlightenment where white, Western theology has failed (Conrad, 1983; Crafford, 1996a:3; Kgatla, 1999:130-133; O'Prey, 1983:9).

Darkness indicates night, the unknown, the impenetrable, but also creativity. I see theology more as a study of darkness, than of light. God remains beyond our finest description and theologians can only blindly delight in his unfathomable depths. Theology is always temporary, conditional and incomplete (Dunne, 1978:xi; O'Prey, 1983:9).

An interesting thing happened to Marlow: He set out to discover darkest Africa and in the end discovered himself. Marlow says that his journey to the "furthest point of navigation" somehow "[threw] a kind of light on everything about me" (Conrad, 1983:32). According to O'Prey (1983:15) this night journey represents the:

> … archetypal myth dramatized in much great literature since the Book of Jonah; the story of an essentially solitary journey involving profound spiritual change in the voyager. In its classical form, the journey is a descent into the earth, followed by a return to light.

I believe any quest for knowledge (and theological insight) is reflexive: when I study or investigate African religion and philosophy I also discover myself, and am changed by the "object" of my study. "Heart of darkness" indicates this intended reflexivity or feedback-nature of my study.

Abstract

African Religion offers new images and symbols of reconciliation that may enhance existing Christian reconciliation metaphors and liturgies. Traditionally, Christians understood reconciliation through the images of either Augustine's victory model, Anselm's objective model or Abelard's subjective model. While these images offered valuable insights, they are limited and increasingly difficult to understand in our modern context.

Postmodern philosophy presents theologians with the possibility of deconstructing dominant discourses in order to consider new possibilities. This approach is eminently applicable to the traditional Christian reconciliation models. A comparative study of Western Christian and African reconciliation myths, rituals and concepts is used to deconstruct the accepted positions on the matter of reconciliation.

Interviews with four African theologians, John Mbiti, Agrippa Khathide, Daniel Ngubane and Tinyiko Maluleke, reveal that African Christians have often understood reconciliation in more and different ways than those available in traditional Christian thought. They often derived their ideas from African Traditional Religion as well as the modern liberation struggle.

In studying African Traditional Religion, it becomes clear that that African religion offers very different options to traditional Christianity with regard to its view on God, ancestors and spirits, life force, and of special importance for this study, shame, guilt and sin. African religion's this-worldly focus views reconciliation as taking place on a mostly human level rather than between humans and God. African reconciliation rituals can be classified according to the purpose or the myths behind them. Some rituals are intended to create or restore community, while others are meant to propitiate or at least transfer guilt. A third

grouping of rituals have the purpose of either expelling or accepting (and thus in a certain sense neutralising) evil (or perceived evil) in the community. Other rituals have a number of intentions, and can use unlikely rituals like open rebellion or dance to bring about reconciliation.

A comparison between two religions should treat the religions equally. An investigation that examines both the integrating and transcending possibilities of religions can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the various reconciliation models without reference to some sort of supernatural reality. The anthropological and social sciences also offer valuable insights into the possible structure of reconciliation. And the South African context demands some minimum requirements for reconciliation in this country. When all these criteria are used to evaluate African and Christian reconciliation models, new possibilities emerge.

Different models show themselves to be useful in different contexts. Some African models can improve our understanding of reconciliation between humans and God, while others fit the social context of South Africa.

It seems that African thought and religion has a lot to offer to the study of reconciliation. The African emphasis on this-worldliness and community, the use of rituals and symbols, as well as Africa's still-coherent myths presents new and exciting perspectives. These insights and models can be incorporated into Christian liturgies and rituals that will deepen Christians' understanding and celebration of reconciliation.

Key Words

African Traditional Religion, Christianity, reconciliation, missiology, religious studies, comparative religious studies, postmodern theology, African theology, myths, rituals, liturgy, this-worldly, community, ubuntu, South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> (The creeds and doctrines of Western Christianity) do not make sense to us in Africa because they are encased in the mythology and worldview of the age in which they were formulated. Often they make no sense even to the modern Westerner with his/her scientific worldview and mythology. Hence the rebellion in the Christian West with strident calls for 'demythologisation', and 'God is dead' and 'Honest to God'. These are in fact calls for a new and more efficacious mythology.
>
> (Gabriel Setiloane, 2000:50)

The reconciliation between God and mankind, achieved by Jesus Christ – and the Church's ministry thereof – is the core of the Christian message. But, like all theological concepts, this reconciliation is described in the Bible through human language, human images and metaphors. These metaphors are not as clear and satisfactory for modern Christians as they used to be for the first readers of the Bible. For example, many images of reconciliation reflect the old Hebrew and Greco-Roman worldviews – views far removed from the twenty-first century.

Is it possible to translate the message of reconciliation into more suitable language and metaphors?

The practice of deconstruction, which developed from postmodern philosophy and epistemology, aims to do just that. Dominant discourses, which obscure other possible ideas, are deconstructed in order to discover alternatives to them. In the Western tradition of the Christian Church, the image of Jesus dying on the cross in order to placate an angry God and to pay for our sins, dominates our understanding of reconciliation. I believe that alternative metaphors and ideas of reconciliation may be pursued.

I am not the first to do so. During the past century African theologians had to interpret the Biblical message and the reconciliation of Christ as its central point in terms of their African

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worldview and language. They had to be creative to formulate the message and meaning of Christ to people who were (I hope to show) not as legalistically inclined as Paul's Roman audience, people to whom punishment and wrath were secondary to simple forgiveness and restoration (Zulu, 1998:192). I hope to find inspiration and ideas from their efforts and from African religious thought as a whole.

I am anxious to see whether these alternative reconciliation images are compatible with Christianity, or better still, more true to the Christian message and better suited for use in Christian communities. To the extent that is useable, I will make liturgical suggestions.

1.1   Research problem

In my research I address the problem of the inadequate and perhaps even offensive images traditionally employed to elucidate reconciliation in Christian theology and practice. Is it possible to describe God's gracious revelation and reconciliation by means of images and metaphors more relevant and appropriate to modern people and contemporary contexts? Can Africa's theologians and religions inform and guide us in this quest?

1.2   Aim of study

I briefly summarise postmodern thought and theology in order to justify and guide my deconstruction of traditional Christian models of reconciliation. I proceed to investigate both Christian and African concepts of reconciliation, hoping to discover several alternative images of reconciliation used by African theologians and in African religions. A number of these images and ideas may be compatible to Christianity and useful in Christian communities in South Africa.

I aim thus to first describe a number of reconciliation metaphors and ideas (religious phenomenology), then to evaluate these alternatives according to their applicability to Christianity (comparative religion), and lastly to apply the suitable images to the spreading of the Christian message through preaching, teaching and liturgy (missiology).

1.3   Motivation and relevance

I hope to gain personally from this study. As a citizen of the twenty-first century, I am uncomfortable with the "bloody" explanation of reconciliation traditionally expounded by the church. I acknowledge that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the way in which God reconciled us to Himself, and appreciate that it is meant to be "a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23), but I am uneasy with concepts like propitiation and sacrifice as the only possible ways in which to placate an angry God. I am even less pleased to preach it. If I could understand reconciliation by means of alternative, more humane images, it would serve both my understanding of God and my ministry.

Many liberal theologians have in the past century objected to this traditional view of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. The idea that the blood of a human being could be required in order to save people from the wrath of God, as someone like Van Ruler suggested with his idea of atonement, led to passionate objections (Van de Beek, 2004:36).

P. Smits wrote in 1959 that: "… if Christian faith would mean that somebody else must be killed for my sins, and that God requires that for my salvation, I refuse to accept that. It is

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against all human dignity and responsibility. If that would be Christian faith, please, give my portion to the dog (*Geef mijn portie maar aan Fikkie*)!" (in Van de Beek, 2004:37).

This study is also relevant to South African society. Since the demise of Apartheid in the 1990's, the process of reconciliation is of national importance in South Africa. Our ideas on reconciliation are fed by both an African worldview, and the Christian message of reconciliation. A closer, reciprocal relationship between the traditional African and the Christian views could only strengthen the reconciliation process in South Africa, but even more so, in *South Africans* (Van der Walt, 1992:28).

In his study of Zulu and Western Christian understandings of 1 John, Ndwandwe (2000:337) observes that religious symbols often seem to be universal, but further study reveals that different cultures interpret similar symbols differently. He recommends that the discontinuity between African and Christian symbolism be studied.

The solution probably lies not only in exploring the symbols, but also the myths that produce them. A deeper understanding of both myths and symbols would help African people and Christians understand one another better. I hope to reveal the myths behind African reconciliation symbols and rituals, which may help South Africans to become reconciled with one another.

At present, reconciliation is a buzzword, studied and promoted worldwide. But I am not so sure that the traditional African understanding of reconciliation has been fully explored and applied to either reconciliation between God and humans or to the intended relationship between humans themselves. I am convinced that the significance and applicability of African theology and religion's contribution (with its emphasis on this world and the

importance of the community) is not limited to South Africa, but can deepen our universal understanding of reconciliation, just as some Eastern ideas have made a world-wide impact.

Fourthly, liturgical guidelines and rituals, derived from African customs, are sorely lacking in our South African churches. While some individual churches and clergy have managed to make some headway in the development of reconciliation rituals, most churches have yet to do so. We need more reconciliation rituals that will facilitate reconciliation on the personal, congregational and national levels.

1.4   Research method

As for method, I study the available literature on African religion and thought. My research therefore, firstly comprised a literature study. I studied numerous sources to come up with African reconciliation models. Some of my sources were freshly written by young African theologians, while I also considered the valuable insights of older authors like John Mbiti and Gabriel Setiloane. I read the myths and legends of Credo Mutwa and the old, but fascinating anthropological account of Junod.

I am aware of the recent debate as to whether white theologians can and should study African theology (Van Niekerk, 1999:115-122; Crafford, 1999:122-127; Van Rooy, 1999:127-130; Kgatla, 1999:131-137). Kgatla distinguished between outsider ("topsiders") and insider ("undersiders") approaches to African religion, and concluded that an insider view is preferable: "Africa must be allowed to speak. Outsiders should learn to listen …." (1997:633). While I take Kgatla's concerns seriously, I cannot but explore African religion

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as an outsider. I therefore follow a reflexive or feedback approach, as I will explain in the next chapter.

I also conducted a number of interviews with prominent African theologians: people who have wrestled with the message of Christianity in an African context, and who have given liturgical expression to this process. I chose to do the interviews not only to gather more information, as the best insights into African theology was generally available in the literature, but also to be guided and tested by these theologians who have more experience in the re-interpretation of the Western Christian message into a non-Western culture. I shared with them my concerns and questions and they contributed greatly to my overall understanding of African religion and philosophy.

I then devised a number of criteria to compare and evaluate old and new reconciliation methods and identify suitable African reconciliation models.

1.5   Outline

1.5.1   Chapter 1: Introduction

In my introductory chapter I deal with the relevance of the study, the research problem, aims, motivation and method, as well as a number of departure points and limitations of the study. These include my basic presuppositions.

1.5.2   Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In the second chapter, I review postmodernism and postmodern theology, and determine their impact on a study of religions. I give an account of my views on a number of issues such as the validity of comparative religious studies, the insider/outsider problem and religious naturalism. From the postmodern perspective, I also consider a number of concepts which I will use in this study, for instance myths and rituals.

1.5.3   Chapter 3: Traditional Christian Images of Reconciliation (A Systematic Theological Perspective)

To introduce the subject, I give an overview of Christian understandings of reconciliation. As this is a study in Religious Studies and Missiology, and not a systematic theological exposition, I do not examine the various views but merely give a summary of how Christian theologians have explained the concept of reconciliation. It includes Augustine's victory theory, Anselm's objective theory of *satisfactio vicaria*, and the subjective reconciliation theories of Abelard and others, modern ideas as well as Biblical alternative descriptions of reconciliation.

1.5.4   Chapter 4: African views on Reconciliation (Phenomenology)

In Chapter Four I explore African ideas of reconciliation. I give an account of the creative work of African theologians in both mainline and independent churches, describing their views on reconciliation, images they formulated and rituals employed and envisaged.

I proceed to investigate the world behind their theology, and the philosophy informing African theology. I group the different methods of reconciliation in Africa. Some ideas are close to the Christian objective theory (for example the widespread use of scapegoatism) and some are quite different (the images relating to the ancestors and the family).

1.5.5   Chapter 5: Religion and Reconciliation: Comparative Analysis (Comparative Religion)

Before I can evaluate the African concepts of reconciliation, I have to develop criteria for this evaluation. I draw these criteria from the insights of Religious Studies, as well as from anthropological and sociological considerations. The South African context also dictates to a large extent what new reconciliation models should look like. I list and investigate the prerequisites for reconciliation as determined by a number of prominent South Africans.

1.5.6   Chapter 6: Reconciliation Models and Rituals (Comparative Religion)

I continue to evaluate the African (and traditional Christian) views on the basis of their usefulness and compatibility to Christianity. I believe some African views reaffirm the popular objective reconciliation theory; while others reinforce lesser known or ignored Biblical alternatives, while still others promise new and imaginative ways to understand reconciliation. From this evaluation I uncover new models for both my personal understanding of reconciliation, and models suitable for use in the wider South African context.

1.5.7   Chapter 7: Contours of a New Understanding and Praxis of Reconciliation (Missiology)

I then summarise what I believe to be Africa's contribution to the study of reconciliation. Focussing on liturgy, I make some concrete suggestions on the basis of the study by proposing new ways of speaking of, understanding and doing reconciliation. In this way I hope to improve the church's understanding of its message and mission of reconciliation, as well as present new promising ways of conducting its ministry of reconciliation.

1.5.8   Chapter 8: Concluding Reflections and Remarks

Finally, I reflect on the validity of this kind of study. I address possibility of using the concept of deconstruction and Religious Studies in a theological study. I conclude by making suggestions for further investigation.

1.6   Departure points and limitations

1.6.1   Disciplines of study

This is a study in the areas of **Religious Studies and Missiology**, and I will limit myself to these disciplines. Where necessary I will state or summarise the labours of other theological fields (e.g. Systematic Theology, New Testament and Old Testament), but detailed investigations of these disciplines are outside the scope of my study.

1.6.2   Reconciliation and Salvation

For the purposes of this study I take **reconciliation, salvation and redemption** all to indicate a restoration of the relationship between humans and God or the relationships between human beings. Although these words are not always used as synonyms, they indicate a similar meaning when they are used to describe Jesus' work in this regard.

1.6.3   "God" and "gods"

In literature on African religion, **God** is sometimes called "God", "gods", "Deity" or "deities". I will follow the authors' use in quotations, but otherwise will use the term "God" for all of these other denotations referring to divinity.

1.6.4   Missiology

Missiology is in the words of Bosch (1978:240) the "theology of the church-crossing-frontiers": it studies the communication of the gospel to people outside Christianity, the establishment and building up of new churches, it addresses relevant social, political and economical issues, and it concerns itself with the theology of other religions and dialogue with people of these different religions and ideologies (*theologia religionum).* Missiology is a branch of Christian theology, and thus looks at the world from the perspective of commitment to the Christian faith, but it nonetheless critically appraises every manifestation of the various aspects of the church's mission (Bosch, 1991:9; Crafford, 1996b:221; Kritzinger, 1987:5; Schmidt, 1988:20).

My study is in the first place a Missiological study. I am a Christian and I look at the world from a Christian perspective. In my study I examine how the gospel can be communicated by using new and different myths, models and rituals. I hope to add to Christians' under-standing of African religion and critically evaluate previous attempts at inculturation, in order to nurture and deepen Christians' faith.

1.6.5   Religious Studies

I secondly also make use of the insights in the area of **Religious Studies**. The various sub-disciplines in the field of Religious Studies do not proceed from some divine revelation, and do not accept any religion as its norm. They simply try to understand religious phenomena and manifestations from within their specific context (*theologia religionum*) (Crafford, 1996b:221; Krüger, 1995:12; De Bruin, 2000:14, Schmidt, 1988:20).

According to Krüger (1982:8):

> Practitioners of this discipline usually distinguish its method from theology, in that they take theology to be a normative discipline, deliberately advocating true religion, whereas science of religion describes, understands and explains religious phenomena.

This means that I will have to suspend my Christian convictions in the chapters where I take the Comparative Religion perspective. Still, even though my analysis in these chapters is not done from a theological perspective, I am aware that other suppositions and values may influence my study of religions (Derrida, 1998:6; Schmidt, 1988:20).

The Study of religion can be done historically or comparatively. My approach will be the latter. I will also try to go beyond mere description and try to evaluate Christianity and

African religion, but stop short of a comprehensive enquiry into religion (Krüger, 1995: 77-78; Schmidt, 1988:xiii, 20).

1.6.6   The relationship between Missiology and Religious Studies

In this study, I utilise Religious Studies as an *ancilla theologiae*, in other words, I use the insights of Religious Studies and Comparative Religion in service of Missiology. Thus, my primary concern is Missiology and theology. Still, Kritzinger (1985:xvi) writes that Religious Studies can play both a helpful and a challenging role in relation to Missiology. This is exactly what I try to do: I use the insights and tools of Religious Studies to compare and assess the two religions' concepts of reconciliation. But I also expect that my comparative study will challenge and reveal inadequate traditional Christian concepts of reconciliation. This is necessitated by a postmodern theology as I will show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> Some say that he was a legend,
> The dream of slaves and beggars,
> Or hippy poet so charged
> With music of the spheres
> That stones sang beneath his naked feet.
> I care not if he lived
> Or uttered a single word
> Or healed a single leper.
> I know only that his name
> Reveals that gift of pain
> That only love can bear
> And having borne still cry
> "I love."

<div align="right">(Pauli Murray, in Caldbeck, 2002:61-62)</div>

2.1   Postmodernism

In my introduction, I referred to a postmodern worldview. I will briefly explain what I mean by postmodernism and a Postmodern Theology.

2.1.1   Postmodern Thought and Theology

The Modernist mechanical and dualist view of the world has been useful, but it turns out, inadequate. Developments in physics, biology and philosophy have shown the limitations of the modernist worldview to describe our reality. Whereas modernism has seen the idea of God as superfluous, it can no longer be scientifically or philosophically maintained that we live in a self-contained world. It is clear that modernism has failed to provide a basis for morality and society, but instead its optimism regarding scientific progress has been tarnished, and the assumption that scientific knowledge is inherently good has become suspect (Burnham, 1989:x; Heelas, 1998:2-9; Herholdt, 1998b:459; Miller, 1989:3-5).

The postmodern worldview holds that the world is instead evolutionary and relative. James Miller (1989:10) explains that:

> The world has come to bee seen not as a system of independent atomic parts linked together by external mechanical relations but, instead, as a dynamic nexus of internal relatings, actual and potential.

This new, postmodern worldview has far reaching consequences for both philosophy and theology.

2.1.1.1   Deconstruction

Jacques Derrida formulated the approach of deconstruction for literary study. According to him, certain traditions or discourses dominate Western thought to the extent that it impedes other possible ideas and alternatives. Deconstruction seeks to undo (and not destroy) these dominant traditions in order to bring the alternatives to the fore (Lechte, 1994:107-109).

Deconstructionism holds that we know reality only in language, but that this is an "unreal reality" like a game that is played, not against the background of a fixed, stable reality, but rather a field of freeplay and infinite substitutions. It differs from structuralism in the sense that it does not view the text as an independent unit that influences the subject, but views both the subject and the text as part of an intertextual world (Heelas, 1998:8; Herholdt, 1998b:453-454).

Kotzé & Kotzé (1997:8) explains that one of Derrida's central methodological devices to accomplish this feat hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure (*sous rature*). A word is literally first written and then erased, keeping both the erased word and the word

itself simultaneously. The erasing is a strategy to accentuate that the term is both needed

and not needed at the same time. They explain:

> This strategy of sous rature is used to employ the familiar and commonly known, to deconstruct the familiar and known. The word under erasure is used to reveal its status as useful, necessary and at the same time wrong and not useful. X is at the same time X and its opposite, not-X. Words being used are therefore necessary in order to understand, while they are at the same time inaccurate. Within the meaning of any possible text there is also its opposite text.

In short, words are necessary in order to represent (or defer) meaning. But at the same

time these words are inaccurate as they obstruct the difference between the word and the

intended meaning (Lechte, 1994:107).

It follows that if words can obstruct true meaning, so too can our discourses. Decon-

struction is then to take apart the interpretive assumptions of a system of meaning that you

are examining in order to reveal the assumption on which the model is based. As these

are revealed, you open up space for alternative understanding (Wolfreys, 1998:58-59;

Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997:8).

Deconstruction can be applied more universally. In analysing gaps, silences and

ambiguities, it also exposes ethno- and androcentrism, as well as prejudices of class, race

and religion. Deconstruction aims to expose this aspect of reality, deconstructing

dominating ideas and highlighting other options. It provides " … a corrective moment, a

safeguard against dogmatism, a displacement, to keep it in process, to continuously

demystify the realities we create" (Kotzé & Kotzé, 1997:7-8).

2.1.1.2   Relationships

Postmodernism is all about relationships. Quantum physics, and especially Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, observed that at a quantum level all things, including space and time, are integrally linked. The world is not mechanistic as modernism believes, but instead relational. Reality is no longer substance, but function (Dill & Kotzé, 1997:9; Herholdt, 1998b:466).

This discovery has far reaching implications for the way we study and understand our reality. A postmodern theologian will not, for example, approach the Bible as if it contains some body of truth that needs to be discovered. Truth lies rather in the relationship of the reader with the text (Burden, 1990:193; Heelas, 1998:8; Herholdt, 1998b:467).

Herholdt (1998b:467) explains that: "Truth is therefore not prefabricated, but dynamic and co-determined by the needs, presuppositions, religious background and cultural heritage that the person brings to the Bible".

This does not imply relativism. A postmodern, relational truth must give meaning, make sense and be useful in the specific relation. Not all models are simply equally acceptable (Herholdt, 1998b:467).

2.1.1.3   Self-organisation

Postmodern theology is influenced by the notion of self-organisation. This concept points to an intrinsic quality of all entities to generate order and to form patterns by means of the flow of energy through a system – the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Since Ilya

Prigogine's work on the thermodynamics of systems far from equilibrium, the philosophical implications of the fact that order and chaos can serve as a source for self-organisation and an ensuing new order, has had a far-reaching influence. It has challenged the concept of determinism to the extent that randomness and unpredictability have gained a positive meaning as mechanisms necessary for creativity and novelty (Cupitt, 1998:220; Dill & Kotzé, 1997:9; Herholdt, 1998a:217; Milbank, 1997:270).

It seems that people are beginning to believe that we live on the edge of chaos, and that the intrinsic dialectic of order and chaos is offering new insights into the meaning of freedom. Thus, the will of God is not a predetermined decision that Christians need to discover in a passive mode of obedience, but instead, Christians are afforded the right to some human input that co-determines the 'plan' for their lives (Herholdt, 1998a:217; Milbank, 1997:267).

Many choices are possible, but in the variety of options we are guided by God as creative participants in our own lives. So too, humans need not plug into a blueprint that renders their own efforts and creative potential sterile, but are co-creators (Herholdt, 1998a:217).

> Postmodernism is, in this sense, a rediscovery of the value of human participation, a quest for wholeness and meaning, a perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality. Postmodernism aspires to provide an alternative approach to reality in such a way that it could yield a significantly new and improved way of understanding the world. Postmodern Theology … aims to provide fresh insights, answer existing anomalies, and provide new meaning by moving beyond modernism. This cannot be accomplished by an escape to the inside of the self … or even a denial of the valuable results offered by the more critical scientific method. Limited subjective input is combined with limited objective reference to result in a balance between both extremes. … the human mind cannot construct reality completely, nor can the human mind know reality fully.
>
> (Herholdt, 1998a:218)

2.1.1.4   Participation

The physicist Niels Bohr stated in his principle of complimentarity that the scientist is always an actor in his or her study, and never simply a spectator. It follows that a postmodern study of theology calls for a commitment to participation.   Believers need to include their relationship with God in the process of their theological reflection. In this sense, postmodern theologians discover truths about God by participating in a relationship with God – they discover and create truth at the same time. The way we model God by means of metaphors bears reference to our spiritual experience and is therefore not groundless (Dill & Kotzé, 1997:9; Herholdt, 1998a:224).

> … the believer is not called upon to master abstract truth, rather he or she is challenged to make sense of the world by participating in the creation of a new world in terms of which the self can be defined. Faith is therefore my own experience and theology the story or account of my life.
>
> (Herholdt, 1998a:225)

2.1.1.5   Truth, meaning and coherence

Like Bohr, Werner Heisenberg found that a scientist can not be detached, objective observer. With his uncertainty principle he mathematically measured the involvement of the scientist, and showed that in scientific work there are always a number of possible, valid results which are only actualised through the choices of the scientists (Capra, 1988:18-19; Dill & Kotzé, 1997:9).

This principle is reflected in postmodern philosophy. According to postmodernism, the test for Christian theological models is their success in providing meaning in terms of how the world is experienced in relation to the Christian belief in a benevolent God. This can be accomplished by the designing of a comprehensive metaphysical scheme in which faith

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can be fitted into the framework of how we actually experience the world on many different levels. Factors like human experience, the dominant metaphors of faith, recent scientific insights into the complexity of material reality and the deduction of reality and pragmatically useful epistemologies all blend into a coherent scheme to form the basis for Postmodern Theology (Herholdt, 1998a:218-219).

According to Herholdt (1998a:220), "This means that truth is no longer regarded as something with eternal, unchanging, authoritative and objective, absolute status. Truth is relative to a particular social context and personal presuppositions of the theologian". The task of Postmodern Theology is not to discover or uphold an eternal, supernatural truth, but rather to provide a personal account of faith in order to increase meaning (Miller, 1989:12; Herholdt, 1998a:228).

The search for meaning demands a sense of coherence. Postmodern Theology points to a coherence between our experience of God and the way we experience the world both physically and morally. Thus, every generation must discover a coherent meaning for themselves (Herholdt, 1998a:224).

2.1.1.6   Metaphors

Despite the Christian belief in divine revelation, God remains elusive within the subject/object scheme. There exists no "otherworldly" language to describe God on an intellectual or theological level.   Fortunately, metaphors are quite useful to describe and explain the unknown in terms of the known. Metaphors form a bridge between the direct experience of God by faith, or intuitive knowledge, and the intelligibility of that experience (Burden 1990:191-192; Herholdt, 1998a:225).

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Don Cupitt (1998:221) explains:

> Our philosophy cannot claim to be any more than what the world itself is – a dance of metaphors, pouring out and passing away. We aim only to supplying unifying metaphors that can help people to see what we are, what our life is, how we should live, and how we can be completely happy with things as they are.

Postmodernism moves beyond the subject/object scheme and the mere descriptive phase of language. Thus, the scientist wants to depict reality in terms of tentative models. This means that reality is created on a mental level with the use of analogical language (Herholdt, 1998a:226).

Postmodern hermeneutics makes use of this metaphorical understanding of reality. This means that when Christians describe God, their descriptions are no more than metaphors. The metaphors highlight some aspect or experience of God, yet God is sometimes obscured or at other times reduced or limited by these metaphors. He remains much more than any metaphor can express (Cupitt, 1998:221; Herholdt, 1998b:463).

The metaphorical understanding of reality has obvious implications for theologians. It emphasises the human role in comprehending God's revelation. Humans judge or describe God in terms of their experiences of God. So too, reality is no longer equated with the truth parallel to the relation between an object and its mirror image. God is only approximately known, in a real sense remains a mystery. "No metaphor can exhaust Him" (Burden, 1990:192; Herholdt, 1998b:464).

Thus we can also question the relevance of certain metaphors for our day and age, and replace irrelevant or outdated metaphors. We can call God our "Friend" in the light of feminist theology, instead of "Father" (Herholdt, 1998b:464). We need not pretend that we

understand God ontologically, but simply functionally, in his relationships, acts and

creation (Gous, 1993:178-180; Herholdt, 1998b:464; Vosloo, 2004:140).

2.1.1.7   Poetic

According to Don Cupitt (1998:226-227), a dogmatic theology serves only to include or

exclude persons from a religion. The dogma is in essence no more than a membership

law. He writes cynically:

> To see dogma as law in this way is, then, to see why so few religious dogmas are
> actually philosophically true. They don't need to be true. If your real purpose is to
> create badges of membership that will differentiate your community from every
> other community, straightforward philosophical truth is quite useless, because it is
> too easy. Most of it is staring every single human being in the face already. It is
> blindingly simply and obvious. But what the religious group needs is esoteric truth
> hidden from the rest of humankind and revealed to the chosen few only. So it must
> deny the obvious, and instead postulate a state of affairs in which all of humanity
> are stuck in sin and darkness, unable to save themselves. To us, to us alone there
> has been granted a special revelation of saving truth. It is colourful, paradoxical
> stuff, but in joining us and accepting our discipline you'll come to believe it, and by
> that you'll prove that you really are one of us.
>
> (1998:227)

Postmodern theology moves away from the dogmatic and tends to be more poetical.

Cupitt (1998:226) suggests that we should see: "the Bible, and indeed the whole system of

Christian doctrine, as epic, narrative poetry".

2.1.1.8   Cosmology

A Postmodern Theology moves away from a dualist view of reality, to a view that reality is

a multi-layered process where continuity exists between all things. Likewise, a

postmodern spirituality does not contrast spirit and matter, but sees both as aspects of

reality (Herholdt, 1998a:227).

The effect of sin on the world is also reconsidered. The classical notion that the Fall is the cause of suffering and death is replaced by a view that suffering and death are natural phenomena. The tragedy of sin is not that it caused death per se, but that it qualifies death as a moral dilemma (Herholdt, 1998a:227).

2.1.1.9　　Interdisciplinary dialogue

Because of the conviction that reality is multi-layered, different objects of study are seen as complementary aspects of one holistically integrated reality. This serves as a basis for the different sciences to work closer together. This also means that theology can no longer claim a privileged status, but is placed on an equal footing with other disciplines to the mutual enrichment of both theology and natural science (Heelas, 1998:7; Herholdt, 1998a:228).

2.1.1.10　　Tentative

Postmodern theology constructs tentative models that can be used until better ones are found. "Hence postmodernism is in line with the conviction that we are progressively moving closer to the truth, but not by an accumulation of doctrinal knowledge, but by the constant switching of paradigms as determined by the spirit of the time in order to remain relevant" (Herholdt, 1998a:228).

2.1.1.11   Can a theology be postmodern?

It should probably be asked whether the postmodern worldview is a valid worldview and more importantly, whether theology can be done from a postmodern perspective. This will depend on a number of questions.

Firstly, the basis for this philosophy should be considered. It seems that postmodern philosophy is grounded in accepted science. I purposely referred to the work of the physicists to show that the postmodern worldview appears to reflect the best science available. It is simply more responsible and honest to proceed from the best scientific basis possible.

Of course the postmodern philosophy is not shared by all – especially not in South Africa where people have widely diverging worldviews. This should be kept in mind as a qualification on my use of postmodernism. Still, this qualification would be true for any chosen departure point in a heterogeneous world.

Secondly, can a theology be postmodern? Theology deals with God, with the Ultimate, while postmodern theory rejects any notions of ultimate and abstract truths. A postmodern theology would certainly call into question many traditional Christian ideas, and challenge traditional beliefs. On the other hand, it could stimulate new and different ways of speaking and thinking about God.

It is important to note that while postmodern theology does not accept abstract truths, it is not relativistic, as some theologians fear. Although truth is thought to be relative, this

qualification does not mean that there are no truths, but it rather attributes truth to a statement in a given context or relation (Lowe, 1999:21; Knitter, 1985:219-220).

A number of Christian theologians have managed to come up with enriching postmodern theologies. Dirkie Smit (2002:119) admits that he is not yet quite convinced of the concept of "postmodern theology" but nevertheless espouses the postmodern perspectives in saying that truth is never absolute, but rather relative, historical and tentative. He even calls for anamnetic solidarity – to listen to the voices of the previously unheard – which comes close to the approach of deconstruction (2002:102-105, 108).

Jaap Durand writes that his mindset changed from believing in eternal truths to coming to value contextualised metaphors as a way to express the inexpressible. He holds that theology is historical, contextual and metaphorical (2002:64, 69).

I agree with Johan Dill (1996:228-229) that although some theologians see postmodernism as a threat, postmodern philosophy and deconstruction presents a promising challenge to theologians and stimulates constructive dialogue.

 A postmodern theology is especially useful for Missiology and Religious Studies. Both Missiology and postmodernism are interested in the contexts of people and the differences between contexts. A postmodern approach also allows and supposes the insights and critical scrutiny of Religious Studies as it is interdisciplinary and reflexive-critical.

2.2   Postmodernist approach to Religious Studies

Within the Religious Studies community, a number of burning issues are presently being debated.   A postmodern approach to Religious Studies determines my views on these.

2.2.1   A Comparative Religious Study

Scientists have in the past questioned the whole enterprise of comparative religious study. Jonathan Z Smith launched a "deconstructive attack" (Patton & Ray, 2000:3) on comparative studies in his 1982 essay, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells", and called the whole study of religious comparison into question. According to Smith, the easily constructed and magically appreciated religious comparisons of EB Tylor and JG Frazer, and even the romantic interpretations of Mircea Eliade, failed scientifically. In their effort to discover contiguity, the early comparative religious scientists disregarded the differences between religions. "The issue of difference has been all but forgotten" (Smith, 2000:26).

In his analysis of comparative studies, Smith confirmed the sentiments of the postmodern philosophers Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, who questioned the "white mythology" and "totalising narratives" employed by modernism. Postmodernists argue that:

> …modernist metanarratives, in order to accommodate widely diverging local histories and traditions, abstract the meaning of those traditions, by way of a 'translation' into the terms of the master code, which leaves the specific tradition simply unrecognisable. Such metanarratives also become coercive and normative: they systematically control and distort the local under the sign of the universal. Such a drive to totality cannot respect the specificities of the genuinely heterogeneous traditions.
>
> (White, 2000:48-49)

Thus the new postmodern emphasis on difference mistrusted the magical comparisons of the past.

Since then, students of religion have tried to answer the postmodern attack on comparative study, and recently, a number of them have made a compelling case for the legitimacy of comparative religious study. Patton and Ray claimed that comparison does not claim to be scientific but rather a "magical" and creative art: "… comparison is an indeterminate scholarly procedure that is best taken as an intellectual creative enterprise, not as a science but as an art – an imaginative and critical act of mediation and redescription in the service of knowledge" (2000:3).

David White added that comparative studies investigate insights, aspects and relations rather than "things". He quotes Smith in another essay as saying that (2000:53):

> Comparison does not necessarily tell us how things 'are'. … Like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be conceived, how they might be 'redescribed'. … A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge,… an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstruction which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relationship between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary.

The very fact that any form of language and linguistic signs is arbitrary, as stated by Antoine Meillet seventy years ago, makes comparison possible (White, 2000:50).

I agree with Doniger that while the first wave of postmodernism and postcolonialism (in expounding the *différance*) denied any attempt at comparison, the second wave of postmodern philosophers and especially deconstructionism's investigation into language "broke open the text in new ways that were particularly useful for scholars interested in using multiple variants…and finding multiple meanings in them" (2000:70).

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Deconstructionism promoted the concepts of multivocality and multiple interpretations that are essential to the comparative method.

Thus, while not forgetting the postmodernist caution against totalising narratives, I do believe that a postmodern comparison of religions is both possible and useful, if it eschews grand theories and is instead artful and playful, recognises both the local (*différant*) and total (universal), and focuses and investigates ideas, relations and aspects rather than things (Doniger, 2000:70).

2.2.2   The Insider/Outsider Problem

Scholars disagree on how easy or even possible it is to bridge the gap between the subject under study (in this case African religion) and the researcher who studies it. How can the researcher enter into the experiences and meanings of another, access the private moments of human perception, bridge the gulf between subject and object? (McCutcheon, 1999:3)

This problem has been answered in at least four different ways. Following the nineteenth century distinction between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, the *first* effort focussed on the human spirit – human desires, hopes, fears; human meanings and intentions as a possible bridge between the subject and the object. The phenomenological research method empathetically described human behaviour in an (rather optimistic) attempt to understand and interpret others' experiences (McCutcheon, 1999:3).

A *second* option considered the scholar's ability to get inside the subject as virtually impossible and instead concentrated on developing theories capable of explaining the

complex patterns of human behaviour. Coinciding with the development of psychoanalysis, this reductionist approach is based on studying only that which can be observed empirically. The goal is to determine the causes and regularities of human actions and beliefs, which may differ from the explanations that the insiders themselves supply for their actions (McCutcheon, 1999:4).

Where the focus on only studying private experiences seems to validate the claims of the insider all too quickly, and where the emphasis on developing explanatory theories can all too easily dismiss insiders claims, the *third* option attempted to remain neutral when it comes to questions of truth and value but emphasised issues of accurate description and comparison at the expense of drawing value judgements. The methodological agnosticism simply described the diversity, similarity and utter complexity of human behaviours and beliefs but avoids asking all questions concerning the truth of someone's claims (McCutcheon, 1999:6-8).

In addition to these three positions (empathetic, explanatory, agnostic), there is a *fourth* approach to the insider/outsider problem. It agrees in part with the first option: it is indeed important to study the inner states and experiences of free, creative human beings. However, it also agrees in part with the second: there is a significant gap between the researcher and the subject. Finally, it differs significantly from the third in that the researcher and the subject alike are both seen to be enmeshed in the human situation, making this much sought after neutrality a mere illusion. "The conclusion in this case is that the experiences that we as scholars are able to study *are none other than our own*." (McCutcheon, 1999:8)

This option bridges the gulf between subject and object by projecting the researcher's own experiences onto the other. The reflexive stance is largely dependent on postmodern thought – a way of looking at the world which:

> … emphasizes playfulness and differences over rules and sameness; it stresses the metaphorical and slippery nature of language over the modernist, objective, factual understandings of how communication proceeds; it addresses the manner in which meaning is not something possessed by a word, an action, or an object as much as it is the product of a series of relationships which comprise the word or the object.
>
> (McCutcheon, 1999:9)

Thus, reflexive scholars are more interested in questions of point of view and the stance of the observer than they are with issues of neutrality, objectivity, and fact (Flood, 1999:35-38; McCutcheon, 1999:10; Jackson, 1999:312, Schneiders, 1989:62).

I am convinced that the reflexive approach to the insider/outsider problem is more honest. According to David Hufford: "Reflexivity is a metaphor from grammar indicating a relationship of identity between subject and object, thus meaning the inclusion of the actor … [in] the account of the act and/or its outcomes. In this sense reflexivity shows that all knowledge is 'subjective'" (1999:294). This means that if we:

> … obtain the appearance of objectivity by leaving ourselves out of our accounts, we simply leave the subjective realities of our work uncontrolled. If we manage to make our facts speak for themselves, those 'facts' cease to be evidence in an argument, and we become ventriloquists instead of actors.
>
> (1999:295).

Having said this, Hufford warns that reflexivity can be either triumphal and self-assured if the researcher takes no account of any other views or realities outside himself or herself, or defeatist if he or she do not realise their own context and position sufficiently, both resulting from an extreme relativism. He also warns against "methodolatry" – a neo-

positivist worship of the right method without reference to its subject results (Hufford, 1999:296). In reporting on her reflexive study, Karen McCarthy Brown similarly stresses the importance of "truth telling and justice" and explains:

> … truth telling not only required enough care and persistence to get the facts straight, but also enough self-awareness and self-disclosure to allow readers to see my point of view (another term for bias) and make their judgements about it. … I (likewise) felt compelled to do justice to Alourdes (the subject of her study) and to her world in my writing.
>
> (McCarthy Brown, 1999:352-353)

Finally, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty makes the case for reflexivity in this kind of study:

> … once we enter other people's heads through their myths, we may find that we cannot get out again; we enter their hearts and their minds too. Their myths become our myths whether we like it or not, particularly when, as often happens, we discover that their myths have always been our myths, though we may not have known it; we recognise ourselves in those myths more vividly than we have ever recognised ourselves in the myths of our own culture.
>
> (Doniger O'Flaherty 1999:336)

2.2.3   Religious naturalism

In dealing with the matters of Chapter Four, I will follow J. S. Krüger's basic orientation towards religious knowledge in this study, emphasising the human world and experiences rather than the supernatural – an orientation called religious naturalism or religious empiricism. What this concept means is that metaphysical or religious statements must be part of and must follow from concrete, lived experience and not deduced from a priori assumptions (Krüger, 1995:24).

This orientation of religious naturalism seems to me more honest and more sensible and helpful for the aims of this study. Krüger explains:

> If all things hang together 'ultimately', we cannot know how they do so. But we can know and say how what we feel, feels like here-now, from where we are, aware not only of the mortality of our feeling, knowing and saying, but also of their morality: they pass away, but are important for a life of value.
>
> (1995:24)

I agree with Krüger that "… the empirical study of religion presupposes and leads to religiophilosophical and eventually in metaphysical and religious questions" (1995:25). In the final chapters of this study I therefore consider these religious questions from a theological (and historically specific, Christian) perspective.

Although I study religions both from the naturalist orientation (in accordance with responsible religious comparison) and the theological perspective (in order to address particular Christian issues and provide usable alternatives to Christians), I do not believe that it is always necessary to interpret naturalist insights theologically. "Religion" and "naturalism" are not mutually exclusive concepts. The whole concept of religious naturalism rejects the notion of two realities, an ordinary one plus another, supernatural one. "'Religion' and the 'divine' point to the radical depth dimension of *this* reality, not to a wholly other reality" (Krüger, 1995:26).

2.3 Definitions and terminology

Following this postmodern approach, I would like to elucidate a few concepts which I will use throughout the study:

45

2.3.1   Myths and rituals

Myths can mean many things to different researchers. I use the word "myth" to indicate the story or reasoning behind a certain belief and practice. Myth works in a reflexive manner, causing the participant to reflect on his or her way of being in the world, and challenging the participant to examine the present in the light of the past (Karecki, 198:314).

Rituals are the re-enactment of the myths. Rituals describe the physical practice of the idea that is formulated in the myth. Rituals are not always determined by myths, but often precede the myth, giving form and meaning to something which cannot be expressed rationally. Eliade (1969:12) contends that the ritual "comes before language and discursive reason". Rituals are repetitive and link up with traditional thinking and practice, but are also creative, causing the participants to take a new and fresh look at life (Hay, 1998:135; Karecki, 1998:310-311, 314; Krog, 1998:7).

When African people sacrifice a goat or a chicken to their ancestors and to God, they may do so because according to an African myth, the life force in blood can bring the ancestors into the world of the living. The sacrifice is the ritual.

According to Arbuckle:

> All cultures have some form of repeated symbolized behaviour that is tied by explanatory verbalization to their fundamental way of understanding the purpose of human existence. … [A] myth provides a framework for comprehending phenomena outside ordinary experience; ritual provides a way of participating in it. Myth and ritual give the security of the familiar in the presence of the potential chaos of the unknown.
>
> (in Karecki, 1998:313)

46

2.3.2   Theology

Following the postmodern perspective, I see theology as an academic discipline from below, although "below" also postulates the "above". Still, from this perspective it is a scholarly undertaking that focuses more on human experiences of God than on God's being. Theology is "talking about God", yet God cannot be made the object of this "talking about God", for God is non-objectifiable (Derrida, 1998:26-28; Milbank, 1997:266; Veldsman, 1998:55).

> To speak of God is only possible if we speak of humanity before God, that is, if out of faith we speak about the relationship between humanity and God. In this sense, faith discloses a new self-understanding of humanity in the world as it exists before God.
>
>   (Veldsman, 1998:55)

It is interesting that Calvin, in the introduction to the Institutes, said something similar, namely, that theology comprises the study of God, man and nature, but that it makes no difference in principle whether we begin with God or man or nature, since dealing with or reflecting on the one automatically entails and leads to dealing with and reflecting on the other two. One of the most profound implications of this Calvinist position is that none of the three subjects of theology – God, man and nature – is (strictly) objectifiable (Calvijn, 1931:1-4).

CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN IMAGES OF RECONCILIATION

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

(Colossians 1:19-20)

3.1   Introduction

How did Jesus Christ achieve reconciliation? The problem has always been clear: for as long as religion existed, God has been defined by otherness; for just as long, humans have feared that alienation between humankind and God was increasing. The solution was reconciliation (or atonement) to re-establish the unity with God (Van Biema, 2004:39).

But exactly how this took place in the life and death of Christ, have kept theologians guessing, theorising and debating. Although the doctrine of reconciliation is a central concept in Christian theology, the church never developed an official explanation of reconciliation similar to that of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ. The only conviction articulated in the ecumenical confessions was that *propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem* (for us human beings and for the sake of our salvation) he came down and became flesh" (Nicene Creed). Exactly how his life and death benefited us was not worked out in the formulation of these early confessions (Nicene Creed; Athanasian Creed art 36; Van der Kooi, 2002:104-105).

3.2   The Old Testament

The Old Testament offers various perspectives on reconciliation. For the purposes of this study – and with specific reference to the reconciling work of Christ – it is interesting to look at the Old Testament traditions concerning sacrifices as a means of achieving reconciliation.

Piet Venter (2005:22-24) explains that according to the Book of Leviticus, humans could be reconciled to God by means of sacrifices. The sacrifices took on different forms: The Israelites made burnt offerings as a sign of dedication, peace offerings to establish communion with God, and purification offerings to expiate guilt. The climax was the on the Day of Atonement when a goat was sacrificed as a sin offering on behalf of the people of Israel.

Interestingly, this sacrifice was usually seen as a petitionary or even a propitiatory gift to God, rather than a ransom or compensation for the damage caused by sin. The emphasis was always on forgiveness: "God waives the penalty for transgressions. The results of the disobedience is wiped away, wiped clean or purged. The penalty is not ransomed, but rather eliminated" (Venter, 2005:25-26).

3.3   The New Testament

The New Testament hints at many possible models to understand Christ's reconciliation, as Theodore Jennings explains: "The New Testament is just all over the map … [Its] writers are all persuaded that something really drastic, fundamental and dramatic has

happened, and they're pulling together all kinds of ways to understand that" (in Van Biema, 2004:39).

The Letter to the Hebrews directly appropriates the Jewish sacrificial metaphor, with the added aspect that Jesus is both priest and sacrifice, spilling not the "blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). The Gospel of Mark favours the Roman legal language for the freeing of slaves: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Meanwhile, the First Epistle of Peter poses Jesus' trails as a model for imitation: "because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Finally, Paul's letter to the Colossians pauses only briefly at the cross on its way to the triumphant image of the risen Christ parading demonic enemies in chains: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15) (Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Van Biema, 2004:39).

The various authors of the Bible thus interpreted the death of Jesus on the cross differently, according to their particular situations and communities. But neither in the New Testament, nor in the works of the Fathers do we find any exclusively normative model of interpretation: "There is a diversity of interpretations, shading into one another, at many levels" (Küng, 1974:420). Thus, juridical, cultic, financial and even military categories of interpretation have been used to explain how Jesus' death reconciled man to God (Küng, 1974: 419-420).

3.4   Three Models

A number of reconciliation models have been proposed in the history of the church. Some early theologians understood Christ to be the divine bringer of knowledge: "the fountain of God, most abundant and most full, is open to all; and this heavenly light rises for all, as many as have eyes" (Lantantius); others understood Christ's reconciliation as a kind of recapitulation: "Jesus Christ became incarnate and was made man, and in himself he recapitulated the long line of human beings … so that what we had lost in Adam, we recover in Jesus Christ" (Irenaeus), or as the deification of man: "the Son of God suffered to make us sons of God" (Cyprian). Eventually, three of these reconciliation models or myths became dominant in the church (Barclay, 1961:97-99, 104-105; Van der Kooi, 2002:104-105).

3.4.1   Victory over the devil

> This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."
>
> (Ephesians 4:8)

It was Paul's model that first caught on. For roughly a thousand years, the church fathers seem to have viewed Christ's suffering and dying less as salvation's all-important fulcrum than as one more necessary step in God's triumphant campaign into the human world and the devil's precincts. Theologians like Athanasius saw the incarnation and the resurrection as far more important than the cross to reconciliation and as a new start for humanity (*deificatio hominis*) (Berendsen, 2002:165; Van Biema, 204:39; Van der Kooi, 2002:107).

Thus, Origen writes: "Through his resurrection he destroyed the kingdom of death, whence it is written that he freed captivity", and the Gospel of Nicodemus (6:22) describes that on Jesus' arrival in Hades, the legion of devils was stricken with terror, and Hades cried out: "We are overcome! Woe unto us!" (Barclay, 1961:103)

This position is still maintained by the world's 250 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, as Frederica Matthewes-Green explains:

> It is like a fire fighter who goes into a building and comes back out covered with wounds and scars but carrying in his arms a baby he was able to grab from the crib. The victory is that he did snatch eternal life out of sin and death. And that's what Orthodox Christians focus on.
>
> (In Van Biema, 2004:39-40)

When the church fathers did pick up on the scriptural language of Christ's death as a ransom, the payee was not God but the devil, who some felt had a legitimate claim on humanity because of Adam's fall. Others such as Gregory of Nyssa, preferred another scenario: to see the crucifixion and Jesus' subsequent descent into Hell as a bait-and-switch scheme, whereby the devil thought he had claimed a particularly virtuous human victim, only to discover that he had allowed into his sanctum the power that would eventually wrest humanity back from his grasp (Berendsen, 2002:165; Heyns, 1978:265, 270, 274; Jonker, 1977:43-45; König, 1983:147; Küng, 1974:420; Van Biema, 2004:38, 40; Van der Kooi, 2002:107, 114-115).

> Basically, [this position] … explains that the human nature, which is common to us all, is taken hostage by the devil and his henchmen. It is in respect to this that the Son of God descends to the world, assumes our flesh and becomes human. The devil has a deep respect for the Son of God, but when Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane breaks out in a cold sweat, Satan forgets for a moment with whom he is dealing.   When Jesus appears overcome by the situation, the old enemy is deluded into thinking that he is confronting an ordinary human being, ordinary flesh, which he can defeat. He seizes him and kills him on the cross. On the cross however, comes the unexpected finale, rightly called the apotheosis. The devil is

tricked. The human flesh of Jesus turns out to be the bait, and Satan takes it. But hidden in the human flesh is the divinity of the Son. As a fish swallows the bait and gets caught on the hook, so Satan is overmastered by the divinity of Christ. Like a fish he is drawn out of his natural element and the human race is no longer dominated by his power. The death of Jesus on the cross defeats the power of the devil, the overwhelming power of death. Since Christ went through death, the power of death has been forever changed.

<div align="right">(Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108)</div>

St Augustine likened the devil to a mouse, the cross to a mousetrap, and Christ to the bait. Others were content to leave the transaction's precise content a mystery, but they were emphatic in their view of a decidedly non-victimised Christ as a great champion against a real and formidable evil force (van Biema, 2004:40).

For centuries the picture of Christ who defeats the dragon was brightly and colourfully painted for the eyes of the faithful. It exited the imagination and was the dominant model. This conception survives in Martin Luther's great hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (Heyns, 1978:265, 270, 274; Theron, 1996:135; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi, 2002:108), and some remnant of it can be found in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism:

What is your only comfort in life and death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil….

<div align="right">(Heidelberg Catechism, 1986:22)</div>

3.4.2   Objective substitution

… the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

<div align="right">(Mark 10:24)</div>

In 1098, Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury, composed one of the most influential theological tracts ever written: *Cur deus homo?* – "Why God became man?". Anselm too read the New Testament lines calling Christ's death a ransom, but he could not believe that the devil was owed anything. He restructured the cosmic debt and explained the cross with the aid of juridical concepts, such as law, guilt, penalty, reward, penance, expiation, ransom, satisfaction, reconciliation and restitution: Humanity owed God the Father a ransom of "satisfaction" for the insult of sin. The problem was that the debt was unpayable – not only did we lack the means, since everything we had of value was God's to begin with, but humans also lacked the standing, like a lowly serf helpless to erase an injury to a great lord. Eternal damnation seemed unavoidable, except for a miracle of grace.

Anselm started his *objective* theory from "above", explaining from God's standpoint why the cross had to be: Human beings, as active participants in the relation between the Creator and his creation, have not fulfilled their obligations. They have not lived up to their responsibilities. As a result, God's honour was infinitely offended and it was therefore absolutely necessary to restore His honour (restitution). This was, according to Anselm, not possible through sheer mercy (*sola misercordia),* but only by rendering appropriate satisfaction. Thus, two options were open to God. God could punish humanity, that is, bring the human race to an end. But God's honour prohibited that. He would then not achieve the goal of his work in creation, namely, a humanity that willingly serves Him. So God chooses another way, that is, he chose to restore the relation. Therefore, He offered the way of compensation or satisfaction. Human beings were offered the possibility of once again becoming subjects. God sent his Son to make compensation possible. Thus God himself facilitates reconciliation (Berendsen, 2002:165; Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Heyns, 1978:270, 274; Heyns, 1992: 242-246, 251-255; Hayes, 1998:175; Jonker,

1977:46-47; Küng, 1974:421-422; Turaki, 1999:277; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi, 2002:110).

The God-man Jesus Christ is on the one hand a representative of humanity. In Jesus the human race willingly offers the obedience due to God. But there is more. The God-man Jesus Christ does more than he is obliged to do. He lays down his life voluntarily, and thereby offers a satisfaction that counterbalances the whole weight of the sin of humanity. The voluntary offering of his life creates a surplus value that suffices to compensate for every human slight to God's honour (Berendsen, 2002:165; Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Heyns, 1978:270, 274; Heyns, 1992: 242-246, 251-255; Hayes, 1998:175; Jonker, 1977:46-47; Küng, 1974:421-422; Van Biema, 2004:40; Van der Kooi, 2002:110).

Anselm's formulation, often called substitutionary reconciliation, has been restated in countless ways over the centuries. Even before Anselm thought of it, Tertullian asked: "Who ever paid for the death of another by his own except the Son of God? He had come for this purpose that he himself, free from all sin and altogether holy, should die for sinners" (Barclay, 1961:118).

The church eventually extended its concept of the sin for which Jesus died beyond Adam's disobedience to everybody's transgressions. In the 16th century, John Calvin endorsed this model, but replaced Anselm's feudal king with a severe judge furious at a deservedly cursed creation. This Calvinist interpretation features in the Belgic confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 12-19 (Barth, 36:88-94; Berendsen, 2002:165; Calvijn, 1931: 549-555; Heyns, 1992:242-246,251-255; Belgic Confession, 1986:11; Heidelburg Catechism, 1986:24-25; Van der Kooi, 2002:109-110, 114; Van de Beek, 2004:35).

3.4.3   Subjective Model

> But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.
>
> (Luke 22:26-27)

From the 18th century on, various thinkers developed a bill of complaints about substitution. The enlightenment theologians turned to the insights of another medieval theologian Peter Abelard. Abelard addressed Jesus' role in reducing sinful humanity's distance from God without recourse to a tit-for-tat transaction. His reconciliation took place less as a contract between God the father and God the son, and more in the hearts of believers cleaving to the message of Jesus' life – and the love most dramatically expressed in his willingness to die rather than renounce his calling. "Love answers love's appeal" wrote Abelard. With Jesus' example before it, humanity, its deaf ears opened, could now gain salvation and reconciliation with God. While in the substitution theory the problem between humanity and God is one of debt, in Abelard's theory, the problem is one of ignorance (Berendsen, 2002:165; Van Biema, 2004:41; Van der Kooi, 2002:107).

Abelard also read Augustine, but this time in conjunction with the Gospel of Luke (Luke 20:9-19; 22:24-30). In doing so, he developed his *subjective reconciliation* theory. According to this theory, Jesus' death revealed God's love for creation and it set an example to be followed, rather than being an objective satisfaction of God's anger. In this model, the decisive moment is there to be seized. The initiative for reconciliation and restoration that comes from God seeks a response from human beings. A restored relation is only realized where the human in full freedom repents and shows love in return. Jesus Christ serves as an example to be followed (Duling & Perrin, 1994:396-398; Van der Kooi, 2002:113).

Although Abelard is credited for formulating this subjective model, some of the earliest church fathers understood that Christ lived and died to be our example. Polycarp, Irenaeus, Lactantius and Augustine all speak of Christ's death as a perfect example for us to follow. Clement of Rome wrote to the warring church in Corinth and quoted Isaiah 53, explaining: "You see, beloved, what is the example which is given to us, for, if the Lord was thus humble-minded, what shall we do, who through him have come under the yoke of grace?" (Barclay, 1961:96)

The subjective model was adopted by the Socinians in the sixteenth century and became influential in the Liberal Theology of the Nineteenth century. Abelard's ideas have been followed and developed by numerous theologians, from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Dorothee Sölle, interpreting reconciliation as an existential event – reconciliation as a personal experience instead of an objective fact. Wiersinga explained this model by saying that we are not saved because someone else is killed in our place, but because Jesus displays unconditional love, even to his enemies. The acknowledgement of this love evokes love in us and changes our lives. Both the negative "death of God" philosophers like Kant and the more positive postmodern thinkers see the passion, or at least the *kenosis*, as the event that changes Christianity from a "cult" into (the only) "moral religion", wherein Christians are called to action (Barclay, 1961:96; Cupitt, 1998:230-231; Derrida, 1998:10-12; Derrida, 1997:177; Hart, 199:165; Jonker, 1977: 128-135; König, 1983:138, 146, 150; Van de Beek, 2004:45; Van der Kooi, 2002:113-114; Ward, 1998:234).

Milbank (1997:272) remarks that God suffers a contradiction until all make for themselves the offering already made by Christ: "the 'incarnation' has no meaning, therefore, except

as 'the beginning,' the foundation of the Church, a new sort of community of charity and forgiveness, as a space for the possibility of this offering".

3.5   Evaluation of Models

Each of these models has both failings and strengths – and they are often two sides of the same coin.

3.5.1   Victory Model: Victory over the Powers or Outdated Myth?

While Orthodox Churches, many Charismatic, Pentecostal and Third Wave Christians, and modern day practitioners of "spiritual warfare" see reconciliation in terms of the victory model, most mainstream Christians feel somewhat uncomfortable with the victory model's vivid presentation of the state of affairs. The devil and dragons are far removed from our experiences and our framework, and the picture of Christ, the vanquisher of the dragon, is of little comfort in a world in which we have bigger problems than dragons!

But this image may yet be very useful and relevant. Modern Christians may regard themselves as self-confident and free individuals who are able to make their own choices. Nobody is to have power over us. Is that true, or are we dealing with an active myth? In the last century the banner of individual autonomy has been torn to shreds (Bosch, 1989:148; Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108).

> More than we had ever recognised our actions turn out to be dictated by anonymous processes, economic interests and nationalistic sentiments that can be ignited into a murderous firestorm in which one collective flies at another. … [Our] chances of understanding the words of the first question and answer of the

Heidelberg Catechism increase the more we realise how often we ourselves are trapped in the bondage of processes, anxieties and enslavements.

(Van der Kooi, 2002:107-108)

3.5.2   Objective Model: The Unforgivable or the Unforgiving?

The *objective model* raises its own set of questions. It is not based on the Old Testament concept of God's justice and mercy, or the New Testament's concern for grace and love, but rather on the Roman design of jurisprudence, which leads to an untenable concept of God the Father. It is too foreign, too cold and too unsympathetic, even absurd that the Father of Christ's moral universe somehow seems to require his death. Likewise, it is questionable whether the demand for compensation agrees with Anselm's own concept of God as sovereign God. Would submission and repentance not suffice? Venter (2005:26) insists that the blood in the Leviticus sacrifices was only meant to remind the Israelites of God's mercy as the source and sustainer of all life, and that the idea of sacrifice working as a substitution, that a sacrificial victim can endure God's punishment on behalf of a different sinner, is certainly found in the Old Testament notion. This is far removed from the Anselm's view of God (2005:28-29; c f Von Rad, 1965:250; Human, 2005:52; Wessels, 2005:67; Jeremias, 1971:180; Breytenbach, 2005:84-87; König, 1983:69-73; Milbank, 1997:273; Barclay, 1961:113)

William Barclay (1961:122-123) writes that:

> If we think in terms of sacrifice or in terms of substitution, it almost necessarily means that something that Jesus did changed the attitude of God to men, that before the action of Jesus God could only punish and condemn men and that after the action of Jesus God was able and willing to forgive them … [There] can be no doubt that this is a view which finds no support in Scripture. Nowhere does the New Testament speak of God being reconciled to men; always it speaks of men being reconciled to God … [It] was never the attitude of God to man which had to be changed; it was the attitude of man to God.

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The substitution model likewise undermines Christ's position. In the Reformed world, this view was often used within an infralapsarian framework. According to the infralapsarian position, salvation was not intended at the creation, but became necessary because of sin. Thus, Christ was only needed to solve the problem of human sin and guilt. It relegates Christ to being an emergency measure and somewhat less than an ideal self-revelation of God (Van de Beek, 2004: 36).

Furthermore, according to Küng, Anselm's theory of satisfaction is fundamentally flawed (1974:422-424). The very presupposition of this theory – the idea of an original paradisiac-unspoilt world, of a primal sin of the first human pair, and above all the Augustinian theory of an inherited sin – seems problematic. "The first pages of the Bible cannot and are not meant to explain *how* – historically and scientifically – the world, man and woman, sin came to be" (1974:422-423).

Hayes (1998:175) points out that Anselm's model changed the way Christians understood sin. "Instead of seeing sin primarily as something that God rescues us from, Western European Theology came to see sin primarily as something God punished us for". This was aided by the idea of the privatisation of religion, where religion was seen as something concerned only with one's relationship with God, and divorced from the rest of life.

And, of course, it is objective. Humanity is disempowered as its redemption is being negotiated well above its collective head. It is objective, and as such human agency seems to be precluded (Kuitert, 1992:143).

John Dominic Crossan calls the objective reconciliation theory: "… the most unfortunate successful idea in the history of Christian thought …" because it gave the church worldly power by creating a sense of debt and a lever for social control. He continues: "If I can persuade you that there is a punishing God and that you deserve to be punished but I have some sort of way out for you, then that's a very attractive theology" (in van Biema, 2004:42). It also delivers a disempowering message: "Countless women have told me that their priest or minister had advised them, as 'good Christian women' to accept beatings by their husbands as 'Christ accepted the cross'. An overemphasis on the suffering of Jesus to the exclusion of his teaching has tended to be used to support violence" (Susan Thistlethwaite in Van Biema, 2004:42).

On the positive side, this model acknowledges the depth of the offence (or in Anselm's words, the "weight of sin").

> Anyone who ignores the disorder or argues that "It isn't all that bad" or glosses things over with the contention that victims should stop complaining and start forgiving, shows too little appreciation for the depth of injury that afflicted people experience. The perpetrator must do something; there must be some form of compensation. When people hurt one another, it is as if they rob one another, as if something is stolen. The injury remains. One can think of marriages that have broken up, leaving the shattered pieces everywhere, of people who have been damaged by their upbringing, of people who were injured because they were violated bodily and spiritually, as in cases of incest and rape. What is necessary in such cases is first of all acknowledgement.
>
> (Van der Kooi, 2002:111)

The Anselmian model acknowledges the seriousness of sin – that some offences are indeed unforgivable – and offers a different way to deal with it.

In a sense, human beings are not denied any responsibility. Humans are honoured as actors, held responsible for their sins. We are not unresisting victims of a cowardly attack

without a will of our own; we cannot exculpate ourselves by taking on the role of victims. But we are not able to repair the relationship either (Van der Kooi, 2002:112).

3.5.3   Subjective Model: Example or Hopelessness?

The *subjective model* of reconciliation has in view situations that can still be turned around and people who can do something about them, people for whom turning around still matters. Some critics note that this theory short-changes sin and evil, giving the impression that there is nothing wrong with the world that can't be cured by human endeavour. But what has the church to offer in the case of hopeless situations, when there is nothing left to repair and everything is totally blocked. What if we cannot respond or there is no response to make? (Van der Kooi, 2002:112; Van Biema, 2004:42).

Critics of this model have held that it had no particular use for Christ's divinity. Any virtuous martyr might do. One wit remarked that the Bible could have ended with the death of Abel, a decent enough man (Van Biema, 2004:42).

The strong point of this model is that it takes the appeal, the command seriously. God is interactive in his contact with people. He tries to draw us onto the playing field, to involve us. Berendsen also emphasises the example character of this kind of reconciliation model. She points out that people are only reconciled through following the example of people who do not just live for themselves. Reconciliation between humans happens when people emulate (secular) saints (2002:173-175).

3.6   What about new models?

All three of the above-mentioned models have a long tradition, and have been used in Christendom. But it appears to me that within the Dutch Reformed Church and probably in many other mainline Protestant churches, Anselm's theory has pride of place, so that reconciliation is seldom explained in any other way. The subjective model may be widely considered and accepted by theologians, but it seems to feature less prominently from many a Reformed pulpit. The victory model, on the other hand, has only been popular in the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. This causes a problem. Although much can be said about and learned from Anselm's model, the exclusive emphasis on it causes a one-sided, unbalanced and dated teaching of reconciliation. Johan Heyns, following the Reformed confessions, for example, fully develops the objective model, lightly alludes to the victory model and completely ignores the subjective model (1978:265, 270, 274; 1992: 242-246; c f Barclay, 1961:111, 121; König, 1989:133).

Anselm's theory does not so much reflect New Testament teaching as the theology of the Middle Ages and the juridical-rational idea or order then prevailing. His intention was admirable: he made the old tradition understandable to a new generation with a new background of experience, using forms of thought and language common to believers and unbelievers of his day. Küng (1974:424) asks:

> … if this was permitted to medieval theology, can we forbid to modern theology its own fresh approach? We can no more commit ourselves now than in New Testament or patristic times to a particular conceptual framework – whether juridical, cultic, metaphysical, or even scientific, technical, physiological, sociological – for the interpretation of the highly complex event of the redemption.

The theory, therefore, of the death on the cross as an expiatory sacrifice, understandable for Jewish Christians at that time, is only one and not the most important model for the

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interpretation of Jesus' death. Since cultic sacrifices are no longer offered in the modern

environment, the concept of sacrifice is not related to any experience and has thus

become largely misleading and unintelligible. The permanent, definitive and irrevocable

significance and effect of Jesus' death must be freed from the restrictions of the older

terminology and interpreted in modern man's horizon of experience, in order to have an

impact in the modern world (Küng, 1974:426).

In recent times various viewpoints have been promulgated by European theologians.

Bultmann argued that concepts like death as the punishment for sin and the pre-existent

Christ's expiatory death are part of a primitive juridical mythology. Our interpretations of

Jesus' death must demythologise these myths (Jonker, 1977:133). Since then,

theologians have conceded that demythologisation is inevitable (Küng, 1974:219), but also

limited (Küng, 1974:413).

Recently, Kuitert (1999a:146; 1999b:166-168, 169-170) has reminded Christians that

reconciliation is originally a ritual that comes from "below" – set up by human beings. God

did not devise it, and then reveal it, so that we have to believe it; it comes from human

beings who mean something by it. He continues:

> The view that God has revealed himself as the one who demands satisfaction (so
> we have to believe that), or conversely as the one who has revealed that he does
> not require satisfaction (so that we don't have to believe that) misses the point of
> the ritual and ends up involving God in our ecclesiastical disputes over
> reconciliation. 'Reconciliation' is a ritual and thus from below, from people who
> were aware that they had become transgressors, were guilty; they had to do
> something about it, and so they offered the scapegoat or a sacrificial animal.
>
> (1999a:147)

Humans have devised the rituals themselves, but not simply because there had to be

rituals. The rituals of reconciliation are a sign of an awakened conscience. People know

about God's order and their own transgression of it and want to make that good. The ritual is thus an attempt from below to make things good above (Kuitert, 1992:148-149; 1999a:151).

When we see God as the only one who has the ghastly privilege of not being able to forgive without a *quid pro quo* (as Von Harnack complained), we forget that reconciliation is an enterprise from below (Kuitert, 1992:149).

> …people wake up, become aware that they have to do something if they are not to be overwhelmed by God's anger, and turn to God with repentance, with a confession of guilt, a prayer for forgiveness, and a promise to improve their lives.
> (Kuitert, 1999a:155)

The idea that God takes over this rite and makes our role his own, "…is not a truth fallen from heaven but a belief, an expectation, a hope, a form of wishful thinking if you like" (Kuitert, 1999a:155).

## 3.7	Conclusion

This leaves us with three historic models of reconciliation. All three have shortcomings; all three have important contributions to make, addressing variously the reality of powers, the gravity of sin and the importance of human participation in and for reconciliation. It seems that the majority of Christians use none of the theories exclusively. They would at times understand Christ's reconciliation as exemplary, and at times as objective, according to their experiences and context. This fits with the postmodern notion of contextuality and the importance of narratives (Van Biema, 2004:43).

Furthermore, our reconciliation models are just that – models. They were devised and thought out by humans (to address a human need) and not revealed from above. Fortunately, God revealed himself and his reconciliation through our models and continues to do so. It is thus right and proper for us to imagine models and images of God's reconciliation that are more in keeping with modern experience and to interpret his love and dealings through these new models. Recently, theologians like Wolfgang Huber devised models for understanding Christ's reconciliation not in terms of the three traditional models, but rather with reference to present-day issues such as justice and responsibility. I will turn to their insights in the concluding chapters of the thesis.

In order to deconstruct the traditional Christian reconciliation models, I will have to do two things: firstly, investigate the dominant discourses and secondly, look at possible alternatives. In this chapter I have given an overview of the traditional models, their histories, contexts, strengths and weaknesses. In the next chapter I will continue with the deconstruction by putting the traditional models in brackets for a moment, and looking at alternatives. Deconstruction does not entail the breaking down of traditional ideas, but rather exploring different options.

CHAPTER 4:   AFRICAN VIEWS ON RECONCILIATION

> This is salvation: entities in their proper places – an ancestor at the head of the clan of healers, the nature spirit back with nature, the ancestress back in her tree shrine, the afflicted person back in good relationships with all these as well as the community.
>
> (Kwenda, 1999:8)

4.1   African Theology

Reconciliation according to African thought is quite a wide concept. One can ask: "Which Africa? Who is Africa? Does Africa have one concept of reconciliation?" I try to answer these questions further on. But it does seem as if the different actors and societies in Africa have some general ideas in common. In this section I examine the insights of African theologians as one source of African wisdom.

4.1.1   The need for African Theologies

Mbiti (1976:7-8) tells a distressing tale to illustrate how traditional theology is largely ignorant and "often embarrassingly impotent" in the face of human questions in the churches of Africa and other parts of the world:

> He learned German, Greek, French, Latin, Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis, and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally, he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology. It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return. He was anxious to reach home as soon as possible, so he flew, and he was glad to pay for his excess baggage which, after all, consisted only of the Bible in the various languages he had learned, plus Bultmann, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Buber, Cone, Küng, Moltmann, Niebuhr, Tillich, *Christianity Today, Time Magazine* …

At home, relatives, neighbours, old friends, dancers, musicians, drums, dogs, cats, all gather to welcome him back. The fatted calves are killed; meat is roasted; girls giggle as they survey him surrounded by his excess baggage; young children have their imaginations rewarded – they had only heard about him but now they see him; he, of course, does not know them by name. He must tell about his experiences overseas, for everyone has come to eat, to rejoice, to listen to their hero who has studied so many northern languages, who has read so many theological books, who is the hope of their small but fast-growing church, the very incarnation of theological learning. People bear with him patiently as he struggles to speak his own language, as occasionally he seeks the help of an interpreter from English. They are used to sitting down and making time; nobody is in a hurry; speech is not a matter of life and death. Dancing, jubilation, eating, feasting – all these go on as if there were nothing else to do, because the man for whom everyone had waited finally returned.

Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister, now a married woman with six children and still going strong. He rushes to her. People make room for him, and watch him. "Let's take her to the hospital," he calls urgently. They are stunned. He becomes quiet. They all look at him bending over her. Why doesn't someone respond to his advice? Finally a schoolboy says, "Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few buses that go there." Someone else says, "She is possessed. Hospitals will not cure her!" the chief says to him, "You have been studying theology overseas for ten years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt." He looks around. Slowly he goes to get Bultmann, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament. Of course he gets the answer: Bultmann has demythologized it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, "Help your sister; she is possessed!" He shouts back, "But Bultmann has demythologized demon possession."

Christianity has become a universal religion thanks to the great missionary movement of the last 200 years, and the dedication of men and women from the older Christendom, plus the assistance of local converts. Many African theologians would add that the message of Christianity was not entirely new for Africa, and that African culture already resembled the worldview of the Bible. An Ashanti proverb explains that: "No one shows a child the Supreme Being", meaning that everybody knows of God's existence almost by instinct', even children know Him (Bediako, 1995:97; Mbiti, 1969:29; Mbiti, 1998:140-142)

Mbiti (1998:142) himself asserts that:

> The Bible is very much an African book, in which African Christians and theologians see themselves and their people reflected and in which they find a personal place of dignity and acceptance before God.

This is certainly true. Many Africans through the ages have found in Christianity and the Bible an experience of God. But as I have pointed out, most Christian concepts and myths were written for a Medieval Western context. So African Christians had to interpret the message of Christianity from their African worldview (Carr, 1976:162; Ndungane, 2003:101; Mbiti, 1998:151).

Another problem with Western theology was that it addresses questions that were irrelevant to African people. While Western theologians debated the Immaculate Conception and the virgin birth, this "philosophised" (Makhathini, 1973:14) Christianity didn't mean much to African people. Africans required a theology that was contextual and liberating, that recognised indifference to diseases and poverty as sin and that religion was more all-embracing than a two hour Sunday (Makhathini, 1973:15-16; Meiring, 1975:115-119). In this sense African theologians aimed to produce a corrective to Western theology.

This gave rise to African Theology where "… nearly every Christian concept is open for re-examination, re-interpretation, re-consideration" (Mbiti, 1998:143).

4.1.2   Interviews with four African Theologians

4.1.2.1   John Mbiti

John Mbiti is a famous Kenyan academic and author on African religion and theology. Although he is retired, but he still teaches and ministers in a parish. He lives in Switzerland.

When I asked him in Pretoria in 2005, what reconciliation means in Africa, Professor Mbiti related how a husband and wife would reconcile after a separation, and emphasized the role of their relatives and neighbours in this process. He explained that community life is very important in Africa, and that an injury to one is an injury to all. That is why people would say "we have been killed" if one member of their community was killed. If this corporate community is thus injured, the whole corporate community must be reconciled and is therefore involved in the reconciliation between (seemingly) only two members of the community. For the same reason, the offender is not the only one held responsible for the injury and he or she will not be punished as if he or she acted alone. The whole community takes responsibility for the deed (Mbiti, 2005:1).

Mbiti commented on the importance of rituals for reconciliation. A cleansing ritual would for example be used to cleanse a broken relationship so that a fresh relationship could be built. These rituals remove both psychological and spiritual injuries. Mbiti informed me that West African people also make use of elaborate covenants to establish or re-establish their relationship. These covenants are taken extremely seriously (Mbiti, 2005:1).

On the question of reconciliation with God, Mbiti felt that it was St Paul who first came up with the idea that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself". He argued that he did not believe that people needed to reconcile themselves with God. Jesus' relations with people were not a kind of reconciliation between Jesus and the people – He met them directly and did not deal with them as sinners; He did not call for reconciliation between humans and God. The question of reconciling people with God did not arise. Mbiti explained that in the African traditional worldview people did not see themselves as sinners before God until they heard the missionaries tell them that. And in his European

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congregation he does not speak of sin, as sin does not cross the lives of the people (Mbiti, 2005:2).

I also asked him whether I should speak of African religion or religions; the singular or the plural. He told me that he used to use the plural in order to emphasize the diversity and plurality of practices in Africa, but that these days he uses the singular more often. He said that there are some general features in all the variations of African religion (Mbiti, 2005:2).

4.1.2.2   Agrippa Khathide

Pastor Agrippa Khathide is a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, a Pentecostal church with a large following among in the African community. During my interview with him at the University of Pretoria in 2004, Pastor Khathide explained that he sees reconciliation as deliverance from evil: Christ defeated the devil once and for all. According to him, Christian theology and teaching should highlight this aspect of reconciliation and take account of the reality of the dangers of the spirit world (Khathide, 2004:1).

He explained that the traditional African idea of sin – the disturbance of the rhythmic cycle of life – is quite different from the biblical notion of inherited sin. In line with this, Africans see reconciliation as a consensual, community-determined restoration of this disturbance. He believed that the biblical view of sin and redemption should replace the African view of sin and reconciliation (Khathide, 2004:1-2).

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Pastor Khathide represents the group of African theologians that see little continuity between African religion and Christianity. As such his church does not use traditional African symbols in their liturgy (Khathide, 2004:2).

Khathide's African theology is quite negative regarding the value of African religion, but takes the worldview of African people very seriously. Anderson (1998:407) explains that:

> The African traditional world is filled with fearsome and unpredictable occurrences demanding a Christian answer. Hermeneutics in Africa must be relevant to the whole of Africa's existence, and proclaim biblical deliverance from sin, from sickness, and from the very real fear of evil that haunts many people. … The Pentecostal-type churches in Africa are endeavouring to provide a solution to this compelling need.

4.1.2.3   Daniel Ngubane

Reverend Ngubane, a pastor in the Assemblies of God which is also a church in the Pentecostal tradition, differs significantly from Khathide. Since the 1980's, he has been very involved in reconciliation between black and white communities in the then tense Durban area of South Africa.   I met him in Durban in 2004 after I heard that he felt strongly about the need for African reconciliation rituals.

He believes that Western Christian teachings and practices are not relevant for Africans or sensitive to their problems. As a result, African people often do not regard these Western notions as important. He recounted how many African leaders were quick to sign peace treaties, but then broke them even more quickly. He believes fervently that African reconciliation rituals should be explored in order to utilise reconciliation models of that can lead to true lasting reconciliation (Ngubane, 2004:1).

Ngubane explained that in African culture, when someone injures another person, he or she will symbolically wash the wound in a nearby river. By washing the wounds, the offender admits guilt, acknowledges responsibility for the injury, and binds him or herself to never do it again. This kind of oath, he says, is taken much more seriously than the signing of a document (Ngubane, 2004:1).

Ngubane (2004:1-2) listed a number of African reconciliation rituals that can possibly be used in a wider context. These include rituals of expulsion, new community formation and cleansing. He believes that it is very important that the truth come out, and in this connection describes the ritual of milking the palm (*ukusengelana ilala*):

> When it is felt that someone has not spoken the whole truth, he/she will be given a blade of palm leaf. This he or she must rub while being interrogated. As it becomes slippery – it squeaks. This is taken to be an indication that he is lying, and must be interrogated again. It is thought that tense (guilty) fingers will make the leaf squeak, while less tense fingers will not.
>
> <div align="right">(Ngubane, 2004:1)</div>

4.1.2.4   Tinyiko Maluleke

Professor Maluleke is an influential African and Reformed theologian and academic at UNISA, who has published extensively on the subjects of African Traditional Religion as well as on Mission within the African context.

Professor Maluleke wrote a poem called "Lethal Loaded Gun" in which he warns that Christianity can be dangerous and life threatening:

> Aids guns
> land-mines diseases
> malnutrition machetes …
> Africans are dying
> in the midst of abundant life
> Africans are crying

so everlasting life
could be nothing but a lie
Africans are wondering

Africans are dying
in which many find solace
yet it is no fun
when they hate and kill and die
in the name of religion
the loaded lethal gun

it kills only by accident
that is what they say
only they will die
who use as superficial dye
without the instruction book
that is what they say
yet the accidents occur
again and again
if you do not believe
consider South Africa here
Sudan and Rwanda there

In the name of Christ they prey
on all the millions who pray
its holy war some say
but how can war be holy
and the holy do such folly
Africa must be saved
some sing
in a big great sound
with much fun and pun
but the poor cannot run
from this thing they found
the lethal loaded gun

(Maluleke, 1998:324-325)

Maluleke calls for a Christian introspection in which Christians should probe "…the role,

significance and effects of Christianity in Africa" (Maluleke, 1998:326). It is with this

introspection in mind, that I asked him about reconciliation.

Maluleke stated that reconciliation with God is very important for African people: "… there

is no sorrier state (for them) than to be not reconciled with their ancestors or God". This

reconciliation takes place on at least four levels: with God, fellow humans, creation and

oneself. Professor Maluleke remarked that reconciliation with creation – the mountains, seas, land and animals – are often overlooked. The Xhosa cattle killings of 1867-1857 – when most Xhosas burned their crops and slaughtered their cattle in obedience to a vision – illustrated exactly how important it is for all levels to be reconciled, and that when there is conflict on one level, it easily taints the other levels as well (Maluleke, 2005:1; Ashforth, 1991:581).

Maluleke (2005:1; c f 1994:252) went on to explain that reconciliation means that all must be accounted for – the truth must be completely disclosed and all the pain must be vented. It does not necessarily mean that everything is solved, but rather that good and bad are recognized (and taken responsibility for).

For Maluleke, Jesus Christ brought about reconciliation by being similar to us. It was reconciliation through solidarity – Christ identified with our everyday experiences and thereby gave us hope and meaning (2005:1).

4.1.3   Ideas on Reconciliation in African Theology

African theologians developed their own Christology and understanding of reconciliation. Some saw reconciliation as liberation, or somewhat differently, as solidarity. This was due to the oppressive context in which they set out to create their theologies. Others understood reconciliation in terms of healing or ecology or as a critique of human political systems, or described Jesus as the Christus Victor, Joto Ancestor, Eldest Brother or first Ancestor (Bediako, 1995:85, 176; Kobia, 2003:190; Magoti, 1990:43, 45; Mugambi, 1989a:87, 120-121).

4.1.3.1   Liberation

The theme of liberation is a strong current in African theology. African Liberation

theologians see Christ as the struggling God, the Liberator, being on the side of the poor

and the oppressed; the one who frees people from their shackles (Mbiti, 1998:153).

Reconciliation means that freedom and justice be done, as Canaan Banana (1976:156-

157) movingly illustrates in his translation of the Lord's Prayer:

    OUR FATHER WHO ART IN THE GHETTO,
    DEGRADED IS YOUR NAME,
    THY SERVITUDE ABOUNDS,
    THY WILL IS MOCKED,
    AS PIE IN THE SKY.

    TEACH US TO DEMAND,
    OUR SHARE OF GOLD,
    FORGIVE US OUR DOCILITY,
    AS WE DEMAND OUR SHARE OF JUSTICE.

    LEAD US NOT INTO COMPLICITY,
    DELIVER US FROM OUR FEARS.

    FOR OURS IS THY SOVEREIGNTY,
    THE POWER AND THE LIBERATION,
    FOR EVER AND EVER, AMEN.

4.1.3.2   Solidarity

Related to the view of reconciliation as liberation, reconciliation is also seen as solidarity.

The idea of God showing solidarity with people in their struggles, has led to touching

images of Christ as, for example, a Black Woman or a disabled God (Johnson, 2002:205;

Ruether, 2002:xv; Willis, 2002:223-224). Accordingly, God saved humankind by showing

solidarity with them in their struggles. African and Black theology places a high premium

on the fact that in becoming human in Jesus, God was not born in the sumptuous palaces

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of kings, but that the almighty and transcendent God chose to empty the godhead in order

to take on the nature of a slave (Maimela, 1998:118; Maluleke, 2005:1).

> God came down from his throne and chose to be born of poor parents, to live and
> die as a poor and oppressed human being so as to give the oppressed Blacks new
> life and hope. In doing so, our Creator, in Jesus, chose to identify the divine being
> with human suffering and pain and let Him share in it so that God might win
> freedom and life in its fullness for the downtrodden.
>
> (Maimela, 1998:118)

In Jesus Christ, God the Father suffered in solidarity with suffering humanity. In this view,

reconciliation means the deliverance from suffering by knowing that God understands our

suffering and ends it (Mbiti, 1998:154).

In his well-known poem "I am an African", Gabriel Setiloane (1976:128-131) touches on

many christological and soteriological themes. He writes that although African people

always knew the one and only God (albeit by different names), the story of Jesus Christ

took some time to reach them. Still, the nativity and teachings of Jesus were both

refreshing and eluding. But the story of the cross and suffering of Jesus was irresistible.

This was God showing solidarity with the oppressed:

> They call me African:
> African indeed am I:
> Rugged son of the soil of Africa,
> Black as my father, and his before him;
> As my mother and sisters and brothers, living and gone from this world.
>
> They ask me what I believe … my faith.
> Some even think I have none
> But live like the beasts of the field.
>
> "What of God, the Creator
> Revealed to mankind through the Jews of old,
> The YAHWEH: I AM
> Who has been and ever shall be?
> Do you acknowledge Him?"

My fathers and theirs, many generations before, knew Him.
They bowed the knee to Him
By many names they knew Him,
And yet 'tis He the One and only God
They called Him:
UVELINGQAKI:
 The First One
 Who came ere ever anything appeared:
UNKULUNKULU:
 The BIG BIG ONE,
 So big indeed that no space could ever contain Him.
MODIMO:
 Because His abode is far up in the sky.
They also knew Him as MODIRI:
 For He has made all;
And LESA:
 The spirit without which the breath of man cannot be.

But, my fathers, from the mouths of their fathers, say
That this God of old shone
With a brightness so bright
It blinded them … Therefore …
He died himself, UVELINGQAKI,
That none should reach His presence …
Unless they die (for pity flowed in His heart).
Only the fathers who are dead come into His presence.

Little Gods bearing up the prayers and supplications
Of their children to the GREAT GOD …
"Tell us further you African:
 what of Jesus the Christ,
Born in Bethlehem:
 Son of Man and Son of God
Do you believe in Him?"

For ages He eluded us, this Jesus of Bethlehem, Son of Man:
Going first to Asia and to Europe, and the western sphere,
Some say He tried to come to us,
Sending His messengers of old … But …
They were cut off by the desert and the great mountains of Ethiopia!

Wanderers from behind those mountains have told
Strange tales to our fathers,
And they in turn to others.

Tales of the Man of Bethlehem
 who went about doing good!
The theme of His truth is now lost in the mouths of women
As they sissed their little children and themselves to sleep.

Later on, He came, this Son of Man:
Like a child delayed He came to us.

The White Man brought Him.
He was pale, and not the sunburnt Son of the Desert.
As a child He came.

A wee little babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.
Ah, if only He had been like little Moses, lying
Sun-scorched on the banks of the River of God
We would have recognized Him.
He eludes us still this Jesus, Son of Man.

His words. Ah, they taste so good
As sweet and refreshing as the sap of the palm
        raised and nourished on African soil
The Truths of His words are for all men, for all time.

And yet for us it is when he is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
        and open side, like a beast at a sacrifice:
When He is stripped naked like us,
Browned and sweating water and blood in the heat of the sun,
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist Him.

How like us He is, this Jesus of Nazareth,
Beaten, tortured, imprisoned, spat upon, truncheoned,
Denied by His own, and chased like a thief in the night.
Despised, and rejected like a dog that has fleas,
For NO REASON

No reason, but that He was Son of his Father,
OR … Was there a reason?
There was indeed …
As in that sheep or goat we offer in sacrifice,
Quiet and uncomplaining.
Its blood falling to the ground to cleanse it, as us:
And making peace between us and our fathers long passed away.
He is that Lamb!
His blood cleanses,
        not only us,
        not only the clan,
        not only the tribe,
        but all, all MANKIND:
        black and white and Brown and Red,
        all Mankind!

HO! … Jesus, Lord, Son of Man and Son of God,
Make peace with your blood and sweat and suffering,
With God, UVELINGQAKI, UNKULUNKULU,
For the sins of Mankind, our fathers and us,
That standing in the same Sonship with all humankind and you,
Together with you, we can pray to Him above:
FATHER FORGIVE.

4.1.3.3   Community and Ecology

Christina Landman distinguishes African Woman's Theology from Feminist and Womanist theologies.   African Woman's Theology addresses the specific situation and challenges of black women in Africa (Landman, 1998:137).

According to Pienaar (2003:52, 56, 57), African Woman's Theology emphasises the community, human relations and life, and has compassion with the victims of society. This is reflected in its community orientated methodology which is sourced from human stories rather than abstract or dogmatic principles (Ackermann, 1994:213, 218-219).

Its concern for the community includes people's relationship with the natural environment. These theologians seek solidarity with and healing of nature as an essential part of reconciliation (Landman, 1998:140, c f Daneel, 1993:311-332).

4.1.3.4   Healing

Other African theologians, especially those from the African Initiated Churches, see Jesus Christ as the ultimate Healer, the one who exorcises evil spirits, the one who protects against magic and sorcery and the one who enables childless women to bear offspring. Salvation is deliverance from the Evil One, rather than deliverance from God's anger at their sins. African women often see Jesus also as their friend, their companion (Hayes, 1998:175, 176; Khathide, 2004:1; Mbiti, 1998:154; Musopole, 1993:348; Ndungane, 2003:104).

4.1.4   African Theology and African Religion

The effort to develop and reformulate African Theology depends heavily upon African Religion which "… gives access to African lifestyles, myths and narratives, practices and rites, and the broad oral tradition" (Du Toit, 1998:390). African religion's worldview, i.e., its view of God, of nature and the ancestors, of community life, medicine and healing, all provide a lens through which traditional Christian doctrines are reinterpreted (Du Toit, 1998:390).

Most African theologians agree that African religion can and should influence Christianity. African religion can do more than simply provide images and symbols for the inculturation of the Christian message. African religion can make a contribution to the life of the church in terms of, for example, spirituality and respect towards nature and creation. "Our growing consensus is that African religion has said 'yes' to the gospel. The gospel has also said 'yes' to African religion" (Mbiti, 1998:151; Kgatla, 1995:129).

At the first conference of African theologians in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1966, the African theologians formulated this belief as follows:

> We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know of Him and worship Him. We recognise the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; and yet it is because of this revelation that we can discern what is truly of God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of Him.
>
> <div align="right">(in Mbiti, 1998:151)</div>

In the next section I will turn to African religion itself, as the African theologians do, in search of Africa's contribution to the study of reconciliation. But first a word on the African Initiated Churches.

4.1.5   The position of the African Initiated Churches

The African Initiated Churches, in terms of formulating a definition of reconciliation, seem to represent an in-between position. Some of these were initially formed by schism from white-controlled denominations, others came into being as a consequence of visions and revelations that came to their founders, while still others were the offspring of Zionist and Pentecostal missionaries from America in the first decade of the 20th century. The African Initiated Churches took the basic message and applied it to the African context (Hayes, 1998:176).

Without Western restrictions, they did so more thoroughly than mainline churches managed. The African Initiated Churches incorporated the African worldview, African problems, symbols and style, and in so doing, produced a more traditional African expression of Christianity. As Carr (1976:162) writes:

> It is here where Africans find themselves able to celebrate unashamedly and gloriously the longed-for freedom – from many forms of slavery – that they have experienced through conversion to Jesus Christ. Here African theology comes to life in music and song, prayers and sacramental acts of healing and exorcism, art forms and architecture liturgy and dress, Church structures and Community life.

On the other hand, the theology of the African Initiated Churches is more than just a middle position theology. The African Initiated Churches have a unique soteriology that is not only an inculturated Western Christian belief, but one that stems from the African worldview and the existence of the spirit world: " … the most significant theological

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development was in [the African Initiated Churches'] soteriology, where they shifted the emphasis away from guilt for individual sin to deliverance from evil" (Hays, 1998:176).

4.2   Traditional African Religion

4.2.1   An unexplored source

Popular modern spirituality is dominated by Western and Christian worldviews and religion. Additionally, the Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc) have become increasingly popular and part of the religious consciousness of our global-village world. In contrast, African philosophy and spirituality have not been recognised to the same extent. I believe that in the same way that the Eastern religions enriched the religious consciousness of the world with their emphasis on relativity and withdrawal, so too can Africa teach us something through its emphasis on community and harmony (Adeyemo, 1998:369-371; Lugira, 2001:46; Magesa, 1997:5, 288; Van Niekerk, 1992:81-82).

In the rest of this chapter, I want to explore the myths and rituals of reconciliation in African religion. Some myths were passed on through the oral wisdom of traditional healers, for example the legends of the inventive mythologist, Credo Mutwa, and may seem strange or perhaps somewhat romanticised. Others have a more national character and explain the founding of various nations or the acts of national heroes. Many rituals were described by anthropologists, and still others were reported by African Christians who tried to make sense of both their Christian faith and the world in which they grew up. Although my sources are varied and not of the same quality, I use them simply to give some idea of African views on reconciliation, and not to compare or evaluate these sources.

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I believe that Africa has a lot to offer and should be taken seriously.

> …we cannot with impunity and a clear conscience ignore or write off African experience before the advent of Christianity as irrelevant or distracting to the process of Christianisation. On the contrary, over the years I have developed a growing conviction of the need to journey a little deeper into this African primal forest (which Western man fears so much and has made us – its children – fear too!). It could, even as it has done for the archaeologists, bring us face-to-face with the spiritual (religious) ancestry of all mankind and help us to understand the forces in which we – all mankind – "live and move and have our being"
>
> (Setiloane, 2000:13).

4.2.2   Which African Religion?

4.2.2.1   One Religion

There has been some debate in the past on whether all the different peoples of Africa have one religion or whether they all had different religions. There is enough reason to speak of African religions – there are about two thousand African people groups (tribes), and each has its own religious system. Still, most scholars agree that African religion is "one in its essence" although there are a variety of expressions of that one belief (Magesa, 1997:15-16; Mbiti, 1969:1-2, 12; 1998:141; 2005:2; Parrinder, 1962:10-11; Smart, 1989:298).

I will therefore use the singular form "religion" as is common practice, bearing in mind that there are considerable differences within African religious tradition (Bediako, 1995:97-99; Thorpe, 1991:4,103) and these differences should be acknowledged. An extreme example is the Bushmen or San whose religion is not truly representative of African religion overall: it lacks a belief in spirit mediators and a precise concept of evil. Still, I agree with Thorpe (1991:9) that "… from another perspective it is the most African of all

religions" and have influenced many other more typically African groups. Where possible,

I will give an indication of the specific group or tribe in question.

4.2.2.2   Old and new

Related to the above, is the question of whether the African religion I describe is a

traditional and pure religion, or a religion influenced by Christianity, Islam and other

Western influences. And to what extent do African people still believe as they did

centuries or decades ago?

This is a difficult question to answer. African people are not a homogenous group and

every single African has probably been exposed to outside influences in different ways.

Many adherents of traditional African religion are urbanised and well aware of other

religious traditions and cultures, and are undoubtedly influenced by them. Others live

more isolated and their version of African religion is less contaminated. I believe African

religion is dynamic and varied, and I am aware that my attempt to pin it down will always

be a bit artificial.

But perhaps the central theses and structure of African religion are more universal. Mutwa

(1998:559) explains that:

> Everything [an African] does, think, says, dreams of, hopes for, is moulded into one
> structure – his Great Belief. Things like disbelief, doubt, agnosticism, atheism,
> disobedience are entirely unknown, unfathomable, senseless, within the framework
> of the Great Belief.

There are some fundamental beliefs such as the connectedness of things and the

importance of the community that informs all the different tribal variations of African

religion, and even the theology of the African Initiated Churches as well (Mutwa, 1998:559).

4.2.3   Importance of reconciliation in African Religion

Reconciliation is the heart of all religions. All religions strive to heal or restore a perceived brokenness between humans and God, between humans and the natural world, or between and among humans themselves. All religions formulate myths, which explain the present (broken) condition, and offer accompanying rituals for the purpose of rectifying this condition. As a typical religion, African religion is also focussed on reconciliation (Maluleke, 2005:1).

Abe is absolutely correct in saying that: "Salvation has been the ultimate concern of all religion … Thus in all the Judaeo-Christian theology and the traditional religions of Africa, salvation of both the soul and the body is their ultimate goal pursued vigorously in every practical religious expression" (1996:3).

But among religions, African religion stands out in its practicality and humanness. Everything is about relationships, strengthening relationships, healing relationships. As such, there is a multitude of reconciliation rites in African religion and culture.

4.2.4   Vertical or horizontal reconciliation?

4.2.4.1   The two dimensions

Most Christian definitions of reconciliation articulate the conviction that the relationship between God and humans has been disrupted. Referring to the religious or spiritual dimension of human existence, the presupposition holds that the estrangement in the spiritual dimension has a thoroughgoing effect on everyday life, on mutual human relationships and on the attitude of human beings toward themselves. Thus, according to Christian doctrine, all humans live in estrangement from God – our source – the creator of heaven and earth. This conflict is reflected in our relationships: our relationship with God, ourselves, one another and the environment (Huber, 1990:43; Van der Kooi, 2002:105-106).

The reconciliation between human beings and God is often referred to as the vertical dimension of reconciliation and the reconciliation between humans as the horizontal dimension. Horizontal reconciliation can in turn take place between quarrelling individuals or conflicting groups.

4.2.4.2   Western Christianity's traditional vertical focus

Western Christianity has been and large segments of it continue to be more otherworldly inclined and focused more on the vertical dimension of reconciliation. There are of course many exceptions, such as the 19th century liberal theology, the Social Gospel Movement of the first half of the 20th century, the Life and Work Movement and the open, this-worldly stance of the participants in the Genevan Ecumenical movement. But still, according to

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traditional Christian thought, all strife and brokenness stems from human disobedience to God. Similarly, the solution for conflict lies in first restoring human relationship with God. It thus makes sense that the focus of reconciliation should be vertical (Steyn, 2005:133).

This does not mean that Western Christianity does not take the horizontal dimension seriously. Reconciliation to fellow human beings is as important for Christians as their reconciliation to God, and is a central tenet is the teachings of Christ. But it always follows from the spiritual kind of reconciliation. Van der Kooi (2002:104) argues that the Christian concept of reconciliation is built on the presupposition that a "real and comprehensive restoration of mutually amicable human relations has its ground and motive in the reconciliation of God with humankind". The healing of the relationship with God brings about human reconciliation on social, economic and political levels. This religious vertical focus, where found may be due to a very strong undertone of dualism that still permeates Western Christianity (Kistner, 1998:103).

In my treatment of Western Christian reconciliation models I accordingly paid mostly attention to the vertical dimension, as this informs Christian horizontal reconciliation. Because, God is, for instance, thought to require sincere confession before He forgives humans, this requirement also stands for reconciliation among humans.

4.2.4.3   African Religion's horizontal focus

African religion, is much more this-worldly focussed, and views the affairs of humans as all-important. Instead of a dualistic worldview, African religion approaches the world holistically, and believes that all creatures in creation are linked. Their solution for distress then is to reconcile on a horizontal level, and to expect that the vertical dimension will

follow from that (Bediako, 1995:101; Ndungane, 2003:101; Nyirongo, 1997:61; Tutu, 1996:xvi-xvii; Van Niekerk, 1982:24).

Thorpe (1991:5) says that African religion is very much part of the society in which it is found. "It is thus oriented to this world and has a clear horizontal dimension". But African religion is also permeated by an awareness of the spiritual, invisible dimension of life:

> Trees, rivers, streams, rain are more than merely things to be utilised. They have a spiritual quality which unites them to human beings in a greater cosmic whole. The ancestors or living-dead continue to be a spiritual part of this greater cosmos even after they have ceased to exist as a physical part. The creator, and even creation itself, belong to this vertical or spiritual dimension of ATR.
>
> (Thorpe, 1991:5)

Africans do refer to God when dealing with reconciliation. In a curious story (from Thorpe, 1991:18-19, also Becker, 1974:52) that deals with the human condition, God is, after all, the One who takes the initiative:

> The Mantis [the divine trickster !Kaggen] made an Eland from his son-in-law /Kwammanga's shoe. /Kwammanga missed his shoe but neither he nor his wife had any idea what happened to it. Meanwhile Mantis collected honey and fed it to the Eland which he had made as it came out of the reeds to eat. Mantis's family wondered why he brought so little honey home for them, and finally they sent Ichneumon [his grandson] to hide beneath a kaross and see what happened to the honey. Watching, he saw the Eland come from the reeds and drink the water into which Mantis had put the honey. Mantis even smoothed the honey water onto the Eland's skin. Then Ichneumon jumped out from underneath the kaross. Quickly Mantis drove the Eland away, but Ichneumon confronted him with what he has seen. As they argued, Mantis denied the existence of the Eland. On his return, Ichneumon reported what he had seen.
>
> Secretly Porcupine's family plotted together and went to the pool where Ichneumon had seen Mantis feed and stroke the Eland. /Kwammanga then put honey into the water and called the Eland by name, whereupon it came out of the reeds to drink. As it drank /Kwammanga shot it. It ran back into the reeds, where it lay down to die.
>
> Meanwhile Mantis was looking for honey to feed his beloved Eland, but he could not find any. Feeling a strange sense of foreboding, he went to the water to call the Eland, but it did not come. He wept as he sought his Eland, following its spoor and then the drops of its blood. At last he saw it lying dead in the reeds. Weeping and

angry, he returned home. In the meantime /Kwammanga had commissioned meerkats to cut up the dead Eland. Mantis ran back to where Eland lay. When he saw the meerkats busy slaughtering his animal, he tried to stop them by shooting arrows, which however, missed their mark. Next he attacked them with a knobkerrie, but all to no avail. Finally, a meerkat snatched the knobkerrie from Mantis's hand and, after beating him, made him collect wood for a fire. While he was thus busy, Mantis saw Eland's gall bladder hanging on a tree. He pricked it open so that everything and everyone was covered in darkness. When he realised what he had done, he quickly removed his own shoe, which had red dust still clinging to it, and threw it into the sky where it became the moon.

Laurens van der Post (in Thorpe, 1991:20) interprets this myth in detail, and explains that the Mantis represents a loving, caring creator. And Mantis's sorrow over the loss of Eland, is the loss for the separation that exists between creator and creature. Thorpe explains that the creation of the moon may suggest the "inner spirit of the human soul which rises above the felt bitterness of an experienced moment to shine again, lighting the way no longer for oneself alone, but also for others" (1991:20). If the Mantis – the divine !Kaggen – represents the creator, as Van der Post believes, he is also the one who heals the brokenness and bitterness. The culprits – Porcupine, /Kwammana and the meerkats – do not do anything to reverse their murder. This myth seems to accept then that the Creator takes the initiative in repairing the human condition, and that reconciliation, thus, doesn't depend on human efforts.

It would seem that African religion presupposes that God is somewhere in the background when it comes to reconciliation, and that the initiative may even come from God. But, African religion being a practical religion, the focus falls squarely on the horizontal side of affairs, as it is thought to influence the vertical as well. In my treatment of African religion, I thus focus mostly on horizontal reconciliation.

4.2.4.4   Grounds for comparison

I conclude that the Western Christian vertical reconciliation models can be compared with African religion's horizontal models, without confusing the issue. Christian vertical reconciliation supposes the horizontal and African horizontal reconciliation, the vertical. The difference lies in the myths – which I do compare – rather than in the dimensions.

4.2.5   Some central ideas in African religion and philosophy

In order to understand African reconciliation rites and images, a number of central ideas must be clarified: the traditional African view of God, the world of the spirits, the ancestors, life force, sin, guilt and shame.

4.2.5.1   God

African religion teaches that God exists, and that this God created all things. God is eternal, all knowing, and ubiquitous. God is, frankly, beyond description. As Mutwa (1998:561) beautifully explains:

> The Most Ultimate God, who is the God of the Gods of the Gods, is Everything in Everything. Each tree, each blade of grass and each stone that you see out there, and each one of the things that live, be they men or beasts, are all parts of God, just as each one of the hairs on your head and each flea in your hair and each drop of blood is part of you. The sun is part of God; the moon is part of God and each one of the stars is but an infinitesimal part of Him who Is, and yet is not, Him who Was, and yet was not, and Him who Will Be, and yet shall never be; because there never was a time when God was not and there never is a time when God can never be.

When African people consider God to be omniscient, they are conferring the highest possible position of honour on Him. Wisdom is very important in African societies, and if it

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is said that God is omniscient, it admits that humans are limited while God is absolute and unlimited. Thus God is called "the Watcher of everything" (Barundi), "the Great eye" (Baganda) and the one whose "ears are long" (Ila). So too, is God omnipresent: His presence protects his people while He also sees what wrongdoers are up to. He is without beginning and without end: "God has nowhere or nowhen, that He comes to an end" (Ila). God is omnipotent – the "Almighty" who can do anything. His might is also seen in political terms as "He who roars so that all nations be struck with terror" (Zulu) and in his exercise of power over nature: "the One who makes the sun set" (Kiga). Power is thus viewed hierarchically in which God is at the top as the Omnipotent; beneath Him are the spirits and natural phenomena; and lower still are men who have comparatively little or no power at all (Eliade, 1958:44-45; Mbiti, 1969:31-32; Smart, 1989:300; Tutu, 1973:43).

God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. While many scholars label Africa's idea of God as an uninvolved *deus otiosus* or a concealed *deus absconditus* (as many myths suggest), Africans do experience God as also immanent: "… He is so 'far' (transcendent) that men cannot reach Him; yet, He is so 'near' (immanent) that He comes close to men" (Mbiti, 1969:32). While God transcends all concepts of time and no one is beyond Him, He is so immanent that humans can make contact with Him through prayers, sacrifices and invocations. He is also near in the sense that He fills all creation, but then more in a panentheistic fashion, rather than a pantheistic manner. (Crafford, 1993: 167; Crafford, 1996:13; Eliade, 1958:47-49; Mbiti, 1969:32; Mutwa, 1998:559)

Although God is usually spoken of in anthropomorphic terms, it is believed that God is spirit, and a fathomless spirit at that. No human mind can measure Him and no intellect can comprehend or grasp Him. Thus, a Pygmy hymn describes Him (Mbiti, 1969:34-35):

In the beginning was God,
Today is God,
Tomorrow will be God.
Who can make an image of God?
He has no body.
He is as a word which comes out of your mouth.
That word! It is no more,
It is past, and still it lives!
So is God.

African people recognise God as one. According to some cosmologies, there are, besides Him, other divinities and spiritual beings some of which are closely associated with Him. These beings are generally the personification of God's activities, natural phenomena and objects, deified national heroes or spiritual beings created by God as such. In some cases, dual aspects of God are recognised (such as transcendence and immanence or good and evil), while the Shona and Ndebele even use a Trinitarian concept of God as Father, Mother and Son (Crafford, 1996:13-14; Mbiti, 1969:36; Mutwa. 1998:563; Smart, 1969:60).

God is seen as essentially good because of all the good things that he provides. However, some societies would consider calamities and misfortunes to be brought on them by God. Still, this will not cause them to see God as evil, but rather beyond human understanding. God is considered to be just and holy – "the pure King Who is without blemish" (Yoruba). There are no direct sayings that say that God is love; but then traditional African people do not really talk about love but rather show it through their actions. People assume that God loves them, and they experience it through His blessings. According to the Ila, God is not only good, but He is also "the compassionate one. God is merciful and does not stop doing good to people, no matter what they say about him. He shows his mercy to all people at all times" (Shuuya, 1973:49; also Crafford, 1996:13; Mbiti, 1969:37-38; Mutwa, 1998:563)

4.2.5.2　　　**World of the Spirits**

The spirits exist between God and humans. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of spiritual beings: those that were created as such and those who were once human beings. These can again be subdivided into four groups, namely the divinities, associates of God, ordinary spirits and the ancestors (Mbiti, 1969:75).

The **divinities** comprise personifications of God's activities and manifestations, of natural phenomena and objects, nature spirits, deified heroes and mythological figures. They are mostly thought to have been created by God as spirits. They are associated with Him, and often stand for his activities or manifestations either as personifications or as the spiritual beings in charge of major objects and phenomena in nature. Some of them are national heroes, who have been elevated and deified, but this is quite rare, and when it happens the heroes also become associated with some function or form of nature (Mbiti, 1969:75-76).

The Ashanti pantheon has major divinities that act as God's intermediaries and minor divinities that were created to protect individual human beings. Banyoro divinities are departmentalised according to people's activities, and include divinities of war, of harvest, of cattle and of the different clans. The very religious Yoruba have seven hundred divinities and an intricate pantheon to accommodate them all. Among them are *Orisa-nla* who is the supreme divinity, *Orunmila* the divinity of language, *Ogun* the owner of iron and steel, and *Sango* the manifestation of God's wrath, thunder and lightning (Parrinder, 1962:44-47; Mbiti, 1969:76).

These divinities are both transcendent, and closer to humans, as they are experienced in the environment daily as thunder and lightning, rivers and lakes, the sun and the moon (Mbiti, 1969:77).

The **associates of God** are mythological figures that explain the existence of customs, ideas and institutions. They include the female divinity (Ashanti) or the Inkosazana or "Queen of heaven" (Zulu), the mother of all peoples and the divine messenger who carries God's gifts and punishment to the world and reports to him on human activities (Berglund, 1976:63-64; Mbiti, 1969:77-78; Parrinder, 1962:45; Sundkler, 1961:20).

The **spirits** are the common spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities and above the status of men. Although some believe that the spirits were created as a race by themselves, most African people see the spirits as what remains of human beings after they die. They are the ancestors of long ago, who are not remembered any more (Mbiti, 1969:79).

These spirits have no more family or personal ties to humans, and are thus feared as strangers, foreigners and outsiders. Still, the spirits are essentially neither good nor evil but can be one or the other. They have some physical power of humans, just as a dangerous lion might have; yet, in some ways humans are better off, and human specialists can manipulate and control the spirits as they wish. So people may fear the spirits and drive them away, but at times use them for human advantage, as they are closer to God (Mbiti, 1969:79-80).

As the spirits are invisible, ubiquitous and unpredictable, the safest thing is to keep away from them. If they appear too often humans will feel uncomfortable. They can possess

humans and cause many kinds of illness like madness and epilepsy. Yet, spirit possession is not always feared, and there are times when people induce it through special dancing and drumming. A possessed person becomes a medium that relays messages from the spirit-world to other humans (Mbiti, 1969:81-82).

The world of the spirits is very real to many Africans. John Mbiti (1969:86) reports that one of his pastor friends told him how as a schoolboy he once walked home with a friend:

> They had to cross a stream, on the other side of which was a hill. As they approached this stream, they saw lights on the hill in front of them, where otherwise nobody lived. My friend asked his companion what that was, and he told him not to fear but that it was fire from the spirits. They had to go on the side of the hill, and my friend was getting frightened. His companion told him that he had seen such fires before, and that both of them had only to sing Christian hymns and there would be no danger to them. So they walked on singing, and as they went by the hill, the spirits began tossing stones at them. Some of the stones went rolling up to where the boys were walking, but did not hit them. As the young men were leaving this hill they saw a fire round which were the spirits themselves. Some of the spirits were striking others with whips and asking them, 'Why did you not hit those boys?', 'Why did you not hit them?' The two young men could hear some of the spirits crying from the beating which they received, but did not hear what reason they gave for not hitting the boys with stones.

4.2.5.3 Ancestors

Who are the ancestors? Ninian Smart (1969:58) quotes a beautiful poem to explain:

> Those who are dead are never gone:
> They are there in the thickening shadow.
> The dead are not under the earth:
> They are in the tree that rustles,
> They are in the wood that groans,
> They are in the water that runs,
> They are in the water that sleeps,
> They are in the hut, they are in the crowd,
> The dead are not dead.
>
> Those who are dead are never gone,
> They are in the breast of a woman,

They are in the child who is wailing,
And in the firebrand that flames.
The dead are not under the earth:
They are in the fire that is dying,
They are in the grasses that weep,
They are in the whimpering rocks,
They are in the forest, they are in the house,
The dead are not dead.

The departed of up to five generations are not yet spirits and their process of dying is not yet complete, they are the ancestors or "living-dead" (Mbiti, 1969:25), although people who have in life injured the tribe may immediately become wandering spirits. The ancestors are still known by name, still part of their human families and people have personal memories of them. They return to their human families from time to time and symbolically share meals with them. They know and have an interest in what is going on in the family. When they appear (to the oldest member of the household) they are recognised, they may enquire after family affairs, warn of impending disasters or war, and rebuke the family members who have failed to follow their instructions. The ancestors' interference is not always embraced: while the Shona eagerly welcome their ancestors, the Zulu deem the interference ancestors as disruptive and deal with them quickly as possible (Thorpe, 1991:45, 56-57; Crafford, 1996:14; Parrinder, 1962:58-60; Mbiti, 1969:83; Smart, 1969:58; c f Mbiti's distinction between *Sasa* and *Zamani* in Mbiti, 1969:22-27).

Because they are still in a sense people, they are the best intermediaries between people and God. Not only are the ancestors bilingual as they speak the language of men and the language of God and the spirits, they also know the needs of humans having recently been human themselves. The Mende of Sierra Leone thus pray (in Tutu, 1996:126): "O good and innocent dead, hear us: Hear us, you guiding all-knowing ancestors, you are neither blind nor deaf to this life we live: you did yourselves once share it. Help us therefore for the sake of your devotion, and for our good." People approach them often for

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minor, everyday needs. They may not be able to perform miracles or extraordinary things to remedy the need, but humans experience a sense psychological relief when they pour out their hearts to their ancestors (Crafford, 1996:15; Mbiti, 1969:83-84; Parrinder, 1962:61; Thorpe, 1991:36; Smart, 1989:301; Tutu, 1996:xvi-xvii).

The ancestors represent the ideal community and serve as a model for their descendents of what their communities should be like. Imitating the ancestors is a kind of cure-all for bickering factions and guilt-ridden individuals (Tutu, 1996:xvi; Zulu, 1998:188). According to Zulu (1998:187) "The ancestors in African society serve as a model of perpetual peace and harmony to be emulated. Reconciliation means that the harmony (*ubuntu*) in the community is restored according to the norms of the ancestors".

There is no such thing as ancestor worship since the ancestors are not worshipped as if they were gods. Instead, they are revered as members of the community having greater status and power, and may at times even be regarded as behaving arbitrarily and are argued with (Crafford, 1996:15).

4.2.5.4   Life force and *ubuntu*

According to African thought, a human being is an energy or a force – sometimes called '*seriti*' (Tswana).   A person is like a live electric wire, which is ever exuding force in all directions (Setiloane, 2000:24-25). In this force is God: "Above all this force is God, Spirit and Creator … it is he who has force, power in himself. He gives existence, power of survival and increase to other forces" (Mulago, in Setiloane, 2000:25).

The "great belief", is the belief in the existence of this life force. Because God created everything, the world itself is godly, and should be kept that way. In fact, God is to be found in creation, and religion, in turn, entails the perpetuation of this creation:

> The fundamental element of African religious life and thought centres on the fact of creation. Created reality, including humanity, exists on account of the will of God. To continue to live peacefully, therefore, created reality must organise itself according to that will which God established for it from the very beginning. God's will for creation is preserved in the traditions of the people and is transmitted from generation to generation through the instructions of the elders and the mystical actions of the ancestors.
>
> (Magesa, 1997:285)

This brings to the fore the importance of relationships. Relationships hold the key to both divining God's will and expressing that will. God wants relationships; the purpose of creation is relationships; the goal of one's life is relationships. Or, put differently, it all comes down to community, humanity, *ubuntu*.

> Through the act of creation, God is related in an unbreakable way to the entire universe. At the centre of the universe is humanity, but it too is intrinsically and inseparably connected to all living and non-living creation by means of each creature's life force. Although God, spiritual beings, ancestors, humanity, living things and non-living things enjoy life forces with greater or lesser powers, all the forces are intertwined. Their purpose is ultimately humanity; they can act either to increase or to suppress the vital force of an individual person or of a community.
>
> (Magesa, 1997:285)

The life force is the relationships. It is the key to God and all creation. In African religion it is important to recognise this life force, and to maintain it. Setiloane (2000:27) compares the recognition of this life force with conversion:

> I venture to propose that in the human sphere, the awakening into consciousness of this dynamics of existence is what Christians have called conversion…. Biblical Christianity speaks about 'becoming a new man in Christ'. From there on one "participates" in a more positive and creative manner in the community. But all this does not happen of one's own volition and doing.

> Here Christianity and African experience are in agreement, namely, that it happens out of the initiative of an external Power (Force). The great "I" was calling the small "thou" into a relationship and communion. Therefore, it would appear that "conversion" is in African terms some kind of "possession".

The interaction of one's vital force with those of other people in the community does not terminate with death. Even after death the vital participation of the deceased is experienced in the community in general and in the clan circle in particular. The "ancestor cult" refers to this experience in the life of the people. The ancestors are experienced as persons and not deities or spirits. Yet, they share the divine essence, and the quality of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – "numinousness" (Setiloane, 2000:25, 29).

4.2.5.5   Sin

The Western tendency to privatise religion and Anselm's reconciliation model determined the Western Christian understanding of sin during much of Church history. I have shown that dominant Western theology saw sin as something that God punished us for, instead of something that God rescues us from. This understanding of sin led Western missionaries to try to induce a sense of guilt for sin in their hearers. Enlightenment missionaries often had trouble managing that. They complained that Africans had no sense of religion and no sense of sin. "In their frustration at their failure to induce this sense of guilt for sin, they called Africans incorrigible savages, and various other uncomplimentary names" (Maimela, 1985:65; Hayes, 1998:175).

Africans' view of sin differs significantly from that of significant segments of Western Christianity. The Africans believe that God is the creator of everything including society. Society, according to their belief systems, is a moral entity since the Creator provided a moral code which directs individual behaviour patterns. However, this moral code can be

violated, and any infraction of it is regarded as sin, which earns the displeasure of God. Such sinful acts include immoral behaviour, breaking covenant, ritual mistakes, breaking of taboos, committing an abominable act, offence against God or man and pollution. Thus, while Christians often conceptualise the source of evil as the devil or sin, African religion tend to locate the source of evil firmly in the human world, in the disruptive ambitions and jealousies of people. Such people are witches or sorcerers. Sin creates imbalance in the relationship between God and man or between man and man. Such imbalance is usually attended by catastrophe not only to the offender but also to the whole community (Maimela, 1985:65; Mbiti, 2005:1; Ndwandwe, 2000:213; Thorpe, 1991:114; Turaki, 1999:141; Ubruhe, 1996:18).

African religion is thus a moral or ethical religion that dictates a certain way of living and relating, the purpose of this ethical consideration being life in its fullness. Africans quickly draw ethical conclusions about thoughts, words, and actions of human beings, or even of "natural" cosmological events, by asking questions such as: Does a particular act or happening promote life? If so, it is good, just, ethical, desirable, divine. Or, does it diminish life in any way? Then it is wrong, bad, unethical, unjust, or detestable (Magesa, 1997:77,285; Ndwandwe, 2000:213).

What traditional Christianity abstractly calls "sin" or "evil" is better expressed in African religion by the concept of "wrongdoing", "badness" or "destruction of life". Although the more abstract notions of sin exist within the African religious consciousness, African religion's moral perspective is concrete and pragmatic. The African concept of sin is therefore conditional. Sin does not exist in an absolute sense but always within the community and creation. Sin depends on the context and community, and not only otherworldly norms (Magesa, 1997:161; Ndwandwe, 2000:213).

Reconciliation is then the restoration of life force whenever or wherever it is diminished. Whenever there is a breach of order in the universe as established by God through the ancestors, humanity must see to it that the harmony is restored. Thus reconciliation often involves immunising victims against witchcraft, alleviating the anger of ancestors and keeping them happy, or offering atoning sacrifices (Magesa, 1997:193; Maimela, 1985:69-70).

It is important to note that, given this view of sin, reconciliation aims to remedy a broken relationship and restore harmony, rather than to punish the guilty (Shenk, 1995:76). According to Zulu (1998:191), "… the most striking aspect (of African society) is the willingness to forgive and not to avenge, and there is no emphasis on punishment or on restitution but on making friends again". And even when God or ancestors seem to 'punish' humans, this is not their goal:

> The ancestors as guardians of life and harmony may kill someone, but this is not usually the case. They are meant to protect life! They intervene mostly to warn human beings. When calamities are meted out, it is for the sole purpose to remind humans to respect their relationship with the creation and to preserve the universal order.
>
> (Magesa, 1997:80-81)

4.2.5.6   Shame and guilt

Van der Walt (2004:2) distinguishes between a Western and an African conscience. He explains that a good conscience according to the West requires justice (obedience to norms) and a bad conscience is the result of guilt (a transgression of norms). A guilty conscience is restored through reparation and retribution. In Africa, a good conscience is the result of honour and acceptance of the community through compliance with its ideals.

It follows that a bad conscience results from one's failure to comply with the responsibilities of the community, in which case the offender experiences shame as a consequence of the exclusion from and rejection by from the community. A shamed conscience is healed through reconciliation and re-inclusion into society (Adeyemo, 1998:375).

In a communal culture – such as in African – Van der Walt (2004:12) argues that a transgression is never directly addressed because it may undermine a person's honour. The insult may be even worse than the transgression itself. The community thus address the wrong through indirect manners like gossip, stories, proverbs, parables, dramas and other symbolic actions. In Western individualist culture guilt is internalised. The individual knows that he/she transgressed and feel guilty about it, even though others may not know about it.

The difference then is that in individualist cultures the transgression of norms leads to a guilty conscience and a fear of being punished. In more communal cultures the failure to life up to the expectations of the community, leads to fear of being rejected and a feeling of shame (Van der Walt, 2004:12).

A guilty conscience is more easily restored than a shamed conscience. In the case of a guilty conscience, the guilty person is punished (by being fined or forced to compensate) and the guilt is resolved. In the case of a shamed conscience, both repentance and forgiveness is complicated (Van der Walt, 2004:13). Repentance and admission of guilt shames the guilty person even more, and is rather concealed as long as possible. If the transgression cannot be concealed any longer, the guilty person will use a mediator to admit guilt on his/her behalf and negotiate reconciliation. The question of forgiveness

further complicates matters. When a wronged person forgives a wrongdoer, he or she implies that the guilty party is bad. And for the transgressor to accept forgiveness is to admit lowliness (2004:14).

It seems that van der Walt may have a point. Instead of direct conflict, African people often try to avoid conflict and rather communicate subtly and indirectly. Van Niekerk (1992:76-77) relates that when some children were destroying his fruit trees, his first instinct was to scold them. But one of the black deacons called to the children to come back the next day. All the children immediately went home without any quarrel or argument. The children understood perfectly that they were not meant to come back again; they knew that he was sending them home.

Likewise, if a father-in-law wants his son-in-law to slaughter a goat, the son-in-law will never refuse. He will assure his father-in-law that he will seek out a nice fat goat. And every time his father-in-law asks after the goat, the son will reply that he still has not found one that is good enough. The father-in-law will understand that he is not getting a goat, but without any conflict (Van Niekerk, 1992:77).

Unfortunately, this indirect approach can also lead to mistrust. Nothing is as it seems; everything has a different, often contradictory, meaning, which can hinder relationships (Van Niekerk, 1992:77).

Still, Van der Walt may be generalising. An interesting exception is often found within African culture. When a diviner finds that some kind of illness or misfortune is the result of a spirit or ancestor being neglected, steps are immediately taken to rectify the situation: rituals are performed, family members cared for and wrongs set right (Thorpe, 1991:60-

61). This easy kind of reconciliation resembles Van der Walt's guilt culture more than the typical shame culture.

It also happens in the worst of cases when witchcraft is suspected. When the offending witch is sought and possible candidates (usually the descendents of convicted witches and anti-socials) interrogated, Shona suspects may be quick to confess. Since it is believed that a witch can do evil unwittingly, the accused are often unsure of themselves (and their innocence) and may confess to being a witch in the hope of being restored to the community through exorcism (Thorpe, 1991:64; Kgatla, 1995:127-128). It seems that evil may be objectified and dealt with quite speedily.

4.3   Reconciliation myths and rituals

4.3.1   Introduction

> African knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people, since there are no sacred writings in traditional societies. One should not, therefore, expect long dissertations about God.
>
> (John Mbiti, 1969:29)

I will use these stories, myths and anecdotes to construct and classify African ideas on reconciliation.

My categorisation and classification will be artificial but it cannot be otherwise. I acknowledge the fact and present my categorisation as one possible way of arranging the myths and rituals. It corresponds with the artful and playful approach necessitated by a comparative study (as explained in chapter 2). Although my categories inevitably overlap,

I use the intention or myths behind the reconciliation rituals as my main distinguishing criterion. Some rituals intend to create community while others intend to propitiate or even expel.

The various myths or objectives behind the reconciliation rituals are not always obvious, as different performers of the ritual may have different intentions with what appears to be one and the same ritual. It is therefore more useful to try to classify the intentions (myths) rather than the rituals themselves. A case in point is rituals involving sacrifices. In African religion the concept of sacrifice is predominant and reconciliation ceremonies with this feature abound in African society. Scholars have differentiated between different kinds of sacrifice according to their purpose: Some sacrifices enhance the relationship between God and humans, while others atone for human wrongdoing. The sacrifices may be made to God himself, other divinities or spirits, the ancestors or any grouping of them. A sacrifice may also be intended for God by way of the ancestors. Sacrifices can ward off evil or confirm and strengthen society. It is quite obvious that these distinctions are not absolute. In essence, all sacrifice usually brings God and worshippers together in an intimate fashion (Schmidt, 1988:422-432; Smart, 1989:302; Ubruhe, 1996:16, 17).

A sacrifice, involving the slaughtering of an animal, its offering and the pouring out of its blood, immolation of some parts of the animal and the eating of other parts, can be intended as a propiatiory act, a gift, a cleansing ceremony, a way to establish communion with the ancestors and/or God or a reconstruction of community (Ubruhe, 1996:14-15; Abe, 1996:7).

4.3.2   Rituals intended to create community

Instead of the Cartesian dictum, "I think, therefore I am", Africans say: "I belong, therefore I am". An African is a being-in-community. This is the concept of *ubuntu* – I am because we are! African people discover their humanity in relationship with others (Adeyemo, 1998:374; Gerloff, 1998:49; Ndungane, 2003:102; Setiloane, 2000:21; Tutu, 1999:35).

Africa's first response to evil is to restore the community. When a person has done something to harm the community, he or she will be confronted and made to understand how disruptive his or her actions are for the wellbeing of the community. The offending person's dignity will then be restored and the community recreated (Ndwandwe, 2000:214; Crafford, 1993:167).

4.3.2.1   Community or *ubuntu* as reconciliation

In their myths about the 'genesis' of things, it is significant that Africans invariably teach that the first appearance of people was as a group, a company. In these myths, whether the first people came out of a bed of reeds or a hole in the ground, it is invariably a community of men, women, children and animals that appear. Gregariousness is an African characteristic that has been observed by students of all disciplines (Setiloane, 2000:20).

A Zulu myth explains how the community was God's solution for brokenness:

> … a mischievous young man was punished by iNkosi by being sent to earth through a hole in the sky. After the hole had been opened in the floor of the sky, iNkosi tied an intestine or umbilical cord around the young man's waist and lowered him to earth. The young man then cut himself loose from the cord connecting him to the

sky by means of a reed. Later, when iNkosi checked on the lad through the same sky-opening, he found him wasting away from loneliness. Since iNkosi was himself the father of the boy, he decided to send the most beautiful young sky maiden to comfort him and be his wife. She too was lowered to earth by means of a cord and she found the youth by a banana plant. When the boy saw the girl, he realised from her great beauty that she had come from the lord-of-the-sky. He cut her cord as he had cut his own, whereupon iNkosi drew it back into heaven and closed the hole in the floor of the sky. Henceforth people could multiply on earth and were no longer lonely, seeking to return to heaven.

(Thorpe, 1991:37)

It is interesting that the problem of separation from God was solved by God himself, but in a surprising way. Instead of restoring the previous relationship, a new community was created which seemed to have satisfied all parties.

The community is the arena for human interaction. Tensions arise and must be dealt with, lest they erupt in acts of aggression and surface as sin. It follows that the community is also the arena where forgiveness and reconciliation can and must take place. The crucial requirement, always, is the maintenance of order and balance within the group; no one individual is permitted to disrupt the whole (Thorpe, 1991:110).

There are countless examples of these kinds of reconciliation rituals between individuals. Often the first option is simply to "make friends again". Some examples from various parts of the continent are:

The clasping of hands with chyme (*mosoang*)

When two enemies want to reconcile, they will clasp their hands with chyme as a sign of reconciliation. Chyme is used because it has the same cooling effect as water. After this ceremony of reconciliation, all the village will eat together as witnesses (Tlhagale, s a:71).

Bodily injury

A perpetrator may also wash the real or symbolic wounds of his or her victim with water from a nearby river. By doing this he or she acknowledges responsibility and guilt for the offence, and binds him or herself never to do it again (Ngubane, 2004:1).

Speaking of good lost days

Enemies could be told to speak to one another of potential good days (parties or meetings) that were lost due to the animosity. They will soon realise how much their animosity is costing them and undoubtedly stop their quarrelling (Ngubane, 2004).

Peace tree

In West Africa, warring tribes will plant a peace tree in order to make a truce. This tree then becomes an actual meeting place where future conflicts can be resolved before they get out of hand (Ngubane, 2004).

Peace child

If factions are at loggerheads – a peace child may be another solution. A child conceived in this time may be seen as a peace child and be given to the leader of the opposing party. As long as this child is alive, there may be no war. Taking wives and marrying can also be ways of reconciliation (Ngubane, 2004).

In my interview with John Mbiti he related how the whole community would involve themselves in the marital problems of a husband and a wife. This is a way to look to the community for reconciliation. By confirming the community the problem is hopefully solved (Mbiti, 2005:1).

4.3.2.2 Sacrifices and offerings of reconstruction

> This is salvation: entities in their proper places…
>
> (Chirevo Kwenda, 1999:8).

In order to achieve reconciliation, sacrifices and offerings can be made to reconstruct a relationship between human beings, God, and creation. The actual elements of the sacrifice constitute a new community (Eliade, 1958:346; Magesa,1997:201-202).

A Turkana (Kenya) sacrifice illustrates this reconstruction:

> The act of giving or presenting is creative, for it constructs a tripartite relation between Akuj [God]… man and animal. In the quotidian affairs of life, these three "elements" occupy separate domains. When the animal is immolated, dissected, roasted, thrown to Akuj and the ancestors; and eaten by the men, as smoke and smell ascends to Akuj; then there is being constructed a new entity or super-entity of interrelationships with coolness and happiness. What used to be three separate entities are now transformed through ritual activity into substantial totality and not just a metaphorical likeness.
>
> (Magesa,1997:203)

Credo Mutwa describes an example of reconstruction of the community through an adoption ceremony, when he recalls the adoption of the two small princes, Zulu and Qwabe, by foster parents after their father died. The new parents were asked the "Seven Questions" which set the ceremony in motion:

…are you prepared to take these two children, Zulu and Qwabe, as your very own flesh and blood, your very own sons regardless of whether they grow up into brave men or cowards, into wise men or fools, into cruel men or kindly? … [Do] you sincerely promise before the thrones of your Holy Ancestors to treat these children as your very own; to guide them as a father should; to chastise them and to teach them the laws and the customs of your tribe? … [Do] you promise to protect these two children, and if necessary lay down your life for them? … [Do] you promise to care for them in illness and ensure that they never lack food? … [Do] you promise that when these children offend you, you will never under any circumstances reveal in the heat of your anger that you are not their father? … [Do] you promise to love both children equally and never show favouritism to any one of them? … [Lastly], do you promise to leave an equal share of all your worldly wealth to both these children on the day you die?

<div align="right">(Mutwa, 1998, 367-368)</div>

After answering these seven questions affirmatively, the adoptive father, Malandela, cut himself with a ceremonial knife on the inside of his left thigh. With blood from this cut he smeared the two boys from head to foot, and after taking both blood bedecked children in his arms, he called his ancestors to witness "… that I am today making these two children my own flesh and blood…" (1998, 368).

Similarly, the adoptive mother, Celiwe, smeared blood from her left thigh on the boys, proclaiming her love and motherhood to them. Then she took the bile sacks from two slaughtered cows and emptied the contents over the heads of the two children, adding: "This bile from a spotless white cow symbolises the birth fluid which covers you, Oh my sons, on this day of your being brought forth by me, your mother" (1998, 369).

4.3.2.3   Sacrifices and offerings of communion

Closely related to the sacrifices and offerings of reconstruction, are the rituals intended as communion. Sacrifices may consist of libations of water, rum or beer, small quantities of food or the flesh of a sacrificed animal. When meat is burned, for example, it symbolises communion with the ancestors. The whole idea is that a communion is established

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between two parties (one of which may be the ancestors) through eating and drinking together (Parrinder:1962:87-88; Tlhagale, s a:11).

Blood plays an important and interesting part in establishing this communion. It is believed that the blood of a sacrificial animal is a symbol of life. If it is offered to the ancestors, it represents the most precious gift one could offer. In accepting this life-giving symbol, the blood offered brings the ancestors back to life. Alternatively, blood can also represent the place where life and death meet. As a kind of frontier between life and death, it can be a pathway between human beings and God (Ndwandwe, 2000:211; Tlhagale, s a:24).

When sacrifices are offered to Zulu ancestors, the community joins in the feast and the ensuing communal meal unites the living with the dead (Thorpe, 1991:46). The very religious Yoruba (Nigeria) often make these kinds of sacrifices too. On some occasions the food is shared and it becomes a communal meal. At other times the sacrifices are meant for the deities alone and burnt (Thorpe, 1991:100).

This communion can also be established between humans: "When two (Tsonga) brothers in Mozambique have quarrelled and wish to make reconciliation they will say, 'Let us eat out of the same spoon, drink out of the same cup, and be friends again'" (Parrinder, 1962:87).

4.3.2.4   Medicines

Reconciliation and community are also achieved through the use of medicines. While medicine-doctors must make sacrifices to the spirit on whom they depend, their medicines work in a more symbolic way. Roots or leaves or parts of animals or birds are boiled in

water or pulverised in fire to form the basic ingredients of medicine. All of these elements: plants, animals, water and fire – represent the major forces of nature. The vapour and smoke produced in boiling and pulverising these medicines symbolise air. In applying them to the human body, the link between nature and humanity is established in a very intense way. This linkage is also realised through the use of charms and amulets (Magesa, 1997:209-211).

4.3.3 Rituals intended to propitiate and transfer guilt

In cases of serious offences, blood must be spilt in order to effect reconciliation (Ndwandwe, 2000:215). These rituals are intended to acknowledge the severity of the offence and deal with it appropriately.

4.3.3.1   Sacrifices and offerings of propitiation

Some sacrifices are not intended to reconstruct a relationship or to be shared as a communion, but instead are made as propitiatory offerings to turn away the anger of the spirits (or God). Nature spirits can likewise be placated through sacrifices (Magesa, 1997:206; Parrinder, 1962:88). The "Fisherman's Prayer" from the Lobi of Cote d'Ivoire is a beautiful example:

> O river, I beg leave to take fish from thee, as my ancestors did before me. The antelope leaps and its young learns not to climb. In such a manner the sons of men do as their fathers did. O river, rise up, engulf your sharp-toothed monsters, and permit our young men to enter the water and enjoy themselves with the fish without being harmed.

> If there is acceptance from you, then show it by accepting this baby chick. If not, if you cannot control the monsters, if one of them should harm our sons, then show it by refusing to accept this baby chick.

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(in Tutu, 1996:125)

So, too, are the Zulu ancestors appeased by sacrifices in cases of misfortune. The animal is offered up to the ancestors, ritually killed, skinned and the best pieces are placed in the back of the hut for the ancestors to lick. The Yoruba also give gifts to the gods that includes food, money, ornaments, animals, fowl or vegetables (Thorpe, 1991:46, 100). These kinds of sacrifices seem to satisfy the ancestors or God's demand for attention or acknowledgement.

Junod (1927:396) quotes a prayer that accompanies a propitiatory sacrifice in order to heal a sick child, which shows how the "gods" – it is not clear whether "gods" refers to spirits or ancestors – are irritatedly bought off:

> You, our gods, and you so and so, here is our mhamba (offering)! Bless this child, and make him live and grow; make him rich, so that when we visit him, he may be able to kill an ox for us … [You] are useless, you gods; you only give us trouble! For, although we give you offerings, you do not listen to us! We are deprived of everything! You, so and so (naming the god, to whom the offering must be addressed in accordance with the decree pronounced by the bones, i. e., the god who was angry, and who induced the other gods to come and do harm to the village, by making the child ill), you are full of hatred! You do not enrich us! All those who succeed, do so by the help of their gods! – Now we have made you this gift! Call your ancestors so and so; call also the gods of this sick boy's father, because his father's people did not steal his mother: these people of such and such a clan, came in the daylight (to lobola the mother). So come here to the altar! Eat and distribute amongst yourselves our ox … [according] to your wisdom.

4.3.3.2 Scapegoats as objects of punishment

Scapegoats are often used in African religion. The myths behind the use of scapegoats vary: in this case the guilt (or affliction) is transferred to the scapegoat to serve as an object of punishment. Scapegoats may be birds or animals, humans and even communities.

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When the immortal hero Lumukanda unwittingly took one of his daughters as a wife, and so committed a heinous sin, it had to be rectified in an elaborate four-part ceremony. In the second part a scapegoat was used to: "Go straight to hell and take all our sins with you … and leave us in peace and happiness" (Mutwa, 1998, 444).

A number of fowls were torn to pieces and smeared on the offenders – symbolising the sin they committed. It was then washed off, and the dirty water was poured over the goat. The carcasses of the mutilated fowls were stuffed in grass baskets and tied to the back of the goat. And finally the goat was pushed into a white-hot fire pit (1998:442-444).

Cases of human sacrifice abound in African religion and culture. A victim for human sacrifice as a scapegoat was usually paraded through the street of the town or city of the sovereign who was performing the sacrifice for the well-being of his government and people. To ensure that he carried away the misfortune, death and whatever guilt they might be involved in, individuals rushed out of their houses laying their hands upon him and thus transferring their sins, trouble, guilt and death to him. Then the victim was led to a grove and finally decapitated. These human victims were in most cases forcibly procured from other towns and villages and offered to God without willingly consenting to perform their supreme sacrifice (Ubruhe, 1996:18-19).

Some of Africa's national heroes became that by being scapegoats:

Queen Iden

Akannuzama, the rightful heir to the Benin throne, relinquished it to his son, Idova, on account of his senility. Idova was, therefore, crowned as Oba Ewuakpe (circa 1700 AD) but the people rebelled against him almost immediately. They refused to attend his palace meetings, to provide him food and supply of labour for the maintenance of the royal buildings. Oba Ewuakpe and his wife, Iden, consequently lived in abject poverty; borrowing money from his subjects for subsistence.

He almost resigned himself to his unpropitious state when an oracle admonished him to offer a human sacrifice to the gods, and to scatter about in the tower of the palace some newly emptied calabashes of palm oil and pads for carrying loads on the head. Iden, Ewuakpe's only wife, urged him to adhere to the advice of the oracle and willingly offered herself as the victim for the sacrifice. She was buried alive near the Oba market. Iden, however, warned Ewuakpe not to allow dirt to remain on the grave and that anyone who trod on the spot should be killed. (Apparently, this custom was kept alive until 1897 when the British Government conquered the city).

The following morning, Oba Ewuakpe's fortune experienced appreciable improvement when the chiefs who rebelled against him presented many valuable and precious gifts to him. They thereafter acknowledged his Obaship (Ubruhe, 1996:19).

Moremi and the Edi festival

In the days past, there was constant warfare between the Ife-Ife (Nigeria) and the Igbo (Nigeria) people in which the Ife-Ife people were incessantly routed and enslaved. The

Igbo people became a serious menace to the Ife-Ife. Moremi, a very beautiful woman, became worried about the apparently insurmountable problem facing her people – the Ife-Ife. Moremi therefore made a vow to the goddess of the River Esimirin that if she could be assisted to discover the strength of the Igbo people so they could be conquered by her people, she would offer her only son to the goddess.

In one of such wars, Moremi was taken captive but immediately became a cynosure because of her beauty. The paramount ruler of the Igbo married her and she became a queen. From this vantage point, Moremi, through her ingenuity and adroitness, discovered the secret of Igbo strength. Later, Moremi escaped to the Ife-Ife and revealed the secret to her people. In their subsequent raids of the Ife-Ife, the Igbo people were routed and enslaved. Ultimately, Moremi became a heroine.

When the period for the votive sacrifice came, Moremi could not substitute another thing, animal or person for her only son. Since she had no option, Olurogbo, Moremi's only son, was offered as sacrifice to the river goddess. She became a double heroine among her people. The people of the Ife-Ife instituted an annual festival designated *Edi* festival, commemorating the heroic act of Moremi (Ubruhe, 1996:19-20).

The Edi cleansing festival was crowned on the seventh day by a human scapegoat called Tele, through which the sins of the inhabitants were carried away by means of a type of life-for-life substitution sacrifice. Tele was usually an Ife slave. He was offered to bear the people's sins, misfortunes, diseases and death into the traditional grove. They ritually identified themselves with him as their sacrificial victim (Abe, 1996:7).

Eleguru

Eleguru was a diviner-priest who later became the "Saviour" of the Ijebu-Ode people. He voluntarily offered himself as a propitiatory sacrificial victim of scapegoatism to redeem the Ijebu-Ode people from the constant disastrous deluge of the lagoon which swept away numerous men and woman of the land and their properties (Abe, 1996:7).

The tradition narrates how the Ijebu-Ode people were constantly menaced by the *Osa* (lagoon) that overflowed its banks and caused incalculable destruction of lives and property. The deluge became a source of anxiety among the people. In their attempt to stem the threat of the disastrous deluge, the people consulted the Ifa Oracle. The diviner-priest divined that a human victim was needed as sacrifice. To the utter surprise of everybody, Eleguru, who was the diviner on the eventful day, presented himself as the priest as well as the victim to be offered (Ubruhe, 1996:20).

On the appointed day, Eleguru came prepared to perform the sacrifice and to die. He spread a mat on the lagoon, placed all his divination paraphernalia on the mat and sat on it. It gradually moved away into the lagoon as he uttered some incantations. Eleguru paid the supreme sacrifice by sinking into the lagoon, and his death marked the termination of the threat from the lagoon (Ubruhe, 1996:20).

The case of Eleguru was unique. Unlike in the case of Tele, there was no need for occasional repetition or annual re-enactment of his sacrifice. His sacrifice was once and final for all purposes and times in connection with the salvation of the people from the lagoon deluge (Abe, 1996:7).

4.3.4   Rituals intended to expel or accept

When an offender is unrepentant, or the evil beyond human control, Africans may resort to the use of rituals of expulsion. This is usually not the first option but rather a last resort. Otherwise, the perceived evil could simply be accepted or accommodated into the community (Ndwandwe, 2000:215).

4.3.4.1   Prayer and petition

One way of obtaining reconciliation is through prayer. Prayers are usually made in this case to expel an evil beyond human control. Although prayer can be said to be the commonest form of worship in African Religion, a prayer for reconciliation in particular emphasises more the dependence of the living on the ancestors and on God (Magesa, 1997:195-196).

According to Magesa (1997:196):

> … prayer says that there comes a time when order and harmony in human life and in the world depend on powers greater than the human power. This is especially so when humanity has done wrong or harbours anti-life elements within it. Prayer places the individual or the community in the hands of greater invisible and mystical powers and intends to overcome or to assuage their displeasure.

Prayers are uninhibited, forthright an honest, and sometimes even include an insult or scolding. The petitioners pray for fulfilment of practical needs in accordance with a full life and protection from affliction (Junod, 1927:422; Magesa, 1997:198:200).

The following Meru (Kenya) prayer for life highlights the theology and basic expectations of an African prayer (Magesa, 1997:198-200):

Kirinyaga (God), owner of all things,
I pray to Thee, give me what I need,
because I am suffering, and also my children,
and all the things that are in this country of mine.
I beg Thee, the good one, for life,
healthy people with no disease.
May they bear healthy children.
And also to women who suffer
because they are barren, open the way
by which they may see children.
Give goats, cattle, food, honey,
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.
If today anyone takes up a stick or a stone
against this our blessing, do we bless him?
May Wednesday and Sunday kill him.
May we flog him.
Hail, let happiness come!
Is our voice one?
Hail, let happiness come!

Prayer may also petition God to deal with an afflicting spirit. The Kono (Sierra Leone)

implore God in their prayers to do just that:

Therefore, I ask you to hold all evil from us.
Make it blind; make it lame; carry it to the spirit in the mountain.
Put it in a deep pit; place a stone upon it;
let the good wind from the north and the south
and from the rising to the setting sun blow upon it.
Let it be so for you are able to do this.

(Magesa, 1997:207)

While many Africans regard God too highly to trouble him with everyday problems – and

rather speak to the ancestors as intermediaries who have sympathy with the troubles of

the living – others make extensive use of prayer. The Shona (Zimbabwe) employ a

number of priests, priestesses and even an oracle in their prayers. In community crises an

official delegation can be sent from a village to ask the guidance of the "Voice" – the oracle

whose instructions usually corroborate the traditional teaching and practices (Thorpe,

1991: 36, 54-55, 56).

The Yoruba (Nigeria) pray daily. The family head starts his day at the family shrine,

greeting the family gods, making libations to them and asking their guidance. So too can

ordinary devotees pray for physical and spiritual blessings at any time (Thorpe, 1991:100).

Some scapegoats are not intended to appease God or the ancestors or to take guilt upon

themselves, but rather to petition. They carry the prayers of the community to God in

times of dire need. Ubruhe (1996:17) explains:

> Essentially human beings were sacrificed to deities with either of two motives – to
> appease them or to carry the petitions of the community to the deities. In the first
> case humans were sacrificed during national crises like death of the youth, an
> epidemic, and times of severe famine or a scourge of locusts. These calamities
> were, in most cases, believed to emanate from an infringement of the deity/ties
> taboo(s). In the second case, the scapegoat or carrier was viewed as the
> representative of the people who carried their petitions to the supernatural powers.

4.3.4.2   Rituals of expulsion

Evil spirits or suffering can also be expelled. This can be done through sacrificing to the

offending spirit at the edge of the village, or even better in the forest, far away from the

community. If the sacrificial food is moreover offered with the left hand, it signifies that the

spirit is despicable and unwanted (Magesa, 1997:205).

But evil spirits can also simply be chased away. The Gikuyu (Kenya) wage a symbolic battle against the spirits:

> The entire village rushes out with clubs and sticks and starts to beat down the bushes of both sides of the paths that lead to the stream in the attempt to drive the evil spirits down the stream. At the stream, the war horn is sounded again and the people throw their sticks into the stream, and shout victoriously simultaneously: "Evil spirits and your illness we have crushed you. We now sink you in the river. Let the water drive you far away from us. You will go forever and never return again".
>
> (Magesa, 1997:205)

Bushmen see sickness and evil to be the result of small arrows sent by a foreign shaman or by God, therefore they may shriek and hurl insults at the spirits of the dead or at God who is causing the illness, insisting that he take back the evil he has sent and that he should not be so greedy as to want to take this sick person away from the group (Thorpe, 1991:24-25).

Sometimes a healer or Shaman, who may be more adept at expulsion, will willingly accept an affliction so as to expel it later. A Bushman shaman will usually receive the affliction of a sick person into his own body during a dance, and then try to expel it by sneezing it out, or alternatively, by expelling it through his upper back. He may make animal-like noises during this trance, as a result of the pain caused by the illness-causing object (Thorpe, 1991:24).

The idea of expulsion is also evident in the Taita reconciliation rite. According to Taita religious thought, God, the ancestors, spirits, humans and even animals must be treated according to their rights and with proper respect. Failure to do this causes "anger" in the hearts of the offended persons or elements of the universe. The only way to restore the

relationship is to cast out the anger. This can be enacted in a number of ways, from blowing water out of their mouths to simply speaking their minds (Magesa, 1997:234-236).

The Zulu see anger as the greatest source of evil because it can cause persons to become involved in sorcery and witchcraft. People are encouraged to bring their anger to the surface and to confess their ill feelings at community gatherings (Berglund, 1976:328; Thorpe, 1991:46). Many rituals aim to do just that. Among them are:

Ukuthelelana amanzi (Zulu, "to pour over water")

When kinsmen are at loggerheads, a third party is called in to mediate. He or she invites them to cool the heat of anger or hatred. The divided parties would be seated opposite each other. Water mixed with ash and medicine would be given to each person to wash his hands. Each would then be given a chance to air his complaints or concerns. The mediator summarises the statements of each person and asks them whether they are willing to forgive and forget. Each then takes a mouthful of water mixed with ash and spits it over his left shoulder. Thereafter, the two drink beer from the same calabash. This is the communion of purification. The symbolic cooling effect of water points to a spiritual disposition of reconciliation (Tlhagale, s a:70-71; Ndwandwe, 2000:214-215)

The rite of "tsu" (Tsonga)

An herb called *mudahomu* is poured into a broken shell of a fruit. This shell is also used for drinking water. The divided brothers sit on the bare ground in the village square. The offender sips the medicine and spits it out making the sound of "tsu" and says: This is our imprecation. We have pronounced it because our hearts were sore. Today it must come

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to an end. It is right that we make peace. The other repeats the same rite and says: I was angry but let us make peace and eat from the same spoon and drink of the same pot and become friends again. He breaks the shell and then they drink beer together (Junod, 1927:399; Tlhagale, s a:71-72).

The rite of *tsu* can entail the spitting out of saliva, charcoal, a piece of termite nest, a thorn, etc, according to the severity of the dispute and the parties involved (Junod, 1927:391-393). A headman who wishes to quell the quarrels in his village may utter the *tsu* while spitting out a piece of charcoal and address the quarrelsomeness by saying: "*Akhwari!* I.e. Smoothly! You, so and so. What you want is this. *Abupsayi!* I.e. Gently! This is fire! This is the mouth of the lion! Let what troubles me come to an end! (Junod, 1927:391)"

Ukubhodlelana (Zulu, "to burp together", releasing the air that is blocking you)

Two enemies will talk together, eat, and more importantly, drink together; then burp – releasing pent up anger. Afterwards, they will discuss hidden agendas and plots, and clear the air (Ngubane, 2004:1).

It is interesting how important honesty is in this ritual. According to the Taita, the success of their whole reconciliation ritual depends on speaking your mind and making sure that there is no hidden anger still in your heart. According to Ngubane (2004:1), Africans need a full disclosure to forgive and apology must be personal. One way of insuring that the truth is told, is the Zulu milking of the palm as described earlier (Magesa, 1997:235).

4.3.4.3   Acceptance

Sometimes an opposite ploy is followed. Evil spirits are accepted and brought into the community. Especially when the evil spirits are thought to be the ghosts of people who have died who could not become ancestors or who are not properly recognised as such. Through sacrifices and offerings, the erection of special ancestor huts and by seeing to it that neglected obligations are carried out, the ghosts are not destroyed but enabled to enter into an enduring relationship with the living (Magesa, 1997: 205-206).

The Shona readily accept foreign spirits or *mashavi* into their community. When such a spirit troubles the community, they are welcomed into the village and new cults are formed to include these spirits into the village rituals (Thorpe, 1991:57).

Chihamba cult

Another elaborate example is the *Chihamba* cult. A disqualified and therefore protesting ancestor captures an ancestress (the 'mode of *Chihamba*') who in turn catches or afflicts her family members. In an elaborate ritual, the protesting ancestor uses the ancestress as a surrogate to produce a new clan for him, while the afflicted member of her family is initiated into the newly established clan. The ancestress is then freed from the protesting ancestor and the protesting ancestor gains a new family and ancestorhood (Kwenda, 1999:1-4).

Kwenda (1999, 5-8) describes the ritual:

> Family members consult a diviner when one of their number falls sick. They are
> told that the patient has been "caught" by the spirit of an ancestress in the "mode of

Chihamba". In order to be healed, the patient must be initiated into the cult of the afflicting agent, which is an alliance of the spirit of the said ancestress and a male nature spirit called *Kavula*, which means lightning. The healing ritual takes place partly in the village and partly at a shrine in the bush, where a white image of *Kavula* is erected. Officiating at the ritual are doctors (usually male) and female senior adepts. After the preliminaries, the candidates for initiation (patients) are introduced to *Kavula*.

They must be able to identify him by his other names, such as *Chihamba, Samasenga, Samasoli*. Then the initiates symbolically kill *Kavula* by striking his head with ritual rattles. A red cock is sacrificed. Then the initiates are symbolically killed as a sacrifice to *Kavula*. Later they discover that *Kavula* has resurrected. They receive secret *Chihamba* names and are paired of with new *Chihamba* friends. Back in the villages a shrine, called *Kantonga*, is built for each candidate. It consists of a bundle of a wide collection of medicines and a white cassava root. Around it some seeds (maize, beads, etc.) are planted. A white hen is sacrificed there. Then lines are drawn with cassava meal from the *Kantonga* to the tree shrines in the village.

Over the whole period during which the crops are growing, the initiated candidate washes continually with medicinally treated water. When the crops mature and die, *Kavula* is said to have left and taken to the air, thus marking the end of the ordeal, although there is a fear that the spirit might come back again.

When an ancestor or ancestress is in the "mode of *Chihamba*", it means that the spirit of the ancestress (in this case) is carrying out the wishes of another spirit – often under duress. The ancestress is in fact a victim who ends up in an undesirable alliance with parasite spirits.

The rituals are performed to rectify all the confusion and social disorder. The ancestress is freed from the afflicting and nature spirits when the white hen is sacrificed and she is lead out of the *Kantonga* shrines alone, along the white lines of cassava meal, to her tree shrine in the village, leaving her former captors in the *Kantonga* shrine where the alien spirit is recruited into as new family and the nature spirit is released through the crops back into nature. The red cock is sacrificed to facilitate this last part of the separation.

The symbolism of birth is also unmistakable. Legitimate ancestorship is mimicked to create a new clan. The ancestress has the ambiguous role of *Chihamba's* consort, and symbolically has to deliver children for the angered spirit, setting it on the road to ancestorhood of a surrogate nature (Kwenda, 1999:8-9).

The solution traditional African doctors prescribe is creating a fictive family or clan for the protesting spirit (ancestor), complete with a name and other kinship paraphernalia. A

Chihamba clan, with *Chihamba* names and *Chihamba* experience (affliction) and

Chihamba expertise (healing) is brought into being. It is this part of the ritual that gives

meaning and coherence to all the other parts. From its symbolic patterns we note that it

hinges on symbolic deaths and rebirths. All parties die to unmanageable forms of

existence (abusive alliances and relationships). They are symbolically made available for

reconstitution as manageable and mutually supportive forms of life (Kwenda, 1999:9).

4.3.4.4   Cleansing

A popular way of expelling evil or guilt is simply cleansing it. This can be done through fire

or sacrifice.

The *Edi* festival (described in the legend of Eleguru) starts off with a ritual cleansing

whereby a symbolic fire brand was made and lighted torches waved over adherents'

heads to ward off all their human miseries and death. They would also pray to the

divinities to grant them long life in union with God (Abe, 1996:7).

In the past, walking over a grave was a source of defilement. Purification was achieved by

the ritual singeing of the feet of the ritually defiled person in a flame (Tlhagale, s a: 72-73)

Ngubane (2004:1) recalled that when a thieving boy stole from a family, the boys from the

family chased him away and killed him. The family members then told the boys that they

must now cleanse the household. This was done trough a communal meal in which the

guilt was transferred to a goat. When blood is shed, a sacrifice needs to be made (blood

for blood) in order to cleanse both the place and the perpetrator. The person who provides

the sacrificial animal accepts responsibility for the crime.

A beautiful example of cleansing is the old Zulu custom of the "washing of the spears"

(*ukuhlanjwa kwemikhonto* or *inhlambuluko*), dating back to the time of Shaka Zulu when

there was a ritual cleansing ceremony after war or killing. It was a ritual cleansing of the

spears to remove the urge to kill (Hay, 1998:136).

> Before the battle or war the *nyanga* (or herbalist) would prepare a concoction of medicine or herbs, called *intelezi*, to remove the fear to go to war. There was the belief in the African world view that after war the warriors needed to be cleansed in order to stop their urge to continue to kill. The effects of the *intelezi* needed to be removed before the warrior could return to the village.
>
> (Hay, 1998:136)

4.3.5   Rituals with a mixture of intentions

A number of reconciliation rituals do not fit into the above categories, and contains either

unique elements, or a combination of intentions.

4.3.5.1   Rituals of rebellion

Rituals of rebellion seem contradictory, as these rites are in fact rituals of integration and

reconciliation. These include ritual transvestism and asexuality (in funeral rites and

divination rituals), ritual killing of the new chief (as done in installation rites), ritual hostility

between social groups (as happens between the escorting bands of bride and groom or

between joking groups), and the ritual use of obscene language (in joking relationships)

(Magesa, 1997:238-240).

Magesa (1997:238) explains:

> In normal circumstances, what is different must not be needlessly confused. The male and female sex or the intensity and weakness of the life force in a ruler, for example, must be clearly distinguished in daily life for the sake of order. However, sometimes the difference needs to be temporarily blurred through ritual to underline its importance when the ritual is over.

Parrinder (1962:85-86) reports on similar rites in Ghana, Togo and Nigeria. During the annual purification rites (which Parrinder compares to the Roman Saturnalia) the people act and speak licentiously, insulting the king, shouting sexual phrases at passers by and running around naked. After the festival, order is restored and the symbols of the gods are scrubbed and cleaned at the river and returned to their shrines.

The reason for this kind of rite was explained by an old priest:

> Our forbears ordained a time, once a year, when every man and women, free man and slave, should have freedom to speak out just what was in his head, to tell their neighbours just what they thought of them and of their actions, and not only their neighbours, but also the king or chief. When a man has spoken freely thus, he will feel his *sunsum* (soul) cool and quieted.
>
> (In Parrinder, 1962:86)

According to Mircea Eliade (1958:359) these rituals bring back the mythical chaos that existed before the creation, in order to repeat the creation:

> … for a time man goes back to the amorphous, nocturnal state of chaos that he may be reborn, more vigorous than ever in his daylight self. … [Man] hopes, by identifying himself with formless, pre-cosmic existence, to return to himself restored and regenerated, in a word, "a new man".

4.3.5.2   Dance

Dance plays an important part in reconciliation rituals. Dancing can be used therapeutic-cally to ward of destructive forces during illness and death, and it integrates the sick person into the health of the whole society, as the society shares its health with the sick

person. Dance is also an expression of rejecting anger and embracing communion and also communion with the ancestors (Magesa:1997:239; Thlagale, s a:11; Turaki, 1999:184).

Thorpe (1991:24-25) reports on one such a dance among the Bushmen:

> While the dance is in progress, a sick person may be laid to one side and gradually the dancers form a circle around the patient. The men take part of their bodily strength in the form of perspiration from their armpits and press it over the sick person's body. The Shaman then receives the foreign object causing the illness into his own body, either when the patient sneezes or by the action of sniffing or sucking. Finally the healer sneezes the pathogenic object out through his nostrils, thus causing his nose to bleed.
>
> Sometimes the patient dies, but always the power of n/um (supernatural power) which is intensified and released by the occasion restores the health and wholeness of the San unit. The singing, the fire, the dancing and the trance all work together to activate n/um, especially in and through the person of the shaman.

Thus, dance enables African people to minimise tension within a closed community (Thorpe, 1991:117).

It is clear that there are many rituals of reconciliation with fascinating myths or models behind them. My list is an exploration and in no way complete. But this selection offers enough interesting material to be investigated further. In the next chapter these possibilities will be weighed.

CHAPTER 5: RELIGION AND RECONCILIATION:

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The holy man of our time, it seems, … [is] a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time.

(John Dunne, 1978:ix)

5.1　　Preliminary observations and considerations

5.1.1　　Not all are equal

Up until now, I have only described various reconciliation models in Western Christian and African religion. In this chapter, I want to go further and compare these models. As I have shown earlier, neither a postmodern approach to religion, nor pure religious studies intends to imply that all religions and religious phenomena are equally good or justified. Even without a belief perspective, models, myths, rituals and theories can be measured, compared and evaluated.

5.1.2　　An enquiry into religion

Kobus Krüger (1995:79-120) laid down the dimensions of enquiring into religion. According to him, an enquiry into religion involves getting the external data, introspection, understanding intended meaning, theory formation, evaluation, and an investigation into religious thought, mysticism and morality.

5.1.2.1   Qualitative research

When gathering data various techniques can be used, ranging from quantitative to qualitative techniques. I chose to do this study qualitatively, concentrating on rituals and the myths behind them, rather than a broader quantitative survey. My intention is to discover some useful new ideas and models of reconciliation, rather than listing all the possibilities. I selected my literature and interviews to give me a qualitative picture of traditional Western Christian and African models of reconciliation (Krüger, 1995:79-80).

5.1.2.2   Objectivity and Subjectivity

On the question of objectivity and subjectivity, I agree with Krüger that adequate knowledge is reached only by taking my subjectivity serious: "'Objectivity' is established at the heart of 'subjectivity'" (Krüger, 1995:81).

I am conscious of my points of departure and take responsibility for them. I am a Christian, white, male, Afrikaans speaking South African – all of which influences my judgements and analysis of the religions in question. My motive (or ideology) is an unease with traditional Western and Protestant expressions of Christianity and a perhaps idealistic appraisal of the African religious expressions. I look at the world with a postmodern eye; see truth as conditional and relative (Krüger, 1995:82-89).

5.1.2.3   Shared humanity

To understand the intended meaning, purpose and aim of different religions is not so easy. While I am a Christian and understand Christianity (or at least my branch of it) on an

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existential level, I can only hope to gain some insight into African religion as an outsider. This I do through dialogue (especially the interviews) and literature on African encounters. An outsider understanding is very limited, but I believe adequate, for the purposes of this study. In the end I do not wish to contribute to African religion, but rather to Christianity by engaging in dialogue with the insights of Africa (the position of reflexivity). Our shared humanity is at least one common basis for understanding religions and religious acts and rituals. Humans share (to some extent) the same joy and despair, feelings of brokenness and ecstasy; I want to get to the different African religious reflections on these human matters (Krüger, 1995:89-91).

5.1.2.4   Understanding and explaining

According to Krüger: "Theoretical work links various phenomena in a network of relation-ships. In terms of this approach a fact is explained if we are able to indicate how it fits into a coherent pattern" (1995:96). I will try to understand the various myths and rituals, explain the logic behind them and point out relationships and underlying patterns.

In order to understand and explain these religions, I will have to formulate theories that may exceed the self-expression and self-understanding of its adherents. This does not mean that I contend to have more insight into African religion, for example, than its adherents as a psychoanalytical reductionist approach to religion may suggest. My theories would simply elucidate my understanding of the religion, rather than pretend to know better. They would always be "…open, dynamic, anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, relative, cultivating the germ that will lead to their own demise" (Krüger, 1995:95-96). They will always be merely tools to help understand and explain, and nothing more.

Such theories and patterns should take into account the dynamics within a certain religion, the socio-cultural context or the views of various religions. My theories will probably span all three different perspectives, and I should take care to acknowledge the uniqueness and historical setting of each religion, as well as acknowledge the points of convergence (Krüger, 1995:97-101).

In their study of Witchcraft discourses, the Sanpad (South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development) team realised the importance of not only the socio-cultural context, but also the political context:

> (An interpretative framework) is the socio-political context. All belief systems must be studied within their specific historical setting, social organisation, and political processes. These contexts explain much and render the processes studied plausible. Explanations occur at both the individual and the social level.
> (Sanpad Research Report 2003 = SRR 2003:10)

They also make a convincing case for comparing religious ideas, or to study the views of various religions – as Krüger suggests. They write in their report that:

> Comparison is essential. Any belief system studied is seen as just another option open to human beings, one possible belief among peers. No system is to be privileged in the treatment, all belief systems are considered equal. Upon that equality comparison rests. The aim of comparison is to provide alternatives for beliefs, practices and control mechanisms; when seen in a strictly local context, all belief systems seem to be inevitable and inescapable. *Only comparison brings out the implicit choices that have been made in these systems*. Thus, it is helpful to see one's own, as well as the informants' belief systems, as one option among many.
> (SRR 2003:9; my emphasis)

It seems that the idea of studying two religions' reconciliation models, may indeed open up not only new possibilities, but also the hearts of the religions themselves.

5.1.2.5 **The cognitive dimension**

A comprehensive enquiry into religion could include the study of myths, metaphysics, mysticism and morality. I will not describe Christianity and African religion in terms of these concepts, as I do not wish to give a detailed account of these religions. But in my study of the rituals and models, myth, metaphysics, mysticism and morality will from time to time be addressed (Krüger, 1995:125).

5.1.3 Principles for evaluating religion

There are two useful principles to measure religions or aspects thereof (as I will show in the following paragraphs): the one is the religion's integrative power – the ability to communicate in a certain context; the second principle is the religion's transcending power. The religion must make a difference – not just state the obvious – and be flexible and incomplete (Krüger, 1995:110).

5.1.3.1 **Integrating**

According to the principle of integration, a better religion or religious act should be clear and comprehensive. This implies, inter alia, that a religion should be coherent, simple and straightforward, link up with existing thinking and cover the facts (Krüger, 1995:110-114).

Coherence

The main ideas of a religion should hang together and imply one another, each deriving meaning from the whole that they jointly constitute. A good religion should make sense

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and be consistent. This does not mean that there can be no paradoxes. Many religions teach paradoxical notions – the whole intention of paradoxes is that they point beyond reason. But flat contradictions make for poor religion (Krüger, 1995:110).

Simplicity

"A good theory is streamlined, a thing of intellectual beauty and elegance" (Krüger, 1995:111). The appraisal of religion itself is largely an aesthetic judgement in that religions appeal to us in their wholeness, their completeness, their balance and their harmonisation of contrasts and discords. It should help people to make sense of their world, and not complicate matters further.

Link up with existing thinking

A religious expression must link up with the tradition in which it stands. Whatever a present generation does or says must somehow articulate that tradition, and is good and true to the extent that it accords with the established norm of the tradition. In a sense a religious idea or act must be acceptable to the religion itself. Of course this cannot be the only measure to evaluate a religion. Any religion must also be in touch with the wider reality. But it must also be compatible with its own holy book or traditions (Krüger, 1995:113-114).

Cover the facts

A religion should cover the facts – its explanations should apply adequately to the array of items they wish to explain. The more facts it covers, the better. Krüger likens religion to a

map that helps its adherents find their way through the world. A good religious map must reflect the topography in as detailed a way as possible. "A map's failure to show a sheer cliff where there is one could be lethal. Unless religions stay in touch with the changing external environments around them, they lose their power in the long run" (1995:115).

Krüger (1995:116-117) concludes that:

> … if a religion does make intellectual statements about reality, the congruence with reality of such propositions may be tested. Insofar as it makes such statements, it cannot claim special privileged status but has to compete on the open market of ideas – with electricity, so to speak (Bultmann). Then the view that the world was created in six days must compete on equal terms with the theory of the Big Bang. As our politicians keep repeating: the playing fields must be levelled. Whether or not such questions are difficult or easy to answer, or will perhaps never be answered, is beside the point. What matters is that they relate to the general field of experience accessible to normal, waking, everyday awareness and to science… [and] that they are in principle examinable.

5.1.3.2   Transcending

Although a religion must be accessible and understandable, it must challenge its adherents to move beyond the obvious and usual. It must help them to grow. Albert Nolan (1988:187) explains that:

> Transcendence means going beyond something, going beyond some boundary or limitation. This is a very concrete, everyday experience. Love, for example, is an experience of transcendence because it means going beyond myself and my own selfish interests. The experience of hope is the experience of reaching out beyond the status quo, the given situation.

Perspectival, relative and historical

Religion should be conditional and open. According to Gort & Vroom (2002:6-10) good religious answers are ambiguous and open new perspectives. Krüger (1995:117) agrees

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that a transcending religion acknowledges that it is perspectival, relative and historical.

Religion is a relation of mutual conditioning of the known and the knower. He explains:

> The known affects the knower, and at the same time its constitution in the perception of the knower is coloured, in a variety of ways, by the knower. Yet it is a real relation. People can imagine things, and deliberately distort the perspective. Certainly no perspective can lay claim to absolute accuracy. And certainly the fact of multiperspectivism should be appreciated.

Religion should be relative. According to Krüger (1995:118), religion is an orientation, a "… never-ending series of balancing acts, a receptive creative interplay with reality". To allow the flow to coagulate into a solid, unchanging state would run contrary to the logic of religion. Therefore conceptual closure in absolute dogmas is an attempt to escape from the dynamic of creative adaptation from moment to moment. Religious forms are landmarks left from other people's journeys. They are indispensable pointers for others. But sooner or later they are left behind. None of them is absolute.

With historical, Krüger means that what was true three hundred years ago, may no longer be true. Good religion is firmly planted in and limited by a specific historical setting Krüger (1995:118).

Authority and force

Better religion relies less on force and more on authority. A sound religious system would captivate people's imagination, while a system that forces itself on people or that can only survive through force and violence is a poor religious system (Krüger, 1995:119).   Again, Krüger says it best: "Authority invites, lures, challenges and pushes you forward into freedom; force threatens, stifles, represses and pushes you back into submission" (1995:120).

Stimulating

Related to the criteria of authority and force, is that religion should stimulate new thought

and ideas. Religious explanations should raise as many questions as answers and should

continue to grow and improve. The opposite is often more true of religions in that they

tend to have a strong conservative instinct. Still, the value of any system (including a

religious system) lies in its ability to stimulate the ongoing search for meaning (Krüger,

1995:120-121).

The difference it makes for the better

It makes sense that a religion should make a difference for the better. It should transform

its followers, and this transformation must leave them and others better off. Possibly,

mainstream religion may not transform its adherents at all. History teaches that religion

sometimes changed communities for the worse. A good religion makes people freer and

happier (Kgatla, 1995:125; Krüger, 1995:121)

The Sanpad researchers make the same point by arguing that a belief or system that

causes suffering, is not just another relative option, but a poor belief system.

> The fact that a particular custom or belief is "traditional" or "part of our culture" is
> neither an explanation, nor a justification of the practice. Other than in politics, in
> empirical studies there is nothing sacrosanct about "tradition" and "culture", as
> these concepts, too, have to be explained, interpreted and rendered plausible. A
> cultural relativistic view considers all variations of culture in principle of equal value,
> but this does not preclude cultural criticism on ethical grounds. Human suffering is
> beyond relativism, and cultural practices that lead to this - as witchcraft accusations
> do – are not to be condoned under the pretext of relativism. Relativism is a tool for
> research and interpretation; it is not a denial of ethical judgement per se, nor a
> denial of shared humanity.
>
> (SRR 2003:10)

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Witchcraft discourses and relativity

In their interesting study on witchcraft discourse (SRR 2003:21-27), the Sanpad researchers found that tension exists in all African communities. Some communities (like the San, the MaButi or the Barakwena) do not have a notion of personal evil and deal with the tension without reference to witchcraft. In other societies (like the Dogon of Mali), tension gives rise to suspicions or gossip about witchcraft, but it is never pursued. It seems that where social relationships are dominant, the need for harmony in close relations is stronger than the need to identify witches or to do anything against witchcraft.

In other societies, where relationships are deemed less sacrosanct and the individual agency less dominant, witches are named, persecuted and even executed (similar to the practice in historical Europe) (SRR 2003:21-27).

It is interesting to compare these different responses to tension and evil. While some communities seem to either live with the tension or find different explanations for it, other communities deal with evil by naming and blaming witches – identifying and expelling evil from within their midst. I would hazard that this may represent two common approaches to disharmony and disruption, also at work in reconciliation rituals: While some rituals of reconciliation seek to deny, appease or attack external sources of tension, others need to identify and expel internal agents of evil.

The question is: Are they both valid ways of dealing with evil/tension? Is the one as good or as bad as the other? Or is one of the options better. To answer these questions, the options' (empirical) effect on society would have to be determined. According to the Sanpad group, the first approach offers the long-term solution that tries to ascertain the

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real causes of tension (for example poverty), it underscores the value of human life, dignity and education. Even though some would consider 'witchcraft' and the naming of witches to be an authentic dimension of African culture, society has the challenge to preserve "…what is valuable in it and do away with what has become harmful and detrimental to society." (SRR, 2003:29-35, also Vroom, 2003:231).

Krüger (1995:122) finally writes that sound religion:

> … (enables) one to live openly and freely, with joy and confidence, and with the strength to endure hardship. It aims to release one from the compulsion to possess all sorts of things – from material goods and other people … [to articulate] error-free dogmas. It aims to get people to the point where they are able to live together in peace and justice in open universal fellowship, in which group egoism is transcended just as surely as individual egoism. It seeks to integrate humanity with a world in which it is linked to animal, vegetable and inanimate nature in cosmic solidarity and responsibility, with reverence for the mystery in all these things. This also permits negative criticism. Where religions legitimise the exploitation of nature or fellow humans, they must be criticised ruthlessly for deviating from their religious intention. The arguments that religion is the universal obsessive neurosis of humankind (Freud), that it is an opiate of the oppressed (Marx), that it is the self-deification of society (Durkheim) are legitimate exposés of some forms of religion. The list of restrictive abuses is longer. Not least among these is the phenomenon of a religion closing in on itself, becoming introverted, setting up its dogmas and forms as inviolable, acting as a jailer rather than a liberator.

5.1.4   Patterns of reconciliation

Religion is a human response to human questions and dreams. So too, is reconciliation a human act, in which human beings try to make their peace with whomever they feel out of peace with. As an anthropological and sociological enterprise, sound reconciliation should be also examined and guided by these disciplines.

Just as religion can be better or worse, so too can a religion's models of reconciliation be better or worse suited to human beings and society. A religion may promote or prevent

reconciliation, perhaps even without realising it. Reconciliation models should not only be tested to determine if they are good religion – they should be tested for their quality of reconciliation. Put differently, one should ask whether the kind reconciliation attempted is in fact relevant and useful. This is of course an expansion of the conditionalist requirement of sound religion. The kind of reconciliation should fit the condition to which it is applied (Gort & Vroom, 2002:3-6).

5.1.4.1 Functionalism and Marxism

The anthropologist André Droogers warns against reconciliation at all cost: "Reconciliation seems to be basically positive, and conflict has a negative connotation. Yet, just as a conflict can be necessary and healthy, reconciliation may camouflage a socially and morally harmful situation" (2002:11).

When one considers, for example, the once competing schools of functionalism and Marxism, his warning becomes clear. The functionalist presupposition is that order is normal and self-restoring in society, whereas Marxism presents conflict as prevailing, just and necessary. Functionalists had a cyclical view of society as always returning to equilibrium after periods of anomie, Marxists took a linear position, viewing society as the arena in which opposite forces were to engage in a long struggle which would last until the proletariat gained the ultimate victory (Droogers, 2002:12).

> This means that functionalists would view reconciliation as the ultimate result of social dynamics, once equilibrium and social order had been restored in a predictable and almost natural way … In contrast, Marxists would condemn reconciliation as treason to the common cause, as an expression of false consciousness and an ill-fated attempt to frustrate the inevitable course of history.
> (Droogers, 2002:12)

Though these schools no longer dominate the construction theory within the social sciences, their insights have not disappeared and still echo in current debates. They also lead Droogers to introduce five sets of dichotomies, which should be considered in order to determine the applicability (or conditionality) of reconciliation models (Droogers, 2002:12-14). I will discuss these sets of dichotomies as possible guidelines to establish what kind of reconciliation is really needed in our society.

5.1.4.2   Harmony and conflict

People usually view harmony, order and continuity as the norm, and conflict, anomie and rupture as the deviation. Yet conflict is all too common. Changing circumstances, ever-innovating self-conscious actors and opposed interests nourish conflict. Reconciliation appears to promote harmony, order and continuity, and rejects conflict (Droogers, 2002:13).

Minnema shows that in the Bhagavad-Gita and Greek tragedies (e g Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*) the concept of a "united human family" may not be the ideal. Contexts or societies may instead demand war or fratricide (as in these cases) (2002:68-84). According to Isaiah Berlin's concept of negative liberty as a secular model of reconciliation we should even abandon all notions of a final harmony – for the desire for harmony is the cause of rather than the solution to many conflicts (in Aarsbergen, 2002:150-151).

That is exactly Wesley Mabuza's predicament. In an interview with Spong (2003:75) he laments that a superficial harmony in South Africa denied a more painful but more real kind of reconciliation:

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> There are two kinds of reconciliation. There is the one where reconciliation contains the acknowledgement of wrong by one party and forgiveness by the other. The other one is where one party gives in: that happens when someone feels that to go on with the other person or group is more valuable than not to go on.

But my question is: Is harmony always reconciliation? Cannot reconciliation under certain conditions demand conflict or at least disorder and discontinuity? How would liberation theology define reconciliation? Huber (1990:44) is convinced that "reconciliation does not mean harmonisation but change", while Derrida (1998:52-53) reminds us that conflict (or "violence") is an integral part of religion, and a balance to the concept of sacrifice.

5.1.4.3   Cyclical or Linear

The second dichotomy is between cyclical and linear views. The former suggests the universal and predictable repetition of social cycles in a history that repeats itself, disregarding local and temporal circumstances and differences; the latter conveys the notion of idiosyncratic historical change, allowing for uniqueness and ever-changing conditions, a history that is marked by trends and developments (Droogers, 2002:12).

> … in the (cyclical view) reconciliation is an integral and recurring phase of social cycles through time, as is in functionalism. (In the linear view) it is almost an impossibility, at most a temporary exception to the usual diversity, strife and struggle, perhaps the once-and-for-all end result of a long-term process, as in Marxism.
>
> (Droogers, 2002:13)

Is it true that reconciliation is a return to a previous state of well-being? Could reconciliation not be something new, something not done before? If reconciliation is part of a transcending religion, then surely it should be changing, flowing and open to new ways of being, and not only returning to old, unconditional cycles.

5.1.4.4   **Structure or Process**

The third set of dichotomies distinguishes between structure and process, the static from

the dynamic. When structure is emphasised as in structuralism or structural-functionalism,

a great deal of attention is paid to the logic of the system and the social scientists focus on

the supra-individual dimension. When the emphasis is on process, the focus is rather on

the questions of what people do with structures, how they are influenced by them, and how

they produce and change them (Droogers, 2002:13).

The concept of power is used in both approaches: in the *structure* approach to show the

power that emanates from the system, in the *process* approach, to show how people

dominate others by manipulating power, or how they resist domination by using

countervailing power. Feminist theory uses both perspectives to make explicit the

anchoring of male dominance in social structures and to design emancipation processes to

change the power balances (Droogers, 2002:13-14).

According to this dichotomy, reconciliation could either be a structural given or a

provisional result in an otherwise dynamic, vulnerable and ongoing process. Likewise,

reconciliation can be the result of the wielding of power, either through the structures

themselves or through the efforts to erode and replace them. Reconciliation can be

enforced or contested by the use of power (Droogers, 2002:14).

Again Mabuza complains that to be powerfully forced into a state of reconciliation is no

reconciliation at all.

> Another thing is that it seems that many white people are refusing us the right to
> feel bad about the past. It is very painful. White people keep on saying, 'Now look

at this President Mandela. He comes out after twenty-seven years in prison and is not bitter and you should be like that'. You refuse us the right to feel pain, and you are pushing us too quickly to forget. It is another perpetuation of oppression that you even deny my feelings.

<div align="right">(Mabuza, in Spong, 2003:78)</div>

In short, is reconciliation a structure that should be built, or something that people should continually do? Under what conditions would we require a structural kind of reconciliation, or on the other hand, an ongoing process of reconciliation? What role can and should power play in reconciliation? A structural reconciliation may emanate a wonderful, life-giving power; it can also stifle any human freedom and initiative. Can power be used to reconcile, or does reconciliation describe the struggle against power. And what about the powerful and the powerless, the offender and the offended?

5.1.4.5   Society and individual

Another dichotomy is between society and individual, group and person, social structure or actor. When studying reconciliation, the role of the individual in stimulating or inhibiting reconciliation in the context of a group or society must receive attention. Are certain individuals vested with the authority to decide for the whole group? What liberty do other individuals have in taking initiatives that deviate from the norm? How much social support do these persons receive? Do they succeed in changing the power relations (Droogers, 2002:14)?

Again Krüger's better religion demands freedom, stimulating and fruitful questioning and less force. Can reconciliation come from one side, or achieved by one person on behalf of all? Conversely, can a group reconcile on behalf of its members? Only the context and conditions will determine the answers to these questions.

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5.1.4.6   Society and culture

Finally, reconciliation has both social and cultural dimensions. According to sociologists, humans are animals; according to anthropologist, they are animals with something extra – call it "culture". This culture makes them reason, question, hope – it gives then identity. Now the question is: do they reconcile on a social or a cultural level? Do they form a new social group, or an existential group? Or as Droogers puts it:

> (Reconciliation) … may refer in a social sense to the coming together of formerly opposed groups or persons, but it may also refer in a cultural sense to the coexistence or synthesis of ideas or practices that were previously used as hallmarks of contrasting positions.
>
> (Droogers, 2002:16)

Globalisation and creolisation (the tendency of people to become increasingly fluent in more than one cultural language) establishes a kind of forced social reconciliation in society. This may cause people to flee from uncertainty and confusion to a more closed autonomous cultural tradition and maintaining their idiosyncratic identity in an otherwise multicultural context. But is can also cause them to move closer to one another and result in a mixing and integration of cultures (Droogers, 2002:17).

Related to this is the question of the depth of reconciliation. Van Bijlert (2002:373-376), Abe (1996:6) and Meiring (2002:286) have shown that people, religions and groups mean very different things when they talk about reconciliation so did. If reconciliation is only a social affair with no cultural reconciliation – it may simply consist of the cessation of conflict, bearing with one another. On the other hand, if a deeper reconciliation is intended, it should probably involve a measure of cultural reconciliation and integration.

Can cultural reconciliation produce social reconciliation? That seems also possible and appears to happen commonly. When people share a culture – for example a belief system or religion – it in turn should facilitate social reconciliation. Two adherents of the same religion should reconcile easier because of that shared worldview.

5.2   The South African situation

> The whole reconciliation idea lends itself to some very wishy-washy, unclear, western liberal, Christian-loving Lord, un-thought-out notions, and so it is a problematic expression for me because it carries with it all these possibilities.
>
> (Faried Esack, in Spong, 2003:239)

It seems that reconciliation models should not only conform to good religion and take serious the questions of the social and human sciences – good sociology and anthropology – but it should also make sense in terms of a specific context. The context wherein a human needs to reconcile himself or herself with God varies, and the conditions giving rise to this need depend on each individual. But the conditions for reconciliation between groups may be quite diverse and may touch on issues such as justice, freedom of religion, power sharing, education, progressive economy, women's issues, concern for others, respect for life, social justice, empowering people, social en economic inequalities, tolerance and power (Folbert, 2002:378-380; Villa-Vicencio, 2000:1-2).

I would also like to unearth a model of reconciliation that could be useful to our nation as a whole. Franz Auerbach reports from a worldwide survey, that members of all religions see reconciliation as involving acknowledgement of wrongdoing, confession, remorse, seeking forgiveness and making restitution by those who have wronged others. The victim of wrongdoing or injustice also has a role to play in that he or she must forgive the perpetrator (in Spong, 2003:223). Does this apply to the South African context as well?

Do South Africans add anything? What would the preconditions be for reconciliation among South Africans?

In the past ten years, the quest for reconciliation has been high on the South African agenda. During the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a lot was said about reconciliation – but it also seemed that everyone had a different idea of exactly what reconciliation was and what it would entail. For some, reconciliation simply meant peace and quiet, a safe continuance of the status quo, meaning in the South African context that the enemies had to be defeated and the unjust system accepted. For others, reconciliation demanded justice – justice first, and then reconciliation and only then is there a possibility for peace (König, 1989:130-131; Volf, 2001:34).

The drafters of the TRC Act built their version of reconciliation on the African concept of *ubuntu* (mixed with a good dose of Archbishop Tutu's Christianity), whereby the restoration of the community takes precedence over retribution. They developed an amnesty process for offenders so that these people could be restored to their place in the community. They also envisaged restitution, which in turn, was not so high on the government's agenda. Some families indeed called for retribution, others retreated (Tutu, 1999:35).

Part of my motivation for this study is to find new reconciliation models for South Africa. The criteria set out above should help to make sense of all the possible variants of reconciliation. But, as the criteria indicate, the South African context determines to a large extent what reconciliation should be. In this section I investigate the context.

There is probably not one South African context. As diverse as our community is, so diverse are South Africans' views of our community, our challenges and what

reconciliation means. In order to find out what South Africans mean by reconciliation, I turned to the views of a number of representative South Africans.

Bernard Spong (2003:19-265) conducted interviews with members of the religious community in South Africa, and recorded their prerequisites for reconciliation in this context. Their answers indicate four important elements for reconciliation in South Africa: the requirement of truth, confession and forgiveness, the requirement of justice, participation of all the actors, and humility and dignity. According to the principle of sound religion, even these elements shouldn't be closed and dogmatic. They are at best guidelines. But we do need guidelines.

5.2.1 Truth, confession and forgiveness

The first essential element for reconciliation in South Africa is truth, confession and forgiveness. Reconciliation cannot do without it, as the following examples show (Gerloff, 1998:46; Maluleke, 1997a:77; 1997b:9):

5.2.1.1 Truth

At the Venda University, Roswith Gerloff recorded this poster (1998:17):

> Don't let our Nightmares become our Children's.
> Let's speak out the truth to each other
> By telling the Truth.
> By telling our stories of the past,
> so that we can walk
> the road to reconciliation together.
> Truth – The Road to Reconciliation.
>
> THE TRUTH HURTS, BUT SILENCE KILLS. LET'S SPEAK …

All agree that reconciliation demands truth. It makes perfect sense; the problem must be spelled out to its fullest extent if it is to be solved. To let the truth out leads to acknowledgement of what happened, handing out and accepting responsibility (Gnanadason, 1999:77; Maluleke, 2005:1; Ngubane, 2004:1; Scott, 1999:352-353).

According to Scott (1999:353):

> Reconciliation needs truth. People must know what happened and why it happened to them. They need to know where their deceased lie; they must know if those who simply disappeared are alive somewhere, or are long dead. Truth is painful, but this pain must be endured if there is to be any hope of reconciliation.

Faried Esack (in Spong, 2003:239) puts like this: "What is reconciliation for me ideally? It is a proportionate acknowledgement of all crimes of the past, meaning there must be acknowledgement from all sides of culpability". Thus:

> Finding the truth is a prerequisite for reconciliation. The victims needed it; it was an important first step on the road towards reparation and rehabilitation. … [the] nation, too, needed to hear the truth, to be shamed by the truth, to wrestle with the truth, to learn to live with the truth and eventually to be set free by the truth.
> (Meiring, 2002:375-376)

5.2.1.2   Confession

Closely related to truth telling is confession. Confession means that you not only tell your side of the story, but also judge it, admitting failure and wrongdoing. Meiring (2002:287) remarks that: "… lasting reconciliation rests upon the capacity of perpetrators – of a community of perpetrators – to recognise their guilt honestly and deeply towards God and their fellow human beings – the community of victims – and to ask humbly for forgiveness". Olivier agrees that there is a necessary connectedness between confession and reconciliation (1997:104).

5.2.1.3   Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an important prerequisite for reconciliation (Gnanadason, 1999:82; Volf, 2001:45). It completes the picture: "there cannot be total reconciliation without confession and forgiveness" (Matalengoe in Spong, 2003:112). And this forgiveness must be sincere. Rathinasamy insists that the person against whom the offence was committed has to truly and really forgive:

> It is not like the Afrikaans saying that you forgive but you do not forget. I think that if you think of genuine reconciliation the forgiveness has to go with a willingness to forget.
>
> (In Spong, 2003:260).

But forgiving does not mean forgetting; reconciliation does not imply amnesia. It is important to remember (Tutu, 1999:218-219, Volf, 2001:45). As long as the lesson is learnt and not lost so that history may repeat itself. Louw takes a psychological view, saying: "The essential ingredient of a Christian memory is accountability. Thus one carries the past into the future with the vital hope and promise: it would and should never happen again" (Louw, 1996:394). Memory should play a constructive role and not become a neurosis and a stumbling block for the process of reconstruction in South Africa (Louw, 1996:394).

Forgiving, then, means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim (Tutu, 1999:219).

Desmond Tutu (1999:35) explains that forgiveness is not just altruistic, but also the best form of self-interest: "Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them".

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5.2.2   Justice

A second element of reconciliation has to do with justice and reparation – rehabilitation.

The wrong should be righted; the community restored. This may well be the one

outstanding prerequisite for true reconciliation in South Africa (Gnanadason, 1999:82-83;

Scott, 1999:354; Tutu, 1999:58). Many South Africans would agree with the statement

that: "The prerequisites for reconciliation are that there should be truth, there should be

justice, and there must be *some sort of meaningful restitution*" (Meiring in Spong,

2003:123; my emphasis).

The writers of the Kairos Document (1985) called for justice as a precondition for

reconciliation: "Any form of peace or reconciliation that allows the sin of injustice and

oppression to continue is a false peace and a counterfeit reconciliation". It warned against

"cheap grace" – a reconciliation that readily receives love from God, but has no sense of

obligation towards one's neighbours. There is no reconciliation without justice. (Connor,

1998: 73; Huber, 1990:44; König, 1989:130-132; Volf, 2001:34-35):

> In our situation today it would be totally unchristian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. It is asking us to become accomplices in our own oppression, to become servants of the devil. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa without justice.
>
> (Kairos, 1985)

This is an interesting prerequisite. Although our South African context absolutely demands

justice for reconciliation between the different groups, it is not an obvious African idea.

While some African leaders stand by it like Archbishop Ntongane of the Apostolic

Methodist Church (Spong, 2003:211): "The people in our independent churches like the

Old Testament. They are not very comfortable with the New Testament so much. Our idea of reconciliation, therefore, is based on the justice of God shown in the Old Testament", there are many who argue (and may even boast) that traditionally, African reconciliation was much more unconditional:

> The African process of reconciliation means to make peace again, to make friends again, restore harmony in society and restore order amongst humans. That is why there is no punishment given as a condition for reconciliation and reparation is never a prerequisite. Reconciliation is a willingness to lose, not forget one's past but gain one's future. Future for an African society is guaranteed by being in harmony with the ancestors and consequently with the community one lives in.
>
> (Zulu, 1998:192)

Tutu (1999:51) distinguishes between retributive justice and restorative justice. According to him, retributive justice is a kind of justice in which an impersonal state hands down punishment with little consideration for victims and hardly any for the perpetrator. In contrast, restorative justice is not concerned with retribution, but: "… in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships". This kind of justice rehabilitates both the victim and the perpetrator, who are given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community.

### 5.2.3	Participation of all the actors

Who should engage in reconciliation? Who must take the initiative? There are many wonderful examples of reconciliation that was initiated by the offender and other examples where the offended started the process. Sometimes it is even hard to say exactly who is more responsible for setting the process into motion. But reconciliation cannot be one-sided. For any reconciliation to succeed both parties must be involved (Hay, 1998:123).

Mvume Dandala (Spong, 2003:57) explains that reconciliation requires the efforts of both sides:

> I do also believe that as a Christian when we talk about reconciliation, we are not talking about something that is acted out by the only one who has caused harm or wrong. It requires, as well, a lot of sacrifice and giving up of oneself on the part of the person who has been wronged.

This position holds across religious lines. Faried Esack concurs from the Muslim perspective: "We have an Arabic expression called *tasamuh*, which means a mutual letting go of the hurts and the pains of the past, and that comes the closest thing in our tradition to the expression of 'reconciliation'" (Spong, 203:239).

Often the lines between individual and social reconciliation dwindle. John Mbiti indicated the important role of the community in reconciling a husband and wife. He said that in African culture, the whole community becomes involved in the reconciliation process, and that the community actually views conflict as an invitation to interfere. In African culture this seems to be true for reconciliation in general (Mbiti, 2005:1).

Maake Masango recalls (Spong, 2003:101):

> I was invited to do a program of reconciliation at the Top Security Company in Hammanskraal. As I walked in I saw that one of the guys there was the one who had tortured me when I was held in Pretoria. They had moved some blacks into the meeting, and there was a lot of tension between the whites and the blacks. So I immediately said, "Guys, I am coming to do reconciliation, but I had always had a lot of anger against you, Hendrik". And Hendrik said, "I don't know you". "I will help you", I said, and I told the story of how he tortured me in prison in Pretoria. My God, he was shocked. Then I went on to say that before we could proceed with the whole thing he and I needed to reconcile. The whole group was shocked. He wanted this to be our private thing. I said no, this thing is part of the community. I have come to help heal this community. You wounded me, and until you and I reconcile there is no way I can help heal the others. We need to be reconciled first. *Then if you and I are healed the community process has already begun* (my emphasis).

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Thus reconciliation calls for the participation of both sides of the conflict, as well as members of the wider community.

5.2.4 Humility and dignity

The last element or prerequisite for reconciliation in South Africa has to do with humility and dignity. It may seem too simple or obvious to call it a requirement. But perhaps there is more to it. It may well turn out to be the most important requirement for many.

5.2.4.1 Humility

Bishop Marcos believes strongly that reconciliation happens naturally when people humble themselves before one another. He envisions a reconciliation that grows from a small group of people sitting flat on the ground, listening to each other. He illustrates it through a story (Spong, 2003:221):

> Let me tell you a story. Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, was known for her faith. She longed very much to look at the true cross of Christ. So her son gave her all the facilities to go to Jerusalem, and there she found the true cross. She knew that this was the true cross through a miracle where this cross brought a dead man back to life. Anyhow, Constantine was baptised and became a Christian. So he came to Jerusalem to place the cross of Christ in a big cathedral there to be called by the name of the Holy Cross. The bishop of Jerusalem at the time was a very holy man. There were great preparations, and it was decided that the emperor of Rome was to carry the cross of Christ on his shoulder and enter the cathedral. So Constantine came dressed in a very, very expensive dress bedecked with many jewels. There was a crown on his head and his shoes were made of gold. He carried the cross of Christ and tried to enter the church, but he could not even take one step with the cross on his shoulders, not even move one step. He fell down and then he tried again and could not move. The people came and supported him and he tried once more, but again he fell down. Then the bishop came next to him and whispered in his ear and said, "Your majesty, the one who carried this cross was naked, was poor, was hungry and thirsty, and he was crushed under pain and sorrow. You can never carry the cross as you are. It will not be possible". Constantine understood the bishop, and

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he went and he removed all these rich things. And when he came with a simple dress he could carry the cross!

5.2.4.2   Dignity

Closely related to Bishop Marcos' humility, is the principle of dignity. Once again it is believed that wherever people's dignity is restored, they are automatically (or at least more easily) reconciled. Discord and strife happens when human beings' dignity is taken away. Furthermore, according to African thought, our dignity is interconnected (Kobia, 2003:94). Tutu says (1999:35): "What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me".

Mabuza holds that South Africans must restore each other's dignity. He recalls that in the African tradition "… when two people were fighting with sticks, the one who won took the one who had been beaten to the river to go and wash his wounds. That is restoring the dignity of the person" (Spong, 2003:75-76). Bishop Marcos echoes the thought that:

> Reconciliation, according to the biblical principle, is when we acknowledge the rights and the duties of everybody, and we recognise the value of each other. No woman is less than the man in the world or no man is less than the woman in the world. And it is the same thing between whites and black and any other colour.
> (Spong, 2003:235).

This also means that the dignity of both the offended and the offender should be restored. No one should be humiliated (Spong, 2003:75-76).

Tom Manthatha remarks that this principle of dignity has structural implications:

> I see reconciliation first in our ability to recognise, to offer, the dignity and integrity of an individual person, whoever that person is and wherever that person comes from. This goes together, of course, with having created such structures that can lead to the recognition and enhancement of this dignity. We need structures that will have a place for these very individuals where they will find recognition for themselves and are able to make decisions about themselves.
> (Tom Manthatha, in Spong, 2003:194).

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It seems that: "… reconciliation is (indeed) a very costly thing" (Chapman, 2003:284). There are so many contextual prerequisites, anthropological and sociological theories and religious principles involved that reconciliation seems very hard to pursue and accomplish. Added to that are the numerous contradictions in ideas and viewpoints. Not that contradiction is a bad thing – contradictions probably illustrate the conditionalist aspect of reconciliation. There is no one correct model. Some are better and some worse, depending on the conditions.

What this means is that there are no easy answers or quick fixes. Reconciliation is hard work, takes a long time, and changes all along. "For (true) reconciliation, a deep commitment is needed" (Meiring, 2002:287). And there is a wealth of models to learn from.

CHAPTER SIX: RECONCILIATION MODELS AND RITUALS

There are both dark valleys of death and bright spots in all human religions.

(S T Kgatla, 1995:128)

6.1   Evaluation and appraisal

In this chapter I will evaluate the different reconciliation models and rituals by using the criteria that I have established. In the second part of this chapter I will draw some conclusions and try to find reconciliation models that suit both my own and the South African context.

To evaluate the different reconciliation models is a very subjective endeavour. The quality and usefulness of a single model depends on so many variables, including the actors' intentions and sincerity, which cannot be measured. Still, I will try to make some distinctions according to the criteria set out above. This is by no means absolute, but rather represents my views which are undoubtedly biased and very relative.

6.1.1   Rituals intended to create community

6.1.1.1   Community

The rituals and reconciliation models intended to create community by just restoring the community seem to agree with both the integrating and transcending principles. They are coherent, simple and completely in line with traditional African thought on the importance of the order of creation and the divinity behind the community. In addition these models

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are relative, uses more authority than force (as it makes sense to stick to it) and does make a difference for the better.

This type of reconciliation model is aimed at restoring harmony, it is cyclical, and reconciliation turns out to be a structure. In the structure lies some power relations – it looks as if the structure may apply some pressure on the individuals to stay reconciled. But this may be consensual. It involves both individuals and society, and individuals do act on behalf of groups. This reconciliation is dependant on a shared culture and it is precisely that which facilitates the social reconciliation.

However, it does not follow the traditional prerequisites of truth, confession and forgiveness suitable for the South African context. Neither does it suggest any kind of justice or reparation (except in the case of the washing of wounds); in fact it purposely does the opposite. It aims to restore harmony regardless of what happened, who was at fault and what injustices remain. On the other hand, it does offer humility and dignity in abundance. All parties play an active role, although in the case of the offended one, he or she (or God) plays the bigger role while the offender must just accept the offered harmony and help maintain it.

6.1.1.2   Sacrifices and offerings of reconstruction

Sacrifices and offerings of reconstruction are drenched in African traditions and as such coherent and in accord with traditional thinking. This model covers the facts excellently in that it directly addresses the problem and cuts to the core in setting it right. Although it is an ingenious solution, it is not so relative or perspectival and one gets the idea that the rituals do not really ever change. One cannot say whether it makes a change for the

better. It may help individuals to feel reconciled to God or their ancestors, but it does seem a bit mechanical which may diminish personal responsibility if applied to two groups.

As the case with the community-creating rituals, this form of reconciliation entails cyclical harmony. Reconciliation is a new structure, but does also involve a complicated process. It is probably intended more to reconcile individuals to the rest of creation (including society) than it is meant for societal use. A shared culture is supposed in order to obtain social reconciliation.

This model does not comply with the requirements of truth, confession and forgiveness. And though some sort of justice or a balance is established, one speak of reparation in the usual sense. The dignity of both parties is at play, the offenders are treated with dignity and the offended party's dignity is restored. Initiative comes from the side of the offenders, often with the help of a third party, while the more passive participation of the offended is important.

6.1.1.3   Sacrifices and offerings of communion

Closely related to the above, is the type of reconciliation effected by sacrifices made to achieve communion. These kinds of sacrifices integrate and transcend in much the same way as the reconstruction sacrifices. Even though it too is a bit mechanical, the aim of communion probably produces better or more observable results, especially between individuals but also in other relations. It might be more relative or perspectival as different variations of this ritual can be expected.

This model shows the same anthroplogical and sociological structure: Harmonious and cyclical reconciliation aimed at establishing a structure in order to reconcile mostly individuals who share the same cultural background. To the extent that a third party may be involved, especially as a facilitator and keeper of divine and otherworldly secrets, power relations may come to the fore.

Again dignity and humility are the main focuses. There is justice in the limited sense of a restored order when the sacrifice is performed by or on behalf of the offender. The sacrifices of communion can be used to greater effect between individuals, than the sacrifices of reconstruction. When this happens, dignity, humility and participation of both sides are greatly enhanced.

6.1.1.4   Medicines

When medicines are used achieve reconciliation, the evaluation and principles are almost the same as the rituals mentioned above. The role, though, that an expert medicine man or woman plays can create unequal power relations. Still, this power is usually ascribed by the patient rather than demanded by the medicine dispenser (Turaki, 1999:154).

Charms or amulets may change the social character of reconciliation to resemble a process more than a structure. Its visibility or touchability may produce longer lasting or more convincing results, increasing these rituals' change for the better.

But in a sense it is so mechanical and impersonal that the dignity of the reconciliation seeker might be under siege. Interestingly, the African Initiated Churches, which make

liberal use of African rituals, generally shun the use of traditional (or Western) medicines. They see such use as indicating a lack of faith (Hayes, 1998:171).

In the South African context, this model fails to meet all the requirements: There might be some elements of truth, confession or forgiveness attached to the broader ritual, but not specifically to the medicine part; there is no real justice, very one-sided and limited participation and questionable restoration of dignity.

6.1.2   Rituals intended to propitiate and transfer guilt

6.1.2.1   Sacrifices and offerings of propitiation

Sacrifices and offerings of propitiation link up with the traditional African worldview and as such satisfy the conditions of integration. But this ritual model fails to meet the other important requirements. It is not perspectival, relative or historical, and neither is it stimulating. It achieves little natural authority and the difference it makes is dubious.

In terms of the human sciences it holds reconciliation to be a structured and cyclical harmony, where both individuals and probably more often, societies, can reconcile with God or ancestors. It presupposes a strong cultural identification.

These rituals fail to address the requirements of truth and confession, but promise some kind of forgiveness. They do not also establish justice. The actors' roles may be one-sided, as the offended just receives the propitiatory gift. There is little evidence of true humility or dignity, even though it is quite possibly supposed to restore the dignity of the offended.

6.1.2.2   Scapegoats

When scapegoats are used, rather than propitiatory gifts, it does make a difference for the better in the community. While it may feel a bit strange to a Western mind, the evidence suggests that in a number of communities stories of scapegoats even become national myths. It may be that these rituals are so memorable or haunting that they remain in people's minds for a long time. Once-for-all sacrifices perform even better. According to Derrida, (1998:50-51) these kinds of sacrifices paradoxically serve to accentuate the value of and the respect for life.

Scapegoating works with the same idea of reconciliation as the propitiatory sacrifices. Reconciliation is a harmony to be established, but the process is more elaborate. When the scapegoats volunteer or at least agree with the practice, power relations are healthier than when it is forced on someone.

Unlike in the case of sacrifices of propitiation, truth and confession (as well as forgiveness) are important parts of these rituals. Scapegoat sacrifice is centred on justice. As in the above, it is one-sided and has little impact on the dignity or humility of the participants.

6.1.3   Rituals intended to expel or accept

6.1.3.1   Prayer

When Africans ask God to expel evil or fix domestic problems, they act in accordance with African thinking. This is a simple and coherent way of dealing with problems that are greater than they are. The biggest advantage of prayer is that it is very relative and

flexible and can be used in different ways and in different situations. It is also historical. Prayer supposes the authority of God or ancestors. It may not be so stimulating in that tends to restrict or impede further human efforts, but on the other hand it probably makes a difference for the better when used to expel evil that is considered to be beyond human control.

Prayer is so open, that a prayer for reconciliation may intend either harmony or conflict, either be cyclical or linear, involve a process or a structure, be individual or societal and need not be grounded in a shared culture. It is probably used more to attain functionalist ends, but depending on the problem, it may be intended differently. It calls for a powerful solution and thus relies on the use of power.

It is hard to say what role truth, confession and forgiveness play and whether any justice is established. It depends on the specific prayer. There may be somewhat of a one-sided imbalance between the actors although petitionary prayer does expect a reaction from the party the prayer is addressed to. The act of praying does establish what might be a healthy portion of humility in the petitioner.

6.1.3.2   Scapegoats

When the prayer is sent by scapegoat, it does not differ much from a verbal prayer. It may tend to be a bit less flexible and perspectival, as this kind of prayer can be seen as a cure-all for a variety of different dilemmas. It may even be a bit more forceful if it is done to coerce action by God. But as in the case of human scapegoats that propitiate and transfer guilt, the ritual may have a big impact on its performers.

Sociologically and anthropologically scapegoat-carried prayer is the same as normal prayer, but it may demand a greater cultural communality from those involved. The weight of responsibility shifts quite a bit to the scapegoat, which has an influence (for better or for worse) on this kind of ritual's usefulness in our context.

6.1.3.3   Expulsion

Evil and strife can also be expelled through rituals, without the help of God or the ancestors. This is certainly in line with African thinking and simple enough. The many ways in which these rituals are performed attest to their relativity and historicity. And it does seem to make a difference for the better, considering its wide usage to heal disagreement within societies. And it is in line with good psychology. It may be based on force when an evil spirit is ritually chased away, but also be built on authority when two individuals decide to expel their anger.

In the case of expulsion reconciliation is seen as a cyclical and structural harmony between individuals or societies and relies on some cultural agreement. As is the case with other rituals of expulsion, power can play an important part in these rituals but may at other times not influence the participants (but rather the externalised problem) when something like anger are expelled.

Truth, confession and forgiveness play an important role when performed between individuals, but justice may not necessarily follow. This ritual relies heavily on the actors on both sides, whether it is a spirit that must flee or a sister who must expel her jealousy. Dignity and humility is also emphasised.

6.1.3.4   Acceptance

The ingenious reconciliation rituals of acceptance are both integrating and transcending. They are simple, coherent and link up with typical African thought but are at the same time stimulating, relative and flexible, and they rely more on authority than on force. Does it make a difference for the better? It depends on the actors and the situation. In a context where a new spirit is accepted into the community, it does make this kind of difference; where differences between individuals are accepted it probably works as well. But it may sometimes deny or cover-up an evil that should be expelled rather than welcomed.

The kind of reconciliation achieved through these rituals is once again harmonious, cyclical and structural, although the harmony comprises new elements and thus differs from the previous states of peace. It involves the whole society and depends on a shared cultural worldview.

Reconciliation of this nature is excellent for restoring the dignity of all parties, but (may as a result) neglect truth, confession, and justice. The actors are primarily the offended – a bit one-sided but considering the side, quite remarkable.

6.1.3.5   Cleansing

Cleansing rituals are kinds of rituals of expulsion similar to those evaluated in the paragraph above. They have a strong psychological value and express the elements of truth, confession and forgiveness strongly. Although these rituals also restore dignity where they was damaged, it often lacks justice.

The "washing of the spears" ceremony is a good example of a useful cleansing ceremony. It is part of a coherent myth of the *intelezi* and undoubtedly worked well in the violent 18th century.

6.1.4   Rituals with a mixture of intentions

6.1.4.1   Rituals of rebellion

The strange rituals of rebellion integrate with African thinking in that they seek to uphold the all-important balance. Furthermore, the acts of rebellion are focussed on the potential sources of trouble, such as the authority of the chief or animosity between in-laws. In addition, this kind of ritual transcends the expected by being perspectival, relative and stimulating, relying of authority rather than force and making a difference for the better.

These rituals resemble the typical African idea of reconciliation as a structured harmony, but the harmony involved here is achieved through quite the opposite means. This is harmony through disharmony, structure through chaos. And it is more of a Marxist process that repeats itself yearly, than any other African reconciliation model. Power is overthrown and society and culture is challenged.

Truth, confession and forgiveness are highlighted, justice established and humility and dignity restored (or enforced!). The actors include all parties and this type of ritual actually empowers members of society to take part.

6.1.4.2   Dance

When dance is used to facilitate reconciliation it integrates with and transcends African culture. Dance is typically African, but it brings forth a transcendent experience. In dance Africans make contact with the divine. These rituals may not be so stimulating or relative and historical, but they do make a difference for the better, utilising the strength of the community.

Anthropologically and sociologically speaking they are harmonious, cyclical and structured reconciliation with special emphasis on the role of the society. The involvement of the community generates a power that is used for the good of individuals.

The elements of dignity, justice (or restoration) are attended to. When the dance is used to reconcile individuals, it may produce forgiveness, but it may also deny justice. The involvement of all actors is actively pursued for and the success of this ritual depends on it.

6.1.5   Revisiting Augustine, Anselm and Abelard

It would be useful to also evaluate the traditional Western models of reconciliation according to the criteria of good religion, anthropological and sociological structure and the South African context.

6.1.5.1   Augustine's Victory model

Augustine's victory model of reconciliation is not so different to the African models of expulsion. The one big difference is that the Augustinian model does not integrate well

with modern Western culture that it is supposed to serve. The elements in myth like the devil and the underworld are no longer part of our worldview. This model thus is no longer understandable or simple and does not cover our modern facts in an understandable language. It is, however, coherent with Christian teaching of God conquering evil.

It does transcend our culture. Even though the language is foreign to us, it highlights the problem of forces beyond our control and serves up a solution to the problem. It may therefore make a difference for the better. And (like the expulsion rituals) it can be of psychological value.

This ritual was mainly used to establish reconciliation between God and humans and never was really employed to bring about reconciliation between individuals. In turn, the strength of African rituals of expulsion strength lay exactly in their success in reconciling individuals. Reconciliation is seen by Augustine to be a harmonious, structural affair but it is more linear and apocalyptical than cyclical.

In the vertical context that it is used, truth, confession and forgiveness are not so important and neither is justice. God is the primary actor and humans simply accept God's achievement. It does bring about human dignity, especially in the sense that it frees humans from external powers.

6.1.5.2   Anselm's Objective model

Anselm's objective reconciliation model also has its parallels in the propitiatory sacrifices of Africa. But Anselm's model is even less capable of integrating with modern culture than Augustine's. Anselm's myth of God's honour that is offended and the plan to restore it

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would today be called esoteric or even occult. Furthermore, it does not link up with the Biblical ideas of God's love that always exceeds God's justice. It is hard to see where it transcends our human culture. The cruelty of the cross is haunting and may cause humans to look at God or their lives differently (as happened when Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* was released). The fact that it is once and for all suggests that it offers a permanent solution.

Anselm sees reconciliation as a harmony and a structure but (as in the case of the victory model) it is linear and not cyclical. The power relations seem unhealthy. This model is aimed at reconciling God to humans and has little use for relations between humans. It depends completely on the same cultural background – in this case the culture of medieval Europe.

This model's strength lies in its emphasis on justice and the restoration of God's (and other offended parties') dignity. But the dignity of the offenders is not taken into account. There is forgiveness, but it is without truth or confession and the actor is only God, albeit in two persons.

6.1.5.3   Abelard' Subjective model

The subjective reconciliation model teaches that Jesus came to show us how to reconcile, and that reconciliation happens wherever people follow Jesus' example. It seems simple, coherent with Biblical teaching and links up much better with present thinking on reconciliation than either the objective or victory models. It is transcending in that it is completely relative and historical, stimulating and surely makes a difference for the better.

According to this model, reconciliation can either entail harmony or conflict, depending on the context (or Gospel). So too, reconciliation can be a cyclical structure or a linear process. It probably leans towards the individual sphere and does not presuppose a cultural loyalty, but it can lead to cultural understanding.

It is difficult to evaluate this model's suitability in our context because it is so relative. It should contain elements of confession and forgiveness, and if it really emulates Jesus' example, it brings about justice, humility and dignity. The model depends only on the actions of one actor – the person doing the reconciling, while the other party may or may not respond likewise (but probably does – Berendsen, 2002:173-175).

It seems that no single reconciliation model is perfect and none completely wrong. But some may be more appropriate for a specific condition or historical setting. In the next section I will try to determine which of these models can be useful in the present contexts.

6.2   Personal understanding

What are my requirements for a personal reconciliation model – for a model that helps me? It can be expressed through the criteria of the previous chapter. A suitable model should integrate with my post-modern worldview and morality. According to John Milbank (1997:269-270), most religions (and polities) secure themselves by drawing boundaries around the "same" and excluding the "other". This is usually done through scapegoats and in expulsion and purging rituals. Postmodern Christianity should not draw boundaries but allow for alternative views, groups and practices (Ruether, 2002:xv). This rules out sacrifices, esoteric and overly magical myths, evil spirits, and propitiatory myths that

presuppose a quality in God that I do not want for myself, like for example vengeance. A model should be clear and simple, make sense, and link up with my thinking. On the other hand, a reconciliation model must also transcend my worldview. It must challenge me to change, must stimulate my thinking about reconciliation and be completely relative.

The structure of reconciliation should be open to the possibility that reconciliation may entail conflict. Younger people today often view the society or status quo as unjust and in need of change. Thus reconciliation could be linear instead of cyclical, and a process rather than a structure. It may take place on a societal level, but the true test of the effectiveness of a certain model would certainly be reconciliation for the individual. A common cultural foundation cannot be required in a diverse and global society.

I am also a citizen of South Africa, and as such, any choice I make should be relevant to this context. Although the elements of truth, confession and forgiveness, justice, humility and dignity and involved actors applies more to the next section, it should be kept in mind for my personal understanding of reconciliation. My personal views influence my reconciliation in the wider context and vice versa.

These requirements rule out all the rituals intended to propitiate and transfer guilt, as well as rituals that make use of sacrifices, scapegoats and medicines. I usually see dance as a recreational activity (although the toyi-toyi dance played a big role in the struggle against apartheid – Hay, 1998:136), and thus exclude it too. I shall consider the remaining possibilities.

6.2.1   Possible Models for Personal Understanding

6.2.1.1   Community

This model of reconciliation simply teaches that the establishment and maintenance of a community is already reconciliation. Its strength lies in this simplicity, making it useful to members of different cultures and worldviews. There are no intricate and esoteric presuppositions, nor bloody sacrifices. God created community as a means of reconciliation. It is easy to understand, and one can be guided by it. John Milbank (1997:273-274, and also Ruether, 2002:xv) asserts that the idea of community is thoroughly Christian, and that Christ overcomes evil in community with his followers, providing a memory of perfect community and a new language of community:

> The Christian claim is that the narratives about Christ show what love – a difficult and demanding practice requiring more subtlety, style, and correct idiom than mere "well-meaning" – is. That here is the Logos, the lost harmonic pattern of genuine human life, which can now be reappropriated.
>
> (Milbank, 1997:273)

The idea of *ubuntu* also inspires personal growth. According to Tutu (1999:35):

> A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.

A community reconciliation model does, however, usually envisage reconciliation as a harmonious structure, but can probably be used in the Marxist, revolutionary sense as well, if the needs of the community call for change. It makes an individual appeal and

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does not depend on shared values or culture other than a need to reconcile. It does offer the element of humility and dignity, qualities sorely lacking in our context.

6.2.1.2   Prayer

Prayer as a model for reconciliation is as simple and useful as can be. It certainly fits with the worldview of all religious persons, me included. The added value of this ritual is that problems or power beyond personal control or influence can be addressed through prayer. This is a strong transcending factor which can be very relevant for individuals.

Furthermore, prayer is not only open to different contexts, but to the different structures of reconciliation too. Although it does not necessarily require truth, justice, or the equal involvement of the actors, a prayer for reconciliation fits the wider societal context.

6.2.1.3   Expulsion and cleansing

Rituals of expulsion and cleansing depend on the belief in a spirit which can be expelled. As such, it is not very useful for people who do not live in an animist world. But if the spirits are understood more psychologically or figuratively, the unquestionable benefits of this model may be appreciated. Rituals of this nature are especially useful to reconcile individuals as I have shown. Still, they are is less open and relative than simple prayer and in their terms reconciliation can be restricted to the usual harmonious cycle.

6.2.1.4   Acceptance

The rituals of acceptance are the inverse of the rituals of expulsion, and offer the same benefits, possibilities and drawbacks. But the whole idea of accepting a troublesome "spirit" or notion is valuable. My usual Western, postmodern instinct would be to try to expel whatever it is that threatens me. It may sometimes be better to accept it – quite transcending! What I believe makes this acceptance so special is that it offers more than just Eastern indifference, but complete and active, courting acceptance.

6.2.1.5   Rituals of rebellion

The principal behind the rituals of rebellion, that harmony is achieved through disharmony and structure through chaos, resonates nicely with my worldview. It is harder to imagine how exactly this ritual can explain the work of God in Christ. Can Christ be seen as a divine provocateur? This concept seems almost blasphemous but maybe Luke would have liked it? It does offer many new, empowering possibilities for reconciliation among individuals. This kind of ritual sees reconciliation as a linear process of conflict. It also suits the wider context in that it brings about usually unarticulated truth, and justice, humility and dignity. Stephanie Mitchem (2002:260) stresses this idea when saying: "… reconciliation challenges all oppressive, dehumanizing systems, not merely restoring the former order, but rebalancing the old so that a new heaven and earth can begin".

According to Bernard Connor (1998:72-73), there is a difference between mediation and reconciliation. "The mediator seeks to lessen the hostility between conflicting parties by persuading each to curb their belligerency, tone down their demands and concentrate attention on what they have in common" (1998:72). In contrast, true reconciliation that

seeks to put all social relations on a new basis may provoke further division and conflict.

He writes that "reconciliation depends upon conversion taking place" (1998:72).

> Those who speak of reconciliation when they are appealing for compromise to reduce overt conflict or a lesser degree of violence have lost the meaning of the term as it is used in Christian theology. Reconciliation is much more far reaching than mediating between enemies to obtain a better modus vivendi, where those in the wrong – and they may be on both sides – still retain their basic antagonistic positions. Arranging a ceasefire or a truce, obtaining a milder form of oppression, or a slightly more just arrangement, may (or may not depending on the circumstances) be a tactical goal worth pursuing. Identifying such goals with 'reconciliation' debases them.
>
> (Connor, 1998:73)

6.2.1.6   Initiative from above

The !Kaggen story hints that Africans can conceive that God simply forgives and restores

by his own initiative. While the initiative from above myth may not be as stimulating as

some of the others, it certainly fits my idea of God. Can we say that God just forgave us,

without the intricate explanations of how and why he did it? This is what Hosea has in

mind:

> How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man; the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.
>
> (Hosea 11:8-9)

6.2.2   Appraisal of Models for Personal Understanding

These models do help me. They elucidate different aspects of reconciliation that I need to

deal with. If I want to imagine God's role in my reconciliation to him, the story of !Kaggen

assures me that reconciliation is God's gift to me. The reconciliation model of prayer helps

me understand that God can help me when I feel helpless, especially when the problems I face seem to be beyond my control. This may apply to my need to reconcile to both God and other human beings.

The image of communion as reconciliation and the beautiful myth behind it, remind me that all reconciliation is bound to the community and that even if I want to be reconciled to God, the way to do it is through communion with my fellow humans. It links up with the African idea of sin, shame and guilt, as I have explained in a previous chapter. The idea that my dealings with the community are completely interwoven with my relationship with God makes sense and appeals to me. This basic conception of the world also empowers me to take part in reconciliation.

The idea that I can expel all kinds of evil and strife may be quite useful in dealing with feelings of guilt or fear. It may be very suitable for reconciliation between human parties. The acceptance model is challenging because it is not a typical Western way to deal with problems. We find adversity and misfortune unacceptable. There may be value in starting to accept what I considered to be unacceptable.

The similarly strange reconciliation model of rebellion does seem quite exciting. There may arise circumstances when the establishment is so unjust and seemingly unshakable that I need to understand Jesus as the divine provocateur and when I may feel called to provoke.

A criterion that I have not expressed explicitly, but have certainly implied, is whether these African inspired models integrate in any way with Christianity. Although these models –

especially the models of acceptance and rebellion – seem very foreign, I believe they do. This question will be addressed later.

6.3   South African Context

A reconciliation model that can bring about reconciliation to all South Africans has to answer to a whole different set of requirements. *Firstly it must correspond with the beliefs and worldview of South Africans* – and it is exactly this integration that is the problem. We are such a diverse nation that we have no single worldview. The challenge would be to find models that are open enough to reconcile South Africans who see the world very differently. This once again excludes all the models that depend on beliefs in the intermediatory ability of ancestors, sacrifices, spirits, and the like. Another possibility would be to find models that are built on the few aspects and beliefs that the majority of South Africans do have in common, particularly our shared humanity, shared recent history and a widely held belief in God.

A *second challenge* would be to choose models that will *transcend our society*, or put differently, break the current deadlock of suspicion, anger and fear that still permeates our society. It sometimes seems that the reconciliation process has run out of steam. A reconciliation model must be strong and imaginative enough to call South Africans to action. It must therefore have a very clear imperative focus.

At the moment we probably need a harmonious, cyclical and structured kind of reconciliation that will bring together not only individuals but the whole society. This reconciliation cannot presuppose a shared culture but only shared living space; if it can start to create a shared culture it would be even better. The requirements set out by South

African religious leaders should be taken very seriously. A suitable model will have to contain elements of truth, confession and forgiveness, of justice, humility and dignity and involve as many actors as possible.

6.3.1   Possible models for the South African Context

It seems to me there are only three reconciliation models that will include all South Africans and truly make a difference to our society. Other reconciliation models – like prayer – may help and even lay the basis for reconciliation, but what I am looking for is models that will give South Africans something to do to make reconciliation concrete and real.

6.3.1.1   Scapegoats to transfer guilt

The models that require scapegoats are terrible and bloody and even repulsive to many. It is exactly my distaste for this kind of model, envisioned by Anselm, which led to the writing of this thesis. But there is one exception. When the scapegoat voluntarily offers himself or herself for the sake of others, this kind of model seems to have universal appeal. I have already mentioned the myth of Eleguru who sacrificed himself on behalf of the Ijebu-Ode people. There are many Western stories of heroes, rabbis, and monks who did the same. It seems that a story or myth of someone sacrificing himself or herself inspires people to do likewise (Ubruhe, 1996:18-22).

René Girard (1982) offers an explanation for the appeal of these voluntary self-sacrifices. He explored the phenomenon of scapegoats and he made fascinating findings. He says that when a community is faced with a universal threat, they usually attempt to counter it

by identifying an innocent scapegoat (or a few scapegoats). The scapegoat then bears their anger while they come to terms with the problem. He illustrates how this was done to the Jews in Guillaume de Machant's poem, "Judgement du Roy de Navarre", when pestilence threatened France in 1349 and the people reacted by accusing the Jews of poisoning their water and proceeded to massacre them (1982:7-19).

Girard believes that the pattern of scapegoats underlies most of our history and is even reflected in our myths (for example in the myth of Oedipus). He also finds this pattern in the Bible, but with this difference that the Biblical accounts reject and protest against the scapegoatism. Whenever someone is made into a scapegoat in the Bible, his or her innocence is pointed out. This is true of Psalm 35, Isaiah 53, and even more so of Jesus. Jesus is said to be crucified without cause (c f John 15:25, Luke 12:34, John 11; Girard, 1982:125-140).

At the same time, Jesus' death exposes and defeats the pattern of scapegoatism. Jesus becomes the "Lamb of God" and breaks the evil power of scapegoatism (Girard, 1982:221). Thus, according to Girard's thought, it would seem that Jesus gave himself up as a voluntary self-sacrifice, not to appease God's wrath, but rather to enlighten people: to reveal the evil pattern of scapegoatism and in doing so recognise the real causes for their suffering, and to challenge them to take responsibility for their own lives and welfare. Perhaps that is the case with all voluntary sacrifices. The pattern of scapegoatism gets revealed and communities are challenged to accept responsibility for themselves.

Wolfgang Huber (1993:573-591) investigated the ethics of responsibility and collective accountability and concluded that Christians are responsible to and for God, as well as to and for humans. He believes that the genocide of the Second World War should remind

Germans to take responsibility for others. The same would apply to South Africans.

Fortunately, our short shared history in South Africa also records example of self-

sacrificing heroes. Among the examples are Nelson Mandela, who sacrificed 27 years of

his life in jail, and then emerged forgiving and humble and reconciliatory, people like Steve

Biko, Chris Hani, Beyers Naude, and countless others. On the other hand, a case can be

made that a lot of the pent up resentment and lack of reconciliation are due to others'

unwillingness to sacrifice or accept responsibility for the past. An obvious example is the

Apartheid government's unwillingness to take part in the Truth and Reconciliation process

(Buthelezi, 1976:180; Maluleke, 2005:1).

People are usually quick to identify scapegoats other than themselves (Connor, 198:83).

Antjie Krog, a journalist who followed the TRC hearings, complains ironically that

(1998:13-14):

> None of those ever shot by police were ever actually doing anything provocative.
> The police seem to have shot specifically those who were buying bread. (This is
> strengthened by the fact that very few MK soldiers came forward as victims). And
> so the feeling grows that the apartheid struggle was not between racist whites and
> brave, organised fighters, but rather between brutal white police and innocent black
> people. Of course, it was like that, runs the official assumption. But this makes no
> allowance for bravery, for heroes. It only allows for martyrs. And then (since no
> one's son or daughter was ever, of course, an informer), it is only people who were
> *innocent* who were ever persecuted by the community or brutally exploited by the
> regime. … [And] so we have reached the stage where people like Verwoerd or P.W.
> Botha have been demonised as the sole sources of evil in the past. They were
> responsible for all the ugly events of the past, while we are not. Because they are
> evil or bad, it is self-evident that we are good. They are the devils and we are the
> angels.

What would happen if South Africans across the board would start sacrificing themselves

and their claims for the sake of reconciliation? What would happen if leaders would take

responsibility for past (and present) injustices? If truth could be told, confessions made

and forgiveness doled out in a thousand small ways? Wouldn't the dignity of people be restored and humility cultivated?

It could mean that justice would be done. As Van der Kooi (2002:112) pointed out, some sins are too big to be just forgiven. The seriousness of the wrongs of the past must be acknowledged. If leaders and members of society will start taking honest responsibility for the past and sacrifice their own interests, the offenders and the offended will be healed.

Self-offering is at the heart of the Christian message. It stands against evil and violence; the expulsion and sacrificing of others (Milbank, 1997:271). Bosch wrote (1982:26): "the ministry of reconciliation … [means] that I should be prepared to do *more* than [the other person] did, to go the 'second mile'. If *I* begin to change, it becomes possible for him to change too".

Another example of accepting responsibility took place during the TRC hearings. Mrs Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is a complex political figure, but in the eyes of many she accepted responsibility for her role in the death of Stompie Seipei. When she testified to her role in the abuses of the Mandela United Football Club, Archbishop Desmond Tutu appealed to her to take responsibility for what happened (Meiring, 1999:300-310; Tutu, 1999:134-135):

> I beg you, I beg you, I beg you please – I have not made any particular finding from what has happened here. I speak as someone who has lived in this community. You are a great person and you don't know how your greatness would be enhanced if you were to say, "Sorry, things went wrong, forgive me." I beg you.
>
> (Tutu, 1999:35)

Madikizela-Mandela probably surprised a few people by taking Tutu's advice:

> Thank you very much for your wonderful, wise words. That is the father I have always known in you. I am hoping it is still the same. I will take the opportunity to say to the family of Dr Asvat, how deeply sorry I am; to Stompie's mother, how deeply sorry I am – I have said so to her before a few years back, when the heat was very hot. I am saying it is true, things went horribly wrong. I fully agree with that and for that part of those years when things went horribly wrong and we are aware of the fact that there were factors that led to that, for that I am deeply sorry.
>
> (Tutu, 1999:135)

Meiring (1999:310) recalls:

> In the hall there was a commotion. Winnie and Stompie Seipei's mother walked towards one another. Cameras flashed. They took each others' hands and embraced. They made their peace. "Now", Joyce Seipei said, "we can really talk to one another. There are many things that I want to know. We are both women and I know that she also has feelings deep in her heart, but now we must talk".

African reconciliation models often sacrifice justice for the sake of harmony. But there is this very strong strand of thinking that sacrifices may at times be necessary. I believe a model and culture of self-sacrifice may be a powerful option for South Africa.

The requirement that a sacrifice be voluntary is very important to African Women's Theology. These theologians warn that the passion of Christ is often used to domesticate women, boosting the male ego and fuelling male determination to the detriment of the humanity of women. On the other hand, "(Jesus Christ) knew what He was doing. He knew that the liberation of human life depended on his acceptance of the cross. He willingly took it up so that He might become the way to reconciliation and the beginning of a new humanity under God" (Oduyoye, 1998:369, also Johnson, 2002:209; Ubruhe, 1996:18-22).

A voluntary sacrifice works against unhealthy power relations. Vandezande (1998:50-51) says that Jesus did not impose but invite, not coerce but convince, He did not demand mandatory compliance but heartfelt community and voluntary discipleship.

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A number of reformed theologians have also tried to soften the idea of a substitutionary sacrifice by emphasising the voluntary aspect of Christ's sacrifice. Subtle substitution holds that: "Living on behalf of another and dying on behalf of another is not against human dignity, and thus not against God's dignity either, because God is a God of humanity" (Van de Beek: 2004:39).

### 6.3.1.2	Expulsion and cleansing

The model of expulsion is an obvious model. It can be used individually, but as effectively collectively. African reconciliation models teach that strife is like a slow poison that ruins all relationships. This poison must be expelled.

The idea of expelling evil can be presented in a way open enough to be acceptable for all members of our society. And expulsion ceremonies may involve numerous groups in our society. It will also be something that people can do ritually, and keep on doing in many different ways. It will necessarily involve truth-telling and forgiveness and an element of justice will have to be built in.

Many people think that South Africa should have had a "washing of the spears" ceremony ten years ago. It acknowledges the contribution of the warriors, but simultaneously "removes the urge to kill" (Hay, 1998:136).

6.3.1.3   Acceptance

The African notion of acceptance can offer a fascinating possibility. Instead of expelling the past, rituals can be devised to accept the past with all its wonder and terror. This may seem dubious to Westerners (the theme of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*); like a kind of laissez faire acceptance of evil, but it is seems to work in Africa, and can make a difference in South Africa. As in the example of the Chihamba cult, such a reconciliation model can be used to create a new clan for all South Africans to belong to. Imagine a big ceremony where the past is accepted by all and a new South African race or a people are born. It can overcome a lot of our present difficulties. It may diminish truth and justice but it need not be so. And the amount of dignity achieved can make up for it.

Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane (2003:103) explains that the African emphasis on acceptance is thoroughly Christian:

> When we refuse to allow difference in our communities and when we ostracize those who are the 'other', we deny ourselves and others to opportunity to be fully human. African culture invites us to embrace the 'other' and to discover a fuller and richer humanity. This understanding of our humanity echoes, of course, the profound insights offered by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which celebrates a loving communion of free, self determining , creative persons.

Ndungane adds that we now have the opportunity to challenge the exclusivism which prefers men above women, whites above blacks, rich above poor, and straight above gay, because our Triune God invites us to demonstrate that in our very differences, we can embrace one another, celebrating otherness, and discovering our deep, Godly unity in those differences (2003:107).

Paul writes that this has indeed become a possibility through the reconciliation of Christ:

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For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

(Ephesians 2:14-16)

6.3.2   Appraisal of Models for the South African Context

The three models offer interesting possibilities. The strength of the scapegoat model is that it acknowledges injustice. It can bring closure to many people who were offended in the past as well as to their offenders. Its success depends on strong leaders that will start the self-sacrificing process and who can inspire others to follow their example. Another advantage of this model is that it can be an ongoing, self-perpetuating process – which is probably what we need. It also ties in well with our understanding of God's reconciliation through Christ. If the emphasis falls on the voluntariness of Christ's sacrifice, instead of the restoration of God's honour for example, it touches even me!

The expulsion model's strength lies in the ritual. Just as African have used this concept in countless ways, it can be enacted at all sorts of ceremonies. As a ritual, the visual and participatory character will undoubtedly have a lasting effect on those who take part. The challenge will be to involve as many South Africans as possible, though perhaps South Africans who are not of African descent will take some persuasion. In return, the ceremony will offer them a sense of forgiveness and closure. This model is not so far removed from the old Augustinian victory model. We can see Christ as the one who expelled all evil. The African version adds participation.

The acceptance model offers a new possibility. It may hopefully create a new South Africa where people are not categorised by the colour of their skin, their language or tribal loyalties, but first and foremost as South Africans. It can bring about a new culture, a new shared worldview, and a shared dream. There is no classical corresponding reconciliation model for this idea, but still it can be used to explain the work of Christ. The apostle Paul and others frequently express the idea of a new family. Christ can be said to be the founder of a new community.

We probably need all three models, and in this order.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTOURS OF A NEW UNDERSTANDING AND PRAXIS OF RECONCILIATION

I wish we can incorporate these things without losing the core.

(Daniel Ngubane, 2004)

My motivation for this study was fourfold. I wanted to find new ways to understand reconciliation for myself and my ministry to replace the traditional models of Western Christianity and especially Anselm's objective model. I was also looking for reconciliation myths and metaphors that would be suitable and understandable to all South Africans to aid the ongoing reconciliation process in our country. In doing so, I hoped to discover something of Africa's unique contribution to the worldwide debate on what reconciliation is and should be. And I was looking for ways to translate these new myths into useful liturgical elements. I was thus hoping to find new ways of communicating the message of Christ's reconciliation to twenty-first century South Africans, and to convert the work of the TRC and other reconciliation bodies into repeatable rituals and liturgies that can be used in churches and Christian meetings.

7.1   Africa's Contribution to the Study of Reconciliation

7.1.1   Central theses

7.1.1.1   This-worldliness

African religion and African theology are humane and practical and as such offer refreshingly undogmatic and relative views of reconciliation. To the African mind reconciliation is decidedly this-worldly, and addresses the problem of evil and strife from a

human perspective and has the intention of offering solutions and explanations for

humans. Therefore there is little use for extra-contextual myths and models to solve the

problem of evil. Rather, evil and strife are described from below and human answers and

rituals are sought. This should empower its adherents (Bediako, 1995:101; Du Toit,

1998:393).

Mulago explains (in Bediako, 1995:101):

> To gain a proper understanding of [the] African primal world view, we must set aside the dualistic dialectic which [often] characterises Western thought whereby the exaltation of man would entail the rejection of God. On the contrary, [the] African primal religious viewpoint has as its two fundamental notions and vital centres: God and man.

Traditional Western Christianity is more otherworldly inclined (Bosch, 1989:142). That is

why, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1998:59), Christianity had to encourage people to

focus on their posthumous fate; put more crudely, Christianity had to produce consumers

for its product. Michel Foucault (in Bauman, 1998:59) wrote that:

> … all those Christian techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have one aim: to get individuals to work at their own 'mortification' in this world. Mortification is not death, of course, but it is a renunciation of this world and of oneself: a kind of everyday death. A death which is supposed to provide life in another world.

Bauman (1998:63-69) suggests that our society has undergone a "anti-eschatological

revolution", whereby human beings are more concerned and insecure about their human

identity, existence and everyday problems, and less interested about their posthumous

fate.

> Unlike the ontological insecurity, identity-focussed uncertainty needs neither the carrot of heaven nor the stick of hell to cause insomnia. It is all around, salient and

tangible, all-too-protruding in rapidly ageing and abruptly devalued skills, in human bonds entered *until further notice*, in jobs which can be taken away without *any* notice, and in the ever new allures of the consumer feast, each promising untried kinds of happiness while wiping away the shine of the tried ones.

(Bauman, 1998:68)

Christianity should not try to change the insecurities and insufficiencies of human beings, but rather address their real needs. Modern humans' problems are this-worldly: Christianity should give people this-worldly answers. African religion shows the way.

7.1.1.2   Connectedness, ecology and holism

African religion offers a worldview of connectedness where all the elements of creation are woven together. This qualifies the human prominence and also emphasises the human community, the ancestors, nature, spirits and God. Humans, their morality and their needs, cannot be separated from this wider community. This basic view of connectedness determines African thought on sin and guilt. Wherever this community is disturbed, there is sin; whenever the community is restored, forgiveness. God is also part of this larger community. As such, God is also touched by humans' actions towards creation, and vice versa. Both sin and reconciliation have as much to do with the physical as the spiritual dimensions – the physical body and the spiritual being (Adeyemo, 1998:374; Crafford, 1993:176; Kobia, 2003:95; Thorpe, 1991:123).

This differs significantly from the Western mentality which, according to Daneel is:

> … conditioned by a dichotomous, dualistic anthropology which divides man into two separate entities – "soul" and "body". This view concurs neither with Scripture (nor) with the African's traditional conception. Both Pietism and the Social Gospel are products of this dualistic approach…
>
> (Daneel, 1989:251)

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A beautiful example of the African holistic worldview is the tendency of all-for-one. While both Western and African models have scapegoats which serve as "one-for-all" propitiatory sacrifices, it is sometimes turned around in African religion (e g dance) so that a community may take the affliction of one person upon the whole community. Instead of one-for-all, it is all-for-one! This may be a useful kind of reconciliation in an individualist, modern society of personal isolation. If individuals feel isolated, not only from other people, but also from God, an all-for-one kind of myth might be revolutionary.

The idea of connectedness has ecological consequences. Du Toit (1998:398) calls it a kinship with nature in which animals and plants, like human beings, have their own spiritual existence and place in the universe as interdependent parts of a whole: "African ontology considers God, spirits, humans, animals, plants and inanimate creation to be one. To break up this unity is to destroy one or more of these modes of existence, and to destroy one is in effect to destroy them all". This idea of the interdependence of all creation is increasingly accepted in the Western worldview and cosmology (Du Toit, 1998:392; Thorpe, 1991:120).

7.1.2   Reservations

This African worldview may produce exciting possibilities for reconciliation, but may also stifle it. I will in time highlight these. Of course, my view of African religion is positive and admiring and I will pay more attention to the new possibilities. This study is meant to be idealistic and one-sided – I want to compare the best of African religion with Christianity. But I will point out some possible dangers of exaggerations.

7.1.3   New emphases on existing ideas

Part of Africa's contribution to the study of reconciliation lies in the unique emphasis that Africans have placed on seemingly universal ideas of reconciliation. The following ideas are also to be found in mainline Christianity, but Africa adds it own nuance.

7.1.3.1   Sin is conditional

I have noted that Africans see sin as a breach of or a threat to the community. Kgatla (1995:126) explains that "sin is inherently the destruction of the group's solidarity, so that a person sins, not against God, but against others". Thus sin is conditional – determined by the context, the actors, time and place, etc (Nolan, 1988:192; Theron, 1996:118-119). This conditional view of sin not only makes more sense to religious people who want to avoid sinning, but reiterates Kruger's requirements of sound religious beliefs.

Kgatla adds that the African view of sin is similar to that of ancient Israel:

> In ancient Israel sin in life could not be separated from the notion of the covenant relationship. This means that the relationship between Yahweh, and individual and the rest of the community should never be disturbed by actions which were forbidden by law. Any behaviour which threatened the natural carrying on of life in the community was considered as a sinful deed.
>
> (Kgatla, 1995:126)

This view has significant implications for traditional theology. If sin is indeed conditional, Christian theologians will need to revisit a concept like "The Fall". James Miller calls for a postmodern theology to do just that:

> If we are to speak in an illuminating way about evil in the universe, or, more particularly, about pervasive evil in human experience, then we need new stories

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which account for the reality of our experience of sin, stories which do not assume that the contemporary experience of evil is in some way a mechanical consequence of the act of a prehistoric ancestor.

<div align="right">(Miller, 1989:17)</div>

7.1.3.2   Sacrifices

Probably one of the most predominant ideas of reconciliation is that reconciliation requires some kind of sacrifice. Exactly why this sacrifice is called for is explained differently by different religions. Traditional Christianity often taught that God demands it in order to restore his honour, or variations of this idea. Some would say, as Africans sometimes do too, that Christ was God's sacrificial lamb who carried the expelled sin of humanity to hell. In this sense Christ can even be seen as a sacrificial messenger.

The use of sacrifices to bring about reconciliation is problematic. I have set out Girard's ideas on sacrifices and scapegoats, and showed that the Bible rejects and objects to the use of scapegoats and that Jesus death was an exposure of the evil pattern of scapegoatism, rather than an endorsement. Huber (1990: 42-43) likewise sees reconciliation as liberation from the scapegoat mechanism. When Jesus commands us to love our enemies, we are "… liberated from the constraint to see in others only what is bad and to see what is bad as the exclusive property of others". In the same way as God loved sinful humanity, we are called to love our enemies and in doing so take part in God's triumph over enmity. In the same tone, Hubert called for human beings to take responsibility for their lives and those of others (Girard, 1982:221; Huber, 1993:581).

These insights make it quite difficult to justify sacrifices – especially propitiatory sacrifices – as a means for reconciliation. But some African sacrifices do not depend on scapegoats. Through a communion and reconstruction sacrifice, African religion hopes to

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achieve something completely different. Such a sacrifice re-establishes and restores the God-ordained order in creation. The fire, smoke and meat bring together all the elements of the wider community and put everything in its rightful place. It creates a new, purified relationship, as Magesa (1997:203) explained earlier, instead of focussing on retribution.

7.1.3.3 Expulsion and Cleansing

The African rituals of expulsion and cleansing are not so unique either. Christians also believe that evil was beaten once and for all in the work of Christ, and thus expelled. But while Christianity claims that this reconciliation was achieved once and for all, Africans are set free by these rituals over and over again. Christians do celebrate and remember the historical once-off event, but Africans actually repeat the event itself. And these often repeated rituals probably do have a bigger impact. While the Christian idea seems so much more final and effective, it is probably less effective (at least) on a human level. These rituals are so useful that they are employed in many different ways in the community. This practical way of dealing with pent up anger and injustice help both the offended and the offender.

On a different level expulsion as a means to reconcile can be a problem. Inus Daneel (1987:278-279) found in his study of AIC's that sometimes the notion to expel (or exorcise) evil can result in persons not taking responsibility for their own weaknesses or misdeeds: "Here the great danger is that sin will be substantiated in the other person and not sought within one's own heart. Such an approach leaves no scope for repentance. Sin is never what one has done oneself, but rather what someone else has done to one" (1987:278-279). This reiterates Huber and Girard's earlier concerns. Still, the exaggeration need not disallow the helpful applications of the expulsion model, as I will show.

6.3.3.4   Community

Desmond Tutu (1996:xiii) wrote with his characteristic sense of humour:

> Adam was having the time of his life in the Garden of Eden. He enjoyed his work as the primal gardener. The animals loved him and lived in an idyllic, undisturbed harmony. Everything was lovely in the garden. No, not quite. God looked on his human creature and was concerned, for his life was not all unalloyed bliss. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." And so God asked Adam to choose a mate for himself among the animals which paraded before him in procession. God would ask his human friend: "What about this one?" Adam would reply: "Not on your life! No, thank you!" And so God decided to put Adam to sleep and produced from his rib that delectable creature, Eve; and when Adam awoke he exclaimed: "Wow! This is just what the doctor ordered."

Tutu explains that the story of Adam and Eve relates a fundamental truth about humans – that we are made to live in a delicate network of interdependence with one another, with God and with the rest of creation. According to Tutu, a solitary human being is a contradiction in terms: "A totally self-sufficient human being is ultimately subhuman. We are made for complementarity. … We need each other to become fully human" (1996:xiv).

All religions emphasise the importance of the community. Abelard's model of the atonement teaches that communal behaviour, as illustrated by Christ, can bring about reconciliation. According to African religion the presence of community itself constitutes reconciliation. The community can heal the human sense of estrangement from God (as illustrated by the Zulu myth of the mischievous young man). Thus, all efforts to create, recreate or restore the community boils down to reconciliation with both the members of society and with God. African thought rightly sees that the relationship with humans and the relationship with God are inseparable.

The all-importance of the community also implies that even the offender's wellbeing is an important part of reconciliation. It is only once the offender's dignity is restored, that reconciliation can take place (Ndwandwe, 2000:214).

This emphasis on community may be more needed than we might think.   According to Thorpe (1991:120):

> Loneliness may well be one of the most devastating diseases of modern people. The Western emphasis upon individual rights has swung the pendulum so far off-centre that many people are no longer able to recognise the fact of their right to belong. … [A] concept of belonging to a community, to a tribe, to a family group, may go a long way towards combating the disease of loneliness which threatens to destroy many Westerners.
>
> (Thorpe, 1991:120)

In Africa, every member of society is closely linked with the community. This creates a chain that binds each person horizontally to the other members of the tribe, and vertically to the ancestors and the coming generations. Individuals cannot exist alone – they are because they belong (Crafford, 1993:176; Shenk, 1995:93; Thorpe, 1991:120).

There is a broad consensus among theologians that traditional Western Christianity can learn a lot from the African focus on the community (Daneel, 1989:272; Crafford, Boshoff & Daneel, 84:48). Setiloane states that: "Christianity could be enriched immensely if it were to learn from African tradition about community, that is, of the very essence of being" (Setiloane, 2000:57).

Of course even the closest community should allow its members to take responsibility for their actions. Huber's concern for accountability and collective accountability should never be ignored for the sake of a community (1993:574).

7.1.3.5   Communion

Related to the idea of community, is the African view that communion or solidarity with

God can mean reconciliation. Jüngel expressed a similar view when he said that in Jesus:

> … the divine Word came to a worldly expression, and the resurrection reveals
> God's self-identification with the Crucified One whose death for others integrated
> his whole life of selflessness. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the being
> of God was realised historically as a unity of life and death in favour of life.
>
> (in Veldsman, 1998:60)

Van de Beek formulates the idea of numerous African theologians by saying that: "God

himself comes to share our bad being and … take us as sinners into his communion"

(2004:43).

7.1.4   New ideas

Some African ideas are quite unique to Africa and resemble typical African (or at least

non-Western) thinking. These were the surprises!

7.1.4.1   This-worldly

The African emphasis on this world and on human beings as the principal actors, is a

corrective of much of Western Christianity's theological over-emphasis on the otherworldly.

This has caused some theologians (like Adeyemo, 1998:372) to label the African

worldview as utilitarian. This can possibly be true when this-worldliness is exaggerated.

Nevertheless, religion and especially Christianity as the religion of the Incarnation should

be incarnate and human (Crafford, 1993:176; Meiring, 1975:116).

Manas Buthelezi (1976:177): wrote in the 70's that Christians made a "false unbiblical dichotomy" between human life and Christian life:

> This explains the present anomalous situation in which sometimes those who profess to be concerned with spiritual regeneration often harbour blind spots in their conscience when it comes to questions of human rights and racial justice. In the United States the Southern "Bible Belt" has for many years been at the same time a haven for the Ku Klux Klan and other professing racial bigots. In our own country the national Christian zeal to keep the Sabbath holy is not deemed contradictory to the parliamentary knack for creating discriminatory legislation that subjects black human beings to indignity.

I have earlier showed that while African reconciliation models display both vertical and horizontal dimensions, the focus is on the horizontal. This this-worldly starting point makes more sense, especially when it concerns reconciliation between humans, which is more urgently needed at this time in history (Bosch, 1989:142).

The same can be said for the so-called "shame conscience" as van der Walt (2004:2-15) typifies the African inclination. The Western guilt conscience often rests on the acceptance of certain absolute norms that easily become detached from society. If norms or moral codes do not directly influence or touch the community, what good are they? How do they make sense? Within the context of Christianity, many norms are ascribed to the untestable will or benefit of God. But is it not true that God wants what is best for the community or at least creation? Shouldn't all norms be tested as to their usefulness for the community? And then, isn't a shame conscience more sensible – if not more biblical? I believe that because a shame conscience is contextual, it is better.

7.1.4.2   Acceptance

The idea, that evil and strife can be tamed and accepted into the community is the exact opposite of what the Christian response would be. Christianity traditionally sees the world in such a dualistic way, that acceptance of evil is beyond conception. But while Africans would often try to expel evil, accommodating that evil is always another option. I have shown that some people groups in Africa are prone to witch-hunting, while others opt to try to incorporate or tolerate the witches. Through the Chihamba cult troublesome ancestors are given their own descendents and have their own special huts built. Although this kind of thinking goes against my Western instincts, Africa may have a point. Some kinds of 'evil' should probably be accepted and dealt with, rather than denied. This reflects the postmodern view (as I have shown earlier) that suffering and death are natural phenomena and should not be treated as a moral dilemma (Herholdt, 1998a:227).

I have quoted Zulu (1998:192) as saying that in African religion efforts are made to forgive and rarely to punish the guilty; while recognising the guilt Africans attempt to remove the consciousness of guilt through rituals. Zulu argues that this corresponds with the biblical priestly, prophetic and wisdom literature which all seem to indicate the fact that reconciliation benefits peace and harmony; the sins are covered or blotted out to bring about a new order, a harmonious community … and there is nothing to be paid, for all that has been done is enough. Venter also made the point that the Old Testament (or at least Leviticus) emphasises God's forgiveness above anything else (2005:26). Desmond Tutu considers the New Testament:

> There is a movement, not easily discernable, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility and disharmony. God has set in motion a centripetal process, a moving towards the Centre, towards unity, harmony, goodness, peace and justice; one that removes barriers. Jesus

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says, "And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw everyone to myself," as He hangs from His cross with out-flung arms, thrown out to clasp all, everyone and everything, in a cosmic embrace, so that all, everyone, everything, belongs. None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There are no aliens, all belong to the one family, God's family, the human family. There are no longer Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free – instead of separation and division, all distinctions make for a rich diversity to be celebrated for the sake of the unity that underlies them. We are different so that we can know our need of one another, for no-one is ultimately self-sufficient.

<div align="right">(Tutu, 1999:213-214)</div>

Daneel (1989:326-329) also values the African notion of acceptance, but cautions that it may at times obscure evil or wrongdoing. Sometimes the easy acceptance may not acknowledge that someone is being hurt or that some practices may be bad. On the other hand, an African theologian like Tutu consistently emphasises justice as a prerequisite for reconciliation, but then, restorative justice (1999:51).

Huber (1990:43) adds that reconciliation demands change on both sides of the conflict. In his reflection on the parable of the prodigal son, he shows that not only younger son had to change but so did his father and older brother. They both had to accept the younger son. The reconciliation model of acceptance especially calls for change in the (supposedly) innocent party or community.

7.1.4.3   Rebellion

The rituals of rebellion seem strange and offensive to the traditional idea of harmonious and structured reconciliation. These rituals challenge the norms and break down structures and disturb the peace and quiet of society. But this may at times be necessary to achieve true reconciliation. Other cultures may have had the same idea; the similarity between the rituals of rebellion and the Roman Saturnalia festival or the cult of Dionysius is obvious, and so is perhaps even the annual dethronement and enthronement ceremony

of the Babylonians. The idea is that power should at times be tempered and established society confronted in order to find reconciliation. In the West we have the principles of democracy – but these speak only to the realm of politics and do not impact on our religiosity (Smart, 1969:319-320).

Reconciliation by way of rebellion certainly represents the view of Black theology which views Christ as the one who overcomes all obstacles. These obstacles not only include physical ills such as blindness and leprosy but also social ills like poverty and powerlessness (Kiogora, 1998:337).

This view of reconciliation requires the confrontation of racism:

> Black Theology contends that that it is as people candidly face the racial factors that breed alienation and conflict that they will be open to the transformative power of the gospel, which will lead Whites and Blacks to acquire qualitatively new ways of becoming human in their relationships with one another.
>
> (Maimela, 198:117)

African Women's Theology adds that reconciliation means being freed from structures that hold vulnerable members of society, and especially women, in bondage. Achievement of reconciliation would then require challenging all power structures, prejudices and social norms (Oduyoye, 1998:363).

7.1.4.4   God's initiative

I have treated the story of !Kaggen creatively and may have read too much into it. Still, this faint strand in traditional African thinking suggests that God can also simply restore and heal the human condition of his own accord, by simply forgiving people and restoring harmonious relations. This is the only African reconciliation model from "above", but it

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makes more sense and does more justice to the sovereignty of God than some of the Christian models.

Reconciliation of this kind seems to disregard a number of prerequisites for reconciliation, among others the demands for equal participation and justice. Still, this may be a valid and biblical reconciliation model. Huber (1990:42) explained that reconciliation is usually seen as a process between equal parties which implies that only when a conflict is symmetrical and equal can there be any chance for reconciliation. He challenges this view and relates how the Cross represented a unilateral reconciliation by God in an asymmetrical conflict. Likewise, the Sermon on the Mount also calls for unilateral reconciliation.

7.1.4.5.   Solidarity

African theologians, along with other liberation theologians from the Third World, strongly emphasise the idea that reconciliation entails solidarity with the oppressed or suffering: "… Jesus is the friend who stands in solidarity with the marginalised…" (Oduyoye, 1998:362).

This is what Dirkie Smit (2002:108) and Wolgang Huber (1993:590) has in mind when they call attention to the importance of anamnetic solidarity: "This solidarity has to be oriented toward the destiny of the weaker, to the suffering of the victims. A preferential option for the victims instead of for the heroes is the appropriate way to deal with history" (Huber, 1993:590). According to Daniël Veldsman,

> … this idea was also espoused by Moltman who said that through the cross, Jesus identified himself with the present reality of the world in all its negativity. The cross represents solidarity.
>
> (Veldsman, 1998:61)

It is evident that Africa's traditional emphases and ideas help us to understand the message of Christ better than we can do without them. I will deal with this matter a bit further on.

7.1.5   Participation and rituals

One of African religion's (and African theology's) contributions has to do with participation and rituals. Africans have managed to engage individuals in reconciliation through rituals in which people can participate. So too has African theology stressed the importance of symbolic theology (Mbiti, 1998:148; Sundkler, 1961:181).

Bauman (1998:69-71) argues that postmodern people are not impressed or affected in a personal way by the accounts of revelation and ecstasy of saints, hermits and monks, but, as sensation gatherers, want to experience this for themselves. In African religion, the whole community participates and experiences the rituals and dance. This can be a guide for Christian churches that want to share the experience of ecstasy with all its members (Daneel, 1987:273; Crafford et al, 1984: 48).

Daneel describes how congregants in an AIC participate:

Sermons are interspersed with prophesy, confession, testimonies to joy or grief, laying on of hands, faith healing and exorcism. Thus the need of the individual is shared and carried by the church. During exorcism the beleaguered soul is tied with sacred cords, and this symbolic act is accompanied by rhythmic song. The demon is then addressed, cursed and expelled by means of numerous symbolic acts. It is all deadly earnest, but if the exorcism should suddenly sound funny, people will laugh and delight at the rebuking of the unwelcome spirit – without in any way marring the seriousness of the situation.

(Daneel, 1987:273)

7.1.5.1   Rituals

African religion also contributes to our understanding of reconciliation in its stress on participation. The majority of reconciliation models involve rituals in which human beings can act out and participate in the reconciliation. It makes reconciliation something concrete and tangible.

Thorpe (1991:121) explains that rituals are an important part of African life. These rituals often take the form of dramatic presentations. By means of objectifying their inner fears and perplexities, the people are enabled to deal with them in a more meaningful and constructive way. In relatively recent times this approach has been utilised in Western cultures as well, for example by psychiatrists working with people in therapy groups.

> Rituals help to structure and thus give meaning to human life. Individuals need this structure lest their lives become totally aimless. When structure breaks down, psychological disaster looms.
>
> (Thorpe, 1991:121)

6.3.5.2   Symbolism

Closely related to the benefits of rituals, is Africa's abundant use of symbolism. According to Thorpe (1991:122; c f Vosloo, 2004:141),

> Western people have become increasingly obsessed with a multiplicity of words – printed pages abound more and more and speeches are disseminated world-wide via the television screen. Instead of being powerful vehicles to carry meaning from one person to another, words have lost their meaning more often than not and fall, at last, on deaf ears.

African Christians express their faith by making abundant use of symbols. Art, sculpture, dance, drama, rituals, colours, numbers, forms of worship, dress, and decorations all

express their beliefs. This is even more obvious in the African Initiated Churches, whose members can often be recognised by their clothes. This is a contextual kind of theology in a context in which many are illiterate (Mbiti, 1998:148).

If there is a disease that rivals loneliness in our world, it is the lack of communication among people. Words alone – because of their multiplicity – become meaningless. It may be time to look for new symbols that will enable people to interpret and give meaning to their lives. African religion and society is rich in symbols. Taboos on certain words, masks and rituals, and communal meals are highly symbolic and express a community solidarity (Thorpe, 1991:122).

Crafford et al (1984:54) agreed that traditional churches can learn a lot from the African use of symbolism because it speaks to its participants on an existential level.

7.1.5.3   Sacrifices

I have thoroughly considered the concerns and qualifications involved when dealing with sacrifices. Evaluated simply as rituals, sacrifice involves all the senses and makes for a spectacular and memorable experience. Even when it offends onlookers, it makes a deep impression on everyone who sees it. It is quite easy to make a sacrifice and anyone can sacrifice something: even a cup of beer or a handful of maize can be sacrificed. Sacrifice opens the mediating or priestly office to every member of the community and can be done as frequently as needed.

In the mainline Christian church we sometimes frown upon the repetition of rituals. While some rituals such as Holy Communion are meant to be performed regularly, others, for

instance Baptism, should happen only once. And with good reason – the fact that we are baptised only once reminds us that Christ accepted us into the community of believers even before we could choose or merit it. And to repeat this ritual could compromise our theology causing us to doubt Christ's sufficiency. But if theology is constructed from below, and all rituals are intended to strengthen the faith of believers, why could baptism – or a similar ritual – not be repeated as often as required? While Christian rituals as we know them are certainly consistent with Christian theology and our view of God, African religion's disregard for metaphysical correctness for the sake of serving its adherents, adds a new dimension to recent discussions on Baptism in the South African theological community.

7.1.5.4   Medicine

African reconciliation models and rituals are usually accompanied by the use of medicines. Although the medicines can in themselves constitute a new and restored community (as I pointed out), they surely also help the people who use them. Ritual medicines once again, are something to touch or drink or rub into your skin. It makes reconciliation more true and lasting.

7.1.5.5   Gifts

Libations, sacrifices and gifts are as real as medicines. Africans will feel the gift that they give to God and possibly experience a lack thereafter. Christianity spiritualised the offering of gifts to such an extant that few churchgoers ever feel their offerings and rarely feel that they have given God a gift as much as they feel they have done towards their friends at Christmas.

7.1.5.6   Expulsion and cleansing rituals

The rituals of expulsion and cleansing are likewise experienced by their performers. When two enemies share such a ritual, it constitutes a powerful symbol of their reconciliation that will not only make an impression on them but on all who witness it. Whether it is anger that is spit out with a mixture of herbs, or truth that is milked out of a palm leaf, reconciliation is made authentic through participation.

7.1.5.7   Dance

Dance as a physical activity once again involves the senses and the resulting weariness is probably still felt the next day! But reconciliation rituals consisting of dance have additional advantages. Through the activity of dance people can achieve an experience of trance and the feeling of union with God. Dance also binds the individual into the community of dancers in a powerful way. Likewise, the dancers can share the affliction of one person in an all-for-one framework (Hay, 1998:136).

7.1.6   Coherent myths

Another of African religion's contributions to reconciliation and reconciliation models is that the myths behind Africa's models are still understood and coherent. In Christianity we have a lot of practices that were once underpinned by imaginative myths, but the myths have since been lost, and all that remains are unintelligible practices and even the more unbelievable attempts to justify them. The idea that God could somehow demand a human sacrifice to appease his anger is one example.

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Krüger (1995:125) explains that there are three kinds of religious cognition, namely mythic cognition, conceptual cognition and mystic cognition. Western culture places an overwhelming emphasis on the conceptual cognition (Krüger, 1995:126). In African religion the mythical cognition is still in tact, and it offers a way of redressing the Western imbalance. Thus, African rituals and models still make sense because the myths have survived. Another reaction to an overemphasised conceptual cognition is mysticism – the rise of which should be interesting to follow the religions and religious ideas of reconciliation in South Africa.

7.1.6.1   Blood

Some African reconciliation models also call for blood. But in some of these cases, the bloodiness is motivated by coherent myths. African religion teaches that blood symbolises the life force that permeates creation. Thus, blood can give life to the spirit of an ancestor and in a sense summon him or her to the place of worship. Once the ancestor is made present, the natural order is restored and reconciliation is achieved.

Venter (2005:26) found a similar myth in Leviticus. He argues that the blood involved in these Old Testament sacrifices is based on the myth that blood represents God or alternatively, life.

The myths in these examples attempt to justify sacrifices through coherent myths. They may not be convincing in our context, but at least offer more coherence than some of the traditional Christian reconciliation models that demands that blood be shed for no other reason than to appease God's anger.

7.1.6.2   Medicine

The use of special medicines is not the result of simple superstition but an acting out of the myth that the (wider) can community bring about reconciliation. The medicines represent different elements of creation and the use of one can put right a diagnosed deficiency. When a patient burns a piece of plant material or animal skin or bone, his or her relationship with the natural world is restored.

7.1.6.3   Connectedness

Even the idea of connectedness itself is based on a myth. I have dealt with this in a previous chapter, but even more simply put it goes like this: God created the world and the world in turn resembles something of God. If this created order is maintained, godliness is achieved or sustained. Furthermore, this order is dependant on right relationships between the different elements of creation. Thus, relationships, connectedness or community holds the key to all.

7.1.6.4   Acceptance

Behind the African option of acceptance is the myth that evil can be tamed or converted. Even troublesome spirits and witches can become wonderful ancestors and contributing members of society if they are accepted into the community (which will make them godly in turn). No one is beyond salvation; there is always the possibility that a good dosage of community will work healing wonders.

The myths behind acceptance are simple, consistent and coherent. It offers a logical framework wherein Africans can seek reconciliation.

7.1.7   Possible exaggerations

It emerged that not every African idea is beyond suspicion. Although African religion offers Christianity and the church wonderful new possibilities, some African models and myths are less useful. It may be because these models came from a different world that no longer makes sense in our context, other ideas seem flawed in any context. The biggest problems lie in exaggerations. Any model taken to the extreme presents dangers and one-sidedness (Tutu, 1996:xiv). I summarise some concerns.

7.1.7.1   Times have changed

A good example of the changing context concerns the use of medicines, dance and sacrifices. While many African people still use these models of reconciliation regularly, many will find it increasingly difficult to do so. Urbanisation and Western medicine may cause African people to have less faith in their traditional culture and remedies, which limits the use of a number of reconciliation models.

7.1.7.2   Exorcism

Reconciliation models that call for the exorcism of evil can be quite harmful. These create unequal power relations where exorcism experts have all the power to determine the source of evil and to expel it, while those people who are not considered to be experts are at their mercy. It often creates an atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion and can even lead to

reprisals. In addition, exorcism may conceal or fail to reveal the real source of a problem. It may cause persons to have unnecessary feelings of guilt or conversely, to give up their personal responsibility.

7.1.7.3   Justice and Mercy

An extreme and unqualified application of the acceptance model can deny justice. There may come times or circumstances when an evil cannot be simply accepted or an injustice accommodated. Reconciliation depends on at least some kind of justice. Likewise, when models of expulsion are used excessively, there may be little evidence of mercy, which is as important a part of reconciliation as justice. These opposite models must be used sensibly and contextually.

7.1.7.4   The actors: God, humans and magic

African reconciliation models are mostly from below. As such, they emphasise the human contribution toward the reconciliation process. This may leave too little emphasis on God as an actor in the relationship between God and humans. Christians hold that God is the primary source and inspiration for all acts of reconciliation. Similarly, when reconciliation is achieved through the ritual use of medicines and the like, it can also emphasise the mechanical role of magic too much, and deny the contribution and responsibility of humans.

7.1.7.5   Suffocating community

For me as a South African of Western descent, the African emphasis on community seems refreshing and wonderful, but sometimes a bit frightening too. Surely individualism is not all bad, and the priority of community all good? Just as Western individualism can be both destructive and creative, the all-embracing emphasis on the community can also become harmful if the wellbeing of the community is demanded to the detriment of the individual (Lawuyi, 1998:186).

7.2   New liturgies and rituals

As I have noted above, African philosophy and religion is always expressed and enacted through rituals. New Christian reconciliation models should also be cast in this form. Dirkie Smit (2002:100) believes that liturgy holds the key to the development of theology and that new theological insight relies on creative liturgies that reflect the lives and faith of believers. Therefore, I will try to turn the new insights I have acquired into suggestions for new rituals and liturgies, drawing inspiration from Africa as well as different parts of the world.

7.2.1   Requirements for new liturgies and rituals

The TRC failed to come up with national rituals of reconciliation. According to Antjie Krog (1998:14-15) the TRC lost some wonderful opportunities to organise national rituals of reconciliation. She believes that a fundraising for the victims could have been one such ritual:

If then a Sunday or some particular day had been identified as a day when all the churches, all religions, would officially accept money (as compensation) for the victims who had testified, then I think a lot of people would have reacted positively because they felt they had to do something. Sadly, that never happened.

Another lost opportunity was 16 December 1997, Reconciliation day. There was talk of a big signing of a Book of Reconciliation on that day, but it failed as almost nobody knew of this book's existence and only fifty-two people signed it (Krog, 1998:15).

It is now the responsibility of churches (and other religious bodies) to make their own traditional liturgies of reconciliation available both to their own members and to others (Connor, 1998:109; Krog, 1998:16).

Previous studies have spelt out some requirements for new liturgies and rituals. The South African Catholic Bishops Conference has explored and experimented with "inculturation liturgies", liturgies devised to inculturate typical Christian liturgies into an African idiom. In these inculturation liturgies you could for instance use salt water, chyme, plant material and soil from ancestral graves, instead of traditional Christian symbols. In this study I want to go a bit further, in that I do not simply want to use African words or symbols to express Christian ideas, but rather take African ideas and beliefs seriously. I am looking for religious ideas that are absent or neglected in Christianity.

But the Bishops' work is nonetheless valuable. They set out sensible requirements for their inculturation liturgies, which apply to my undertaking too. According to their guidelines, new liturgies should be based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of African culture. A liturgy should be clear and make sense. The myth must be coherent and understood by all. Lastly, any liturgy is useful only in as far as the community accepts it. New rituals and liturgies must be accepted and also involve the members of the

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community (Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference 2002a = SACBC 2002a:18-19; Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference 2002b = SACBC 2002b:9-20).

In addition, Karl Dortzbach (2002:90-91,100) identified five elements that are necessary for healing to take place within an African context. The elements are meaning or mental healing, emotional healing, physical healing, volitional healing and social healing. These five elements also apply to reconciliation (as an eminent form of healing) and give us some clues in our attempt to define and elaborate new liturgies and rituals.

Buti Tlhagale (s a) has developed a number of African liturgies and rituals. These are mostly inculturaltion liturgies, but they can form the basis for further investigation. I will proceed to investigate his liturgies according to the myths underlying them, and point out new possibilities. The Bishops' requirements will be used as guidelines, as will other requirements and perspectives worked out in this study.

7.2.2   Liturgies based on the community

> Collective guilt … should be dealt with within the liturgy of the Christian community.
> It is through *koinonia* that we can really listen to the stories of the past. It is not the
> task of the church to cultivate guilt and grudges, but to transform guilt through the
> festive liturgy of koinonia.
>
> (Louw, 1996:394).

6.4.2.1   Funeral rite with spilling of blood

Tlhagale (s a:24-25) worked out a ceremony wherein the ancestors are acknowledged and called up through the sprinkling of blood. He states emphatically that the ancestors are

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not worshipped but that their presence are meant to (re)establish the community: "In this ritual, the sacrifice to the ancestors is not meant to be a sacrifice in the true sense – true sacrifice is reserved for the redemptive work of Christ – but rather a kinship affair – no more and no less" (Tlhagale, s a:27).

The liturgy starts when blood is sprinkled on a shrine or poured into a hole in the ground and an invocation is made to the ancestors:

> You, our ancestors, receive this warm gift of life.
> We, your descendents look upon you for help
> for support, for protection, for strength.
> We speak to you in this fashion
> because this is how our fathers
> spoke to you.
> We ask a favour from you not only
> because you have begotten us, but
> also because you are in the world of
> the Spirits. Plead then our cause with
> the Almighty Father of all mercies.
> We too, in our feeble manner,
> as we recall the saving mysteries
> of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first to rise
> from the dead, we ask Him to
> welcome you into His royal kraal, where
> we too, at the end of time, hope
> to share in the feast prepared for all those
> who believe.
> You, our ancestors, arise and kindly receive our prayer.
> Amen.

I have pointed out how important the African idea of community is, and that it should surely be made part of our bigger South African and Christian beliefs. This liturgy expresses the African myth of the community in a typical and coherent way. But the problem is that few people who are not African, will feel comfortable with this imagery. While African theologians will understand exactly what the role of the ancestors are, many others will wrongly see such a ritual as that described above as ancestor worship. The potential for misunderstanding limits this liturgy.

7.2.2.2   A community liturgy from the Psalms

Still, the idea of the importance of the community is too important to be neglected. If a

liturgy or ritual could be developed to express this idea in more neutral terms, and possibly

include our community with nature (which is very much part of the African myth), it would

be very useful. Perhaps a text like Psalm 148, that calls all creation to praise the Lord,

could be used to also express the African idea that all creation is in community and should

be so:

> Praise the LORD .
> Praise the LORD from the heavens,
> praise him in the heights above.
> Praise him, all his angels,
> praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
> Praise him, sun and moon,
> praise him, all you shining stars.
> Praise him, you highest heavens
> and you waters above the skies.
> Let them praise the name of the LORD,
> for he commanded and they were created.
> He set them in place for ever and ever;
> he gave a decree that will never pass away.

> Praise the LORD from the earth,
> you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
> lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
> stormy winds that do his bidding,
> you mountains and all hills,
> fruit trees and all cedars,
> wild animals and all cattle,
> small creatures and flying birds,
> kings of the earth and all nations,
> you princes and all rulers on earth,
> young men and maidens,
> old men and children.

> Let them praise the name of the LORD,
> for his name alone is exalted;
> his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.
> He has raised up for his people a horn,
> the praise of all his saints, of Israel,

the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD .

<div align="right">(Psalm 148)</div>

This text emphasises both the traditional Christian belief of God's exultance over the creation and it substantiates the African view that God permeates the natural world (as life force) as much as God is above it – a totally valid (panentheistic) view of God.

7.2.2.3   A community liturgy from the Western Church Tradition

The beautiful Taizé text "Ubi caritas" expresses the idea that God is present in loving human relations. This certainty echoes the African sentiment:

> Ubi caritas et amor
> Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est.
> (Where there is charity and love
> Where there is charity, there is God).

<div align="right">(Taizé:49)</div>

7.2.2.4   Reflections on Wholeness

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a moving litany of wholeness that echoes African thought and makes use of Christian theology:

> Busy, normal people: the world is here.
> Can you hear it wailing, crying, whispering?
> Listen: the world is here.
> Don't you hear it,
> Praying and sighing and groaning for wholeness?
> Sighing and whispering: wholeness,
> wholeness, wholeness?
> An arduous, tiresome, difficult journey
> towards wholeness.
> God, who gives us strength of
> Body, make us whole.

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Wholeness of persons: well-being of individuals.
The cry for bodily health and spiritual
strength is echoed from person to
person, from patient to doctor.
It goes out from a soul to its pastor.
We, busy, "normal" people: we are sick.
We yearn to experience wholeness in
our innermost being:
In health and prosperity, we continue
to feel un-well
un-filled, or half-filled.
There is a hollowness in our pretended
well-being:
Our spirits cry out for the well-being of
the whole human family.
We pride ourselves in our traditional
Communal ideology, our extended family.
The beggars and the mad people in our streets:
Where are their relatives?
Who is their father? Where is their mother?
We cry for the wholeness of humanity.
But the litany of brokenness is without end.
Black and white;
Rich and poor;
Hausa and Yomba;
Presbyterian and Roman Catholic:
We are all parts of each other,
We yearn to be folded into the fullness
of life – together.
Life, together with the outcast,
The prisoner, the mad women,
The abandoned child;
Our wholeness is intertwined with their hurt,
Wholeness means healing the hurt,
Working with Christ to heal the hurt,
Seeing and feeling the suffering of others,
Standing alongside them.
Their loss of dignity is not their loss:
It is the loss of our human dignity,
We busy, "normal" people.
The person next to you: with a different
language and culture,
with a different skin or hair colour –
it is God's diversity, making an unbroken
rainbow circle –
our covenant of peace with God, encircling
the whole of humanity.
Christians have to re-enact the miracle
of Good Friday:
the torn veil, the broken walls, the
bridge over the chasm,
The broken wall of hostility between

the Jew and the Gentile.
The wall between sacred and secular?
There is no wall
There is only God at work in the whole;
Heal the sores on the feet;
Salvage the disintegrated personality;
Bind the person back to the whole.
For without that one, we do not have a whole.
Even if there are ninety-nine:
Without that one, we do not have a whole.
God, who gives us strength of
body, make us whole.

<div align="right">(Tutu, 1996:110-113)</div>

7.2.2.5   Re-enactment rituals

In Sydney, Australia, united Christians dressed in period costume gathered near the Opera House to remember the violent mass rape of female convicts by male convicts shortly after the arrival of the first fleet. An account was read publicly, and Christian men asked forgiveness from their countrywomen and then escorted them ashore with the affection and dignity that they should have experienced the first time. "Now whenever the first story is told, the action of Christians in the 1990's must be told with it, thus sowing a healing memory into the story of the land" (Dawson, 2001:244).

This kind of re-enactment ritual restores and recreates the community. Perhaps South Africans can re-enact a scene like the Battle of Bloodriver (Battle of Ncome), complete with a new vow, encompassing the commitment of all South African Christians.

7.2.2.6   Other considerations

The restoration of the community also presupposes **justice and reparation**. Liturgies and rituals that include reparation would bring about a physical healing (Dortzbach, 2002:117-118; Van der Merwe, 2003:277-279).

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In New Zealand, Christians tried to further justice and reparation by organising Justice Action Forums that work with government agencies dealing with injustices in land use and the tribal claims that have been ignored. "If there are unjust laws in your city", asserts John Dawson, "Christians cannot remain silent" (2001:245).

Reparation can take on many forms. During the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, "…nearly everybody wanted information. … [Others] requested that photographs and other personal possessions confiscated at the time should be returned, or that the mortal remains of a husband or a child be brought home for re-interment. Some requested gravestones" (Meiring, 1999:26).

In California, a large suburban church bussed its members over to a struggling African-American church. They surrounded the building and surprised the Sunday morning worshippers when a delegation entered the service and presented a $ 25,000 gift for the building fund. This is a very good example of what a ritual of reparation could look like (Dawson, 2001:244).

Another way to restore the community is through ritually restoring the dignity of people. During the TRC hearings, this was ritually done in a clever way. Before a hearing would start, the commissioners entered the hall quietly and unannounced and took their seats. After a while they would stand and ask everybody else to stand. Then the victims were led to their allocated seats. In this way the victims were made the most important persons in the meeting, instead of the commissioners or the dignitaries. This restored their dignity in the community (Krog, 1998:10).

7.2.3   Liturgies based on propitiation and the transfer of guilt

7.2.3.1   Cleansing rite using a goat

The possibility of transferring guilt to a sacrificial animal is popular in African thought.

Tlhagale used this kind of ceremony to transfer the sins of the past on a goat.

With hands outstretched over the head of a live goat, the minister says the following

prayer:

Upon the head of this animal I put all the sins of
division among us.

Christ have mercy.

We promoted division based on the colour of our skin.

Lord have mercy.

We despised, suspected, hated and even persecuted
those who differed from us.

Christ have mercy.

We discriminated on the basis of language and culture
and even taught our children to do likewise.

Lord have mercy.

We conducted witch-hunts, harassed and even killed
those whose political preferences differed from ours.

Christ have mercy.

With our lips we claimed to be members of the Body of
Christ but denied it in our actions.

Lord have mercy.

We now ask for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Christ have mercy.

We ask for strength not to indulge in the wrongs of the past.

Lord have mercy.

Let this animal carry away our wrong-doings.

Christ have mercy.

May we experience again the mercy of God.

Lord have mercy.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The goat is let out of the Church.

(Tlhagale, s a: 112-113)

This ceremony directly addresses the South African context and South African sins and feelings of guilt. It also closely resembles the Old Testament practice of the Azazel goat. But even though it is not clear whether the goat is slaughtered afterwards, or merely chased away as is the case with Azazel, it is still an unwilling sacrifice and guilt is placed on an innocent victim. I have argued that such sacrifices are not only offensive to some and incoherent to others, but reinforce the pattern of scapegoatism and of not taking responsibility.

7.2.3.2   Sacrifice liturgy from the Psalms

If we really want transcendent liturgies and rituals in South Africa, rituals of sacrifice should be self-sacrifices in which people are taught to take responsibility for their actions, rather than place the blame or guilt on other persons or things. Perhaps this liturgy can be modified so that congregants can ritually take the guilt on themselves – as Jesus Christ did, rather than lay it on an unfortunate scapegoat.

Instead of ritually slaughtering goats to carry away our guilt, I propose a text or liturgy more in tune with Psalm 32:

> Blessed is he
> whose transgressions are forgiven,
> whose sins are covered.
> Blessed is the man
> whose sin the LORD does not count against him
> and in whose spirit is no deceit.
>
> When I kept silent,
> my bones wasted away
> through my groaning all day long.
> For day and night
> your hand was heavy upon me;
> my strength was sapped
> as in the heat of summer.

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Selah

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD "-
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin.
Selah
Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you
while you may be found;
surely when the mighty waters rise,
they will not reach him.
You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
Selah

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you and watch over you.
Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.
Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD's unfailing love
surrounds the man who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

7.2.3.3 Other texts

If the stories of voluntary scapegoats are told, it can bring about mental healing and a new

sense of meaning (Dortzbach, 2002:120). Isaiah 53, which is often used (wrongly) in the

context of propitiation, actually emphasises Jesus' voluntariness, and this beautiful text

can also be used to great effect. Outside the church, stories such as the stories of Queen

Iden, the diviner Eleguru and even Moremi can be used to inspire and instruct South

Africans so that they will understand and further this kind of reconciliation.

7.2.3.4   Symbolic acts

Mass gatherings can be organised as rituals of confession and as opportunities to take responsibility for the past. In Hawaii 27,000 people gathered in a stadium to worship and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation over the way elements of society had wounded one another in the story of the islands. Similar gatherings could surely also be conducted to good effect in South Africa (Dawson, 2001:244-245; Van der Merwe, 2003:277-279).

7.2.4   Liturgy of prayer

I have found two African prayers that address reconciliation in a typical African fashion.

7.2.4.1   We Kneel Before Thee

The first, from the DRC, comes out of a Christian community that is nonetheless thoroughly African. It asks God to remove sin and guilt, and to protect his people from evil:

> O thou Chief or Chiefs, we kneel before thee in obedience and adoration. Like the bird in the branches, we praise thy heavenly glory. Like the village sharpening stone, thou art always available and never exhausted. Remove, we pray thee, our sins that hide thy face. Thou knowest that we are poor and unlearned; that we often work when hungry. Send rain in due season for our gardens that our food may not fail. Protect us from the cold and danger by night. Help us to keep in health that we may rejoice in strength. May our villages be filled with children. Emancipate us from the fear of the fetish and the witch doctor and from all manner of superstitions. Save the people, especially the Christian boys and girls in the villages, from the evil that surrounds them. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son.
>
> (Tutu, 1996:105)

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7.2.4.2   O Sun, As You Rise in the East

The second is not Christian in origin. It likewise asks God's protection, but interestingly

also petitions God to bring about personal change:

> O sun, as you rise in the east through God's leadership,
> Wash away all evil of which I have thought throughout the night.
> Bless me, so that my enemies will not kill me and my family;
> Guide me through hard work.
> O God, give me mercy upon our children who are suffering;
> Bring riches today as the sun rises;
> Bring all fortunes to me today.
>
> (Abaluyia, in Tutu, 1996:120)

7.2.5   Liturgies based on expulsion and cleansing

The African idea of expulsion and cleansing is used widely in Christian liturgies in the

mainline churches, Pentecostal groups, and especially in the Zionist churches. These

African Initiated Churches see reconciliation mostly as healing, and their rituals underline

this expulsion and cleansing focus. They often use holy water, ashes, ropes, staffs and

whips to drive away evil (Anderson, 1998:406; Ashforth, 2000:144-145, Hayes, 1998:170).

Hayes (1998:170) reports:

> The method of healing may vary, but almost always includes prayer with the laying
> on of hands. Blessing with a holy stick, and drinking holy water are also common.
> The holy water is sometimes mixed with other substances, such as ash. Baths are
> sometimes prescribed. Enemas and emetics are also sometimes used. Ash is
> sometimes used on its own, either sprinkled over the patient or around the house as
> a protective device. … [Anointing] with oil, sometimes in the form of petroleum jelly)
> is also used.

In line with this, Tlhagale (s a: 112) has composed a variety of liturgies to be used on different occasions to bring about social healing (Dortzbach, 2002:105). The first is intended for reconciliation in our country:

7.2.5.1   Cleansing rite using bile/gall

Lord God,
With this bile anoint the wounds brought about
by division among us.

Christ have mercy.

Let this oil soothe away the pain that has left us haggard
and wasted

Lord have mercy.

With this oil let our faces become radiant with hope

Christ have mercy.

Project us from the evil spirits that nearly destroyed
your image in us.

Lord have mercy.

With this oil heal us, strengthen us.

Christ have mercy.

Anoint our joints, weary from fighting futile battles.

Lord have mercy.

We wish to raise our hands in prayer to you Lord.

Christ have mercy.

Anoint our legs so that we be nimble and carry your gospel
of Good News and Healing,

Lord have mercy.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The myth is that bile or gall can both exorcise evil and pain, and (as a symbol of oil) can heal and anoint our brokenness. The duality of the bile or gall seems a bit confusing, but African people do not have a problem with it. They often use water in the same way – to symbolise the exorcism of anger and to symbolically cool off the participants – as illustrated in the next liturgy (Tlhagale, s a:110).

7.2.5.2   Cleansing rite with water

The minister holds a basin of water in front of him/her, saying:

> With this water, cool our hands, our bodies from the heat of the sun.
> With this water, kindly remove the heat of the heart.
> With this water, soothe our injured feelings, remove the anger of yesterday
> Cleanse us from true and false accusation
> Cleanse the stain left by our own wrongdoing
> Wash away the blood stains of those who died unjustly
> Purify our hearts and mind.
> Remove any trace of suspicion.
> With this water, give us a fresh start to build a new community.
> With this water, fill our hearts with your clean spirit.
> With this water, prepare us to be reconciled to Yourself through Christ
> And through one another and to one another.

The fact that this liturgy makes use of water instead of bile or gall obviously makes it more accessible and therefore useful in the bigger South African context. Water is also used in the Bible as a symbol of cleansing. In my opinion, this particular liturgy is very helpful: it is simple and coherent, and acceptable to a large number of people. While it utilises a commonly held association of water with cleansing, it transcends culture and makes a difference for the better. This liturgy can be used on national days of reconciliation, but also in smaller ecumenical events.

7.2.5.3   Ritual of the Aloe

The next set of rituals has more to do with our reconciliation with God, but in a typical African way, implies human reconciliation and community as well. The ritual of Aloe accompanies a funeral and as such deals with reconciliation at a time when people are confronted with their own mortality:

We accompanied our deceased brother/sister
To the border between heaven and earth,
We bade him/her farewell and pray for his/her
peaceful repose. Cleanse him/her Lord with your
precious blood so that he/she may enter the gates
of your heavenly kraal.
We who accompanied him/her to the crossroads of life
and death, we who have seen the depth of the grave;
We have stared death in the face;
We have touched the soil of the dead.

So tainted we are that we have now become part of the dead.
With this water cleanse us from the stain of death. Restore to us the gift of life.
Rekindle the hope in us;
Renew our faith in the rising of the dead.
Wash our hands so that we may participate in your meal. We ask this through
Christ our Lord. Amen.

<div align="right">(Tlhagale, s a: 111)</div>

7.2.5.4　　　Cleansing rite using fire

The second ritual is set in the context of human conflict (in South Africa), but asks God to

change the hearts of the conflicting parties:

Participants momentarily place their outstretched hands over fire while praying:

With this fire cleanse the stains on our soul
With this fire burn down the walls of division among us
With this fire purify us so that your Word
may find a clean abode in us.

With this fire test our feeble faith and do not find us wanting
With this fire inspire us with courage to embrace the truth,
drive out fear from our hearts
With this fire let us feel each other's warmth,
drive out the ghosts of the past
With this fire light our path, rekindle our fervour,
set our hearts aflame,
renew the zeal in us to build a new South Africa.
We ask this through Christ
our Lord. Amen.

<div align="right">(Tlhagale, s a: 109)</div>

Both aloe juice and fire would seem acceptable to most if not all South Africans. While

water has the connotation of cleansing, aloe juice and fire burn away our guilt and sin.

The use of fire can even link up with the Christian symbolism of fire, which symbolises the

Holy Spirit. The ideas of reconciliation and cleansing are close to the Christian

understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

7.2.5.5   Nigerian prayer of expulsion

This prayer is simple and practical:

> God in heaven, you have helped my life to grow like a tree. Now something has
> happened. Satan, like a bird, has carried in one twig of his own choosing after
> another. Before I knew it he had built a dwelling place and was living in it. Tonight,
> my Father, I am throwing out both the bird and the nest.
>
> (Tutu, 1996:44)

7.2.5.6   Deliver Us from Fear of the Unknown

This Nigerian prayer deals with the problem of fear:

> O Lord, we beseech thee to deliver us from the fear of the unknown future; from
> fear of failure; from fear of poverty; from fear of bereavement; from fear of
> loneliness; from fear of sickness and pain; from fear of age; and from fear of death.
> Help us, O Father, by thy grace to love and fear thee only, fill our hearts with
> cheerful courage and loving trust in thee; through our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.
>
> (Akanu Ibaim, in Tutu, 1996:104)

7.2.5.7   Expulsion through the Eucharist

Desmond Tutu composed a litany of expulsion that makes use of the symbols of the

Eucharist:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Our God, our God, why have you forsaken us?
My God, our God, my Father, our Father
When will we ever learn, when will they ever learn?

Oh when will we ever learn that you intended us for
Shalom, for wholeness, for peace,
For fellowship, for togetherness, for brotherhood,
For sisterhood, for family?
When will we learn that you created us
As your children
As members of one family
The human family-
Created us for linking arms
To express our common humanity.

God, my Father
I am filled
With anguish and puzzlement.
Why, oh God, is there so much
Suffering, such needless suffering?
Everywhere we look there is pain
And suffering.
Why must there be so much killing,
So much death and destruction,
So much bloodshed,
So much suffering,
So much oppression, and injustice, and poverty and hunger?

I am dumbfounded
I am bewildered
And in agony-

This is the world
You loved so much that for it
You gave your only begotten
Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to hang
From the cross, done to death
Love nearly overwhelmed by hate
Light nearly extinguished by darkness
Life nearly destroyed by death-
But not quite-
For love vanquished hate
For life overcame death, there-
Light overwhelmed
Darkness, there-
And we can live with hope.
In the Eucharist as we offer the bread
That bread is all that bewilderment, the anguish, the blood, the pain, the injustice,
The poverty, the hate, the anger, the fear, the death,

The war, the bombs-
And we offer it all together with
The perfect all self-sufficient sacrifice
Of the Lamb without blemish
For peace,
For transfiguration, for compassion,
For Bush, for Hussein, for soldiers,
For civilians, for peace, for Shalom,
For family, for togetherness-

Oh my God, our God, oh my Father
When will we ever learn?
When will they ever learn?

(Tutu, 1996:87-92)

7.2.5.8   Other symbolic ways to expel evil

In the TRC process people's terrible memories were ritually exorcised by allowing them to tell their stories. It appears that any ritual that allows people to share their stories and fears constitutes a ritual of expulsion. Perhaps churches should provide more opportunities for their members to speak and recall their hurtful experiences, rather than just letting the clergy address the congregation all the time (Krog, 1998:11-12, Van der Merwe, 2003:277-279).

Bernard Connor (1998:109) suggests that a traditional ceremony be used as a ritual of expulsion. Holy Thursday, the day when a gathering of people usually wash one another's feet, can easily be used to indicate and generate a willingness to let go of all the dirt and attitudes of superiority assumed in the past.

7.2.6   Liturgy of Acceptance

The first is the African model of acceptance. Africans believe that evil can be overcome by simply accepting it into the community. The myth behind this model suggests that when a

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bad person or spirit is brought into and becomes part of the community, that person or spirit will change. I have suggested that this idea can be very valuable in South Africa, and that we need to accept one another with all our baggage and faults, and create a new society where there is a place for everyone.

In the Chihamba cult the participants built new huts for the ancestors pestering them, and created a new set of descendents to honour them. Perhaps South Africans can build new monuments to honour our new and free society, monuments which could and would play an important role in emotional healing (Dortzbach, 2002:101).

7.2.6.1   Freedom Park

The erection of the Freedom Park monument, which acknowledges the fight for freedom by all South Africans, is a step in the right direction. This kind of structure should represent the shameful, as well as the proud moments of all South Africans, and not only one part of society. While most other monuments, like the Voortrekker monument or the Apartheid museum, importantly remembers the experiences of one sector of society, reconciliation monuments should unite all South Africans.

At South Africa's Freedom Park, a new history is being created by reinterpreting South Africa's tumultuous past during the 19th and 20th centuries as a time of nation building. Seleti ([2004]:7) explains:

> It might be appropriate to interpret the various activities by the different role players as motivated by the desire to build nations. To this end the political activities referred to as the Mfecane, were also wars of nation building. These wars of wandering triggered off nation-building activities across the entire southern Africa. Many nations emerged out of this process, the Zulu, the Sotho under Moshoeshoe,

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Swazi under Sobhuza I, the Pedi under Sekhukhuni, the Ndebele States in South Africa and Zimbabwe and many more.

The Freedom Park also represents a new South African ethic of non-racism, non-sexism, and a commitment to a new society and an exorcism of past evils. This is further strengthened by the Memorial Declaration ([2004]:19):

We, the undersigned organisation/party hereby declare our commitment to break with the past characterised by the legacy of moral decay and the wounded spirit of our nation as a result of the colonial and apartheid systems, in the struggle against which heroes and heroines were created, who fought as freedom fighters in the conflicts/events that occurred in our land. Those events included pre-Colonial Wars, Genocide, Slavery, Wars of Resistance, Anglo-Boer/South African Wars, World War I & World War II and the Struggle for Liberation.
We, therefore rededicate our loyalty to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and unconditionally devote ourselves to live and be guided by its founding values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom: non-racialism and non-sexism: supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law: universal adult suffrage, a national common voter's roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness. We do so as a living testimony and monument to remind current and future generations that never, never, ever again will our province and country experience the bitter past which, today, we are burying at this site: ashes of the past with which we collectively cement a future of a better life for all. We further re-affirm that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity, and we honour and remember all those who suffered for justice, peace and freedom in our land.

The Freedom Park is thus aimed at creating a new shared national identity and patriotism (Seleti, [2004]:6). Although the ideals of the Freedom Park have not yet been achieved, and very few South Africans have visited the monument so far, it has the potential to become a living ritual of acceptance.

7.2.6.2   Prayer of a dying man

A Dinka prayer from the Sudan hints at the new possibility of acceptance:

And though I behold a man hate me,
I will love him.
O God, Father, help me, Father!
O God, Creator, help me, Father!
And even though I behold a man hate me,
I will love him.

(Tutu, 1996:101)

7.2.6.3   Collect of Poplarville

In 1959, the African American priest, Pauli Murray, wrote a prayer that was included into the Episcopal Church's "Book of Common Prayer". This prayer, called the "Collect for Poplarville", highlights the idea that reconciliation by acceptance can also mean that a person can win his or her enemies over through goodness and love.

Although this prayer comes from a very different context, it gives us an idea of what a prayer of acceptance could look like:

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;
    Teach us no longer to dread
        hounds yelping in the distance,
        the footfall at the door,
        the rifle butt on the window pane.
And by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night;
    Give us fearlessness to face
        the bomb thrown from the darkness,
        the gloved hand on the pistol,
        the savage intention.
    Give us courage to stand firm against
        our tormentors without rancor-
    Teach us that most difficult of tasks-
        to pray for them,
        to follow, not burn, thy cross!

(in Caldbeck, 2002:60-61)

7.2.6.4   A Prayer for Africa

From Ghana comes an accepting prayer, written specifically for Africa, which is very

applicable to the South African situation:

O Lord, o Ruler of the world,
O Creator, O Father,
this prayer is for Africa.
For our brothers in the South,
for our brothers in the North.
You know
that the white brothers have made their black brothers
second-class people.
O Lord, this hurts us so much.
We suffer from this.
You have given us a dark skin
so that we may better bear
your strong sun.
Why have our brothers done this to us?
They are not better than we,
and we are not better than they.
What comforts us is
that you always love most
those who suffer most.
We call ourselves Christians on both sides.
But we go to different churches,
as if there were also different heavens.
The white men
still have power in parts of Africa.
Help them, to use their power wisely
and accept us as brothers.
Take the mistrust out of their hearts and minds
and make them share with us,
for this is our continent,
or, more truly, yours;
and you have marked us for this continent
and them for the North.
We also pray for ourselves.
O Lord,
keep our hearts free from hatred.
And let us also be grateful for what
missionaries have done here
and others too, for government and for the economy.
Let us become brothers again,
as it should be among your children.
You have died for all,
and risen,

Halleluia!
We praise you, our Father,
who are greater than Europe and Africa;
who loves where we hate;
who long ago could have destroyed us.
But you love us so much
and we have not deserved it.
Praise be to you, O Lord!
Amen.

(Tutu, 1996:101-103)

7.2.6.5   Family metaphors

Christian teaching offers helpful resources to create a new family. The earliest Christian

believers saw themselves as a new people, who were defined by their religious beliefs

instead of their language or culture. Bosch (1982:30) writes:

> In this community there was room for simple fishermen from Galilee, for erstwhile
> Zealots such as Simon and one-time tax-collectors such as Matthew, for erudite
> Pharisees such as Paul, for members of the nobility such as Manaen who had been
> brought up with Herod, for Jews and Greeks, for Blacks from Africa such as Simon
> called Niger, who served with Paul as an elder at the church in Antioch, for the
> slave Onesimus but also for his owner Philemon, for prisoners but also for members
> of the imperial guard and for a captain in the Roman army.

These early Christians' metaphors and images can be used to great effect both inside and

outside the churches. There are numerous Biblical texts that describe the new family.

Paul writes of this:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the
> barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its
> commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new
> man out of the two, thus making peace.
>
> (Ephesians 2:14-15)

7.2.7   Liturgy of Rebellion

This reconciliation model states that the seemingly harmonious establishment may at times be the biggest threat to reconciliation. Some sort of ritual rebellion must confront this "harmony" in order to achieve reconciliation.

It will be quite a challenge to find a way to re-enact this ritual in our present society. Traditionally, participants ran around, breaking taboos and insulting passers-by. This will probably not work in our volatile society. What we need is some sort of structured way in which people can vent their anger and pent-up feelings and bring about volitional change (Dotzbach, 2002:115).

Perhaps dance and other art forms can provide an answer. Through participation in the arts, persons can release their feelings and call attention to their grievances in a powerful but less threatening way. Through music, drama and the visual arts we can move closer to reconciliation (Hay, 1998:136).

Huber (1993:590) anticipates more monuments for the victims of suffering. He believes that: "Humankind needs memorials like the Hiroshima Peace Park or Yad Vashem more urgently than it needs columns of victory". Such monuments could symbolically challenge society and its power structures.

7.2.7.1   Rebellion text from the Psalms

In Church, the writings of someone like Luke or the prophets will provide the beginnings of new liturgies. Texts modelled on the Magnificat (Luke 1) and Jesus' inaugural sermon

(Luke 4) will challenge the order of things. The Psalms offer a wealth of possibilities, for

example Psalm 82:

> God presides in the great assembly;
> he gives judgment among the "gods":
>
> "How long will you defend the unjust
> and show partiality to the wicked?
> Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;
> maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.
> Rescue the weak and needy;
> deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
> "They know nothing,
> they understand nothing.
> They walk about in darkness;
> all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
>
> "I said, 'You are "gods";
> you are all sons of the Most High.'
> But you will die like mere men;
> you will fall like every other ruler."
>
> Rise up, O God,
> judge the earth,
> for all the nations are your inheritance.

7.2.7.2   Symbolic actions

Ndungane (2003:104-105) writes that Jesus Christ subverted traditional power structures

by washing his disciples' feet and by befriending undesirables and outcasts. To wash

each other's feet is a common ritual in churches, especially during the time of Lent, but it is

usually explained differently. The same ritual can be used as a ritual of rebellion, as a

challenge to the power structures. Ndungane suggests that the ordination of women

should be a big priority for the church. I believe that the unsanctioned ordination of women

(and other marginalised people) would also be a ritual of rebellion that confronts the

current injustices.

Albert Nolan (1988:158-159) believes that singing and dancing was the "most visible and most characteristic manifestation of the struggle". He suggests this as a powerful ritual against oppressive structures and explains that singing and dancing expresses a hope for a new world and is a celebration of solidarity and unity.

7.2.7.3   Extract from Confession of Alexandria

The Confession of Alexandria is a call for struggle and thus a liturgy of rebellion:

> We have spoken against evil when it was convenient. We have often avoided suffering for the sake of others, thus refusing to follow His example (1 Peter 2:21). We have preferred religiosity to what the Holy Spirit might be whispering to us. We have struggled against colonialism and many other evils and yet have built up again those things which we had torn down (Gal 2:18). We confess that we had often condoned exploitation and oppression by foreigners. When we have condemned these evils we have condoned the same things by our people. We have turned a blind eye to the structures of injustice in our societies, concentrating on the survival of our churches as institutions.
> We have been a stumbling block for too many. For these and many other sins, we are sorry and ask God to forgive us.
> A full understanding of this forgiveness leaves us no choice but to continue the struggle for the full liberation of all men and women, and their societies.
> We accept that political liberation in Africa, and the Middle East, is part of this liberation. But the enslaving forces and the abuse of human rights in independent Africa point to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of liberation. Liberation is therefore a CONTINUING STRUGGLE.
>
> *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, by the power which is at work among us, to Him be the glory in the Church of Christ Jesus from generation to generation evermore!*
> *(Ephesians 3:20-21)*
>
> (Tutu, 1996:49-50)

7.2.7.4   Belhar Confession

The Belhar Confession was drawn up in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church with a view to providing a Christian response to the injustices of that time. It was later accepted

as a fourth confession in the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA), and is at

present being studies and hotly debated by the Dutch Reformed Church as part of the

process of unification with the URCSA (Botha, 1998: 23-24).

It is also a liturgy of rebellion that challenges the unjust structures in society. The liturgical

version of the Belhar Confession can be used to great effect:

We believe in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Who gathers, protects and nourishes the church
from the beginning of the world to the end.

**The church is one.
The church is holy,
The church is universal.
It is the community of God's children,
called together from the whole of humanity**.

We believe that the reconciling work of Christ
gives birth to a uniting church,
because church unity is a gift from God
and a goal we need to strive for.

**The unity of the church must become visible
so that the people around us can see
how separation and hatred are overcome in Christ.**

We believe that the genuine faith in Jesus Christ
is the only condition for membership
in this Christian church.

**So we reject the suggestion
that colour, class, gender, or culture
should determine who belongs to this church**.

We believe that God has entrusted to the church
the message of reconciliation,
and that the church is called to be the salt of the earth
and the light of the world

**So we reject the belief
that the gospel encourages separation of people
on the basis of race, gender, class, or culture**.

We believe that God wants to bring about

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true justice and lasting peace on earth;
We believe that God is, in a special sense,
The God of the suffering, the poor and the downtrodden.

God gives justice to the oppressed
and bread to the hungry;
God sets captives free
and makes the blind to see;
God protects strangers, orphans and widows
and obstructs the plans of the wicked.

We believe that the church is the property of God
and that it should stand where God stands:
against injustice and with those who are wronged.

So we reject every policy that causes injustice
and every teaching that allows injustice to flourish.

We are called to confess and do all this
in obedience to Jesus Christ, our only Lord;
even if authorities or laws oppose this;
even if punishment and suffering are the result.

Jesus is Lord!
We will follow him!
To the one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be honour and glory for ever and ever!
Amen

(URCSA Melodi Ya Tshwane, s a:1-2)

7.2.7.5   May Anger and Fear turn to Love

It is important that liturgies of rebellion clearly define the intended struggle, and that the

struggle and rebellion will stop when it has achieved what it set out to do. The following

prayer (written by Capetonian Margaret Nash when thousands of young people were jailed

without trial during the Apartheid era) serves as a conclusion to a struggle and ends in an

expulsion of anger:

O God
whose Son in anger

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drove the money-changers
from the temple
let the anger of Nkwenkwe Nkomo
and his fellow detainees
be to the cleansing
of this land.

O God
I hold before you
the anger
the rage
the frustration
the sorrow
of Mrs. Nkomo and all black mothers
who demand for their children
the same chance to grow up
strong and tall
loving and unafraid
as any white mother
wants for her children;

In penitence
I offer you
my own mixed-up anger
that it, with theirs,
may be taken up
into your redemptive will
in which the clash
between anger and fear
oppressed and oppressor
can give way
to the incomprehensible action
of agape-love
bringing about reconciliation
the embrace of the other
the alien
the enemy
creating the festival of shalom
in which the wolf shall lie down
with the lamb
and the whole of life on earth
shall rejoice
in the splendour of your glory.

(Margaret Nash, in Tutu, 1996:45-46)

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND REMARKS

In this last section I would like to reflect on the study that I undertook. Is it possible to study reconciliation from the perspective of religious studies? And will such a study produce practical results that will make a difference in congregations and concrete contexts, and not just be an academic exercise?

8.1   Validity of study

I found that the religious studies perspective offered a number of unique approaches to study reconciliation that would otherwise not have been possible. While studying reconciliation from the perspective of the Old or New Testament, ethics or systematic theology, offers it own advantages, these fields limit and inhibit other approaches because of their particular focuses and confessional restrictions. Religious studies offers both a different starting point and a bigger measure of freedom from traditional ideas.

8.1.1   A study from below

Any study in religious studies is necessarily a study from below. If religions are to be studied scientifically, research has to be based on what can be measured and seen. This empirical approach need not discount people's unmeasurable experiences; but its concern is with the influence and impact of religious persons' revelational claims regarding themselves and society. It thus takes human beings and their societies seriously.

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Reconciliation is often studied from above. Numerous theologians endeavour to explain God's view and requirements for true reconciliation. While it is true that (for me as a Christian) all reconciliation is inspired by God, reconciliation is as much a human activity as a godly one, if such a distinction is at all warranted. We need the human perspective.

8.1.2   Equality

When two different religions are studied from the perspective of religious studies, they must be treated equally. Of course no researcher is objective, and in my case I am a Christian. But when comparing Christianity with African religions, my loyalties need to be placed "in brackets". This equality allows me to consider and value the wonders of a different religion, and also forces me to admit to the shortcomings of my own. In trying to be fair, I must critically question some the basic tenets and expressions of Christianity, as I do with African religion. This critical stance may seem mischievous if used in the other theological disciplines, but reasonable in this kind of study.

8.1.3   New kind of critique

Religious studies present a new kind of critique. When I study reconciliation from this perspective, I must evaluate the integration and transcendence of the religious models, the impact of the types of reconciliation on humans and their communities, and whether they fit the context. These considerations rarely are put forward in theological studies, but offer important insights to the study of reconciliation.

One example would be that reconciliation may require upheaval and disharmony. The Marxist view in my opinion augments our understanding of reconciliation. So too does the

principles that a good reconciliation model should be relative and stimulating. These requirements are not usually addressed in purely theological and Biblical studies.

### 8.1.4	New options

The open and free approach of the discipline of religious studies offers new options. Our Christian Bible is a contextual document that espoused reconciliation in specific contexts. While many of the biblical contexts are quite familiar to us today, some of our contexts and questions are not dealt with (explicitly) in the Bible. Some options may be lost to us. But if we study other religions, there is always the chance of discovering new options and images that are also available to Christians and in accordance with Christian teachings.

Furthermore, every religion has its own unique emphasis. Every religion offers options and possibilities not considered by others because of this special emphasis. If all religions are human activities, the insights from one group will surely benefit other groups. African religions' view of the importance of the community illustrates this point. The idea that reconciliation between God and man can come from being part of the community, enriches all religions' concepts of human societies and our wonderment of God.

## 8.2	Treasure at home

This study led me to a rediscovery of Christianity, as much as it helped me to understand African religion. Religious studies teaches us about ourselves, our own religion and the treasures within.

8.2.1   Not so unique

When I studied African reconciliation models, I was amazed at the creative and original ideas and myths that I came across. Further thought and consideration helped me to discover that many of these ideas were not so unique, but often only neglected within Western Christianity. I discovered wonderful Christian possibilities and new insight into old texts.

The rituals of rebellion and acceptance caught my imagination and offered radically new ways of pursuing reconciliation. Then I realised that some of that same spirit was also recorded in the teachings of Luke and Paul. And that Isaiah 53 says nothing about a propitiatory sacrifice or an offended God, but is a song about a self-sacrificing hero.

8.2.2   The Story of the "Treasure at home"

An Indologist, Heinrich Zimmer (in Doniger O'Flaherty, 1999:337) relates the Hasidic tale about a Rabbi who lived in a ghetto in Cracow. The Rabbi dreamt that he should go to Prague, where he would discover a hidden treasure buried beneath the principle bridge leading to the castle of the Bohemian kings. He went to Prague and waited by the bridge for many days, until one night he was questioned by the Christian captain of the guard on the bridge, and the Rabbi told the captain about the dream that had sent him there. The captain laughed and said that it was foolish to trust a dream, since he himself had been commanded in a dream to go to Cracow and to search for a great treasure buried in a dirty corner behind the stove of a Jewish Rabbi named Eisik son of Yekel – clearly a ludicrous proposal, since half the men in the ghetto were called Eisik and the other half Yekel. The

Rabbi, who was Eisik son of Yekel, said nothing but hurried home and found the treasure behind the stove in his house.

Zimmer comments on the myth that "… the real treasure … [is] never far away; it is not to be sought in any distant region; it lies buried in the innermost recess of our own home, that is to say, our own being. … [But] there is an odd and persistent fact … [that] the one who reveals to us the meaning of our cryptic inner message must be a stranger, of another creed and of a foreign race" (Doniger O'Flaherty, 1999:337).

Within Christianity, I found, were all the possibilities and options needed to make sense of reconciliation in South Africa. The treasure is indeed buried at home. But I would not have found it without the guidance of a different, African religion. The study of religion can facilitate this kind of encounter that will help Christians to rediscover their own treasures (Bellah, 1989:91).

David Bosch (1973:73) once wrote:

> I would therefore dare to say that today I understand God better than I used to.
> This is due above all, of course, to the boundless grace of God, but my increasing
> understanding of African concepts of God was instrumental in the process. God
> used the richness of African religious experience to teach me more about his
> richness.

8.2.3 Deconstruction

Finding the "treasure at home" links up with my deconstructionist aim in this study. I used African insights to deconstruct the traditional (dominant) reconciliation models and ideas, in order to rediscover new and different possible ways of understanding reconciliation. As

I have noted in the first chapter, a reflexive and postmodern approach to research always leads back to the researcher, casu quo my values and questions.

A postmodern approach also allows me not to take the research or myself too seriously. It is after all an artful and playful exercise. I did not set out to create new dogmas, nor change the church in South Africa or change society. What I intended was a personal exploration of religion, of Christianity and African religion, and of the needs of South Africans. I had fun doing it, and sometimes got a bit side-tracked. This study is at most a provisional experiment.

I did not intend to be thorough. It would have been theoretically possible to catalogue every African idea, and to exhaust all the possible African reconciliation models, but that was never the idea. Instead I opted for an eclectic approach hoping to find stimulation and inspiration from African religion, rather than create a new anthropological analysis. Eclecticism, is a legitimate departure point if I want to change myself and my personal worldview, and thus import my personal religion, likes and dislikes into the study as much as my academic background (Doniger O'Flaherty, 199:344-345).

8.3   Practical value

The question that remains to be answered is whether this study achieved anything. Even though the study was personal, it would have been of little value if it did not produce a number of insights that have practical value for my own ministry in the congregation, as well as for the wider community I am serving. I believe it did.

### 8.3.1	Principles of good religion

The study gave me new criteria to evaluate religious models and ideas. Kobus Kruger's (1995) insistence on integration and transcendence helped me to understand what a good religion constitutes, and to evaluate my own religious ideas and practices. Likewise, his insistence on the relativity and perspectivity of religious models put in words my discomfort with the models that dominated within traditional Western Christianity, and showed the way to better these models.

The study shed light on different sociological and anthropological options that exist in the quest for reconciliation. It also helped me to understand the prerequisites for this quest in South Africa. The method was thus enlightening.

### 8.3.2	Community use

I came to understand what kind of reconciliation should be sought in South Africa and which models could be best used in pursuit of this reconciliation. I realised that quite a number of existing reconciliation liturgies can be directly employed and that others can be used after slight modifications. I tried to explore new and acceptable liturgies where it was needed.

### 8.3.3	Personal understanding

The African ideas and myths on reconciliation helped me to understand typical Christian reconciliation models – like those associated with bloody sacrifices – and add to these models. I found new ways to interpret the reconciling work of Christ for myself (and by

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extension for my congregation). To integrate this into my pastoral work and preaching – as well as into the creation of new liturgies for Lent – constitutes a very real challenge.

8.4   Suggestions for further investigation

This study is, as I have stated, certainly not meant to be the last word on African religion and reconciliation. A much more thorough appraisal of African reconciliation models should be conducted, with more input from African theologians. I tried to prove that it can be done, but it should be done on a much larger scale by more people.

It should be very interesting, for example, to conduct a close examination of AIC spirituality, theology and practice with a view to discovering the way in which they have combined, integrated, synthesised or syncretised traditional African and Christian myths, concepts, models and facilitating liturgies of reconciliation.

From the perspective of religious studies, it could be interesting to examine the critical parameters of "Christianity" as an historical religion, or to reflect on the concept of reconciliation as a religious category, perhaps to reflect on the person and work of Jesus Christ in this context.

In addition, this study's focus on reconciliation myths, models and rituals, did not permit me to explore other valuable and related concepts in African religion such as the African concept of time. Western conceptions of rigidly linear time are useful for organising life in an industrialised society, but in Africa societies, time is not conceived in this way. Time is more cyclical and relative. According to the pygmies time is spherical – and we should always be in the middle of our sphere. If we move too fast (in body or mind), we move

away from the centre of our sphere, and become disorientated and unpredictable. But given enough time, our spheres catch up with us again (Thorpe, 1991:124).

Within Christianity the linear idea of time dominates, especially in our eschatology. But how healthy is this? And does it allow us to live life to the fullest in the present? It would be fascinating to compare African and Christian views on eschatology, which also touche on all other aspects of these religions.

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