

The need for ethical quality of life practices

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on ways in which the idea of an ethical quality of life of the people of God can be contextualized. This idea is largely similar to the concept of the wholeness of life that is found in documents of the World Council of Churches. Attention is given to the results of efforts to improve the quality of life in Africa through modernization during the development era, as well as to the quality of life in post-apartheid South Africa. The consumer culture has a strong influence on rich and poor, but there are different forms of resistance to modernisation. These forms of resistance often become destructive. If the church wants to present an attractive life-giving alternative, we need a moral vision, even a new cosmology, as well as the technology, practices, life styles and other ways to make that vision a reality.



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1. INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on ways to contextualize the statement of Christopher Wright, an Old Testament scholar: "...ethics stands as the mid-term between election and mission. Ethics is the purpose of election and the basis of mission... the ethical quality of life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission. God's intention to bless the nations is inseparable from God's ethical demand on the people he has created to be the agent of that blessing. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics" (2010:93, 94).

This statement finds support in the description of eternal life in the writings of John, as explained by the New Testament scholar, George Eldon Ladd. In summary, John's view of the life of the believers is that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to give eternal life to those who believe. This eternal life is the fullness of life that was expected in the age to come, that Jesus brought into this present age. It becomes a present fact and continues beyond physical death. Those who follow Jesus must by necessity act according to this new way of living and impart life to each other and to their own world. It is the same structure that we find in the Synoptic gospels, where it is announced that the future Kingdom of God invades the present and begins to play a transforming role in this age (Ladd 1974:257-281). Eternal life is, in other words, an ethical quality of life, imparted by Jesus to his followers, that does not end even when we die, because God maintains his relation with those who believe in Him.

This theme, the theme of life in its fullness, of life-affirming and life-giving practices and ministries, has been the central theme in the circles of the World Council of Churches the past number of years. The WCC document *Together towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, for example, states: "Health is more than physical and/or mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. This understanding of health coheres with the biblical-theological tradition of the church, which sees a human being as a multidimensional unity, and the body, soul and mind as interrelated and interdependent. It thus affirms the social, political and ecological dimensions of personhood and wholeness. Health, in the sense of wholeness, is a condition related to God's promise for the end of time, as well as a real possibility in the present. Wholeness is not a static balance of harmony but rather involves living-in-community with God, people and creation. Individualism and injustice are barriers to community building, and therefore to wholeness" (WCC Resource Book 2013:62).

Improving the quality of life is often stated as the goal of efforts to make life better, for example in development projects for communities where something – poverty,

conflict, disease, pollution, and so on – is doing damage to life. The term that Wright uses, *the ethical quality of life of the people of God*, adds an important aspect, namely the ethical aspect and in this case the *Christian* ethical aspect. This addition changes the meaning of the term. Quality of life is not measured only in terms of human needs anymore, even if these needs may still be very important. Quality of life is now measured in terms of certain ethical standards that cannot be derived only from what we need or want, but from what is expected from us by virtue of the fact that we confess to belong to the people of God. This emphasis on the ethical aspect of the wholeness of life is also found in recent WCC documents, for example, a policy document of the WCC, *The church – towards a common vision*, states: “The ethics of Christians as disciples are rooted in God, the creator and revealer, and take shape as the community seeks to understand God’s will within the various circumstances of time and place. The Church does not stand in isolation from the moral struggles of humankind as a whole. Together with the adherents of other religions as well as with all persons of good will, Christians must promote not only those individual moral values which are essential to the authentic realization of the human person but also the social values of justice, peace and the protection of the environment, since the message of the Gospel extends to both the personal and the communal aspects of human existence. Thus *koinonia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel” (WCC Resource Book 2013:40).

The term ethical quality of life is used in this article in such a way that the term quality of life and the insights of secular quality of life studies are in principle included and maintained, and considered in the light of Christian ethics. It combines “quality of life” and “ethical quality of life”, taking the potential conflict between them as something to be considered when it occurs.

This article reflects on the way in which the term *the ethical quality of life of the people of God* can be contextualized in our contemporary lifestyles as rich and poor South Africans.

2. BACKGROUND

There has been much debate on the impact of colonialism in Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries, and the role of the churches and missionaries in this time. It would have been much easier for everyone if the plight of Africa could be blamed on the evil – which was there – of colonialism and apartheid. What is practically and morally much more complicated, is to consider the *unintended* destructive consequences of the good intentions – which were also there, however tainted – of the West: to bring progress and modernity to Africa.

The same can be said of the post-colonial era. Martin Meredith, in his book *The state of Africa* (2005:683) wrote that, since political independence, "...more than USD 500 billion of Western aid has been sunk into Africa, but with little discernible result". To this figure must be added the income from resources such as oil and mines that did not benefit the vast majority of the population. It is perhaps not correct to say that there was no discernible result. The funds have often been used to finance wasteful lifestyles and even the further oppression of those who are most vulnerable.

Throughout the 20th century African writers reflected on the impact of modern culture on the African world. Kofi Awoonor (1976:252-254), a writer from Ghana, comments on Chinua Achebe's well-known book *Things fall apart*: "To Achebe, the African world before the arrival of Europe was a well-integrated one, with dignity and honour ... As a story of the tragic encounter between Africa and Europe, it is an attempt to capture and restate the pristine integrity which has been so traumatically shattered by that confrontation ... Order and coherence are followed by that slow, imperceptible and disguised process of destruction and decay...when the Christians come...the seeds of havoc are planted."

In his *A short history of African philosophy* Barry Hallen (2009:135-137) argues that one reason for the unmeant negative impact of Western efforts to improve the quality of life in Africa, is that the conceptual frameworks that are used to "understand" African society have their origin in Western culture. This applies to concepts such as community, family and gender. For example: female scholars in Africa such as Oyewumi, Amadiume and Nzegwu "at various points and in the strongest terms reject 'feminism' as a Western-based and Western-oriented movement that has yet to demonstrate that it is prepared to reject the misrepresentations of African societies by Western scholarship and is prepared to learn from rather than dictate to the non-Western world." Western feminists strengthen the gendering of society in individualistic terms, while traditional African culture puts the community first, and gives male and female equal and interdependent roles in the community, which makes it possible not to gender society. Amadiume, for example, blames Western feminists that their imposed systems erode all positive aspects of historical gains, "... leaving us impoverished, naked to abuse, and objects of pity to Western aid rescue missions" (quoted by Hallen 2009:136).

Neither was the impact of the Christians always perceived, as was the intention, to be life giving. In 2001 the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, dr Molefe Tsele (2001:1) complained, "African Christianity has either borne bitter fruits or none at all. For many Africans, the Church continues to be an ambiguous institution they love to hate... On the one hand, Christianity is more rooted in the Continent than anywhere else, on the other hand, the Continent continues to

reap bitter fruits of poverty, wars, abuse and enslavement... we must ponder for a while on what to do to this big tree called Christianity, which is green with leaves of millions of African adherents, yet continues to fail them at their hour of need.”

We as the churches, as Christians, can only present a life-giving message that is perceived as such if we understand the dynamics of society, as they are perceived by the members of that society. The risk of us causing damaging but unintended results emanating from well-meant efforts can only be reduced if the people who are in the situation and their understanding of what is to be done are fully included in the way that problems are formulated and solutions are designed and presented. All efforts to improve the quality of life of a community must be fully contextualized and internalized by that community itself.

3. THE CONTEMPORARY LIFESTYLES OF RICH AND POOR SOUTH AFRICANS

In post-apartheid South Africa the economic solution to human need has moved to the centre of the stage, with the consumer culture in a dominant role. One result is that there are two types of communities that have grown most visibly hand over hand: so-called squatter camps (informal settlements) and luxurious golf estates and gated communities, sealed off by high walls, electric fences and security services. Neither was expected when the “new South Africa” came into being in 1994. There was a general expectation, not least among the poor, that the eradication of poverty would be a much more central concern that would be tackled with dedication and that such affluence would not be allowed. However, both poverty and affluence have grown beyond all expectations.

In August 2013 Robert Brand and Mike Cohen wrote in an article, *SA's post-apartheid failure in squatter camps*: “Only 15% of South Africa’s 14.45 million households earn enough to secure a mortgage, while 60% earn less than R3,500 a month and can qualify for state housing, government data shows. The remaining 25%, including most teachers, nurses, police officers and soldiers, have had access to neither.”

While new squatter camps continue to spring up, golf estates are doing the same. In 2009, for example, a property group reported that there had been significant growth in the residential golf estate sector in the previous five years in South Africa: “during this period, 50% of a total of approximately 30,000 residential golf estate properties located within 66 golf estate developments, came onto the market in South Africa” (Golding 2009). This figure does not include the large number of luxurious gated communities that do not have golf courses.

The country is growing in two directions, away from each other. The high ideals that seemed to drive the transition to a new South Africa immediately before and after 1994, of making life better for all, have made way for a destructive consumerism, also, all too often, among the poor who are its victims but still dream of a luxurious lifestyle.

Former anti-apartheid politicians are in the lead. One example: at the time of writing this article, there is a hot political battle caused by the finding of the public protector that the state spent R248m of tax payers' money to upgrade state president Jacob Zuma's private Nkandla estate. But the politicians are not alone: in all sectors of society there is a drive for having more, for the purpose of having more, beyond the satisfaction of fundamental human needs. Churches and church members all too often take part in this, whether we preach a prosperity gospel or not.

It depends on what indicators of poverty and wealth are considered, but according to Pauw and Mncube (2007:3), there is wide agreement amongst researchers that the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. A report, *Poverty Trends in South Africa. An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2011* that was released in 2014 by Statistics South Africa, indicates that the income of the poor has indeed improved, but an important reason is the increase in grants from 3 million in 2000 to 15 million by 2011 (p 20), which makes the poor very vulnerable to pressures on the economy.

In an article in the Mail and Guardian on 3 August 2012 the well-known economist Sampie Terreblanche wrote about the "elite compromise – or the elite conspiracy – reached between the corporate sector and a leadership core of the ANC before 1994... The ANC government has used the power allotted to it to create a black elite by implementing black empowerment and affirmative action in rather doubtful and myopic ways and plundering the budget recklessly. The perpetuation of white elitism and white corporatism after 1994 and the creation of black elitism over the past 18 years, to the detriment of the poor and unemployed is the main reason why income has become increasingly unequal since 1994. The richest 10-million South Africans received almost 75% of total income in 2008, whereas the poorest 25 million received less than 8%."

How do we, both rich and poor, start to transform our lifestyles towards a better *ethical quality of life, as the people of God* in this context? It is a difficult question, since we have not yet reached agreement on what we mean by a good quality of life.

4. CONFUSION ABOUT A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In the past, the churches from the West have mostly promoted the Western way of living, such as schools, hospitals, modern technology, and other elements of this lifestyle. The two books: *Reeftown Elite* (1971) and *Coming through. The search of a new cultural identity* (1978) describe to what extent black South Africans, from their side, idealized the Western way of life in the 1960's.

In 1971 a poet from Soweto, Oswald Joseph Mtshali (1972:25) Mtshali wrote:

I don't want to go to heaven when I'm dead.
I want my heaven now, here on earth in Houghton and Parktown;
a mansion
two cars or more
and smiling servants.
Isn't that heaven?

This is still the predominant attitude of many people of all races and classes today. But there has also been resistance to this ideal. Soon after writing this poem, Mtshali joined other black poets, writers, theologians, politicians and academics in singing the praises of African culture and African values. Some have denounced Western culture; others saw a blending of cultures as the way to go. The seventies was the period of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Black Consciousness is not as visible now as it was then, but resistance to modern culture still accompanies, paradoxically, the consumer culture with its desire for modern consumer goods.

The resistance to modern culture is, for example, visible in the education system, albeit in a passive way. The education system with its schools and universities is the way in which modern culture is transferred to learners, but there is a general lack of interest in good education amongst large sectors of the population: "...the system has failed to reverse unacceptably low exam results or to improve the standard of teaching. The quality of education remains very poor, and the output rate has not improved... challenges include: poor teacher training; unskilled teachers; lack of commitment to teach by teachers; poor support for learners at home; and a shortage of resources in education despite the large budgetary commitments by government" (Matshidiso: 2012). A culture of learning has not emerged.

Resistance to Western education has a long history. There was strong protest against the education policy of the apartheid government. The University of the North, a so-called "black university" where I was teaching from 1984 until 1993, was a centre

of the struggle against apartheid in those years. Boycotts, strikes, the burning down of buildings, endless negotiations and on-going violent confrontations with the security forces meant that the academic programme was constantly under severe pressure. But it was not only political protest. It was also protest against modern Western culture, for example against its emphasis on individual responsibility and individual success or failure. Slogans such as “An injury to one is an injury to all” and “Pass one, pass all”, which were seen as the traditional African value of community or Ubuntu, were repeatedly used to bring the academic programme to a halt. It happened that the whole university was brought to a standstill because one student had failed in his exams.

This cultural protest confirmed the trends in the black urban poetry of the seventies, during the time of Black Consciousness. In the seventies black poets such as Oswald Mtshali, Wally Serote, Sipho Sepamla and Pascal Gwala, hailing from Soweto and the township Alexandra, published a number of bundles in English that identified the conflict between modern Western and traditional African cultures as a central issue in the unrest in townships (cf A S van Niekerk:1983 and Mphutlane wa Bofelo 2008:191-211).

In 1998 the literary scholar D Brown published a book *Voicing the text: South African oral poetry and performance* in which he describes a still deeper level of protest against Western culture, the mobilization of oral forms by the black consciousness movement in the 1970's. The main strategy for liberation was to liberate people's minds and to reassert communal values of black humanism (Brown 1998, p169). The oral poetry of the seventies in Soweto, that expressed this movement, rejected Western literary and cultural norms and forms, and made use of traditional African forms (Brown 1998:174,175). It included resistance to Western education. Oral poets followed a strategy of performance rather than publication. Protest poets like those mentioned in the previous paragraph, who did publish their poetry, were regarded “with hostility and mistrust” (Brown:182-183).

This protest builds on earlier forms of protest by figures such as the prophet Isaiah Shembe who was the founder of one of the largest AIC's in South Africa. Shembe worked in Natal between 1911 and 1935. He resisted the suppression of orality by the epistemological and cognitive authority of the Western tradition of print (Brown:124). Brown comments: “Shembe...sought to revitalize Zulu society through the maintenance and revival of social customs and mores, many of which were rejected by the mission churches. In one of his songs he, from his side, rejected their emphasis on the written word: “...their bibles and testaments... they said it was written... Breaker-away, let us leave and let us head for own Zululand...” He wanted

to undermine “the colonial discourses of power, particularly the centrality of the printed word and the Bible” (Brown:147).

The present lack of enthusiasm for learning among teachers, parents and children, is nothing new. There are two options; the people could change their attitude, or the possibility to contextualise the education system to function better in the present context, which is influenced by culture, politics, the economy, and so on, can be investigated.

The overall context was well articulated by a writer from Kenya: “We need to see Africa’s history in three broad phases: Africa before white conquest, Africa under colonial domination, and today’s Africa striving to find its true self-image. We are all involved in a common problem: how best to build a true communal home for all Africans. Then all the black people, all the African masses can truthfully say: we have come home” (Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongó 1981:4). And the Euro-Africans have to find a place for ourselves with the “African masses”.

In Latin American liberation theology there was also an element of suspicion against the modern way of life, that was associated with the Protestant faith: “When a poor peasant or a worker in the new industrial areas becomes a Protestant, he stops drinking, starts working regularly, establishes a stable family, learns to read and write, and consequently gains social and economic status. Quite likely his children will already belong to the ‘progressive’ middle sector of society. Protestantism is thus clearly linked with the whole North Atlantic ideological, cultural, economic, and political thrust beginning with the nineteenth century...” (Bonino, 1975:12).

This confronts us with the question: Liberation towards what? Is Protestantism merely a part of modern Western culture? Can the church present a better alternative? What would an ethical quality of life look like, seen from a Christian perspective?

5. WHAT WOULD AN ETHICAL QUALITY OF LIFE LOOK LIKE, SEEN FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE?

A Christian description of an ethical quality of life may be characterised by good relations, fairness to all, promoting the lives of others and of God’s creation, and promoting dignity. In his book *The gravity of sin. Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* Jenson (2006:1-2) emphasizes that, over the last century, a broad consensus has developed in Western theology and philosophy that human personhood is fundamentally constituted by its relationships. He refers to Eberhard Jüngel, who calls sin “the urge towards relationlessness and dissociation” and the sinner “a person without relations”.

In WCC declarations, justice, peace and the integrity of creation have emerged in different formulations (Rasmussen 1996:139) with the emphasises on relations as an important theme. It is in many ways the opposite of both destructive consumerism and chronic poverty. The WCC document *Together towards life* expresses it well: "... the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is, therefore, vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole *oikoumene*, as being interconnected in God's web of life" (Resource Book 2013:52).

Rasmussen (1996:329, 330) argues that relations are necessarily developed locally and not globally: in spaceship economics, even when "greened" as sustainable development or green globalism, however pure the motives, some begin to decide what is in the interest of the rest. "Things are no longer soul-size, with multiple voices attuned to the complexity of things on the ground in places very different from each other... It treats Seattle, Boston, Madras, Rio, and Kuala Lumpur as though they were very much the same, or should be". Following David Korten, Rasmussen rejects the ideal put forward by Akio Morita, founder and chairman of Sony's, of one global culture based on the free market, where "relationships, both individual and corporate, are defined entirely by the market, and there are no loyalties to place and community".

If the ethical quality of life is marked by healthy relations, it is of fundamental importance that it must be realised on community and household level, where we can form such relations, as well as on the level of our wider network of relations and ecological and social footprints. The micro- and macro- levels are connected in many ways. The household is an important driver of macro-industry: a large part of the production of industry is for consumption by individuals in the household context. And to have integrity, it is important not to separate private and public life, as is the trend in modern culture.

The emphasis on relations and responsibility finds practical support in the principle of subsidiarity, which plays an important role in Roman Catholic circles. Subsidiarity means, "...one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry". (Pope Pius XI, 1931). This principle leads to an emphasis on grassroots community projects where community members are involved in leadership and decision-making (cf Rasmussen p 336). At the same time, those functions that cannot be executed on a local level must be escalated to higher levels: "...subsidiarity asks not for the most local but for the most appropriate level of organization and response" (Rasmussen:339).

An emphasis on local relations as such is not enough. Such an emphasis can also be found in the prevailing tendency to build golf estates and the so-called ‘hamlet’ trend. “This is the emergence of ‘small town’ South Africa where people are electing to live in smaller towns for lifestyle reasons, and with new technology are able to work from home... (Golding, 2009).” This could lead to further withdrawal into oneself, which could as such be a withdrawal from an ethical quality of life, as argued by Matt Jenson.

The vision of an ethical quality of life as presented by the church of Christ will have to be developed locally, in our case in the context of contemporary Africa, where the modern and postmodern global cultures and the traditional African cultures are in a process of forming new combinations, and breaking them up all the time, and where Islam has a growing presence. These combinations differ from place to place. The local context must be seen within the global context.

It is a very complex and concrete task to put this moral vision into practice: to develop new relations to each other and to the material world, to find new ways of using energy and water at home and of disposing of waste, to protect and sustain ourselves. Transforming our own network of relations means the transformation of our own identity. It requires a new vision of what happiness is, and it requires resources, knowledge, skills, funding and partnerships. Our present ways of living have developed over centuries. They are imbedded in a web of practices, habits, conventions, regimes, systems, vested interests, agreements, traditions, technologies, symbols, dreams, values, and worldviews. It is no easy task to transform them into different alternatives that embody the vision of a different world.

6. THE CHRISTIAN ROAD TOWARDS AN ETHICAL QUALITY OF LIFE

What would an ethical quality of life look like, and how do we get there? This question was also considered by the South African Council of Churches, with reference to the problem of climate change: “...we require a radical change of direction, a change of heart and mind, a transformation of our society towards a sustainable economy and a sustainable lifestyle... It is a matter of moral vision. We need to envision alternatives to the current global economic order that has caused climate change. Such a vision needs to be attractive enough to motivate millions of people, to energise and mobilise action. The question is therefore whether a different world is indeed possible’ (Declaration SACC 2009:x, 41).

The “alternative world”, according to the SACC Declaration, is “a matter of moral vision”. The SACC is not alone in this approach. Rasmussen (182) refers to Bateson,

who “assumes the reality and efficacy of a cosmology and its ethic: ‘the whole way of thinking about what we are and what other people are.’ And he assumes that earth’s present distress is a foundational challenge to the reigning cosmology. Its consequences expose this cosmology and ethic as death dealing. Bateson concludes that an alternative cosmology must take its place.”

The WCC document *Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All A Call to Action* thinks along the same lines: “Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual” (WCC Resource Book:86).

Is this formulated correctly? Is it true that “(T)echnologies express cultures. Ways of doing things reflect ways of seeing things”, as Rasmussen (181) states? Is it not true that churches and church members all too often practice a privatized spirituality that we combine comfortably with either the prevailing consumerism or the culture of poverty of our communities, separating the vision of faith and the way of living? This happens also with those of us who are convinced that we need a sustainable lifestyle: we still live in the prevailing economy and technology, even if these structures do not express our cosmology and the way we think things should be. We may have a moral vision of an alternative world, but we do not have the means to bring it about even in our own lives, apart from making a few adjustments to the prevailing systems. This applies to Christians in both the affluent and poor communities.

That does not make a moral vision irrelevant, but it depends on what we do with it. We can take as example the “Declaration on the Environment” signed by Patriarch Bartholomew I and Pope John Paul II on 10 June 2002: “What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act” (The SACC Declaration 2009:6,7).

This statement is true, depending on what is meant by “a genuine conversion to Christ”. Does this statement not fall back into “...the wrong conception of conversion as a purely religious phenomenon separated from its sociological context“ that Newbigin refers to? Newbigin argues for a conception of conversion that is inseparable from its sociological context. He illustrates it with reference to the message of Moses and Aaron to the people of Israel in the house of bondage. They told the elders of Israel

that God had seen their plight and was ready to lead them out of the house of slavery "...and the people believed... and bowed their heads and worshipped" (Ex 4:30-31). From that time onwards the people were facing the other way, comments Newbigin; turning towards God is in itself turning away from slavery and undertaking the journey towards life (Newbigin 1969:94-95).

It is not that a genuine conversion to Christ, as a purely religious phenomenon separated from its sociological context takes place first, and that we then, from there, express this faith in an ethical quality of life almost automatically. Many churches have preached such a conversion for many decades, and the resultant ethical quality of life is often limited to a few personal issues. In Western Christianity, Pietism has often restricted faith to the emotional inner life of the individual, and orthodoxy to the maintenance of the pure doctrine. Both have a tendency to separate faith from public life and the rational approach of modernity and to live largely according to the rationality and values of modernity while believing according to the Christian doctrines (Jonker 2008:32-37). In his preface to Willie Jonker's book, Dirkie Smit (Jonker, 2008:xi) states that the Christian message is one of salvation for the world, and that being a church without being passionately concerned about the deepest problems of the world could be regarded as a betrayal of the church and her message. Conversion to such spirituality should be avoided.

A genuine conversion to Christ can rather be understood as hearing the call of Christ to accept his gift of eternal life as the calling to an ethical quality of life and responding positively to this call by searching to develop such a quality of life for yourself and for others, and presenting a life-giving alternative within the existing context. In the context of Southern Africa, the ethical quality of life of the Kingdom of God must be passionately concerned about the deepest problems of this context, which include the search for identity and dignity in our multi-cultural context and the search for sustainable lifestyles in which such an identity exists.

The SACC statement on the possibility of an alternative world contains valuable elements but it does not sufficiently combine the need for a moral vision with the need to demonstrate that vision in practice. To do that, we could expand it to read: "It is a matter of moral vision and of the capability (capacity and ability) to put the vision into practice. In order to develop a vision that is attractive enough to motivate millions of people, to energise and mobilise action, we have to illustrate it in practice. The question is therefore whether we can demonstrate that a different world is indeed possible, by presenting an alternative cosmology in the form of alternative economies, lifestyles, practices, habits and technologies."

Faith, which is always expressed within some or other cosmology, cannot be packaged, transferred and consumed like a fast food hamburger. Living faith is more like yeast that is kneaded into the dough and then acts as a life-giving and transforming agent, working through the whole of our lives. With technology it is not completely different. Technology, also, cannot be transferred as a package, as is often attempted in development projects; the people who are to use it must conceive it and functionally integrate it into their own lives. Both faith and technology play a role in shaping our daily domestic practices and both must be contextualized by those who use it into their daily lives, also by those who want to develop an ethical quality of life.

In their book *The homeless mind* Peter L Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner (1977) use the term *consciousness*, that refers to the everyday knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and affects of the community (p 18). In a process of modernisation, elements in modernity and elements in local consciousness that have an affinity to each other seek each other out, and form “packages”. A package consists, therefore, of a combination of elements from the modernising institutions and from the consciousness of the community (cf. Berger et.al 1977:64-77). The term *package* means more or less the same as the *practices* described above, but the word package more clearly expresses the *combination of cultural elements* that formed the practice.

Such packages and practices must be developed intentionally, using the best resources – science, technology, networks, funding – available.

On a most local level, we can begin by examining our own domestic practices. A domestic practice combines elements of the residents’ cosmology with the available technology and resources such as materials and artefacts to form patterns of behaviour that we regularly use to achieve certain goals. These practices play a role to shape our roles and relations. We can examine the ecological and social footprints of these practices. We can evaluate to what extent they help or hinder us in responding in our sociological context to Christ’s gift of an ethical quality of life. We can investigate possibilities to develop alternative practices and patterns of living. We will have to apply our minds, our hearts and our strengths. We will need advice from others who have knowledge and skills that we do not have: philosophers who think about life, engineers, architects, agriculturalists, health care workers, psychologists, and others. It becomes a process that builds relations with fellow believers and with people who do not believe, where they may come to understand our faith better, hopefully, as a meaningful and life-giving power.

7. CONCLUSION

If the church is to present a life-giving message in the 21st century, we will have to develop an ethical quality of life for ourselves and for the different local contexts in which we are. Such a quality of life cannot be perceived in isolation from our sociological context. It can only come into existence if we hear the call of Christ to a sustainable and dignified lifestyle in our different but related contexts, and if we respond to that call by searching for alternative ways in which we can combine our faith and cosmology, the consciousness of local communities and the available technology and other elements of modernisation, to form practices that better express an ethical quality of life in each context.

We need to plan a deliberate process of interaction between our Christian consciousness and the cultural consciousness and technological elements of our contexts, to form a Christian ethical quality of life that is relevant to each context and the wider world we live in. In the Southern African context, we not only have to consider the cultural elements of modernity and post-modernity, but also the role of African traditional culture in the whole mix of things. We have, in other words, to work with what is at hand in our context, and not merely import and implement lifestyles from abroad.

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KEY WORDS

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TREFWOORDE

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