

# Afrocentric *or* Eurocentric ?



Our task in a multicultural  
South Africa

B.J. van der Walt







# **AFROCENTRIC OR EUROCENTRIC?**

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**South Africa**

**B.J. VAN DER WALT**

**Potchefstroom  
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## Preface

Cultures and cultural *values* are important in the life of every human being. They could be compared to the rules determining the progress of a match. Or they could be compared to the foundations of a building: invisible but indispensable. Therefore, in our multicultural world cultural *differences* are also important. The aim of this book is to compare, describe and evaluate the two dominant cultures in South Africa, viz. that of Africa and the West, in an attempt to bring them closer together.

This book is a follow-up of my previous publication *Die hand in eie boesem; 'n besinning oor Afrikaneridentiteit*, published in 1995. In it I concentrated mainly on the *former* identity of Afrikaans-speaking white people. I merely skimmed the surface in the quest for a *new* Afrikaner identity. The very important question of how Afrikaners see themselves in Africa - of which the new South Africa is an inherent part - was not discussed.

The white people of South Africa (Afrikaners, Englishmen, Dutchmen, Portuguese, Greeks etc.), our (Afrikaans- and English-speaking) brown or coloured people and different groups of Eastern origin are also Africans, belonging to this continent. This book, however, endeavours to answer the question of how, especially whites of Western origin on the African continent, should view their own cultural identity. Stated in terms of the title of the book: Should they simply choose between an Afrocentric or Eurocentric view of themselves? Or is the answer to the quest for an own cultural identity far more involved and complicated?

Many whites may perhaps not regard this as a problem at all. They are - and also view themselves as - Westerners *in diaspora* on a foreign continent. To them "home" is really thousands of kilometres to the north. They see no need for wrestling with the old and, at the present moment, urgent question of: Am I *really* an African?

However, to those who are grappling with the issue, this book provides the following: (1) As an introduction a chapter on how cultural diversity should be understood and evaluated. (2) A comparison of the African and Western ideas regarding communality and individuality. (3) The different conceptions, experience and use of time in Africa and in the West. (4) The different ways of thinking of Africans and Westerners. (5) A chapter which discusses how young South Africans (both black and white) contend with the birth of a new, own cultural identity in which African and Western

values are reconciled. (6) The relevance of the previous insights to the issues of economic development and management. (7) A final chapter in which issues such as unity and diversity, Africanisation, transformation and reformation are discussed in order to answer the question of what a culture which honours and glorifies God, would look like.

The different chapters of this volume were originally delivered as papers on various occasions in Australia, the United States of America and South Africa. This explains the structure of the present book: On the one hand the chapters complement each other, but on the other hand they also overlap. Some important information which should perhaps have been provided earlier, is only discussed at a later stage. This publication, however, contains my preliminary, modest contribution to an issue of vital importance - not only in the field of education, but in every area of life.

A word of heartfelt thanks to the following persons who read sections of the original manuscript and provided me with valuable comments: Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi), Dr. Stuart Fowler (Melbourne), Prof. Bob Goudzwaard (Driebergen), Prof. Sydney Rooy (San José, Costa Rica), Dr. Theodorus Setiawan (Jakarta, Indonesia), Prof. Theo van der Merwe and Dr. Fanie van Rensburg (Potchefstroom).

In grateful acknowledgement, this volume is dedicated to Prof. Albert J. Viljoen, Vice-Rector (Academic Affairs) of this University. On many occasions he arranged the necessary funds to enable me to attend meetings and conferences, to lecture and to do research in different African countries. As far back as five years ago he realised how important it was to study multiculturalism. The fact that he, at that time, appointed me on a commission of the University to investigate the possible consequences of a new, multicultural South Africa for tertiary education, served as an incentive to keep me interested in the issue and to finally write this book.

*Afrocentric or Eurocentric?* is furthermore dedicated to all the members of our rainbow nation who are willing, apart from appreciating the bright "colours" in their own culture, to acknowledge its dull, not so beautiful "colours". And who, apart from that, also wish to be assisted in achieving the reverse: to recognise not only the dullness in other cultures, but also their bright, beautiful sides.

**Bennie van der Walt**

**December, 1996**

\* \* \*

## Chapter 1

### HOW SHOULD CULTURAL DIVERSITY BE UNDERSTOOD AND EVALUATED?

The behaviour of a person from another group can sometimes be totally incomprehensible. Very often the basic reason is that his/her culture is radically different from one's own. In South Africa the differences between (black) African and (white) Western culture can result in communication breakdowns or even clashes.

This chapter will therefore begin with a few examples of these amazing cultural differences. In the second place it will briefly concentrate on how people react to cultural differences by indicating the way in which African culture was regarded by both Westerners and Africans themselves. In the third place, without elaborating, culture and its relationship to religion, worldview and philosophy will be discussed. This will bring us, fourthly, to the main issue to be dealt with, viz. the reasons for cultural diversity. Two contemporary theories about cultural diversity will be scrutinised, followed by a Biblical perspective on cultural plurality. This new perspective will also enable us to evaluate cultural differences fairly and correctly, thus providing us with a standard or criterion according to which we may decide which characteristics of African and Western culture are desirable and acceptable and which are not. In the fifth place, in conclusion, we will deal with possible misconceptions regarding my way of describing and evaluating these two dominant cultures in South Africa.

#### 1.1 Examples of cultural differences

The following illustrations are intended to remind all of us that our own ways of conduct are not the only possible ways and should not be regarded as normative for everyone.

- In some Western cultures *love* can be expressed by way of a kiss. Some African tribes, however, find this behaviour rather disgusting - only monkeys kiss each other!
- *Clothes* are considered to be important in the Western world, because it would be immodest to be naked - therefore we wear clothes even in bed! The traditional Gava tribe of Nigeria, however, believe that one covers one's body only if one has something to hide. Therefore: remain naked and prove yourself! According to the Higi people of the same country,

clothes are merely a means of ornamentation and should therefore be worn only on special occasions.

- *Orphans and problem children* are drawn into society and absorbed by other families in the case of traditional inclusive African culture. Everyone becomes the mother, father, sister or brother of such children. In this way they are cared for, loved, nurtured and developed as members of society. In the West we isolate orphans and problem children in *orphanages* and homes where professionals take care of them. This often means that children are separated from normal, everyday life in society and are not easily integrated at a later stage.

- *Youthfulness and age* are also approached in a different way. In many Western countries youth is desirable and old age undesirable. One therefore has to appear to be young (cosmetics are invaluable if one is no longer in that fortunate position) and act youthfully. Old age is dreaded, elderly people are unwanted and are placed, outside society, in homes for the aged. In traditional Africa exactly the opposite applies. The youth are tolerated - one day they will be grown up. One should therefore not act youthfully, but prove oneself to be mature. Conversely, age is desirable and the aged are revered as an important group of society because of their experience and wisdom.

- *Play* in Western cultures is often not play, but intense competition between the same age group with the expectation that one will be the victor. Among the Pueblo of New Mexico races may, however, involve that an old man and a little boy are placed in the same race with young men. The aim of a race is not to beat someone else, but only to do one's level best!

- In the case of *meetings*, Western people expect from the participants that they adhere to the agenda which should be dealt with item by item. Africans, however, may talk round and round a point. Westerners are also inclined to be very direct - even if it may result in conflict. Africans regard this as being insensitive and rude. They prefer an indirect way of communicating something. The person with whom the discussion takes place, has to draw his/her own conclusion - doing this on his/her behalf, would be an insult! Westerners, to whom "yes" means "yes" and "no" means "no", may also find it difficult to understand that, according to Africa's culture of courtesy, "yes" could sometimes imply a "no".

- *Personal space* in some Northern European countries is quite large. In Africa and Latin America the interaction distance is far less. People from

these parts of the world are unable to talk comfortably with one another unless they are in close proximity. The result is that when an African moves closer, a Westerner will withdraw. The one is trying to increase the distance in order to feel at ease, while the other tries to decrease it for the same reason! Westerners may think that Africans are obtrusive, breathing down their necks and spraying in their faces, while Africans may regard Westerners as distant, withdrawn, unfriendly and cold. For the same reason Western people usually prefer working in a private office, while people of other cultures experience no problem sharing the same office space as a group.

- People's viewpoints about *femininity and masculinity* may be rank opposite to each other in different cultures. Most Western cultures will discourage touching one another except during moments of intimacy. Iranian men, however, are often seen to be holding hands or even embracing one another. They are sensitive, have a well-developed intuition and in many cases are expected not to be too logical - all female characteristics according to Western stereotypes! Women in Iran, on the other hand, are considered to be coldly practical - characteristics usually associated with men in the West!

- In the West *schedules and punctuality* are sacred and one is expected to be prompt and punctual. If you are five minutes late for an appointment, you are already expected to make a mild apology; if it is a ten-minute delay, a more profuse apology is required; fifteen minutes late will require an explanation and thirty minutes will be regarded as an insult. *Hora Africana* (African time), however, is totally different from *hora Europeana* (European time): thirty minutes late is not the exception but the rule and therefore requires no apology or explanation.

- *Different criteria for treating people* are also common. In the West, if you are first, you have the right to be served first. (If a latecomer is attended to before you, your blood pressure will surely rise.) In many countries outside Europe, however, service is dependent upon a person's status or rank.

- Western *humour* is usually associated with special occasions (e.g. telling jokes) and it is a binary type of humour, which is either turned on or off. In the Far East humour is a natural part of everyday life, it is more of a continuum with subtle degrees of enjoyment.

We could continue with many more examples. In different cultures the way people eat, walk, sit, stand, lie down, greet, show their emotions or

hide them, talk, laugh and cry, use time, apply the law as well as their sexual behaviour, education etc. can be totally different.

From these few examples the following conclusions may be drawn:

- There is not one aspect of human life which is not touched by culture. Culture controls behaviour in a deep and persisting way, it characterises man, it gives him his unique identity.
- Because one's own culture is usually outside one's awareness and therefore beyond conscious control, it is regarded as normal and other cultures as abnormal.
- Culture hides more often than it reveals. What it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants. Culture can be a prison. Our real task therefore is not in the first place to understand foreign culture, but to understand our own. Learning to understand one's own culture, is quite an achievement.
- Strangely enough one of the best ways - perhaps the only way - to learn about oneself is by taking the cultures of others seriously. Understanding oneself is closely related to understanding others. To do the one, you must start with the other and vice versa.
- To achieve this, will be no small task when the following is kept in mind: Apart from the 223 political nations (countries), there are today more than 5 000 different identified languages or ethnic groups in the world! Nigeria, for example, has more than 400 ethnic groups!

Did people really learn to know their own and appreciate other cultures? Mostly not. We will therefore have a brief look at how the amazing - and confusing - cultural diversity was handled in the wrong way on our continent.

## **1.2 The attitude of the West towards African culture and the reactions of Africa**

This brief and general overview of what happened on our continent cannot be exhaustive. It is intended to help South Africans to learn from the mistakes of the past.

## *The attitude of the West*

During colonial times (the previous and the first part of the present century) a generally accepted idea was that cultural differences are inborn and not acquired. Western people are culturally born to be the masters and Africans are born inferior and destined to remain slaves. "White" is regarded as civilised, good, beautiful, intelligent and rational. "Black" is regarded as primitive, bad, ugly, unintelligent and irrational.

The philosophical background of this viewpoint was the Western evolutionary theory developed by C. Darwin and others. This theory was applied not only to biological but also to cultural development. A. Comte, for instance, believed that human society evolved through three basic stages: the theological, metaphysical and the positive. Within the first stage, the human mind evolves, said Comte, from fetichism, through polytheism, to monotheism. Fetichism is the most primitive philosophy of mankind. Comte's influence on Edward Taylor's book *Primitive culture* (1871) cannot be denied. He believed that the acts of "primitive" people are based on a specific outlook, worldview or philosophy.

Levy-Bruhl designed the concept of a "primitive mentality". The rationale for the bizarre, strange and surprising deeds of "primitive" people should not be sought in a *philosophy*, i.e. a particular form of rationality, but in a specific kind of *mentality* or psychic constitution. So-called primitive people are not governed by reason, but their behaviour is determined by their emotions. He therefore simply replaced Taylor's ethnophilosophy with an ethnopsychology. No real understanding is possible between "primitive" Africans and "civilised" Westerners, for not only their theoretical presuppositions, but also their mental functions are totally different. These differences are not in degree, but in kind. When judged according to the Western model of rationality or logic the primitive mentality is basically irrational and pre-logical!

These are only two examples of the kind of theories which strongly influenced Western colonialism in Africa in general and the Western evaluation of African culture in particular. It is also against such ideas and practices that black Africans reacted.

## *The reactions of Africans*

- The first reaction was *acceptance* and *assimilation*. Some Africans accepted their inferiority without changing their culture. Others, however,



wanted to overcome their black "inferiority". The white culture is still considered to be positive (beautiful, intelligent, rational, objective). However, by training and by hard work, some blacks can be made to abandon their culture (which is considered to be ugly, irrational and subjective) and acquire good Western qualities and virtues. In everything he does - the way he walks, talks, laughs, thinks etc. - the black man should reject his own culture and adapt to foreign Western culture. In this way some black Englishmen arose from the British colonial rule. In the French colonies they were called *évolvés* and *assimilados* in the Portuguese colonies.

It was soon realised, however, that the black people opting for assimilation into Western culture - in spite of the fact that some even succeeded in marrying white women - were not really recognised as equals in the white world. They were continuously reminded that the history, culture, scholarship - everything - was the white man's history, culture and scholarship without any black contribution. As an African one should not simply become "a black skin in a white mask". The impossible was expected: to become "a white skin and soul", to completely denounce one's culture and act and think completely "white".

- *Rehabilitation* was a second type of reaction and cultural consciousness developed in African countries. According to the *Negritude* movement, culture could not be the monopoly of non-white races. Advocates of this viewpoint believed that the black man must, in his own way, have made a contribution to the civilisation and history of mankind. Such a contribution has to be exposed to the world. Europe may be the master of logic, science and rationality, but Africa is the master of emotion and rhythm. Both reason and emotion should be treated as equal positive qualities in man.

Clearly this rejection of rationality was an emotional reaction against the claim of the West that "reason" is white. *Negritude* could also not acquire deep roots among the African masses - it mostly appealed to the "alienated intelligentsia". It was said that L. Senghor (one of the most well-known proponents of *negritude*) was addressing the French public rather than ordinary Africans!

- *Exclusivism*. Beyond *negritude*, the next phase of cultural consciousness was that of an uncompromising, anti-white black nationalism. All the positive qualities (goodness, beauty and intelligence), previously ascribed to the white race, were denied. No compromise with white Western culture was deemed possible. The black world, it was said, should close

ranks and fight to regain its past glory, own culture and political independence.

- *A multi- or transcultural* consciousness is the last stage in the modern development of black consciousness. It tries to transcend all the previous phases. It wants to get rid of the imperialistic tendencies in both Western and African culture. Due to technological and economical imbalance and numerous ethnic and other conflicts, this viewpoint has, however, not yet firmly taken root. Tribalism is a very serious problem in Africa.

### 1.3 Culture, religion, worldview and philosophy

Culture is often viewed as something apart, separate from the way of life of a people. It is turned into something which people do or an event which people attend on special occasions. It is regarded as something distinct from ordinary, daily life. It becomes a commodity which could be bought, sold, imported, exported and imprisoned in museums, art galleries and opera houses - places where people do not *live*, but which they only *visit*. The items in a museum, for instance, are mute and should not be touched - they convey no message to the visitors.

An African drum, for example, is not for mere gazing at, but for beating, for dancing, for celebrating a religious belief, a philosophy of life. Therefore it can only be "alive" when people, steeped in a worldview, use it. Only when its thunder is combined with the voices of these people, the vibrating of their buttocks and the sounds of other instruments, when it contributes to the meaningfulness of their lives, only then is it *living* culture. Otherwise the drum is a meaningless *object*.

#### *A complex phenomenon*

Culture is not only something alive. It is also rich and complex. It includes habits, customs, social organisations, techniques, language, values, norms, ideas, beliefs and much more. We could briefly define culture as the way in which human beings shape their natural and human environment. It is a secondary environment - that which man creates out of God's original creation.

Culture, however, is not confined to man's relationship to his fellow-creatures. Because human beings are not locked up in themselves or confined to this world, but also have a relationship with the true God or a

substitute in his place regarded as absolute, culture also includes a religious dimension.

### *Explanation by way of an image*

If we use the image of an onion which we start peeling, we find at least the following layers: (1) habits and customs, (2) tools, technological devices, buildings, (3) institutions such as marriage, the family, the state and its laws, (4) values, norms, a life and worldview and (5) the religious convictions of a group of people. These five layers could be visualised in a diagram consisting of five concentric circles, numbered 1 - 5 from the outer to the inner circle.

The cultural layers on the outside are easily visible. The deeper we move to the centre, the less visible the facets of a culture become. It is therefore easier to describe a specific cultural artefact or custom than it is to explain the worldview or religion of a group of people.

The outer layers of a culture also change more easily than the core. Few black Africans will still wear traditional clothes today - or go without clothes. Many of those who wear Western clothes, however, may still adhere to more or less the same worldview as their ancestors. Westernisation has not touched their essential being.

### *The five basic components*

When moving from the more covert to the more overt side of a culture, the different "aspects" could be indicated as follows: the religious, worldviewish, social, material and behavioural.

- The *religious aspect* is the deepest core of any culture. In one's religion one expresses one's ultimate commitment to the true God who revealed himself in creation and in the Bible, or to something in creation which is absolutised as divine.
- The *worldviewish aspect* could be called the philosophical core of a culture, because it provides a view of the whole of reality. (For a detailed description of a worldview, see Van der Walt, 1994a:39-56.) Together with religion it provides inspiration, guidance (by way of norms and values) and meaning to the more visible sides of a culture.

- The *social part* of a culture entails language, institutions, laws, economic relationships etcetera.
- The *material side* will include tools, machines, buildings and the like.
- The *behavioural dimension* is the concrete way of life, the peculiar habits and customs of a specific culture.

The following should be kept in mind: (1) This distinction in five dimensions or aspects or sides is a theoretical abstraction, simply intended to help one in understanding something about the complexity of the phenomenon called culture. I will therefore not mind at all if the reader prefers a different way of describing culture. (2) Distinction may never lead to separation of the different facets of a culture, because it is always a living unity. This is what I had in mind with the above warning that culture is not an entity separated from real life. A piece of art cannot be separated from the worldview or religion of an artist. A concrete example: What is the meaning, the message of a Yoruba religious mask hanging on the concrete wall of a modern apartment building in secular Paris - a room reeking with unbelief and the aimlessness of life?

### *Philosophy*

A last important preliminary question to be answered (before we return to the main topic of this chapter, viz. cultural plurality) is: What is the relationship of culture to philosophy and philosophy to culture?

Philosophy is always determined by some or other culture, especially its worldviewish dimension. But there is also an obverse relationship: that of philosophy to culture.

As is the case with a worldview, philosophy provides a total picture of reality, it wants to achieve a conception of the whole. It, however, also differs from a worldview. While a worldview is more implicit, philosophy is explicit. A worldview is pre-theoretical in nature (first order thinking), while philosophy is theoretical (second order thinking). Philosophy is a scientific reflection about a worldview. Stated differently, we could say that the worldviewish dimension of a culture arrives at full self-consciousness in philosophy. Philosophy could be defined as the self-consciousness of a culture.

It is precisely for this reason that philosophy is of vital importance when reflecting on culture and cultural differences - as will be the case in this book. (This also explains the extensive use of articles and books on African philosophy in the writing of *Afrocentric or Eurocentric?*)

Philosophy is an indispensable and a powerful tool in the search for one's own cultural identity as well as for transcultural understanding and dialogue. The psychological support of mere empathy is not sufficient. Comparison and understanding, a conception of the whole, is needed.

The condition is, of course, that philosophy should be positive and not employed negatively to defend an ideological, dogmatic position in an aggressive and intolerant way. The claim of absoluteness for one's own philosophical position should be relativised. Apart from philosophy being the self-consciousness of a culture, we need the additional self-consciousness of philosophy itself - its being culture-dependent!

After being sensitised to the great diversity amongst cultures, we are ready for the next step, viz. to look for an answer on the question about the origin of cultural plurality.

#### 1.4 Two hypotheses for cultural differences

At the moment two conflicting paradigms, trying to explain the differences of behaviour, values etc. between Africans and Westerners in South Africa, are at loggerheads with each other. Their basic question is the same, viz. what could be the causes for the obvious cultural differences which cannot and should not be ignored? The explanations which they offer, however, are totally different.

According to the one viewpoint, religion and worldview determine people's cultural perceptions, values, behaviour etc. Not much attention is given to the more concrete or visible socio-economic-political circumstances or the daily experience of people which also influences their cultural perspectives and behaviour. According to the other viewpoint exactly these factors are the primary reason for the cultural differences. In this second viewpoint very little, if any, attention is given to the possibility of religious and worldviewish causations. One could describe the first as a *religious* paradigm and the second as a *contextual* (secular) paradigm.

An example of the first is the book by A.S. van Niekerk (1993, previously published in Afrikaans) and examples of proponents of the second are J.C. Kotzé (1993) and C.S. van der Waal (1994).

Advocates of the second viewpoint blame Van Niekerk *cum suis* of the following (cf. Van der Waal, 1994): (1) That he offers little hope for the future, because development, for instance, will require deep-rooted, fundamental and difficult changes in African culture. (2) He mostly emphasises the negative aspects of African culture. (3) He generalises about African culture and ignores the remarkable differences in African societies of different places. (4) He isolates the extraordinary and bizarre. (5) He reveals a lack of empathy, sensitivity and views African culture from a distance and from a biased Western perspective. (6) He simply offers face value, simplistic explanations of the behaviour of Africans. (7) He proposes a static view of culture, seeing it as a timeless, a-historical phenomenon. (8) He offers a deterministic view: culture is viewed as having a firm grip on people rendering them passive puppets, instead of people being the actors, continuously adapting, manipulating and even ignoring the prescribed cultural rules. (9) In spite of the fact that he rejects the earlier racist paradigm, in which genetic causes were found for the differences in culture, his viewpoint is simply a modernised version of ethnocentrism or racism: the primordially of genes is replaced with the primordially of different cultures. (10) His viewpoint will reinforce stereotypes of black people and cause mistrust amongst people from the different cultures in South Africa.

In the light of this critique it will be understandable why the first viewpoint is not regarded as politically correct at the present moment, while the second is regarded as more acceptable. My own viewpoint in this paper could easily be identified with the now unpopular first paradigm. In such a case I will have to object because I regard the present conflict between the two paradigms as an example of the age-old false chicken and egg debate.

Both these viewpoints reveal a moment of truth, but because they absolutise that truth they become one-sided. They ask the same question (why these cultural differences?), but propose different causes: the one being religion and the other the context. I reject "religionism" as well as "contextualism" as explanations, but I accept their moments of truth. I agree with the first viewpoint that one cannot divorce culture from religion, an inherent facet of every culture - even an atheistic one! I also agree with the second viewpoint that culture is definitely being shaped by one's multifaceted experience in the areas of social life, politics, economics, labour etc. Culture cannot be isolated from them, because they are aspects of a particular

culture. (Even if one insists on distinguishing between culture and context, the context not only influences culture, but one's cultural convictions also influence the context!) I agree with the second viewpoint that human beings are active actors in shaping, adapting, manipulating culture. But I also agree with the first viewpoint that people can become the willing, passive captives of a culture.

Therefore, instead of opting for one or the other of the two extremes, my own viewpoint is more holistic and balanced. Religion and worldview as well as society, politics, economics etc. are simply different aspects of the phenomenon which we call "culture". And these different "parts" of a culture are continuously in interaction with each other, influencing each other reciprocally. Sometimes religion will play a decisive role. In a more secularised society (*nota bene*: secularism is also a religion!) economic or political factors may become the determining factors.

I do hope that a concrete experiment conducted with my students (see Chapter 5) will clearly illustrate that it is one-sided, simplistic - and dangerous - to explain cultural differences one-sidedly, as both these paradigms try to do. My experiment clearly revealed that (to once again use the perspectives of the paradigms I have rejected) *both* the new socio-economic-political situation *as well as* deep-seated religious and world-viewish presuppositions are at the moment influencing and shaping the identity (crisis) of these young South Africans.

### 1.5 Cultural diversity in a Biblical perspective

From the preceding discussion it is evident that in the first place we need to have a closer look at the *reasons or causes* for cultural diversity. Secondly, the two theories discussed do not offer clear *criteria* to judge what is wrong and what is correct in any given culture, in other words to evaluate different cultures.

To find an answer to the first problem, I was greatly helped by the work of Blauw (1978:35-67). In my search for a solution to the second difficulty, I found the book of Onvlee (1973:263-301), as well as a discussion with Prof. Bob Goudzwaard (of the Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands) very helpful.

To make my exposition as brief as possible, two diagrams will be employed. The first diagram appears as follows:

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

EMPHASIS ON  
THE SUPERNATURAL (GOD)

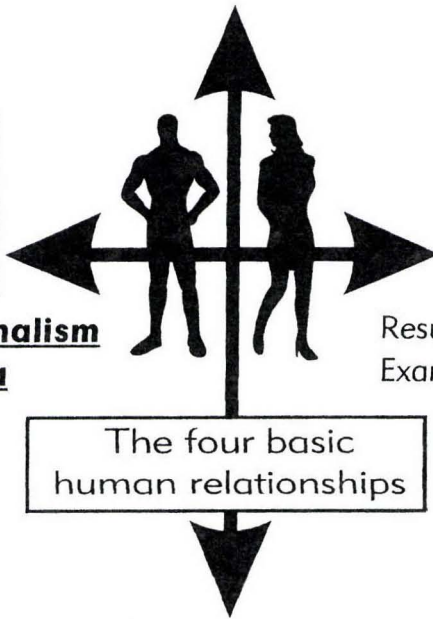
Result: **Pantheism**

Example: **India**

EMPHASIS  
ON  
THE OTHER  
(COMMUNITY)

Result: **Communalism**

Example: **Africa**



EMPHASIS  
ON THE  
SELF  
(INDIVIDUAL)

Result: **Individualism**

Example: **West**

The four basic  
human relationships

EMPHASIS ON  
THE EARTH (NATURE)

Result: **Naturalism**

Example: **China**



Our first point of departure is the Biblical perspective that God reveals Himself as well as information about creation to all people and nations. (Rom. 1:19, 20.) We distinguish (not separate) this way of revealing Himself (so-called "general" revelation in the history of theology) from his Scriptural revelation in the Bible, by calling it his creational revelation.

Our second point is that in their different cultures all human beings, whether they are aware of it or not, are answering to God's creational revelation. These answers can be given in obedience or disobedience. And because all humans are sinful, the cultures they create are usually of a mixed nature. On the one hand the tendency exists to suppress and replace God's revelation (cf. again Rom. 1:19 20). On the other hand one cannot fully succeed in doing so, because God's revelation is too clear and powerful.

Our third point emphasises the four basic relationships into which God has created all human beings: (1) in relation to himself/herself, (2) to his/her fellow human beings, (3) to nature and (4) to God. These four relationships should be in balance. Because, however, of the fact that we do not listen carefully enough to God's creational revelation or do not do so obediently, the different cultures tend to overemphasise one of these relationships, regarding it as more basic or real than the other three.

An overview of the cultures of the world for instance indicates that the culture of India (as is evident from Hinduism and Buddhism) puts all emphasis on the supernatural or divine. The self, fellow humans and nature are only appearance and not reality. The divine (in which the visible world participates and should finally be assimilated) is the most real and important. This viewpoint could be described as *pantheism* (everything is god/divine).

Other Eastern cultures, like the Chinese culture, put all emphasis on the natural world, the earth. We could indicate this viewpoint as *naturalism*, overemphasising man's relationship towards nature.

Of course this characterisation entails a great deal of generalisation regarding the situation in China. It is more applicable to Taoism than to Confucianism. In Taoistic religion and culture great emphasis is placed on the perfect laws of nature as well as respect for nature. Confucianism, however, emphasises (like Africa) interpersonal relationships and harmony. Apart from these two important trends in the Chinese culture, many Chinese (especially business people) already accepted (not only in business, but also in private family relationships) an individualistic Western attitude.

The West and Africa is visualised on the horizontal line of the diagram. On the African continent the relationship to one's fellow human beings is of paramount importance. It is not an individual standing in relationship to the community - that would still be a Western way of seeing it - but the "individual" has no existence apart from or outside of the community. The community has priority above the "individual". (*Individual* is written between inverted commas because, according to this culture, an individual does not exist - man by nature is a communal being.) The word to describe this viewpoint is *communalism*.

Western culture does exactly the opposite: it stresses the importance of the individual. Being human does not mean to be in community, but implies to be independent, on one's own. Individuals may for their own benefit agree with others to do something together, but such a relationship is not essential. This viewpoint is described as *individualism* because it absolutises the individual.

Each one of these four cultures (India, China, Africa and the West) contains an element of truth because it emphasises a real relationship. But at the same time it contains an error, a misconception, because they overemphasise one of the four relationships at the cost of the other three.

I acknowledge that this sketch of the four cultures entails a generalisation. It is an "ideal-typical" method which does not intend to represent concrete, historical realities. A typology like this, however, is a handy tool to provide us with a broad overview in which the unique characteristic of a culture is identified.

Viewing cultural diversity according to this model has the following immediate advantages (which will be explained later in more detail):

- One can be grateful because one knows that every culture - also one's own - contains something good.
- One should at the same time be humbled, because one realises that one's own culture - every cultural activity - contains defects.
- It provides the possibility to be open towards other cultures, because it is a fact that only through the spectacles of another culture is it possible to see clearly the one-sidedness, restrictions, limitations and defects of one's own.

- Cultural diversity should not be regarded as an embarrassment, but as an opportunity to be enriched. Contact with other cultures, therefore, is not an option any more but a task - on condition, of course, that one does not prefer to be enclosed in one's own cultural one-sidedness and poverty because one thinks that one cannot learn anything from other cultures. A well-known African proverb states that someone who never enjoys a meal outside his own home, may think that only his mother can cook!
- This perspective also provides us with the incentive towards continual cultural renewal and reformation. The ideal is to try harder in one's cultural activity, to respond in such a way to God's creational revelation that a balance can be achieved in one's relationship towards God, nature, one's fellow human beings and oneself.

The next diagram explains the consequences or implications of two of the four cultural perspectives described in the previous diagram.

# THE INTERPRETATION OF REALITY (=CULTURE) ACCORDING TO THE SPECIFIC ONTOLOGICAL FOCI

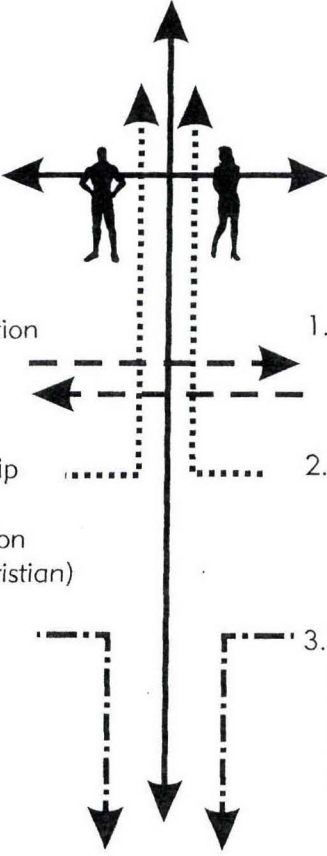
GOD (CREATOR)

**Africa**

**West**

THE COMMUNITY

THE INDIVIDUAL



1. The **person** is a reflection of the community

2. **Communal** relationship towards God (both in traditional African religion and after becoming Christian)

3. Nature viewed as a "**reflection**" of the community ( a tree, mountain, animal = a symbol of the family, clan, tribe)

1. **Community** is an expression of the individual will

2. **Individual** relationship to God (personal confession of sin and salvation)

3. **Use** nature for **personal** purposes (a tree is potential firewood or furniture to be sold)

NATURE

In this diagram we omit India and China and concentrate on Africa and the West. It illustrates that an overemphasis on one of the four "poles" (God, nature, community or individual) has definite implications for our perspective on the three remaining relationships. These three relationships cannot be viewed correctly because they are interpreted in the light of the "pole" which has been granted greater ontic status or all-important reality. First a specific culture *accentuates* one of the four relationships (diagram 1). Secondly it *interprets* the three other relationships from the perspective of the one accentuated or absolutised relationship (diagram 2). Let me explain.

- *Relationship towards self and community*

It is impossible for Africa to understand human individuality, because the "individual" only exists in a community. The person is a reflection of the community. "I am, because we are."

On the right hand side of the diagram the obverse is very clear: The West cannot understand and appreciate genuine community, because a community is simply viewed as the collection of a number of independent individuals. Community is an expression of the individual will. "We are, because I am."

- *Relationship towards God*

From their perspective in which the community receives all the emphasis, Africans also see their relationship towards God as something communal. Before the advent of Christianity a whole clan or ethnic group adhered to traditional African religion. When afterwards the Gospel was preached, it often happened that a whole tribe accepted the Christian faith, because it was unthinkable for Africans to regard religion as something requiring *a personal* decision.

If we compare this with the West, we again find a totally different perspective. From its starting point of individualism the relationship towards God is regarded as something individual requiring personal conversion, confession of guilt, faith and finally also personal salvation.

While the Bible teaches that our knowledge about God should determine the knowledge about ourselves, in both Africa and the West, the order is reversed: Self-knowledge (whether it is individualism or communalism)

decides our view of God! In both cases our knowledge of God will be distorted, because of an already distorted view of the self.

- *Relationship towards nature*

Because their points of departure differ, man's relationship towards nature is also viewed differently in Africa and the West.

From its communalistic perspective Africa views nature as a reflection of the community. Something physical (such as a mountain), a plant (for example a tree) or an animal (for instance a bull) may symbolise a clan or group. From a Western angle nature, however, is regarded as an object. The question which is asked is how it can be used to the individual's advantage. One can climb a mountain, use the tree to make furniture or a fire and slaughter the bull!

It is clear that both Africa and the West have specific spectacles, vantage points or "keyholes" through which they view the rest of reality. They are not neutral cultures but strongly coloured by either communalism or individualism.

## 1.6 **The implications for a Christian evaluation of cultural diversity**

The preceding model provides us not only with an explanation of the *reasons or causes* of cultural diversity. It also equips us with *criteria* to move out of our own cultural restrictions and to view other cultures more objectively. "Objective" does not imply neutrality, which is impossible, but indicates that we are placed in a position - a "third" perspective, that of the Bible - to study African and Western culture. Simply to criticise African culture from a Western perspective or conversely, to be critical about Western culture from the perspective of Africa, will not be a good method at all.

The criterion to be deduced from the preceding can be summarised in the following two propositions, the first positive and the second negative:

- Every culture in the world (not only those of India, China, Africa and the West) *has its own beauty, dignity and legitimacy*, because it contains an answer to God's creational revelation and focuses on an important aspect of God's multifaceted creation.

- Every culture also reveals a *lack of beauty, dignity and legitimacy*, because it does not listen carefully enough to God's creational revelation, tends to suppress and replace it with a lie and therefore overemphasises an aspect of God's multifaceted creation, resulting in an -ism (pantheism, individualism etc.) which becomes the main perspective from which the rest of creation is misinterpreted.

The following are a few implications to be deduced from these two propositions:

- Truth is not to be found in only one culture, for example one's own. At the same time no culture could be regarded as totally evil. We should therefore neither uncritically romanticise any culture nor over-critically reject any culture.
- We need different cultures to reach the truth or a correct response to God's creational revelation. Paul states (Eph. 3:18) that only all the saints together will be able to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ really is. The same could be said about the different cultures' responses to God's creational revelation: *only together, in mutual correction* of each other do they provide a correct and full answer.
- On the one hand we should *acknowledge and appreciate* the positive elements in every culture. But on the other hand we should *criticise* their negative elements (absolutisations and distortions).
- Cross-cultural contact is of vital importance. Because of the fact that every human being, is to a great extent, the captive of his own culture, it is necessary to view it from a distance. The best way to achieve this, is to try and do so through the "eye(s)" of another culture(s), even if it may be a difficult task.
- Even if we do so, we will not succeed in arriving at a perfect culture. Because of our sinful natures, all (cultural) answers to God's revelation remain imperfect.

### 1.7 **Ethnocentrism and two kinds of anti-ethnocentrism**

Ethnicity (to belong to a particular cultural group) is normal. Ethnocentrism, however, is a result of the fact that one's own culture is applied as a norm from which to judge other cultures. They will be regarded as being abnormal, below the standard (of your own), wrong and therefore having to be "uplifted" or even corrected.

## *Two types of ethnocentrism*

Western Eurocentric attitudes towards non-Western cultures, including African culture, is a well-known - notorious - example of ethnocentrism (cf. point 1.2 above).

In reaction to this attitude of superiority, Afrocentrism has today become popular in South Africa, especially in the form of *ubuntu* research projects, conferences, training courses and books. *Ubuntu* has become a fashionable buzz-word. We already have the Ubuntu Society of Southern Africa (USOSA) and an Ubuntu School of Philosophy (USOP). Many regard *ubuntu* culture and philosophy as *the* solution to our problems in, for instance, education, management, government and many other areas. On the one hand we should rejoice that - at last - African culture is beginning to receive the attention it deserves. On the other hand I have the impression that for the new *ubuntu*-supporters Africanisation becomes a kind of *panacea* (cure-all). This will simply amount to a new rival form of ethnocentrism.

The central message of this book is that neither Eurocentrism nor Afrocentrism will be a solution to the challenges of multiculturalism. *Any* kind of ethnocentric thinking should be rejected. We should learn to think non-ethnocentrically. Not every kind of anti-ethnocentric approach, however, is acceptable. I cannot accept *relativistic* anti-ethnocentrism.

### *Relativistic anti-ethnocentrism*

The relativistic non-ethnocentric approach correctly reacts against ethnocentrism, because it regards the own culture as the norm for judging every other culture. Proponents of this viewpoint firmly believe that every culture should be measured only against its own norms and values.

The problem with such a viewpoint, however, is that it will never be able to rise *above* cultural diversity. The different cultures may be *described* and *compared*, but one is not permitted to *choose* between them, because such a choice will imply a norm or standard. A culture or aspects of a culture may therefore not be qualified as "good" or "bad". One may, at most, qualify it as "functional" or "non-functional".

The two writers mentioned earlier in this chapter may serve as examples.



Van Niekerk (1993) is a theologian who judges (the African) culture from a normative perspective. He does it from a Christian-religious-worldviewish viewpoint. His Christian faith, however, is clearly Western in nature. Therefore, in spite of an honest and serious struggle, he could not free himself of a degree of Western Eurocentrism. This explains why, especially towards the end of his book, he more or less gives up any hope of understanding and appreciating African culture.

The anthropologist, Kotzé (1990, 1993 and 1996), is a clear example of a relativistic anti-ethnocentric scholar. In a lecture (1996) he stated that he didn't want to use the word "culture" any longer. This I can appreciate, because "culture" has been misused in the past to separate people and to down-grade non-Western cultures. The main reason, however, why Kotzé does not want to employ the concept, is because he wants to get rid of its normative connotation. Unfortunately he only replaced one concept ("culture") with another ("perception"). He emphasises context and experience in the way people perceive reality, themselves and others. What he has to say about "perception" (of Western and African people) is very similar - if not identical - to what the old concept "culture" means! The only difference according to him is that perception is something relative - one cannot describe it as either true or false.

The result of these two different approaches, is the following: Van Niekerk is *very pessimistic*: In their encounter, Africa and the West will never really understand each other. Kotzé's solution again is *too simplistic*: We should simply, without any criticism, accept the two cultures next to each other.

What then is the difference between Van Niekerk, Kotzé and myself?

#### *Non-relativistic anti-ethnocentrism*

I agree with Van Niekerk (and disagree with Kotzé) because ultimately we cannot escape normative judgments about cultures. No human being can be neutral. As will become abundantly clear in this book, we will have to *choose* between certain aspects of both African and Western culture, because both of them contain good as well as bad elements. In theory it may be possible to make an "impartial" comparative study between the two. In the final instance, however, we will have to make a choice to be in a position to solve urgent practical problems.

I agree with Kotzé (and disagree with Van Niekerk) that we should not apply Western, Eurocentric norms to judge African culture. I cannot agree, however, that judgement should be postponed.

Having said this, the next logical, very important question to be answered is: According to what perspective then should we choose? The answer, already provided in the preceding pages, needs further elaboration.

### *The standard for our choice between cultures*

History has already given birth to many efforts to explain cultural diversity. According to some, it has a biological-genetic origin. According to others different (social, economic, political and other) circumstances are the reasons or causes for the diversity. All the different theories contain elements of truth, but not one of them succeeded in explaining the mystery of the plurality of cultures. After some time a new theory will replace the one which is no longer fashionable!

The basic error of all of these theories is that their perspective is confined to this world alone. As Christians we know that the human being is not locked up in himself or enclosed in this world. It is therefore not possible to explain his activities, his culture, merely from "below". The most profound questions about culture (of which the reason for cultural diversity is but one) can never be answered satisfactorily, without reference to man's relationship to God. Acknowledging this religious relationship has the following implications:

- Through his creational revelation (cf. Psalm 19, Isaiah 28:23-29, especially verses 26 and 29 and Romans 1:19, 20) God continuously and personally speaks to every human being - not only to Christians - irrespective of his/her culture.
- Because every human being is individually addressed by God, he has to respond to God's Word. Whether we appreciate it or not, we are partners in a dialogue. It is our responsibility to respond. Even if we refuse to listen or respond, or respond in disobedience, it nevertheless will be a (in this case negative) response.

According to this viewpoint, culture could be defined as the totality of man's responses or answers to God's creational revelation.

- As already said, our reaction to God's Word (the culture we create) is not something neutral - it is either done in obedience or the demands of his Word are suppressed in disobedience.
- Culture is therefore not something relative, independent of any norms. God's Word is a normative Word! It is not only the case with his written Word, the Bible. People who have never heard of or read the Scriptures, may know and even obey God's will or laws for life. We read, for instance, in Romans 1:14, 15 that the Gentiles do by "instinct" what God's law commands, because God's commands are written in their hearts.
- According to these divine laws every human being has to structure the four basic dimensions of life: the relationship towards himself, towards others, nature and God. The first diagram (1.5 above) illustrated how India, China, Africa and the West tend to overemphasise one of these dimensions. The second diagram explained how, secondly, each one of them interprets the three other dimensions of life in the light of the one absolutised.

This step could also be visualised for each culture by way of four concentric circles with arrows from the inner circle to each one of the outer circles. The circle in the centre is the most important and it "colours" or determines the character of the surrounding circles or dimensions of life.

- This explanation of cultural diversity has a twofold implication for our evaluation of cultures: (1) Because every culture has to respond to the God-ordained dimensions, it cannot be totally evil, but contains something good and beautiful. (2) Because no culture is a perfect response to God's Word, we should at the same time never forget that every culture - including one's own - contains elements which are not beautiful, good or correct. To clarify my position on both ethnocentrism and relativistic anti-ethnocentrism, more should be said about this second statement.

### *A double-edged sword*

Paul's assessment of the human response to God's Word is unambiguously clear: "*everyone* has sinned and is far away from God" (Romans 3:23). The *everyone* is emphasised and includes Paul's own Jewish culture (verses 9-12): "Are we Jews then in any better condition than the Gentiles? Not at all! ... There is *no one* who is righteous, *no one* who is wise or who worships God. *All* have turned away from God; they have *all* gone wrong;

*no one* does what is right, not even one." (Compare also Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:2 and 53:3.)

This word from Scripture is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it severs every kind of ethnocentrism at the root. *No* culture is perfect and can therefore not be used as a criterion to measure other cultures. On the other hand it rejects relativistic anti-ethnocentrism, which teaches that *every* culture is good in its own way. Because *every* culture has sinned, not *one* is righteous, wise or correct, responding in total obedience to God's Word. We may never accept any culture as it is. We have to test it against God's norms.

On the one hand this final divine judgment on our human cultural endeavours is a reason for grief and repentance. On the other hand it provides the only really liberating perspective in a multicultural world - it liberates us from both ethnocentrism and relativism!

*Also religious relativism to be rejected*

The fact that I accept cultural diversity as well as the freedom of cultural expression, does not imply that I am a (post-modern) cultural relativist. The preceding exposition substantiated this fact clearly. It should be stated as clearly that, in spite of the fact that I am in favour of religious freedom, I am not a religious relativist. The different religions should not be compared with the spokes of a wheel meeting at the axle, or simply regarded as different paths leading to the same mountain top. The Christian faith, when truly based on God's Word (in creation, Scripture and Christ), is unique amongst all other religions. To me Jesus Christ is the only Way, the only Truth (John 14:6. Compare also Acts 4:12.) This viewpoint and its implications are explained in detail in other publications (Van der Walt, 1994b and 1994c).

\* \* \*

In recapitulation the following. This book is trying to encourage and facilitate something extremely difficult: It expects us to jump over our own (cultural) shadows! We do not accept the statement that we are basically all the same. We want to see and acknowledge the - mostly deeply hidden - barriers between people. We furthermore want to look across these barriers - both the barriers of our own and those of other cultures. This is a task of gargantuan proportions for anyone, but especially for Westerners who often regard their own culture as the norm for the rest of

the world. Western science itself is one of the main stumbling blocks in the way of our understanding non-Western cultures such as that of Africa.

## 1.8 Dangers and possible misunderstandings

In conclusion of this chapter I would like to remove possible misunderstandings about my approach to cultural diversity as described in the previous pages.

- The first possible danger is that of *stereotyping*. When reading preceding pages as well as the following chapters, the reaction of the reader could be that I am guilty of generalisation. I fully realise that something like *the African* or *the Western culture* does not exist because the variety encountered within each of them is far too great. However, to get an initial grip on the broader characteristics of a culture, one simply has to generalise. As a scholar I acknowledge the existence of a great variety of "sub-cultures" in both Africa and the West as well as the fact that individuals from these cultures will not always fit snugly into my generalised view. It may, for instance, be possible that some Westerners will fit into my description of African culture better than some Africans themselves do!
- The second danger and possible misunderstanding is that - to a lesser or greater extent - *acculturation* between the two cultures has taken place with the result that they cannot be distinguished so clearly from each other any longer. I indeed haven't taken it into account for the simple fact that the degree of acculturation will differ from place to place. Added to this is the fact that the strong character traits of a culture tend to persist even where substantial acculturation has occurred.
- A third possible misunderstanding may be that the author is simply propogating *apartheid*, even if it is done in a new way. Is it not clear from the fact that he places such emphasis on the differences between the two dominant cultures in South Africa? My reply is that I don't deny the similarities between blacks and whites. I also agree that it is important, especially in the new South Africa, to stress similarities and our common factor of being human. If, however, we want to engage in a penetrating cultural dialogue, the real differences should not be regarded as trivial, of minor importance or be ignored.
- A fourth and last possible point on which I may be misunderstood is the following: How can the author be so *arrogant* as to presume that he can write about African culture? Can one speak with authority about a culture

to which one does not personally belong? My reply to this objection is that someone from outside is often in a better position to discern the prominent features of one's culture. As an outsider I may therefore have an advantage in describing the typical characteristics of a foreign culture, because of the simple fact that it is "foreign" to me. A Chinese proverb correctly states that if one needs a definition of water, one should not ask a fish! A fish is accustomed to the water and perhaps not even aware of it - as we are unconsciously submerged in our own culture(s).

At the same time I have to acknowledge that, in spite of the fact that I have read in depth about African cultures, closely observed them in many African countries and discussed them with black Africans, I often discover that I still think and write in Western categories about African culture. I am convinced that nobody will ever succeed in getting rid of his/her own cultural restraints. Therefore I want to state explicitly that what is written in this book is not intended as a final word. It is only a first effort which needs supplementation, precision and correction, especially from the side of blacks who know, experience and live their African culture.

\* \* \*

This introductory chapter has paved the way for the following chapters to give a penetrating analysis of African and Western culture. We will start in the next chapter with the most important one: a comparison between African communalism and Western individualism.

## Chapter 2

### COMMUNALISM OR INDIVIDUALISM?

Africa and the West are different. Their ontologies (understanding of reality), their anthropologies (views of man), views of society, theories of knowing (how knowledge of reality is obtained) and axiologies (norms and values) are often diametrically opposed. One of the outstanding differences between the two cultures which will immediately be noticed by the careful observer, is that the one (Africa) stresses human community, while the other (the West) emphasises the individual as the most important.

#### 2.1 A few examples

This difference in emphasis is clear in the following comparison:

##### **African communalism**

Communal self-concept  
Interdependence  
Survival of the community  
Group assurance  
Co-operation and harmony  
Affiliation  
Shared duties

##### **Western individualism**

Individual self-concept  
Independence  
Survival of the individual  
Personal gratification  
Competition and conflict  
Ownership  
Individual rights

To bring the difference home clearly, two examples could be valuable. Starting from a Western perspective, we will use the same cultural features but indicate how the assumptions and conclusions of Africa can be totally different from that of the West.

- *Buying*, Westerners will assume, is an impersonal economic transaction and their conclusion will therefore be that prices are fixed. One is not really interested in the person (seller) and therefore wants to get it over with as quickly as possible. Traditional Africans, however, view buying as a social person-to-person transaction and therefore they will take their time to bicker over the price in order to establish a personal relationship between buyer and seller.
- *Marrying*, Westerners will assume, is a contract between two individuals. Their conclusion will be that the father and mother of both bride and bridegroom may out of courtesy be asked for their consent to the

marriage, but it is not really of vital importance, because marriage concerns only the two people. According to Africans, however, you do not simply as an individual get married to another individual. You marry (into) a family and even a clan. Stated even better: the two families or clans get married! Many people therefore have to be consulted, negotiations conducted and a "bride price" be paid to the bride before one could dream of getting married!

In the West a wedding is an exclusive affair. A specific number of guests are invited. (In many instances there is a fair amount of arguing as to whom should or should not be invited!)

In Africa the opposite is the case. A wedding will include as many people as possible. On the wedding day, anyone who would like to, attends. But people do not arrive empty-handed. They bring beer and food (besides the gifts for the bridal couple) to add to the celebration.

This communalistic attitude is, of course, not something unique only to Africa. It is encountered on other continents and in parts of the world. We could describe such cultures with different names, such as "primitive", "primal" or "traditional" of which none is really satisfactory. Also the individualistic approach will be encountered in other than Western cultures. They could be named with different names such as "modern", "developed" etc. which again are not very satisfactory descriptions.

I will therefore abide by my characterisations of *communalistic* and *individualistic* to describe African and Western culture respectively.

## 2.2 Communalism versus individualism

The following comparative table offers a number of the most prominent differences between African communalism and Western individualism.

<b>Communalism (NB: not communism or socialism)</b>	<b>Individualism</b>
First the community, then the individual. (I am because we are. I share in the community, therefore I exist.)	First the individual, then the community or social relationships. (We are, because I am. The community exists, because it is constituted by individuals.)



### Implications:

1. A high regard for the group, elevates it above the individual
2. Like people (socially-centred)
3. Inclusive attitude
4. Security
5. Dependence on people
6. Intense, strong personal relationships
7. Open in social context
8. Closed in inter-individual relationships
9. Group pressure strong
10. Individual initiative is not appreciated or encouraged - good human relations are a priority
11. Co-operation
12. Great degree of uniformity
13. *Duties* towards the community are emphasised
14. The law has to restore social harmony - *restitution* is important
15. Readily shares with others, generosity. (Venda proverb: Children share the head of a locust)
16. Eating is mainly a social event with a view to sharing food and discussion
17. Peaceful co-existence is highly regarded
18. Dialogue: decisions have to be taken with the approval of the group, and everybody has the opportunity to air views
19. Modesty, compliance, pliability,

### Implications:

1. A high regard for the individual, elevates it above the group
2. Fear people (ego-centred)
3. Exclusive attitude
4. Loneliness
5. Individual independence
6. Casual, impersonal interpersonal relationships
7. Closed in social context
8. Open in inter-individual relationships
9. The opinion of the group is not so important
10. Individual initiative is highly regarded - personal achievement is more important than attention to the community
11. Competition
12. Individual differences are preferred
13. The *rights* of the individual are stressed
14. The law has to determine which individual is guilty/innocent - *punishment* is important, even though it causes bitterness at times
15. Acquisition for personal use, the danger of materialism
16. Eating is mainly directed at acquiring new energy
17. Confrontation is not avoided at all costs
18. Monologue: decisions are often taken individually or by a few - don't waste time through endless discussions!
19. Honesty, frankness, incorruptib-

- willingness to compromise - character traits which lead to peaceful co-existence with one's fellow man (Westerners see this perhaps as a sign of dishonesty)
20. More casual and *indirect* way of asking and answering questions; would rather keep quiet than disturb relationships; prefers to give the answer one thinks the other would like to hear
21. Values such as friendliness, helpfulness, hospitality, a forgiving nature, patience and brotherliness are highly regarded
22. Poverty means that one does not have children or does not belong to a family
23. *People* are important
24. Joy is experienced in social relationships
25. A community-centred culture: *be available* to others
26. Builds relationships by greeting people
27. Greet with a soft handshake, don't look each other in the eye
28. Prefers to do things *together*
29. It is not fitting to work for individual status - the norm is group status. (Good social character implies acceptance and guarantees status)
30. Salvation is acceptance by the group
- ility, steadfastness and perseverance - all individual virtues. (The African might, as a result of these, regard the Westerner as being rude)
20. More *direct* questions and answers; if necessary, somebody is told the unmitigated truth - even if it hurts and is injurious to relationships
21. Formality, independence, self-sufficiency, etc. are highly regarded
22. Poverty is an indication that one (as an individual) does not have a (large) house, (expensive) car and (huge) salary
23. *Things* are important (possessions, buildings, machines)
24. Joy is sought in possessions
25. A task-oriented culture: *do* something for others
26. Obtains information in greeting someone
27. Greet with a firm grip, looking the other straight in the eyes
28. Prefers doing something yourself, *on your own*
29. Strives for individual achievement and excellence. (For this reason academic qualifications can provide status)
30. A more individualistic concept of happiness and therefore also of the Biblical concept of salvation

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 31. Responsibility is easily shifted on to the community - and everybody's responsibility easily becomes nobody's  | 31. Individual responsibility is emphasised   |
| 32. Group egoism   | 32. Ordinary, individual egoism   |
| 33. Ethnic or tribal ethics or morality. Right means defending your own group and wrong means to sin against your own group  | 33. More universal ethics: any transgression against other individuals is therefore wrong                                 |
| 34. Shame plays a more important role than guilt in ethics (it is important that people should not know that you erred, so that your public image should not be damaged)                           | 34. Guilt is perhaps more important than a sense of shame (personal guilt is felt even though nobody else knows about it) |
| 35. Tolerance and forgiveness, easier acceptance of others' viewpoints and religions   | 35. More intolerant and inclined towards conflict - something is either true or false                                     |
| 36. Marriage is compulsory for all, needs the consent of the community and intended in the first place to engender children  | 36. Not such strong pressure to marry, and marriage is in the first place intended for the sake of the two individuals    |
| 37. Strong bonds with the <i>extended</i> family (many brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers)   | 37. Slacker bonds with a <i>nuclear</i> , more mobile family  |
| 38. More personal communication by way of the spoken word (cf. riddles, proverbs, poetry, stories, dramas and song). Thus: oral tradition, strongly developed memory, danger of parroting in study | 38. More impersonal modes of communication by means of the written, printed word and electronic media                     |
| 39. Little personal space required   | 39. Huge personal space needed  |
| 40. Spend much time with other people  | 40. Have little time for fellow human beings  |

### 2.3 The beautiful sides of African communalism

Space does not allow us to discuss all the 40 different points of the above comparison. What follows will only describe in broad outlines some aspects of African communalism. Because this book is written, in the first

place, for white Westerners to assist them in their understanding of black African culture, the emphasis will be mainly on the latter. It is taken for granted that Westerners will at least know something about their own culture. Only something very briefly will therefore be said about Western individualism.

### *Man as a communal being*

Creation is man-centred and man is socially directed. Tempels (1959:43) already noticed this: "The created universe is centred on man" and "Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings" (Ibid.:64). Even while God is the Origin or the Creator of reality, man takes the central, most important place in creation.

But, "for the Bantu, man never appears in fact as an isolated individual, as an independent entity. Every man, every individual, forms a link in the chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his ancestry and sustaining below him the line of his descendants ... the Bantu is quite unable to conceive an individual apart from his relationship ..." (Tempels, 1959:71, 72).

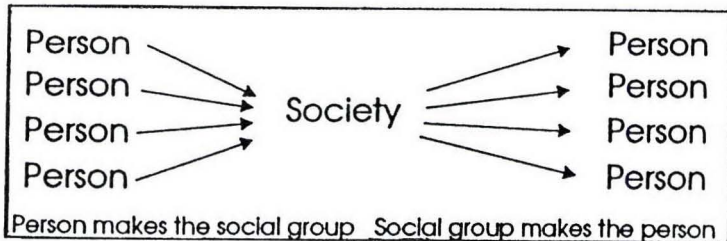
Subsequent to Tempels, many researchers have confirmed and reconfirmed this. I mention, as a passing example only, Marguerite Kraft's (1978) study on the Kamwe in Northeast Nigeria: "... the Kamwe person, according to tradition, has no identity apart from his family - he reflects his family, he is obliged to his family, and he depends on his family ... The family unit is the 'glasses' through which the world is seen" (Ibid.:13). And Mbiti (1970: 14), an African, puts it as follows: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".

Many people in South Africa today are interested in and write on *ubuntu* (cf. Shutte, 1993:46-58). Mostly, however, it is not very clear what *ubuntu* means. According to myself the essence of *ubuntu* is communalism and its implications such as unity, solidarity and communality. Mbigi and Maree (1995:2) correctly writes: "The cardinal belief of *ubuntu* is that *man can only be man through others*".

If we cursorily compare the traditional African view with the Western way of thought, the uniqueness of the first will emerge more clearly. Western thought moves from various individuals to a view of society; the direction of the traditional African's thought is precisely the opposite: society is the point of departure. One could also say that the West often has mere

*collections* of individuals as against Africa's true *communities*. Westerners often agglomerate in a societal structure simply out of individual, selfish motives, because this will enable them to attain things that they would not be capable of if they were simply separated individuals. The *our* is an addition, while this is an essential and innate component for the African.

In a nutshell, the viewpoint of communalism is: "First the community and in the second place the individuals", while individualism says: "First the individual(s), then the community". Explained by way of a diagram:



### *Duties - not rights*

This view of the traditional African has enormous consequences. Menkiti (1979:167) mentions for example the interesting fact that, unlike Western societies which are organised on the basis of *rights*, for the traditional African the concept of *duties* predominates. "In the African understanding priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to collectivity, and their rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to the exercise of their duties. In the West, on the other hand, we find a construal of things in which certain specified rights of individuals are seen as antecedent to the organisation of society, with the function of government viewed, consequently, as being the protection and defence of these individual rights."

### *The ideal person according to African culture*

Virtues of sharing and compassion are regarded very highly in Africa. The individual has a social commitment to share with others what he has. Stinginess is anti-social and thus one of the greatest imaginable sins. One

seldom hears the traditional African saying that "this is *my* land", or "*my* cattle". Usually they will say that "this is *our* land" or "*our* goats".

The African has his own idea of what the "ideal person" should be and this is determined - as could be expected - by the importance that he allocates to personal relationships. Marguerite Kraft (1978:52ff) devotes a special chapter to the ideal view of man from the Kamwe perspective: "Kindness and good character, generosity, hard work, discipline, showing honour and respect and living in harmony."

These virtues and values are kept vivid by the Africans' proverbs and songs. Proverbs are therefore useful means by which to determine what the anthropology of a group is, because these reveal to us what they revere and what they hate, what they respect in a person and what they find reprehensible. These offer us a glimpse into their hearts. One such proverb which recurs in various languages right across Southern Africa is (in Tswana, the language spoken where I live): "Motho ke motho ka batho" (Man is a man through other people). In a more positive manner, then, this renders the Western idea that "no man is an island".

Against this background of the priority of interpersonal relationships and co-operation, one has to note the fact that Africans especially inculcate characteristics such as friendliness, helpfulness, modesty and compliance in their children. If we keep in mind that most Western people highly regard traits such as resoluteness, frankness and honesty, even if this might lead to a clash with the community, then one can understand why the African often sees the Westerner as being rude, and the Westerner often sees the African as being dishonest.

Ruch and Anyanwu (1984:140) arrange the typical African virtues in the following three categories:

- "*Self-control and humility*: prudence, patience, moderation and politeness are the clearest expressions of this self-control, and incidentally those which most often exasperate Westerners. It is the old *in medio stat virtus*: no precipitation, no undue anxiety; don't do or say anything which you might regret or which might destroy the always precarious harmony of the group ...
- "*Faithfulness in friendship*: Many a Western employer considers it a breach of faith when one of his African employees suddenly breaks his contract and goes back home. For the African a signed piece of paper is not

necessarily a promise. Faithfulness assumes a bilateral relationship of personal friendship, of empathy, of family relationship ... etc. It is not necessarily sealed by legal formalities which do not add anything essential to it. Here too one sees the radical difference between the cold, rationalistic and legalistic West and the warmheartedness which ideally ought to dominate personal interrelationships in African societies.

"This faithfulness manifests itself in *gratitude* towards benefactors ... The ungrateful or faithless friend is often referred to by the worst insult: a 'dog'.

- "*Goodness and kindness*: Goodness refers to one's rectitude, nobility and magnanimity towards others. Courage and willpower must be tempered by delicacy and tact and by a certain empathy with one's fellow man. Thus one avoids hardness and contempt, all of which contribute to the breakdown of social harmony."

#### *An appreciation of people for their own sake*

For Westerners in many cases material things have become more important than people. The African respects people, especially older people. Age, which is feared in the West (because one will supposedly then be worthless), is still viewed in Africa as an asset.

K. Kaunda (1966:22-32), former President of Zambia, mentions the following characteristics of his people: "(1) we enjoy people for their own sakes, and not because they can mean something for us; (2) we are patient people; (3) forgiving people and (4) an accepting, inclusive people". Of the latter he says, for example, that "... social qualities weighed much heavier in the balance than individual achievement. The success-failure complex seems to me to be a disease of the age of individualism - the result of a society conditioned by the diploma, the examination and the selection procedure. In the best tribal society people were valued not for what they could achieve but because they were *there*. Their contribution, however limited, to the material welfare of the village was acceptable, but it was their *presence* not their *achievement* which was appreciated" (1966:23). It also annoys him that Westerners manoeuvre their elderly to old age institutions, something which is unheard of in traditional Africa. It is a sin to deprive old people of (especially their grand-) children. It is damaging not to be able to listen to their wisdom. It is therefore not a duty but a pleasure to care for them personally.

A last example of which I personally have had experience in different kinds of meetings, is that important decisions are always taken in concert. A Westerner does not hesitate to make a quick decision by himself. Africans do this *together* - they talk about a matter until everybody agrees, no matter how long it takes. Decisions are not simply taken by means of a majority vote.

### *Appreciation for Africa's emphasis on the community*

It is a fact that Western Christians (such as missionaries) often had the attitude that the people of Africa, who clung to traditional customs, were always wrong and the whites always right. Such people did not see the wealth of African culture. An African once (with justification) referred to them as (spiritual) cannibals, devouring the African's personality and leaving behind him an unattractive, individualistic person who lacks harmony with those with whom he has to live. The theology of such missionaries is also in error, because they deny God's creational revelation to the African. Before they even had contact with the Bible, God already spoke to the hearts and the consciences of the people of Africa. That is why they are usually, as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned, superior to the Westerner.

## **2.4 The shadows of communalism**

Just as little as we should idealise and idolise Western culture should we romanticise African communalism. It would be dishonest not to mention examples on the debit side as well. An over-appreciation of the community must of necessity imply under-appreciation of the individual.

### *Group pressure*

Community constraints can at times be enormously strong. And because the individual has to wait for seniority and the community before taking any initiative - in contrast to the West, where the individual usually stimulates the community - and the community usually comes into motion more slowly when it comes to change, it often causes great frustration for the progressive individual. The individual is also limited to a specific position in the social hierarchy. (Traditional African societies are not egalitarian, as people often tend to think, but hierarchical.) If he moves out of this hierarchy, he disturbs the social balance. If somebody has more wealth (for example, has a shop or a farm that yields more because of progressive methods) than his allotted position warrants, that person is easily suspected



of practising black magic. Because wealth is essentially a limited commodity, the perception is that he could have achieved what he did only by robbing someone else of the limited amount available!

Boon (1996:107, 108), executive chairman of a large business group in South Africa, sees this tendency in African culture as a great stumbling block in the acceptance of responsibility: "The process of personal responsibility works directly against the African concept of *uMona*. For want of a better description, this is the 'tallest poppy' syndrome. If you stick your head out or raise it above the group, it is seen as exposing the group and pressure will be brought to bear on the individual to retract. This can extend to threats of violence, witchcraft and even death, and needs to be taken seriously ... During the freedom struggle *uMona* was used as control. Anyone standing against the group was in severe danger. This culture now disempowers many managers ... Leaders must be aware of the enormous courage it takes for any individual to stand against *uMona*."

### *Envy*

Envy is a common phenomenon in Africa. (Somebody once referred to it as the "national evil" in a country like Malawi.) As long as someone gains his riches through honest, hard work, a Westerner will usually not have many problems with him. The traditional African does not always realise that greater wealth is mostly the result of hard work. This kind of envy undoubtedly hinders development and progress.

This is also true of the tendency to evade individual responsibility by shifting the burden on to the community.

### *Ethics of shame*

The reasons why one refrains from doing wrong should not simply be shame when one's faults are exposed, causing one to lose one's position in society. Personal relationships are often more important for an African than the truth is. A Westerner feels that he has the right to speak the truth. If an African realises that speaking the truth is going to cause trouble and incite people to hostility and hatred, he will rather keep quiet. To say to somebody's face: "You are lying!" is a great sin. Therefore you simply remain quiet or you pretend to believe what he is saying. You will say to someone who wishes to drive with you that you will pick him up tomorrow - rather than saying that he cannot come with you. Another example: if your mother-in-law asks for a goat, you dare not say directly that you do

not wish to give it to her. If she enquires again later, you simply say that you are still looking for a goat! It is much more important to respect people than to speak the truth. Fear of trouble often makes Africans say *yes* when they mean *no*.

This habit of pretending to be willing to do something (unreliability, according to the West) does present difficulties for the dissemination of the Gospel in Africa. In the churches this tendency has had the result that the sins of the members and the officials of the church are concealed and not made public. (Behind the person's back, however, gossip goes on unchecked!) The Bible teaches, however, that man should fear God more than man.

### *A form of idolisation*

An African Christian, T. Adeyemo (1979), reveals the negative side of African communalism unequivocally when he comes to the conclusion that salvation and blessedness for the African (even Christians among them) often mean acceptance by society. Another researcher, H.J. Möller (1972: 430), does not hesitate to say: "Good group liaison is to me the central core of the urban African's view of life, and constitutes his actual idol, to which he is enslaved ...". In contrast with the romantic idealising of this communal awareness (for example, the idea that only the African can really know what the communion of the holy means) he postulates (ibid.:434) that the church should take note of this, and that churches will have to be much more strongly cohesive groups in order to obtain the necessary attraction, but the churches should also be keenly aware of the fact that traditional communalism is by nature (group) egoism, and differs radically from the true communion of Christians.

As is true of Western culture, then, we should also, apart from appreciating it, look critically at African culture. No culture is perfect, revealing both light and shadow. The African has understood and accepted a great deal of God's creational revelation. But this has not been complete, and in many ways it also differs from God's Scriptural revelation.

## **2.5 Communalism is still a dominant characteristic of Africans**

Many people tend to believe that communalistic behaviour amongst black South Africans is something of their past, traditional culture. This, however, is not the case at all if we read what Kotzé (1990 and 1993) recently wrote. In chapter 1.4 I already indicated that I cannot agree with his viewpoint that culture is determined only by socio-economic-political cir-

cumstances. In spite of that, what he has to say confirms my idea that communalism is the key to understand - both traditional and contemporary - African culture.

Kotzé (1990) speaks of a pervasive collective consciousness overriding the differences in language, tradition, education, occupation and creed amongst black people. This collective consciousness (what we have up till now indicated as communalism) is, according to Kotzé, derived from a common experience. And the common experience is general and total deprivation: low income, unemployment, lack of social stability (in terms of marital instability in the family), lack of residential stability (because of, for instance, migrant labour), malnutrition, poor health, little or no education. In other words total (material, physical, social and intellectual) insecurity as a consequence of which an individual is totally dependent on the rest of the community.

Indirectly, a collective consciousness is the result of growing up or living among those who are totally or partly deprived. Collective consciousness is therefore the result of poverty and not something inherent in, for instance, black people only. If poverty would be replaced by widespread affluence, a different (individualist) perceptual style would develop simply because collective consciousness was not designed for affluence. (Examples of a more individualist attitude amongst affluent black people in South African may be mentioned.)

People therefore think and behave in the way they do mainly as a result of their experience. People who differ in experience will also differ in the ways they react to the same situation, because they interpret the meaning of the situation differently. "As such collective (like individualistic) consciousness is an all-inclusive, omnipresent, subconscious worldview - the way people view the world, life, nature, people, themselves. It determines, for instance, how one defines human nature, masculinity and femininity, authority, love, justice and other ingredients of life" (*op. cit.*: 53).

Kotzé mentions interesting examples of how African people in remote rural villages, a neighbourhood in Soweto or in a small black township experience and know life as members of a group. For the sake of mere survival one has to depend on and co-operate with others in the same situation of deprivation. Because people with a collective consciousness are far less aware of themselves as individuals, their ego's or personal selves are far less of an issue. They are less aware of themselves because they are (in

comparison with individualists) acutely aware of others. There is a far greater perceptual fusion between one's own person and those of others.

We may therefore conclude that African communalism is not something merely inherited as a tradition from the past. Present circumstances in Africa may also strengthen this characteristic culture.

It is therefore interesting to compare the remarkable similarities between *traditional* African culture as we have summarised it (point 2.2 above), and the way Kotzé characterises *contemporary* collective consciousness (abbreviated as c.c.). It becomes even more interesting because he also compares it with Western individualistic consciousness (abbreviated as i.c.) or culture, as we have been doing. He presents the following ten comparisons and illustrates them with concrete examples that we - unfortunately, due to lack of space - cannot repeat here:

- Persons with c.c. are socially open, whereas persons with i.c. are socially closed.
- Persons with c.c. are inter-individually (that is, in private situations) closed, while persons with i.c. are open in inter-individual, private situations.
- Persons (particularly males) with c.c. in various emotional ways constantly seek physical contact with members of the same sex, while males with i.c. shun it.
- By reason of the fusion between the self and the others, persons with c.c. require far less physical space than persons with an i.c.
- Communities characterised by c.c. require collective democracy, consensual procedures and consensus, whereas people with i.c. regularly demand their individual democratic rights.
- In communities dominated by c.c. adjudication is a matter of reconciliation, while the legal process in societies dominated by i.c. is clinically geared to establish right or wrong, innocence or guilt.
- Persons with c.c. are forced to divide their loyalty between the group or community and the workplace, whereas persons with i.c. subordinate group loyalty to professional loyalty.

- C.c. creates an insatiable need for people and social situations; i.c. creates an acute need to escape from people at times.
- C.c. defines time socially and in terms of the immediate present, while i.c. defines time in terms of economic surplus and the future.
- People with c.c. view a handshake as a friendly message of goodwill and brotherhood and it should therefore not be too forceful or aggressive, whereas people with i.c. greet with a firm grip, looking each other boldly in the eye.

We may therefore conclude that African communalism is not something merely inherited as a tradition from the past. Present circumstances in Africa may strengthen this characteristic culture.

If we view the African culture as a response to God's creational revelation (cf. chapter 1) it contains a special beauty, dignity and legitimacy. According to Donovan (1982) he had to come to Africa to experience - for the first time in his life - what real community means. Next to the positive we, however, also have to take note of the negative: its lack of beauty and dignity. The irony is that the negative is the result of an over-emphasis of something (e.g. community) which in itself is not bad!

## 2.6 Something about Western individualism

The fact that Western individualism was only mentioned in the comparative table, but was afterwards not discussed as fully as African communalism, is not because I am uncritical about Western culture. The only reason is that this book is written in the first place for white Westerners to assist them in understanding African culture. At the same time a critical look at one's own culture could contribute towards greater openness towards other cultures. Even if not in such detail, we will therefore conclude with some critical remarks about Western individualism. I will employ only one source to do so. Even if this book is, according to my own viewpoint, not critical enough about Western individualism (in its American form), it remains one of the few books written by Westerners who do not simply take individualism for granted. The book is the best-seller *Habits of the heart; individualism and commitment in American life* (1985, updated with a new introduction in 1996) written by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and Tipton.

## *Liberalistic individualism*

According to *Habits of the heart* individualism is the essence of American culture. It is a liberalistic individualism, because freedom is regarded as the highest American value. The emphasis is on free *from* and not necessarily freedom *towards* something. Americans want to do what they like, want to be left alone, to be independent, not to be involved or committed. The struggle against dependence to be independent and autonomous is an overriding concern. Americans don't like having responsibilities towards others. They also want to be free from the past and from tradition. Even justice is regarded simply as every individual's right to do as he pleases in the attainment of personal happiness. Self-fulfilment and self-realisation are of cardinal importance.

## *Individualistic values*

In *Habits of the heart* the typical values of individualism are spelled out clearly: (1) independence and self-sufficiency, (2) perserverance, initiative, efficiency and hard work making possible the "self-made" self, (3) being impersonal, hard and powerful, (4) competition and individual achievement is praised, (5) success is highly evaluated and measured in terms of material prosperity (capitalism), (6) cash, consumption and convenience (the three c's) are important and (7) finally individualistic American culture is driven by a strong faith in progress - the future is of far greater importance than the present and the past.

## *Consequences*

The writers of the book are of the opinion that most Americans do not really proceed beyond a negative concept of freedom (free *from*). They do not have a notion of its possible positive meaning (freedom *towards*). Their freedom, for example, simply means that they do not want to be bound, obliged or committed. The writers are of the opinion that for this reason individualism has become a cancer destroying freedom itself. The "freedom" to be left alone as an individual in the end delivers exactly what people wanted: a very lonely freedom. The book describes loneliness as a national feeling. Egoism (the writers acknowledge that individualism is basically the same as egoism) cannot expect something better than isolation and loneliness!

No real criterion exists against which achievement can be measured - except greater income and consumption. An important consequence is that

the inherent value of work is also lost. Because success is separated from the deeper meaning of life, more and more Americans question its worth.

Even self-realisation and self-fulfilment finally appear to be illusionary concepts. The self-made self in the end is an empty self! Many people, it is said, have a terrible feeling of emptiness. The final consequence of individualism is nihilism!

Individualism's consequences for the community and the environment is even worse. The book complains about the absence of interdependence, solidarity, trust, care and compassion. Softness and weakness are despised and for their poverty the poor have only themselves to blame. It is stated that Americans do not have a need for God and therefore they don't feel a need to have contact with their fellow human beings. According to their capitalist ideology not only their human but also their natural environment is exploited for personal enrichment.

### *The irony of individualism*

In spite of the fact that the writers of *Habits of the heart* are not happy with individualism, they don't want to totally reject it. They have succeeded, however, in clearly describing the bankruptcy of Western individualism.

The irony is that when one ignores the three other basic relationships (towards God, one's neighbour and nature), one actually destroys oneself. One becomes lonely and an empty self!

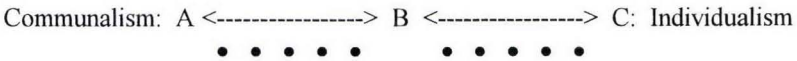
Individualism carries with itself its own bankruptcy, the germ of its own decay, death and destruction. It tries to reduce the three relationships (towards God, fellow humans and nature) to what value they could have to the individual. Because a relationship to God and other human beings could be of little value to the self, they are rejected. Nature is exploited for personal gain. But finally one discovers that, as an individual, one's life is empty, without meaning. In its extreme, radical individualism annihilates not only the first three relationships, but all four of them!

The opposite, however, is also true: When one lives in the correct relationship towards God, one's fellow human beings (the community) and nature, one will personally benefit. One will not be an empty self, but fully human!

## 2.7 Degrees of communalism and individualism

To conclude our comparison between communalistic Africa and the individualistic West, it is important to remove a possible wrong impression. It is not true that Africa does not know or acknowledge individuality at all - just as it is not correct to think that the West has no idea of what community is.

Both types of cultures are encountered amongst different groups in different parts of the world in different degrees. (We even encounter cultures which are mixtures of communalism and individualism. Usually they are communalistic in their private family relationships, but more individualistic in public life.) The grading of communalistic and individualistic cultures may range from very weak and passive to very strong and active. The following diagram helps to explain:



A indicates an extreme form of communalism and C an extreme form of individualism. At point B the contrast between the two cultures is not so sharp and the differences between communalism and individualism become vague. The dots indicate different people or groups. People, groups and cultures close to A and C will differ clearly from each other. Those, however, close to point B, will not be as clearly distinguishable from each other.

Africans and Westerners with a low degree of communalism and individualism, will therefore be much closer to each other (the two dots on both sides of point B) than either the African to his strongly communalistic fellow-Africans (the dot next to A) or the Westerner to his extremely individualistic fellow-Westerners (the dot next to C).

Some white Westerners, for instance in rural areas or in the southern parts of Europe, reveal communalistic tendencies, while some black Africans, especially those who are urbanised and under strong Western influence, tend to become more individualistic in their behaviour. Culture is not something static, but it changes continuously. In our "global village" the different cultures are no longer as isolated as in the past and they reciprocally influence each other.

This chapter in fact only concentrated on point A and C of the above diagram and did not pay attention to the different nuances in both com-



munalism and individualism. The reason is, as stated previously, to clearly indicate the differences between the two types of culture. Reality, however, is always much more complex than our scientific representation can indicate!

One last important question remains to be answered in this chapter: How does the Word of God judge communalism and individualism? The careful reader will realise that implicitly the answer has already been given in the preceding pages. It is, however, necessary to state more explicitly the liberating perspective of the Bible.

## 2.8 **The Bible rejects both communalism and individualism**

Any -ism, like communalism and individualism, entails an absolutisation of something good in God's creation. In spite of their beautiful aspects, both of them are distortions - also from a Biblical perspective. Being aware of this is important, because many Western Christians try to prove their individualistic perspective from the Bible. Other Christians, however, frustrated by Western individualism and its consequences (loneliness, estrangement and the falling apart of marriages and families) regard communalism as a Biblical remedy to the dehumanising effects of an individualistic way of life. Indeed, because of the extreme poverty of our Western experience of community, there is much to be learnt from communalist societies such as those of Africa.

Yet communalism offers no real alternative to Western individualism, but just another kind of impoverishment. Communalism has its own dehumanising effects in its denial of human individuality and the subordination of all human experience to a single all-embracing community.

The consequence of both individualism and communalism is a mutilated view of the human being. The anthropology of neither recognises the integral, full human being created and redeemed by God as revealed in the Scriptures.

### *Asking the wrong question*

Both individualism and communalism provide unsatisfactory answers to the question "Who am I?" because each likewise asks the wrong question. Each of them asks what is *within* the human person that gives identity to that person. They each look for something *within* the human world that

gives meaning to human existence. They only differ in what they identify as the source of this meaning within the human being.

Such an approach is a fundamental denial of the Gospel. Because, according to God's Word, it is God in Christ who establishes human identity and gives meaning to human life. The correct answer to the question "Who am I?" is that I am created in the image of God and that (after the fall) this image can be recreated in Christ. The Bible declares that the meaning of being human lies beyond the human being in God. It is in an obedient relationship to Him and his law that we find our true identity. This starting point gives us a true perspective on individuality and communality.

### *Two complementary dimensions*

In the first place we will realise that both are only *dimensions* of the fullness of being human. Therefore neither one of them, nor both together, will give us a complete anthropology. It is therefore more accurate to state that a human person *has* individuality, than to say that the person *is* an individual. And to say that a human being *has* a communal dimension, rather than to say that the person *is* a communal being. Individuality and communality each represents a fundamental quality of humanity, but neither defines the human person.

In the second place complete and healthy human development requires the development of both the individual and communal qualities of humanness, because each one of them represents an important dimension of the fullness of human experience. Neither of them is more important than the other. Fowler (1993b:22) correctly states: "These two qualities, individuality and communality, complement each other. Neither can develop normally without the other. A healthy community life will nurture the individuality of its members and a healthy individuality looks for fulfilment in communal life."

In Scripture both the unique individuality (cf. John 21:20,21) and the communal quality (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27) of the human person are recognised as fully complementary dimensions of human experience. There is no tension or conflict between them and neither is given priority over the other. The Bible records God's dealings with people as individuals as well as communities like families and other societal relationships as well as groups like tribes and nations. It also reveals clearly that God does not only call people to give account to Him individually but also to give an account communally (cf. Luk. 10:13-14 and Rev. 2, 3).

In the third place it is heresy either to say that "I belong to the group" (communalism) or that "I belong to myself" (individualism). Both viewpoints are in conflict with the heart of the Gospel, viz. that in life and death I belong to Jesus Christ, who paid with his own blood to liberate me from the devil. (Cf. for instance, Rom. 14:7, 8 and Eph. 1:1-14. This central Biblical message is also echoed in the very first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism.)

### *Authority*

Starting from the central Biblical message of the Kingship of God, we have to realise that both individualism and communalism involve a fundamental denial of the Gospel. Central to the Gospel is the confession that Christ is Lord. This means that only Jesus Christ has comprehensive and absolute authority over human life. Any claim by a community to have comprehensive authority over the whole of life clearly involves a denial of this confession. This, however, does not imply that God has given unlimited authority to the individual over human life. Scripture gives no foundation for a claim to an *absolute* but only to a *limited* right of individual judgment. Western people should remember that submission to Christ as Lord requires limitation of individual authority in mutual submission to one another in different societal relationships (cf. Eph. 5:21, Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). God has not given the individual an exclusive right to determine what his will for human life is.

This, of course, does not imply that there is no place for resisting communal authority. No human authority is absolute! This is, however, not based on the priority of the individual over communal judgment. It is based on the illegitimacy of the claim to authority or the abuse of that authority - never because the authority's judgment is simply in conflict with my individual judgement!

### *A liberating perspective*

In recapitulation, the Gospel provides a correcting, liberating invitation to both individualism and collectivism. The Gospel calls people in a communalistic society to an experience of the fullness of being human that communalism has denied them: the experience of individuality and a diversity of societal relationships. For those of us living in an individualistic society, the same Gospel calls us to an experience of the fullness of being human that individualism has denied: the experience of genuine community.

\* \* \*

The importance of what was discussed in this chapter will become clearer in the next chapter: Africa's and the West's conceptions of time are determined by their communalistic and individualistic points of departure.

## Chapter 3

### ENJOYING OR USING TIME?

South Africa is the very last of the African countries to have entered the phase of decolonisation since 1964. For many black people of South Africa this means the end of the powerful hold which Western culture has had on the southern tip of Africa for almost 350 years. The new freedom has also inculcated a desire in black people to return to original African culture. Whereas politicians and the state used to determine our identity (via racial classification laws, among others) we are now able to decide for ourselves who we are, in which way we wish to be regarded by others and whether we are comfortable with it.

This quest for a new identity is applicable to both the West-oriented whites and Africa-oriented blacks.

In the past, members of the until recently dominant Western culture were not always so aware of their own cultural identity because it was simply regarded as the norm. Now they have to rediscover their real (new) identity and they have to determine their identities in relation to those of others. Such an investigation of oneself is not always easy - in many cases one must first be liberated from one's former (imposed) self-image in order to discover who one really is or would wish to be in the new South Africa. Many black people have internalised the image of inferiority which white Western culture had of them. Today, however, they have come to the realisation that they have to rid themselves of that attitude and have to recover their own human dignity and their own cultural identity.

Both groups are also realising that their differences are not simply skin-deep - it is not merely a question of racial or colour differences, but a far more fundamental issue. For a real encounter between Africa and the West in South Africa a simple attitude of colour-blindness won't do. The meeting - confrontation? - will have to take place at a much deeper level if we really want to make progress in the process of nation-building.

In this chapter we will discuss one problem (different conceptions of time) in which the clash between Africa and the West becomes very clear. But before we do so, as an introduction, a few words about the present debate between Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism.

### 3.1 Afrocentric or Eurocentric?

If I am assessing the situation correctly, it does not appear that the two dominant cultures in South Africa are succeeding in fundamentally meeting and truly enriching each other. *Transformation* at the present moment seems to be the magical formula in South Africa. Unfortunately, however, the same word has two totally different meanings to the Westerners and the Africans.

The Westerner's attitude can be compared to that of a chameleon. In the new environment he changes his colour so as to adapt and be as accommodating as possible. His essential nature, however, does not change. With a sense of desperation, we cling to the Western way of doing things and especially to Western standards - otherwise, it is said with dire foreboding, we are moving inexorably downhill.

For the African the necessary transformation of the South African society could best be explained with the image of a tadpole: Society should not merely change in terms of colour, but in terms of shape. It should undergo a metamorphosis and change from being a fish to a frog: We have to get rid of the Eurocentric way of thinking and replace it with a clearly Afrocentric paradigm. A radical transformation is required!

The two important questions are *what* should be transformed and *how* it should be done?

Amongst the blacks in South Africa we could distinguish between a more moderate and a more radical approach to transformation. Prof. S. Bengu, Minister of Education, wants a negotiated settlement regarding especially the educational values and structures which should be changed. The black students, inspired by apparent Marxist revolutionary ideas, want to get rid - if possible overnight - of everything, including the underlying educational values and present structures. They are against capitalists and are fighting for the underdogs. According to their viewpoint, transformation may, if necessary, also imply violent destruction. Transformation simply means a take-over! (The tadpole is not allowed to gradually develop into a frog, it is simply replaced by a frog!) The inherent danger is that educational institutions are transformed into socio-political instruments, losing their academic character.

In this situation white academics and students are forced to negotiate (according to the more moderate view of transformation) or capitulate (in the case of the more radical model).

Where to *start*, which *route* to follow and which *goal* to bear in mind in the process of transformation is not clear at all. If we could only reach clarity of the basic *norms* which should guide this whole transformation process, it could have been a much easier transition.

The whites would prefer peaceful negotiations, with no disruption, destruction or decline in standards as well as a recognition of the academic nature of the educational institutions to be transformed. The values the blacks would emphasise are, for instance: relevance, access, accountability, transparency, proportional representation (80% blacks, 20% whites), affirmative action, service to the community, English as a medium of instruction etc.

This brief detour into the issue of educational transformation will be sufficient to put the much wider-ranging debate between the so-called Eurocentric and Afrocentric approach in South Africa in context.

I am of the opinion, however, that neither Eurocentrism nor Afrocentrism offers a true solution. (In the last chapter we will return to the issue of transformation.)

*Eurocentric* and *Afrocentric* can simply indicate different worldviews or sets of values, which have their origin and application in either Europe or Africa. *Eurocentrism* and *Afrocentrism*, however, indicate two -isms, the one-sided absolutisation of a specific culture, which is wrong because every culture is a human creation, flawed and mostly one-sided. (Compare chapter 1.)

### 3.1.1 *Eurocentrism does not offer a real solution*

Eurocentrism is not acceptable. By way of illustration we mention the present debate on standards and relevance in the field of education. Western teachers, lecturers and academics are immediately suspicious if the need to make educational programmes and methods relevant to the needs of the African situation is mentioned. This would, they maintain, immediately imply a diluting or lowering of standards of education.

In contrast to this, black teachers, lecturers and academics regard the South African educational institutions as "ivory towers" where peoples' eyes are

shut to the real needs of the society of which they are a part. The educational institutions should not simply strive for academic excellence, but should actively become involved in the daily issues and should help to find solutions for problems which beset society. The South African educational institutions should no longer be a perfect imitation of European-American institutions, but should adjust to the African circumstances, and have a clearly African character.

I have the feeling that neither the one-sided emphasis on Western standards (excellence) nor the emphasis on African relevance (applicability) will bring us closer to a solution. We may not absolutise either of the two.

Does academic excellence mean that in South Africa we should develop an obsession with international recognition? Does it mean that we should be doing sophisticated research in areas which Western people regard as important? Is it not possible to be relevant to the African situation and at the same time remain in contact with the international academic community?

I think we should ask ourselves: *Who* and according to *what criteria* will it be determined what excellent standards are? What should excellence consist of? In other words, *in what context* do we speak of excellence? We can therefore produce excellent academic work measured in Western terms which is totally irrelevant or meaningless for the South African situation. Obversely we can render academic work (such as research) which, according to Western standards, is pretty elementary, but which is, at the same time, highly relevant to and useful for our present situation.

My conclusion is, therefore, that excellence and relevance need not exclude each other. It is a false dilemma, a symptom of the fact that Africa and the West have not really had an in-depth encounter in South Africa. The emphasis on standards as against relevance is still a remnant of our Eurocentric mentality. I am of the opinion that one can produce work of the highest academic standard which may simultaneously be 100% relevant.

### 3.1.2 *Afrocentrism can also not succeed*

On the other hand there is the danger of Afrocentrism, sometimes also called Africanisation, in the new South Africa.

The meaning of the concept *Africanisation* is not clear at all. After much reading and many interviews, P.J. Vorster (1995:157) could distinguish at least six meanings! The following four can be clearly distinguished: (1)



that black people should be in control; (2) that something, such as, for example, a specific technology, should be devised, applied and sold by black people; (3) that something of Western origin, such as for example a specific custom, institution or technology should be adjusted to or contextualised within African circumstances; (4) that the traditional African culture should be revived. I am not going to comment on the first three meanings now (see chapter 7.3). I would like to expand somewhat only on the last notion, viz. Africanisation as the return to traditional African culture.

According to this viewpoint African culture with all its institutions is unique and unalterable. Any change to the African culture in all its manifestations would be a catastrophic destruction of the African - culturally, socially and politically. African customs, habits and traditions should therefore be protected against alien, especially Western, influences. In those cases where it has been suppressed, as in South Africa, everything possible should be done to revive the original. The only real solution for the new South Africa is to return to its original roots. These cultural revivalists have a very romantic and idealistic notion of a glorious past which has to be restored.

Apart from the fact that many Africans with so-called "divided souls" still think that the only way to regain their lost identity is to return to the past, many others in African countries which have been independent for 30 or 40 years are realising, however, that such a reversion to the past is no longer possible. D.K. Agyeman (1996) of Ghana, for example, mentions many examples of how modern African culture has become irrevocably intertwined with the West. Marriage and family life, tribal life and religious views have all changed radically. Simple phenomena such as modern transport and roads have inculcated change in many other fields as well (pp. 6, 7). In difficult modern economic conditions typical African communalism, especially in the cities, is disintegrating rapidly and making way for the Western individualist principle of personal interest. Increasing urbanisation in Africa often has the concomitants of crime, breakdown of marriages, prostitution, child neglect, disease, unemployment and much more - things which had earlier been inconceivable.

Agyeman therefore refers to those who strive for a renaissance of the original African culture, as hypocrites. For while, on the one hand, they accuse the West of all that is negative and of propagating Africanisation, they are, on the other hand, the ones who indulge in practices which are totally alien to traditional African culture. Tribal chiefs, for example, are very fond of the latest model Western cars, have extravagant weddings and funerals in Western style and enjoy American films on television. On the

one hand the alien influence from the West is held responsible for the conditions in Africa, while on the other hand the West is slavishly imitated. According to him it would be better, instead of exalting the past, to realise that the West also had to make the difficult transition from an agrarian to an industrial society and that Africa could learn from the West in this regard so as not to make the same mistakes. The influence of the West on the continent is already so considerable that the ideal of a reprimination to the "good old days" is simply not attainable any longer.

Agyeman gives the impression of being a greatly Westernised African. I would also be hesitant to brand Africans who behave in the ways he describes as hypocritical. They may be quite sincere, but not capable of integrating the new (Western culture) with the old (traditional African culture).

The encounter between cultures is a complicated process. Not in every case will the result be that the one culture is dominated by the other. This is clear in the case of inculturation. When this occurs, Western culture is incorporated in African culture and rendered harmless. Not in every instance, therefore, is African culture damaged or even wiped out in the case of modernisation or Westernisation.

### 3.1.3 *The road ahead, illustrated by way of a concrete problem*

I trust that these few introductory remarks have made it clear that both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism are equally unattainable - and even dangerous - ideals. In South Africa it is impossible, however, to live and think exactly as in the West. Africa cannot be Westernized 100% - one will have to keep cognisance of the African context. Predominantly Western institutions, like universities, will have to move "closer" to Africa. Obversely it is impossible to ignore the strong Western influence on South Africa, to try to reject it and to think that one could *fully* revert to traditional Africa. As far as I can see, there should be no serious objections against Africanisation in its third meaning explained above (adaption to or *contextualising* it to African circumstances).

Apart from Africanisation in its *cultural* connotation (the fourth meaning above), it should also imply *organisational* independence (the first meaning above). Black people should be appointed in executive positions and should influence decision-making. They should have equal opportunities, and to get them out of their disadvantaged position, affirmative action may be necessary. All this will not necessarily imply the lowering of standards, but the advancement of the standards of more people!

The second, *intellectual* meaning of Africanisation, implying that also intellectually black people should contribute, is to my mind one of its most important meanings. The other forms of empowerment may still be on the surface or of a cosmetic nature. It is, however, of the utmost importance that the African mind should be "decolonised" to enable Africans to think and act independently. Technology can serve as an example. Instead of simply *transferring* technology from North (West) to the South (Africa), African people will have to become technologically *educated*. Their technological education should equip them in such a way that they themselves are in a position to invent new, appropriate technology for our continent. (We will again return in Chapter 7 to the issue of Africanisation.)

But how this may be achieved, is a difficult question!

I will try in this chapter to reach a solution by concentrating on a concrete issue: the different conceptions of time, experience and use of time in Africa and the West.

### 3.2 The problem of time

White Westerners tend to become very irritated with our black fellow citizens: "They are regularly late for important appointments and waste the whole meeting's time, they do not adhere to work schedules, do not plan ahead - they are simply too slow!"

The black African has exactly the opposite problem with Western whites: "They want to start the meeting at exactly the specified time, while I still have more important things (other than the meeting) to do first. They drive you mad with their precise work schedules, they always want to plan things meticulously- they dash around like beheaded chickens!"

Because of their communalistic attitude, communication between people is of great importance to Africans. They wish to listen to each other, hear each other. We could describe it as a talkative culture. The Western individualist has difficulty in understanding the need for so much talking!

Different conceptions of time is not a problem unique to South Africa. Carlos Fuentes, a Mexican author and spokesman of the developing countries in Latin-America, says (in 1981) in a lecture in the USA: "The final question of time is whether we shall live together or die together ... The West has been in love with its successive linear image of time ... It has condemned the past to death and the tomb of irrationality and celebrated

the future as the promise of perfectibility." In this way the West has denied the existence and rights of non-Western cultures. This is a crucial issue to him for: "We shall know each other or exterminate each other." I think that exactly the opposite could be said by an American about the Mexican concept of time!

### 3.3 The more profound cultural background

Whites and blacks can, as a result of their different conceptions of time, easily become stereotyped, so that the blacks can accuse the whites of being workaholics and the whites the blacks of indolence. Before one does this, however, it is important not to look merely at external behaviour (the tip of the iceberg, or in African terms, the ears of the hippo), but to probe more deeply (the largest part of the iceberg which is under water, or the whole body of the hippo).

People's worldviews and cultures differ. Each group looks at reality through its own coloured spectacles and so creates its own world. We do not have only one reality (either the Western or the African), but different ones. Each person naturally feels comfortable with his own - because he/she personally created it. What people see is therefore what they have been conditioned to see from early childhood. And if people come from different cultures the two worlds may differ completely and even clash with each other.

One should be able to distinguish between the various layers of any culture. There are deeper, more hidden layers (for example, religion and worldview) which are difficult for outsiders to fathom and even the adherents of the culture find it difficult to describe. Any culture, however, also has outer or more superficial layers (behaviour, customs, uses, etc.) which are visible to other people and of which the adherents of the culture are more conscious.

It is the intention of this book to bring something more about the hidden layer (the body of the hippo) to the surface and to help people to try and understand why the West and Africa have such different experiences of time. The reason is located in totally different conceptions of what time really is.

We as Westerners tend to think far too often that we can solve all our problems with (preferably the latest) technology. Give the new black leadership corps a course in management science with all the concomitant

techniques and all of our problems will be solved! I simply do not believe this. Mere techniques without insight into deeper cultural differences simply will not help.

Silberbauer (1975:2), writing about the African worker, correctly says as follows: "...the White man often does not understand his fellow African worker, and the African worker fails to assimilate the culture of the Whites. The Africans may learn the White man's language, copy some of his mannerisms and learn some of his skills but this is only the very surface of acculturation. A man remains rooted in the culture of his home where he speaks his own language, and worships his own deities and is immersed in the traditional way of life of his people.

"So, to understand his fellow Black man, the White South African must make an adventurous journey across the frontiers of his own culture and enter the strange and unknown territory of a culture which has its roots, not in the civilization of the West, but in Central Africa".

Elsewhere he writes (1975:39): "Culture is a silent language, and if one does not know something of the other man's culture one can 'hear' so many wrong statements. One can hear insolence where there is respect, ingratitude where there is gratitude or sullenness where there is warmth of feeling. Whether we 'hear' correctly or incorrectly can make a material difference."

Is it really so important to get to know each other at the deeper level? Why should we tire ourselves trying to understand other patterns of behaviour and methods of communication? Is this task not too difficult, too time-consuming, too complex and too vague? I do not think we have a choice. If we do not do it, the tensions and conflicts will simply become bigger and less manageable. We cannot afford ourselves the luxury of ignoring the realities of the different cultures in South Africa.

Should we, however, make the effort, the reward for the trouble can be great. However paradoxical this might sound, understanding and knowing more about other cultures means that you will at the same time have a better understanding and knowledge of your own culture. Discovery of personal identity depends on whether you understand others who have a totally different cultural identity. The study of other cultures leads to a more critical attitude towards your own culture - you cease simply to accept everything because you have always done things in a specific way and because you have always looked at life in a certain way.

Cross-cultural communication, therefore, presupposes more talent than simply climbing the ladder of success within your own culture. It requires sensitivity, intuition, empathy towards other cultures.

### 3.4 General remarks about time

Time is an important facet in any culture. A Westerner, E.T. Hall (1983) says, for example, that "Time ... is a core system in our lives around which we build our picture of the world. If the time systems of two cultures are different, everything else will be different." For a well-known African theologian, J.S. Mbiti (1969) time is also a key concept in the understanding of the traditional religion, worldview and culture of the African. To my mind the viewpoints of both of these people are somewhat exaggerated. One's culture includes more than simply the way in which one regards time. We have also already indicated that one's view of time cannot be isolated from the other characteristics of one's culture. African communalism and Western individualism determine the ways in which they look at, experience and use time. Yet, it remains interesting to look at different cultures through the keyhole of their conceptions of time.

One should also be careful not to reduce time to one facet only. Western chronological-linear time emphasises the physical-spatial aspect of time. Time has to be measurable, and this is done in the West by way of something physical (a minute hand or second hand) which moves across a specific space (the face of the clock). Time indication (clock time) is not time itself, however. (Clocks, at least as we know them, only made their appearance in Europe in the fourteenth century and were initially so expensive as to be affordable only by the rich. It was only in the sixteenth century that they became available to the broader public as well.)

Should space - and time! - have permitted, we could have considered the physical, spatial, biotic, psychical, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical and religious facets of time. Only our experience of time (the emotional or the psychical), will be described as an illustration of one facet of multifaceted time.

It is a well-known fact that a positive experience, something which one enjoys, makes time fly, while a negative experience, something which we do not enjoy, causes time to drag. Time, or rather our experience of time, can therefore be "extended" or "compressed". There is a clear difference between clock time and psychological time. The two can also be in con-

flict. (Just as clock time and biological time may clash - for example in the well-known phenomenon of jet lag.)

Further examples of the relativity of (psychical) time can be found in the fact that any form of concentration can make one totally forget "how much" time has passed. For some reason time also flies more rapidly for older people than for young people. The environment within which one finds oneself also has an influence on one's experience of the passage of time: An unfriendly or uncongenial meeting can prolong time, while the obverse is true for pleasant circumstances. It is a fact that different people and different cultures also have different rhythms. (Equal time intervals make the sequence of events something rhythmic.) We speak of a "slow man/woman" and a "fast man/woman". Two such different persons sometimes find it difficult to synchronize their rhythms. Rhythm is typical of music (cf. typical African rhythms) and other art forms and also of sport - practically the whole of culture. Two cultures with totally different rhythms will therefore find it difficult to synchronize. On the other hand the same rhythm is an important factor which can help a group of people to cohere. They "read" each other more easily.

You might well pose the question: But what is time really? Unfortunately I have to disappoint you - I don't know either. What I do know is that all of reality is a temporal reality, and that temporality determines our life. The church father, Augustine, in his well-known book *Confessiones*, also struggled with the problem of time, and was forced to acknowledge that: "If somebody should ask me what time is, then I know exactly what it is. But as soon as somebody should ask me to describe what it is, I do not know any longer!" We can do no more than concur with him in this confession.

Instead of philosophising about time - and perhaps boring most of my readers - I would like to compare the two visions of time (of Africa and the West) by firstly noting their characteristics and then by describing the implications of their divergent conceptions of time.

Before we come to that, however, a final important remark. I am compelled to generalise to a very large extent. The "typical" Western vision of time is not applicable to all Westerners. (It is more applicable to the northern than to the southern Europeans. In South Africa it will be more applicable to Gauteng than to the Eastern Cape Province.) In some Western nations we find a mixture of the two conceptions of time. (More Western in their public actions but definitely non-Western, closer to African time, in

their personal life.) One can accordingly also not speak of a single traditional African vision of time. By the same token I have not taken account of acculturation. The Western concept of time has not left Africa untouched and to a certain extent the obverse has also happened. (Many of the older rural whites will act more in accordance with an African time concept, while many black people clearly show a Western understanding of time in their actions.)

### 3.5 A SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE VIEWS OF TIME OF AFRICA AND THE WEST

#### AFRICA

#### WEST

Different views about the nature of time
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- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1.1 Something relative (depends on the context as well as on how one uses it in relationship to others or how one experiences it) | 2.1 An absolute   |
| 1.2 Something dynamic   | 2.2 Something static  |
| 1.3 Time is events (that which you do or what happens to you)   | 2.3 Time is mathematical, measured in figures   |
| 1.4 Time is determined by events  | 2.4 Time is determined by a clock   |
| 1.5 Something concrete, interwoven with one's daily existence   | 2.5 Something abstract, independent of ordinary life  |
| 1.6 Organic-holistic  | 2.6 Mechanistic-fragmented  |
| 1.7 Kairological (the right moment in time is important, time is an event)  | 2.7 Chronological (course of time, time interval important)   |
| 1.8 Is located within man, more like natural, biological time   | 2.8 Is located outside man, a watch on the arm or clock on the wall   |
| 1.9 Community-centred (relationships are more important than tasks)   | 2.9 Task/issue-determined (tasks precede relationships)   |
| 1.10 Time moves <i>past</i> man   | 2.10 <i>Man</i> moves <i>through</i> time   |
| 1.11 More directed upon the past and less future-directed   | 2.11 More future-directed, less directed upon the past  |
| 1.12 Time is <i>made</i> when and to the extent that it is needed (for example, for interpersonal communication)                  | 2.12 Time has to be <i>filled</i> (this emerges from words such as <i>time lost, saved, made up, used, wasted, passed</i> ) |



<b>The implications of the two visions</b>
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### AFRICA

### WEST

<p>1.13 Man is the <i>master</i> of time</p> <p>1.14 A tranquil pace, not such a big problem if one has to wait</p> <p>1.15 Relaxed human relationships</p> <p>1.16 Time is there to unite people</p> <p>1.17 A more holistic existence is the result</p> <p>1.18 Enriching</p> <p>1.19 Poor planning</p> <p>1.20 More flexible schedules and procedures render one less effective</p> <p>1.21 Being punctual is not so important</p> <p>1.22 Irritated with the rat race of the West</p> <p>1.23 Africans say that the West <i>idolises</i> time</p> <p>1.24 Africans do not know how to <i>use</i> time</p>	<p>2.12 Man is the <i>slave</i> of time, it regulates the whole of his life</p> <p>2.14 A hurried pace of life, cannot wait</p> <p>2.15 Tense human relationships</p> <p>2.16 Alienates people from each other</p> <p>2.17 Segments man's existence</p> <p>2.18 Impoverishing</p> <p>2.19 Thorough planning</p> <p>2.20 Tight schedules and procedures make one effective</p> <p>2.21 Punctuality</p> <p>2.22 Irritated with slow African time</p> <p>2.23 Westerners say that the African <i>wastes</i> time</p> <p>2.24 Westerners do not know how to <i>enjoy</i> time</p>
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The careful observer will realise that the differences are in keeping with our everyday experience. I would therefore like to confine my remarks only to some of these points (1.9 and 2.9, 1.10 and 2.10, 1.11 and 2.11, 1.12 and 2.12, 1.14 and 2.14 and 1.19 and 2.19).

### 3.6 Community-oriented versus task-oriented

Africa is community-centred, the existence of Africans is determined by human relationships (called communalism). If you appreciate people, it means that you will also have to make time for them and not, as a result of a full programme, simply ignore them or not have enough time to listen to them.

Against that, the individualist West - myself included! - is directed at things, tasks, schedules and procedures. Because these things are regarded

as being very important, they also gradually assume an existence independent of man. This can result in a situation where no cognizance is taken of human needs and desires. All these rules of time and their effects make many Western nations notorious for the fact that in their business practices they do not consider people and they do not pay attention to their employees. While the African considers human relationships, especially in the immediate family, as being the most important thing, these things are vastly neglected by Westerners, with irrevocable alienation, loneliness and disintegration as a result.

Africans' concept of time also interlinks with their view of life as a single stream in which work and leisure flow together. Silberbauer (1975:30) explains: "The African has not got this specific idea of work in his culture. Life is not dualistic, with a theme of work and leisure; it is a single flow of existence. The villager who is intending to sow his crops does not decide that he will start his work at five next morning. He calls together his neighbours for a celebration. They eat and drink and make merry and engage in the fun of cultivating the land as they feel like it."

### **3.7 Time moving "past" man versus man moving "through" time**

The fact that traditional African people are directed to the past, is closely related to their idea of community. To this community not only the living, but also the "living dead" (ancestors) belong. The original, that which lies in the past, is regarded as much more powerful than the present. By way of all kinds of myths and rituals primordial time therefore has to be revived in the present-day to make people healthier and stronger. That which is good therefore lies in the past and not, as Westerners believe, in the future.

We can explain the two different conceptions of time by means of an image (cf. Moreau, 1986). The African view can be compared with somebody who stands in a river. The present is the water surrounding him, the past the water which has flowed past and the future the water which is approaching him. Only the water (time) which has already flowed past (the past) and the water surrounding him (the present) are realities and therefore of importance. The water which is still approaching (the future) is not a reality yet and for that reason is not really important.

The Western view in terms of the same image is different. The person does not stand still in the river, but wades upstream (against a more or less solid mass of water). His attention is directed more at what is to come (the

future) than on the water around him (the present) or the water which has already flowed past him (the past).

The result is a difference in direction and in perspective. It is not as Mbiti (1970:15-20) and Kagame (English & Kalumba, 1996:82-90), among others, maintain that the African does not have a notion of the future. Kato (1987) and Gyekye (1987) has already convincingly criticised and rejected this notion. The difference lies only in the direction. Westerners are more strongly focused upon the future and less directed at the past, while Africans' primary attention is directed at the past and not so strongly focused upon the future (cf. 1.11 and 2.11).

In spite of the fact that J.C. Kotze (1993:15,16) provides a different explanation for their concept of time (circumstances of poverty and deprivation), his research proved what has been said: "Africans define time socially in terms of the immediate future, while Westerners define time in terms of economic surplus and the future." He writes: "Individualists are usually very punctual (at least in contrast with persons with collective consciousness), whilst collectivists regard punctuality as some kind of lunacy. For people with surplus material assets the present is part of history, life is projected into the future, and time is of the utmost importance. To people who possess no, or insignificant, surplus material assets, survival is a serious matter of the here and now. To them life holds very little predictability. To be concerned with the future in terms of material considerations would therefore be neither sensible nor practical. Predictability is consequently sought in social relationships which are constantly maintained and reinforced for the sake of long-term security. Social relationships, though, demand a lot of time."

We as Westerners do not always realise how fascinated we are by novelties and accept them almost without criticism. It is clear in our attitudes towards books, computers, music, fashions, cars - and even marriage partners. Even when we discover something old, we regard it as "new"! Everything is disposable, there is practically no continuity any more.

This difference in orientation is possibly an important reason why the West is so strongly attuned to the notion of careful planning for the future while it does not play such an important role in Africa (cf. 1.19 and 2.19).

Let me recapitulate. In the West the past and present are taken up into or even sacrificed to the future. (This may, by the way, be the reason why Westerners are so strongly attracted to ideologies which are basically

efforts to master the future.) In Africa the future and the present are pulled back into the past. (For this reason ideologies may perhaps not be so popular amongst Africans.) If we add traditional Jewish culture, we have a third viewpoint which does not emphasise the future or the past but the present. Every day (the present), Jewish people believe, may be the day upon which the Messiah may arrive. Today is open to tomorrow!

The West interprets the present and the past in terms of the future, Africa interprets the future and the present in terms of the past and traditional Jewish culture interprets the past and the future in terms of the present!

Here again we have good examples of both the strengths and weaknesses of every culture (compare chapter 1), as well as proof that different cultures need each other to attain a balance in which past, present and future each gets its rightful place.

### 3.8 Time that is "made" versus time which is "filled"

We could use the image of a conveyer belt with a variety of empty containers on it to illustrate the Western notion of time. As the conveyer belt moves past (time) the containers have to be filled. If we waste time, the belt moves past and the containers are only half-full or empty. We evaluate ourselves and others according to how full we have been able to make the containers. If they are full, we have been productive. The more productive, the greater the admiration - and the larger the containers become which we have to fill in order to sustain the competition!

There is therefore no merit in being idle and whiling away a day. Yet, many other peoples believe (including communalistic Africans) that it is important to encourage, help and support others. These "good souls" should, however, when measured against Western standards, understand clearly that they "have not achieved much in life".

For the West productivity is a sacred, unassailable word. Each moment counts, has to be used, bought off, no moment of time may be squandered or wasted. If we look back on the week and we have not achieved what we had planned we are unhappy.

The African has a much more difficult task, however, for he is not forced to use time *productively*, but *correctly* - he has to live properly.

In contrast to this the attitude of many Africans is: "Why should I hurry? Work is never-ending, but humans do come to an end." Silberbauer (1975:31) explains: "Time in western culture relates to specific situations and events. We must be at certain places at specific times and for specific periods of time. Work is performed from one period of time to another, and recreation and meals fall within definite time periods. So time becomes a basic measuring factor. Time can be bought and sold, used or wasted. The White man who pioneered freedom from slavery has enslaved himself to a ruthless master, Time, which is the cause of his heart attacks and ulcers. When he looks at the Black man's concept of time he finds it utterly incomprehensible. The Black man claims that he is no slave of time, but that he can make as much time as he wants. 'Time waits for no man', is a Western saying, but the African says that time can wait as long as he wishes. There is no need to get 'het-up' because no one has arrived for the 10 a.m. appointment; 10 a.m. can happily wait until 11 or 12 and even later."

This is perhaps the reason why things which take time (such as painting, writing poetry, composing music or simply listening to others) are not important to Westerners any more. We are compelled to continue filling containers, and achieving the objectives and goals that we have set for ourselves. Is this true, fulfilled life?

### 3.9 A tranquil versus a rapid pace of life

Westerners plan their time and partition it according to rigid schedules, so that, if it should become clear that for some reason or other they are not going to achieve what they had planned, the tempo can be increased. Africans may be aware of the fact that something should be completed by the end of the day, but they are not going to start hurrying. If they should hear about a friend who is in hospital, they may simply stop working and first visit their friend. The Westerner has internalised the work schedule and it is often more important to him than visiting the person in hospital. For the African the internalised network of friends and family is more important - work schedules are external matters and must take second place.

The two groups also do not have much consideration for each other. A concrete example could be the following: A highly-placed, hurried Westerner, from the city, arrives in a fast car in a much slower, people-oriented rural town for an appointment with the local chief. The time for the appointment arrives, it passes and becomes history - without the person

showing up. The white person gets hotter and hotter under the collar, his blood pressure rises and his ulcer starts acting up ...

Africans are not committed to a specific time or schedule, but to the people who are with them, especially those close to them. If someone is therefore late in arriving, he/she is not upset, because there are many things which are happening. Being late is also not regarded as an insult, because a schedule is an exterior thing and does not affect your ego.

In the West being late for an appointment, however, is regarded as a serious insult. Time which has been planned and set aside for a specific activity and which is not used, is time which can never be recovered.

In the West time is not only functionally structured. It controls all of our lives. Banks (1983) correctly entitled his book on time *The tyranny of time!* Therefore it is also linked with status: if an important person sets time aside for you it is regarded as a privilege. And especially when it comes to filling "containers" with material matter, it is a question of "time being money".

In contrast with this, procedures in Africa can be very time-consuming. An example of this is travel problems in Africa. If you find yourself somewhere in Africa and you receive a message that you should return home urgently, you may have to contend with endless problems. Your ticket was not issued for that specific date, and much more. You have to leave the country within three hours, but the travel agency needs three days to make arrangements! A citizen of the country will simply sidestep these drawn-out procedures by paying a judicial bribe to a friend or a relative who is correctly placed, and then board the plane. If you finally find yourself waiting in a queue for a seat on the plane (there are no seat numbers), somebody else is helped before you. The official of the airline company cannot believe that you - even if you have been waiting for a long time - are more important than his friend. If you have to wait, it usually means that you do not know somebody who can help you, or that you have no friends, because you do not know how to communicate with people!

We, white Westerners, simply cannot wait. Do watch people who are waiting to be helped in a hospital, licensing office or other public place - often for the second time, because they had to leave unsuccessfully the previous day. Whites are restless, repeatedly check their watches and fidget, stand up and sit down again, go outside, return, stretch their legs and show their impatience in a myriad little ways. When one notices the impatience

of small children from the Western culture, one realises that they have already fully internalised the Western way of thinking about time because they keep asking the time and how long something is still going to take.

In contrast to this, black people are patient and chat to each other. It would appear that they have no problem with sitting there knowing that time is passing by. The children are also tranquil. If they become hungry or thirsty the mother will undo her dress and feed her baby until he is quiet again.

In recapitulation we could say on the one hand that the African concept of time contains its own beauty, dignity and legitimacy. On the other hand, however, it also has a lack of beauty, dignity and legitimacy. The African concept of time could be as demanding as that of the West. As a result of their communalistic attitude, Africans could *insist* that you *make* time to see them even when you really don't have the time to do so!

It is very clear that the Westerner's view and experience of time is not shared by the African. And these different views of time, experience of time and use of time lead to misunderstandings and even clashes in many fields - also in the field of education.

### 3.10 Which is the correct conception of time?

One finally arrives at this important question. The answer is not simple, however. The reason for this is that man cannot be neutral and detach himself from personal cultural prejudices. Each individual tends to think that something which differs from his own culture must of necessity be wrong or at least be worse.

One cannot say, for example, that African culture is *right* and Western culture *wrong*. They are *different*. Neither one is *only* right nor *only* wrong. We have already explained in chapter 1 that each culture contains something good and beautiful, but at the same time also aspects which are not so good and beautiful. These two elements are mixed in every culture.

I think that we should be as honest as possible with each other and acknowledge that our own notion of time is not ideal or the only possible one. It is precisely when comparing it with the concepts of time of other cultures that we note the weaknesses or shadowy sides of it. In each culture there is inevitably the tendency to over-emphasise those things which are good to such an extent that they become less good.

For that reason my above table was concluded with points 1.23 and 2.23 as well as 1.24 and 2.24. If we say that Africans *waste* time, we have to ask ourselves whether we do not *idolise* it. (Somebody once said that Western people have changed from God-fearing to time-fearing beings!) And if we say that Africans still have to learn to *use* their time we have to ask ourselves whether we should not perhaps also learn something, and that is to *enjoy* time more. Luther once pointed out to Melanchton (a workaholic) that he still had to master the skill of simply doing nothing - in the service of God!

The implications of the foregoing example for the educational situation are clear. A better understanding of Africa time will sensitise lecturers to the fact that black students sometimes have little sense of the chronological succession of events. Furthermore, it would help us understand why Africans arrive late for classes, tests and even examinations and have difficulty in answering examination papers within the given periods of time.

On the one hand we will have to help the students by allowing more time. On the other hand they will also have to get used to the fact that an assignment, a paper or a course has to be completed within a specific time.

Another example as an illustration is the following. It will be a total disaster to try to run a modern factory on the African continent according to the African concept of time. At the same time one can imagine that the time schedules of a factory in Africa should be more flexible to allow enough time for communication between the workers. This will not necessarily be a waste of time - because in a more friendly, relaxed atmosphere people may be more productive.

As Westerners we will have to realise that it is impossible for good human relationships to flourish in a "rat race". We are reminded by Africa that we have to make time for our fellow human beings - and in this way also for ourselves.

The model of chapter 1 helped us to explain the different time conceptions of the West and Africa. It also assisted us in judging both conceptions in a fair way. Both viewpoints contain strong but also weak points. The challenge is to affirm the good and to reject what is wrong. If we succeed in achieving this, we will be dealing with cultural diversity in South Africa in a responsible way!

\* \* \*



In the next chapter an even more difficult problem will be tackled: What are the differences in the modes of thought of Africa and the West? This is a *terra incognita*, an unknown territory about which very little recent research has been done. At the same time we have to deal with it, even if our results will be of a preliminary nature. Stated in terms of the central theme of this book: If we regard the Afrocentric as well as the Eurocentric way of thinking as one-sided, what then should be the solution?

## Chapter 4

### THINKING LIKE AFRICA OR LIKE THE WEST?

We are facing a similar problem here as that of the preceding chapter. In this case too it is not an abstract theoretical problem, but one which confronts one daily. Africans find the Western way of thinking and practising science difficult to understand. Conversely Western people find it difficult to gauge how African students think. Once again the question has to be asked who has to change: the Africans, so that they can master the Western way of thinking? Or perhaps Westerners?

Proponents of Western culture (of which Western science is one of the most important facets) usually respond sceptically to the second option: The effort to Africanise science cannot succeed, because this will affect the essence of science and will simply lead to the lowering of standards. Science is a thoroughly Western product and is therefore averse to Africanisation. If Africa wishes to progress, it will simply have to acquire the Western mode of thought. On the other hand, the response of those who have become the prey of a new Afrocentred ideology is also predictable: this attitude is simply the result of an Eurocentric vision.

If Westerners should argue that science cannot be Africanised, because black people cannot be good scholars, they would be wrong - our continent has already delivered excellent scholars! The issue of Africanisation, however, is much more complicated. "Africanisation" can have different meanings as was indicated already in chapter 3.1.2 (compare also chapter 7.3).

#### 4.1 Voices of criticism

In this case too (just as in the case of the different conceptions of time) we are not confronted with a problem which is unique to South Africa or the African continent.

A Brazilian theologian, Ruben Alves (1980:41), started his response on the paper of a British scientist on the nature of science at a conference of the World Council of Churches on *Faith, science and the future* (1979) with the following parable: "Once upon a time a lamb, with love for objective knowledge, decided to find out the truth about wolves. He had heard so many nasty stories about them. Were they true? He decided to get a first-

hand report on the matter. So he wrote a letter to a philosopher-wolf with a simple and direct question: What are wolves? The philosopher-wolf wrote back a letter explaining what wolves were: shapes, sizes, colours, social habits, thoughts, etc. He thought, however, that it was irrelevant to speak about the wolves' eating habits since these habits, according to his own philosophy, did not belong to the *essence* of wolves. Well, the lamb was so delighted with the letter that he decided to pay a visit to his new friend, the wolf. And only then he learned that wolves are very fond of barbecued lamb."

With this parable Alves wanted to make it clear that Western science likes to speak about itself in such a way that its eating habits (detrimental effects) are hidden. The "lambs" of the so-called Third World were blinded by that for a long time, but are beginning to realise more and more what its dangers are, more so than those who are paid to practise that science and to defend it as a "civilizing power". The difference between the British scientist and the South American theologian lay in the different ways in which they saw the role of science in culture. The first saw it as progress and civilisation, while the latter saw its immense assimilative - and ultimately destructive - power.

One of the most important Western values, which has also emerged clearly in science, is that of the autonomous power and control of man over his environment. Science enables man to do with the environment what he pleases. How he does it is not subject to higher norms, because his concern is with power for the sake of power and especially for the sake of economic-material progress. (Higher norms like stewardship, responsibility, accountability and respect for the environment are neglected.) While the objective of Western secular man is autonomous control, the key or method of achieving this is his scientific control of reality. This method is often idolised and scientific knowledge is regarded as being higher and more important than other forms of knowledge.

This secular way of scientific endeavour has undoubtedly led to enormous prosperity in the West. Today the West measures its wealth by way of especially scientific knowledge, technological power and commercial wealth. The other (mostly submerged) side of the picture, however, is that this has led to the creation of "intellectual barbarians", very poor people indeed. The mere fact that we measure our wealth in terms of material possessions in the West testifies to our immense poverty, because human life does not consist of an abundance of possessions and pleasures (Luk. 12:15). Christ Himself says that life consists of far more (Matt. 6:25).

The West, obsessed with its faith in progress, sees development simply as scientific, technological and economic development. Unfortunately, but entirely understandably, it is only in these fields that the West has developed (over-developed?). In other aspects the West is poverty-stricken, for, as far as human relationships and our awareness and experience of true human communion are concerned, we are poor. We are poor in aesthetic experience. We hurry through life without enjoying the vast wealth offered in abundance by creation, because joy has to be manufactured and bought ...

The present Western scientific practice therefore not only clashes with the culture of the "Third World" (Africa included), but also with our deepest Christian convictions. The tragedy of the matter is that even Christians do not notice this danger. The Western way of scientific practice is uncritically accepted as being normal. The only question which is still discussed is how this type of education can take place in a more effective way and be made more "acceptable" to other cultures - or simply be enforced.

As Christians from the West we have to accept that nothing in this world is inherently good. (Cf. again chapter 1.) Even the best products of our culture have a mixed character. On the one hand it releases or liberates man of many things (such as monotonous routine labour), but on the other hand it enslaves man. It is therefore of crucial importance to reflect on, amongst others, the nature, purpose, practice and results of science.

## **4.2 Important guiding questions**

How could one - in a fair way- compare the patterns of thought of Africa and the West? Whoever asks questions of this nature immediately opens a hornet's nest of problems and is susceptible to all kinds of criticism. They are, however, so important that we will have to answer them in detail.

### *4.2.1 Generalisation*

As already mentioned at the end of chapter 1, the question could be asked whether the whole of Africa thinks in the same way. With more than 1000 ethnic groups and languages/dialects spread across the continent, such a uniformity is, of course, impossible.

But if one wishes to say something about the African and the Western patterns of thought, one can only generalise, otherwise one would achieve

no more than monographs about the ways of thinking of individual tribes or groups.

#### 4.2.2 *Regarded from a Western angle*

A subsequent general question (again compare the end of chapter 1) is whether it is possible for one to describe and understand the way a person from another culture thinks. Would one not, if one is a Westerner, distort African culture by trying to render it in Western categories? Of course the answer to this has to be in the affirmative.

This does not mean, however, that one is so enveloped in one's own culture that one is not capable of understanding anything whatsoever of another person's culture and mode of thought. It is important to remember, however, that should such an understanding emanate from a paternalist attitude of superiority, it will definitely distort and thus be unjust to the other culture.

#### 4.2.3 *Emphasise similarities rather than differences*

A third general question (also mentioned at the end of chapter 1) is: Why stress the differences and not rather the similarities between Africans and Westerners in South Africa? Surely we heard enough about differences in the old apartheid South Africa! My response to this is that we should indeed stress similarities, because our shared humanity is most important. In the old South Africa this was not a generally acknowledged fact. The differences which we stressed in the old South Africa were, however, superficial ones, such as differences in skin colour, habits and customs. We should now look at some of the more deeply seated differences, and then not stress difference for the sake of difference (a sort of neo-apartheid), but know the differences in order to understand each other better.

My purpose is therefore not to emphasise the differences in order to keep the cultures separate or drive them apart, but to bring them closer to each other, to understand each other better, to accept and respect each other.

#### 4.2.4 *Keep account of acculturation*

To be able to do this one should, for the sake of clarity, of necessity exaggerate the differences somewhat and therefore expose oneself to criticism such as the following: Do Africans still think as their traditional forefathers of 100 years ago did? Have they not changed a lot as a result

of the enormous influence of Western culture? These are legitimate questions. There has already been a great deal of acculturation between the two cultures.

There is also a "but", however, because in spite of Westernisation, traditional religion and worldview (the deeper cultural layers of Africa), which co-determine the mode of thought of black people, have not been eradicated. In fact, when one scrapes off the veneer of the West (clothing, habits, customs) one discovers a totally different layer of "paint" underneath. It is also not unique to Africa that the traditional may continue to exist virtually intact for generations under the modern layer. Furthermore, in the new South Africa, liberated from white oppression, conscious efforts are made to seek out the traditional roots and to revive them.

#### 4.2.5 *Causes of differences*

A more difficult question is to which cause(s) the differences in the mode of thought between Africa and the West should be attributed. (Compare what has already been said in this connection in chapter 1.4 and 1.5.) Are our ways of thinking biologically-genetically determined? Does it depend on the conditions under which people live? Or perhaps both? Should the latter be the case, what then is the relationship between the two factors? Does the biological determine the context or the obverse? Or is there a constant reciprocation between the two?

One could also ask the question in the following way: Is one's mode of thought determined only by one's own (cultural) attitude or is it the result of geographic, economic, social, political and many other factors? My own viewpoint is that one cannot begin to separate the two sides of the issue because they are too intimately interwoven. Even if we could say that they influence each other reciprocally, this is still too simplistic. In reality the problem does not only have two sides, but many facets. Because man himself is a biotic, emotional, language-creating, social, economic, aesthetic, ethical and religious being, all these factors influence his mode of thought. Furthermore, man lives in a specific environment from which he cannot be isolated. He is only human *within* his environment. And this environment also is multifaceted, as has just been said of man himself.

An example could explain the problem. Scientific thought is not the invention of the West. The highly developed cultures of the Chinese, Sumerians, Babilonians and Egyptians flourished thousands of years prior to Western science. (Examples from ancient Egypt are its agricultural

methods, pyramids, embalming techniques and writing.) Modern science, however, blossomed in the West. Why? Why did it only happen at a specific moment in time? One could try to explain this riddle in different ways, such as, for example to point to the written word rather than the oral mode of transmission of information. Or use intensive intercultural contact with other, totally different cultures as an explanation. Or the need for world-wide trade, which led to the discovery of foreign countries and cultures. This and many other factors, however, do not yet fully explain why modern science developed in Europe at a particular point in history. The most fundamental solution to this mystery is the answer already given in chapter 1.5, viz. that different cultures respond differently to God's creational revelation by focusing on different aspects of his multifaceted creation.

#### 4.2.6 *The two phenomena which are compared*

This brings us to a subsequent problem - perhaps the most important in this investigation. It is the question as to *what* in Africa is to be compared to *what* in the West?

One possibility is to compare the *traditional* mode of thought of the West with the *traditional* mode of thought of Africa. There will definitely be differences. We then have two problems, however: (1) Westerners do not think in the traditional way any longer, but have been changed significantly by the modern scientific mode of thought. (2) Should we study the original, pre-scientific Western mode of thought (sources are available for this purpose), it would emerge that it does not differ all that much from the present traditional mode of thought which is still found in many places in Africa.

One could also compare the *modern* Africa with the *modern* West. Then we will have the opposite problem, however. In many instances Africa still thinks in traditional ways (as already pointed out above). The "modern" is often a matter of a Western top-dressing on an African substratum. (There are also, of course, Africans who have become almost totally Westernised.)

The only alternative - and I do not believe that it is unfair, because it takes the factual reality into account - is to compare *traditional* Africa with the *modern* West and to keep in mind that this has to be done with especially the following reservation firmly in mind: The picture that will be drawn will not be 100% in line with reality. Wide reading and experience in a

dozen African countries, however, have convinced me that this need not be a meaningless exercise. It can help us, in spite of all the reservations, to understand each other better.

### 4.3 Pre-scientific and scientific

Should I compare the traditional African culture with modern Western culture, it almost amounts to the fact that I am comparing something that is pre-scientific with something that is scientific. I can say this because, as already stated, Western culture today is a strongly "scientified" (and technicised) culture.

I am aware of the fact that the word "pre-scientific" can be misunderstood. For example, that pre-scientific would only be an elementary preamble to scientific knowledge which would be real, genuine knowledge. This is not my opinion. I also do not understand pre-scientific as pre-logical or un-logical. Pre-scientific knowledge is logical! One could replace *pre-scientific* with the words *concrete* or *naive* knowledge, but they are not very satisfactory replacements. With the necessary reservations, I therefore prefer to keep the word "pre-scientific".

For the sake of clarity - and to avoid any misunderstandings - a little more should be said about the distinction between pre-scientific and scientific.

#### 4.3.1 *Typical of all people*

By pre-scientific knowledge I mean the ordinary, everyday way of knowing - the common sense mode. This is typical of all people. Even among Westerners, who have been strongly influenced by the scientific way of thought, we still find this way of understanding reality.

#### 4.3.2 *Not more important or less important*

The word *pre-scientific* also does not mean that this form of knowing is in any way inferior. There is often an attitude, especially among scientists but also amongst ordinary people, that scientific knowledge is somehow better than the knowledge of the person in the street. This, however, is not the case. In every scientific abstraction something of concrete reality is lost. Someone once remarked correctly: "On the dissecting table of science, real life dies." An example to illustrate this is the fact that poor people often have a better understanding of poverty than all the knowledge of different scholars studying the phenomenon of poverty!



The one way of knowing is not *better*, however, but simply *different* (see later). Both are ways of trying to understand, explain, control and predict reality. Both, for example, seek to find regularity in the midst of apparent irregularity, order in the midst of apparent chaos and unity in the midst of diversity. They, however, do this in different ways.

This can be explained by way of a simple example. A child is ill and the mother (who has already raised a few children) is certain that it is chicken-pox. However, she takes the child to the doctor. With his medical knowledge he diagnoses chicken-pox and prescribes the necessary treatment. It would be foolish to try to determine who would *best* know what is wrong, because the mother does not know *less* or the doctor *more* about the child, but they both have a *different* type of knowledge of the child's illness. (The mere fact that the mother realised that the child was not well, is already an indication that she is capable of knowledge.)

#### 4.3.3 *Distinction but not separation*

It is important, therefore, that we should *distinguish* the two ways of knowing and the two types of knowledge - but we should never *compartmentalise* them watertightly. The scientifically-trained doctor's knowledge *builds on* to the pre-scientific way of thinking. Without this more concrete way of knowing it cannot exist. And the pre-scientific knowledge can also be *enriched* (sometimes also *impoverished!*) by the scientific knowledge. One could therefore think in terms of two overlapping circles, because it is not always clear where the pre-scientific ends and the scientific begins. (Especially in a strongly scientified culture, such as the Western one, the distinction can be difficult at times.)

#### 4.4 **Points of departure and aims**

To summarise, this investigation is done from the following presuppositions and with the following aims in mind:

- In African culture we still find a strong traditional component.
- This component provides a good picture of what most people's pre-scientific knowledge was like (including early Western people).
- We would like to compare this pre-scientific way of thinking with the modern scientific mode of thought.

- The concern is therefore not only with a comparison between Africa and the West, but also with a comparison between pre-scientific and scientific. Traditional Africa is our example of what the pre-scientific mode of thought was like before it came under the influence of Western science.
- The ultimate goal of the investigation is to determine whether the scientific cognitive attitude does not let one lapse into one-sidedness and concomitantly impoverishes life instead of enriching it. Can its disadvantages perhaps be limited by once again considering the pre-scientific mode of thought? It might sensitise us to the fact that "science" cannot simply be associated with one kind of science (so-called standard science). The Mathematics and Physics, for example, which one finds in a textbook, is not the only possible kind of Mathematics or Physics - it has been built on specific Western cultural presuppositions. We need not accept it as the only or final possibility.
- From this new perspective it would be possible, for example, to write a textbook for a specific subject in such a way that greater transparency is offered for the religious, worldviewish and cultural contexts of the African, in a way that he is really involved and in which he really has insight into his own particular types of problems. I am therefore proposing *contextualisation* rather than complete *Africanisation* in the sense of Afrocentrism. It would be pretentious to maintain that the scientific industry would be capable of such a radical transformation that the African mode of thought could be a complete alternative for it.

#### 4.5 A comparison between the pre-scientific pattern of thought of Africa and the scientific mode of thought of the West

The African mode of thought (like its conception of time) cannot be understood apart from its strong communalistic attitude. It could be described as *communal* thought. (Compare point 8 of the comparative table below as well as the explanation under point 4.7.) In the same way the Western way of thinking can only be understood from the perspective of the strong individualistic tendency of the West. The thinking subject in the West is primarily the *individual*.

The following table contrasts the two worlds of thought by way of summary:

## Africa

## West

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Spiritual powers important  | Material entities important                                  |
| 2. Focus on knowledge of the spiritual world   | Focus on knowledge of the material world                     |
| 3. Power-oriented  | Truth-oriented   |
| 4. Spiritualistic-organistic   | Materialistic-mechanistic                                    |
| 5. Quest for supernatural causes   | Quest for physical causes                                    |
| 6. Divination  | Verification   |
| 7. Magical   | Technological  |
| 8. Emphasis on human interaction   | Emphasis on non-human things                                 |
| 9. Holistic, integral, totality knowledge  | Reductionist, fragmented knowledge                           |
| 10. Close to concrete reality  | Abstract, removed from reality                               |
| 11. Warm, personal, individual knowledge   | Cold, businesslike, universal knowledge                      |
| 12. Pragmatic  | Neutral  |
| 13. Symbolic   | Theoretical  |
| 14. Affective  | Objective  |
| 15. Emotional  | Intellectual   |
| 16. Closely involved with object of knowledge  | Observes object of knowledge at a distance                   |
| 17. Less analytical, more synthetic  | More analytical, less synthetic                              |
| 18. More intuitive   | More reflective  |
| 19. More experience-oriented   | More experimental and technical                              |
| 20. More cyclic  | More linear-systematic, methodical                           |
| 21. Expressive   | Instrumental   |
| 22. Elementary distinctions  | Complex distinctions   |
| 23. Ideas bound to events/situation  | Ideas bound to ideas   |
| 24. Flexible and flowing   | Fixed and rigid  |
| 25. And - and logic  | Either - or logic  |
| 26. Complementation of differences   | Duality of opposites   |
| 27. Consensus important  | Competition important  |
| 28. Past-oriented (traditional)  | Future-oriented (progressive)                                |
| 29. More protective and closed   | More critical and open                                       |
| 30. Does not easily accept coincidence, probability and other factors which render knowledge uncertain | Accepts coincidence and probability of knowledge more easily |

As already said earlier, there are *differences* between the pre-scientific, everyday mode of thought of Africa and scientific mode of thought of the

West, but there are also *links*. This clearly emerges from this diagrammatic comparison. At times the differences are very clear. In other cases it was more difficult to capture these in words or they were simply differences of degree, so that I had to speak of *more* or *less*. Even in the cases where scientific knowledge was indicated with concepts such as *analytical*, *intellectual*, *reflective* and *distinguishing*, one has to keep in mind that to a lesser extent the same traits are also true of pre-scientific knowledge. Rational thought is not the prerogative of the scientist, and we do not find logic only in Western thought! We also find it in non-Western countries such as Africa - even though it might imply a different kind of logic.

On the basis of further research, reflection and experience the list could therefore be extended. Or what might have appeared to be differences at first glance could subsequently lapse. This diagram and its explanation does not pretend to be more than a preliminary exploration. Interesting research has already been done in this field, for instance by Robin Horton (1993) as well as Hallen and Appiah (see English & Kalumba, 1996:216 ff. and 229 ff.), but much still needs to be done.

The central issue at stake here is of what significance Africanisation can be in the case of scientific practice, and what it should not imply. Stated differently: Would it be possible, on the one hand, that (pre-scientific) African thought could offer correctives to Western (scientific) thought and could it, on the other hand, possibly be that Western science could become more "friendly" or sensitive towards African thought?

Although I am not a philosopher of science by profession, I am aware of the fact that Western science, especially the positivist mode of scientific practice, has had to endure a great deal of criticism in recent decades. This criticism has emanated from Western ranks by such prominent figures as Feyerabend, Popper, Kuhn and many others. Efforts have even been made to make adjustments to the Western scientific way of thought from Eastern perspectives. Many Reformational thinkers (Stoker, Vollenhoven, Dooyeweerd and their successors such as Hart and Wolterstorff, to mention only a few) have also made important contributions to the interrogation of Western scientific practice. Lack of space does not permit one to elaborate on this matter, as the focus here is on a comparison with African thought. At most one could indicate here and there how perspectives from African thought have supported certain Reformational perspectives and *vice versa*. My comparative table can also not be dealt with in detail. As in the case of the concepts of time, only certain facets can be highlighted.

#### 4.6 The spiritual versus the material

Under this heading we summarise the first seven points of the comparison between the patterns of thought of Africa and the West.

Western science has, even though today this is true to a lesser extent, largely ignored the spiritual dimension. It has concentrated on the visible, measurable, weighable and countable physical reality. Possible "supernatural" causes were not allowed to be brought into consideration in science. Everything was explained according to natural causes and results. This focus on the material would, it was believed, also enable science to be objective, unprejudiced and neutral.

To put it somewhat differently, we could say that the West has severed the umbilical cord between faith and science. Everything associated with faith was regarded as personal, subjective and metaphysical. Science, however, which has the task of studying physical reality, is regarded as objective and universally valid. In this way an artificial divide was created in the West between faith and scholarship. The detrimental consequences of this division is very clear today!

I need not direct attention to the fact that, for centuries, African thought has already realised that nothing, - including knowledge - can be neutral. Their holistic religious orientation does not make it possible to distinguish between the secular and the sacred, the profane and the holy or the natural and the supernatural - least of all separating them. For that reason, in their efforts to understand reality, supernatural causes play such an important role.

In this regard the contemporary secular scientific practice, which does not allow for faith in something or someone above the material, can learn something from Africa. Today some prominent natural scientists are of the opinion that man will, within the foreseeable future, understand and explain everything. Once condensed in compact formulae the world around us and we ourselves - from the big bang to the distant future - will be as transparent as glass. God is no longer needed to explain something. There is no deeper mystery on earth or in heaven.

Although a Christian may not approve of the veneration of supernatural powers, ancestors and even more in traditional African religion, it still remains a fact that Africa does not ignore the "spiritual" side of reality as

the West does. Their way of thinking is therefore, in principle, richer than that of the materialist-mechanist way of the West.

It is also one of the strong points of the Reformational philosophy that it emphasises that science cannot be neutral. If one does not serve the true God in one's scientific endeavour, one is simply serving a substitutory idol. Science is inherently ideologically loaded. Some kind of faith is the deepest motivating force in science. (Present-day Post-Modernism has confirmed this.)

Faith is not only the deepest driving force behind any scientific practice. It is also acceptable, from one's convictions based on faith, to seek answers to the many issues with which science is confronted on a daily basis. History, for example, is not simply a secular matter which can become transparent through the study of intra-worldly causes and effects. Historical research should also keep cognisance of the divine mystery in historical events.

On the debit side for Africa, however, one should mention point 13 in the comparison.

Africa's ontology is concerned with the spiritual world and the forces which play a role in it. Put in Western terminology, Africans regard supernatural causes as the explanation for everything. I emphasise that this is a Western way of expressing the situation, because for Africans these causes are not supernatural but natural. It would be even better to avoid using the word "natural" and simply speak of causes, because Africans do not know or accept the Western distinction between the "natural" and the "supernatural". Symbols play an important role in the way Africa knows reality. Concrete objects which, according to the African, have magical qualities, are, in the first place, not seen for what they *are*, but for what they *represent* or what can be associated with them. Items and events of symbolic value refer to other things outside themselves. Dreams, for example, may represent facts. Symbols may even be dangerous! An example of older symbols may be found in the ancestors. A recent example is the removal of the Verwoerd statue in Bloemfontein, which was done by the ANC government because for them it represented *everything* that involved apartheid.

Western science makes use of pictures, images or metaphors, but they try to pin them down or reduce them so that they lose the flowing quality of the symbol. We would rather call them signs. Through definition and precision their multifaceted meaning is reduced. In the magical-symbolic way

of thinking, however, the images which are used are undefined. Because figures or numbers are precise signs, black students often find it difficult to cope with statistics in science. They do not think in such exact terms and do not understand why this is important. (It is probably also a reason why it is so difficult for the African to plan meticulously.)

A further negative result of this concentration on the spiritual world and the quest for supernatural causes can be found in point 30 of the comparison: Africa does not easily accept coincidence, probability and other factors which lead to uncertain knowledge. Of course Western science can also be dogmatic about its own explanations. Yet it is more open to the possibility of multiple explanations of a phenomenon.

#### **4.7 The human-social versus the non-human**

The African's way of thinking is strongly influenced by the community and social relationships (a communalist worldview). Du Preez (1978:77) correctly writes: "Their way of thinking is determined by social traditions, beliefs and rituals which affect the individual from the days of childhood through community contact. It is, indeed, this fact - the accent placed on group bonds and the suppression of individuality - which causes the individual to be subordinate to the group in all cases. This is true to such an extent that even individual perception and understanding are influenced by group attitudes and beliefs."

As indicated in the comparative table (point 8), Western science is especially directed at non-human things, that is, it is materialistically inclined. The emphasis is not, in the first place, on the investigation of human issues. Also the person (scientist) himself, who is doing the investigation, is not important: he practically does it in a mechanistically, neutral fashion. Western scientific practice also has a strong individualistic trait: individual competition and achievement are highly regarded.

Does scientific practice therefore have no human and social side?

If we think about this carefully, we realise that no one can practise science on his own or in isolation. Science is practised in a group context and scientific paradigms claim particular communities of thought. Most scientists are continually exchanging ideas with co-scientists. They read articles and books by others, receive criticism on their own work, etc. Social power and authority relationships also play a role in scientific practice. Knowledge is power and those who know more have greater authority and

power. They can use or withhold their knowledge to manipulate people. Not only is science itself socially determined but it in turn determines social circumstances.

Is the pre-scientific knowledge of Africa, which puts such strong emphasis on human interaction (communalism), not an important contribution to take into account? Should science only be based on individual competition? Is mutual co-operation or consensus not as important? Do we always keep adequate cognisance of the social implications of our scientific practice? Such questions might help to release us from a one-sided view of science.

#### 4.8 **The concrete versus the abstract**

From the comparative table we can deduce that Western science is especially characterised by four actions: Abstracting (10), theorizing (13), analysing (17) and systematising (20).

Abstraction takes place in four stages. (1) It leaves the concrete, observable reality behind and abstracts especially the laws which are valid for reality. (2) It relinquishes the special, unique data and abstracts only the general or the universal. (3) From the coherence of all the aspects of reality it further also abstracts only one aspect. In Economics, for example, the economic, and in Physics the physical, etc. (4) The scientist also relinquishes his own and other advantages and interests - science should be "disinterested".

By means of this fourfold abstraction one arrives at theoretical knowledge which is especially characterised by an urge for distinction, analysis or a breaking up into components of the abstracted "portion" of reality.

Finally everything is summarised again in a system of knowledge, a process in which logic plays an important role. For that reason science is considered as logically coherent knowledge. This knowledge could be expressed in mathematical relations (one could call this a further abstraction). Subsequently science could be used as an instrument for the control or manipulation of reality.

Scientific knowledge is therefore (through all the above steps) "alienated" from concrete reality, the fullness of reality has been lost. Science therefore can never obtain a complete grasp of reality and we should not equate knowledge of reality with reality itself - although this is often done.



Against the abstract scientific way of knowing, there is the more concrete mode of knowing of Africa (point 10). The African is more closely involved with the object of knowledge and observation is not done at a distance as is done in the West (point 16).

When the young people of Africa still received their education on the farm or from the local carpenter, potter or artist, their training was not theoretical. Under the guidance of a master craftsman, their attention was directed at (1) concrete objects or situations. (2) They noted general patterns. In the case of the carpentry apprentice, for example, the texture of certain woods. The generalisations which they made on the basis of their observations were not dependent on conceptual abstractions, however, but always referred to concrete things. They were not *abstract* but *concrete* generalisations. (Theoretical knowledge gains meaning within the relation in which it stands towards other concepts in a conceptual system, while concrete concepts refer to aspects or characteristics which we experience as real things, events or relationships. An example of a concrete concept is the concept "table". A mathematical system, however, is something abstract, because a mathematical problem can be solved with pen and paper or a computer without reference to any concrete thing.) (3) In the third place this type of instruction helped pupils to get to know the individual qualities of things.

I therefore question the view that concrete knowledge is a more primitive form of knowledge which can be left behind as man's theoretical knowledge progresses. It can be striven for with as much discipline. It is also not less reliable and accurate than Western scientific knowledge. Such knowledge is obtained by concentrating on the richly shaded details of concrete things. According to repetitive patterns general deductions are made and tested. In this way a source of knowledge is built up which can identify and understand universal patterns. It can be described in concrete, basic, everyday language.

On the other hand it should be emphasised that no training at a tertiary institution (college, technicon or university) can occur without some measure of abstraction - even in the fields which could be described as less abstract. Even though the emphasis in colleges and technicons might be less theoretical, knowledge of (abstract) scientific principles remains a condition.

All students, however, cannot develop the same high level of proficiency in abstract thought. Many students simply are not gifted in this way. Sound "Africanisation" should probably keep cognisance of this, not by accepting

the deficiency, but by assisting students to master the minimum abstract scientific skills required in a specific discipline or a certain educational institution such as a college, technicon or university. (See also 4.12.1 below.)

#### **4.9 Individual-personal versus universal-impersonal knowledge**

Western science seeks the universal, typical facets of things and the general laws which govern them (point 11). It tends to regard the unique, individual sides of things as being of less value, because they constitute a stumbling block on the road to operational efficiency. Against this the attention of the pre-scientific knowledge of Africa is directed more at the concrete, individual things. Because individuality cannot be learnt via the categories of an abstract conceptual system, Africa's focus is also on a face to face interaction with concrete reality (see previous point).

In Western thought itself there have been trends and schools (as for example in the reaction of Romanticism to the Enlightenment or in the case of the late Rationalism of Dilthey) which have stressed the fact that the specific or individual (against the universal), the concrete (against the abstract) and what is unique (against what is identical) should not be neglected in scholarly endeavours. In the Reformational tradition too (e.g. H.G. Stoker and H. van Riessen) this onesidedness in Western science was noted - without solving the problem.

Perhaps we should acknowledge that everything in reality has both a universal side (pecan trees) and an individual side (the specific pecan tree in my garden). Should we get to know the universal facet of something through science, we should therefore realise that it represents only one side of it - we only have something concrete once we also know its individual facet. Individual differences can be important, such as, for example, in the case of medical science.

#### **4.10 More emotionally-synthetic versus more intellectually-analytical**

This is the contrast that emerges from points 15 to 17 in the table.

Western science is seen as something intellectual, in which the emotional definitely does not belong. Against this we have the pre-scientific knowledge of Africa, which is more involved, warmer, more personal, emotional, affective and expressive. Du Preez (1978:76) has the following to say in this connection: "In contrast to modern man, whose approach to life is

objectively analytical and whose spirit is accordingly also divided into value, thought and feeling systems, blacks have a different approach. They do not face the world objectively and at a distance, but live in it. No object exists outside reality. They touch and are attuned to things and the earth. They experience everything intensely and are part of everything."

It seems as if the mode of thought of Africans is closer to that of the holistic-concrete way of Hebraic thinking. Black people are more congenial to the Old Testament than to New Testament literature.

Are these two ways of knowing completely irreconcilable? Can we really detach scientific practice from all our senses? May involvement, interest, experience, engrossment, perception not play a role at all? I have the feeling that Western science has a stronger emotional side than we may think.

At the same time the Western pattern of thought is also more analytically directed when compared with the emphasis on synthesis of the African way of thinking. For that reason it was already indicated in point 9 of the comparison that, while Western science offers fragmented knowledge (not only within the same science but as a result of the ongoing specialisation also between the sciences), African thought aims at holistic, integral knowledge of the totality. To my mind the holistic picture which African thought offers is as important as the detailed knowledge of Western science.

A third point, which relates to the previous paragraph, is given in point 25 of the comparison. The logical is usually seen as the most or, at least as one of the most, important characteristics of Western science. The more emotional accent of African thought, however, does not imply - as is sometimes suggested - that African thought is not logical. Even in the West there is not only one system of logic. (Aristotelian, Medieval and modern symbolic logic are all different). Africa, however, uses a different type of logic.

Africa mostly operates with an *and - and logic*, as compared with the Western logic of *either - or*. In the former case differences are seen as complementary, while in the latter case differences are seen rather as contrasting, opposing (26). African logic is more flexible and flowing, while that of the West is more fixed and rigid (24). My question would be whether these two types of logical thinking are not reflecting two sides of the same reality. Does Africa not put more emphasis on the unity of things, while the West wishes to emphasise their diversity? Should this be

the case, the African way of thinking offers a valuable correction to the Western way of scientific thought.

#### 4.11 Traditionally-closed versus progressively-open

With this last contrast (points 28 and 29 of the table) this preliminary investigation is concluded. Although the Western ideal of progress is often absolutised, the pendulum would, in this instance, swing in favour of the Western mentality, which is more receptive to new possibilities than tradition-bound African thought.

This elementary comparison has, in fact, indicated that the comparison between Africa and the West has at times favoured Africa and at times the West.

#### 4.12 The balance

Before we return to the question of Afrocentrism versus Eurocentrism I first want to launch an hypothesis.

##### 4.12.1 *Different gifts and ways of knowing*

As already indicated in chapter 1 and as subsequently became even clearer, different cultures (1) emphasise different sides of our *fourfold relationship* to God, nature, others and ourselves. My hypothesis is that because of this state of affairs, (2) different *gifts* are also developed in the different cultures. (3) These gifts enable the different cultures to *know reality* in different ways. (4) Knowledge of reality can also be *expressed in different ways*.

A common way of knowing reality and expressing our knowledge, is by way of language and numbers (a mathematical way). This is typical of Western educational systems: listen, read, memorise and write. Today, however, even Western educationists realise more and more that "intelligence" cannot be limited to only these two ways of knowing. Scholars have drawn our attention to what is called "multiple intelligence". Not only people who are capable of working with words and figures should be regarded as intelligent. These are only two forms of intelligence. We should also acknowledge other ways of attaining knowledge and other learning styles. It is, for example, also possible to get to know reality and express one's knowledge about reality in the following ways: (1) by way of visual images, (2) with body activity, (3) in an aesthetical way, (4) in a

technical way and (5) through personal contact with others. To really comprehend the richness of God's creation, we need all these gifts and their accompanying ways of knowing.

On the one hand we should never try to fit someone into only one of these learning style "boxes" as if it would be the only way in which that person could acquire knowledge. On the other hand we should not suppress a unique learning style and simply regard someone as stupid because he/she cannot express him/herself very well in a language. A teacher/lecturer should be aware of the specific kind of intelligence of a student and create different kinds of learning opportunities to enable the student to use his own gifts. This also calls for a variety of evaluation methods in education.

My hypothesis is that what was said of individuals thus far, may also apply to cultures. Specific gifts, intelligences and learning styles may be more strongly developed in certain than in other cultures. My guess is that the visual, active (body) and interpersonal (communal) way of knowing and learning is most probably more strongly developed in Africa than in the contemporary Western world. In the West the mathematical and technical ways of knowing and expressing knowledge is perhaps better developed. Much more research has, however, to be conducted to confirm my hypothesis. If it is proved to be true, we will not only have to acknowledge individual talents. In the same way the unique gifts, knowing and learning styles of different cultural groups should also be acknowledged in education. Africanisation understood in this way, should not be viewed as a threat (the lowering of standards, for example), but as a challenge and an opportunity for the enrichment of our educational process.

#### 4.12.2 *Afrocentric or Eurocentric: a false dilemma*

What was said on the previous pages about the two ways of thinking of Africa and the West confirmed my viewpoint stated in chapter 1 that every culture contains something good and valuable, but simultaneously it has something not so good, a defect. To be able to get rid of the negative and gain the positive elements, we will have to accept cultural pluralism as something positive and valuable.

I would like to advocate *mutually affirming and corrective cultural pluralism*, which implies that the cultures of Africa and the West mutually affirm as well as correct each other. This entails that one will first have to accept that one's own culture has, apart from good qualities, limitations from which it can only be freed by listening carefully to other cultures.

Only then, in the second place, will one be in a position to help other cultures to accept their own limitations and weaknesses.

Such a mutually affirming and corrective approach to cultural diversity will, of course, only be possible through intense dialogue between the two cultures. It will be impossible when the cultures exist next to each other as during the time of apartheid. Neither will it be possible when one culture intends to force others to accept its perspective, as is the case in both the Afrocentric and Eurocentric approaches.

We can no longer cling to a Eurocentric orientation. The pre-scientific mode of thought of Africa should make us sensitive to the defects of Western scientific thought. We should seriously ask ourselves whether scientific thought should not be "broadened" to soften the cultural shock which Africans experience.

At the same time it should also be emphasised that the latest trend to approach everything from an Afrocentric perspective will not provide a solution for the encounter between Africa and the West. In spite of its limitations and defects, Western science and technology provide opportunities without which a developing country like ours cannot survive.

When we are critical towards both Afrocentric and Eurocentric ideas, we will be moving closer to the ideal of a balanced, correct response to God's creational revelation as explained in chapter 1. Exactly how such an answer will appear, is difficult to say at this stage. It may imply that the *ways* we think and the *nature* of our scientific activity will have to change.

What I have in mind could perhaps be explained by stating, in conclusion, how the basic *aims* of scholarly work should change. If the deepest motive behind scientific work could be reformed, it may also result in a serious reconsideration of the *way* we practise science as well as the *character* and *nature* of scientific endeavour.

As has been mentioned in passing, secular science today is motivated by power or domination. It is regarded as autonomous power (power for the sake of power) which is not subject to norms outside or above science. The emphasis is on excellence and achievement, to rise above the ordinary. In the place of that, Fowler (1993a) proposes the following aims:

#### 4.12.3 *Service*

In the light of Scripture, scientific practice - as with any other human activity - only has meaning if it stands in a relationship of loving service towards God, other people and the rest of creation. Service is exactly the opposite of the obsession with power of Western science. Knowledge imparts power, but the power does not have any value in itself if it is not used to serve. Therefore, students and lecturers who are high achievers should receive recognition, but they should not be lionised when they are not willing to use their achievements in the service of the whole community.

#### 4.12.4 *Wisdom*

Apart from service, science should lead to insight or wisdom. The present science industry produces - like a sausage-maker - largely uncritical operators of scientific techniques aimed at controlling reality. Students are not taught to understand themselves, their fellowmen and the world around them. Issues pertaining to religion and worldview, and questions regarding the meaning of science itself, are seldom asked - while this should be an integral part of education towards wisdom. The Humanities, which could well make a contribution in this regard, are regarded as unimportant and are treated as such.

#### 4.12.5 *Appreciation*

Should controlling power be the driving force behind scientific endeavour, the value of everything is reduced in terms of domination. People, animals, plants and other things are merely seen as aids to achieve this. Whatever does not promote human power (such as, for example, the Humanities) is considered to be of lesser value. In this way man and his environment are devalued and impoverished.

Bearing this in mind, I think that students should be encouraged to discover, to investigate and to appreciate the rich diversity of the creation which God has given us. It should be appreciated not because we can use it, but because it is God's gift to us. This enjoyment is not something which is to be denigrated as mere recreation, something with which to pass the time. It is our most important task: gratitude to the Lord for the great gift which He gave us. We cannot really serve God in science or have true insight if we do not appreciate and enjoy, in deep gratitude, his gift to us.

These three aims of scientific endeavour should be guided by clear norms. The scientist should, for instance, be guided by respect for God's creation and act as a responsible and accountable steward.

Recapitulated, the task or goal or scientific practice in Biblical perspective is threefold: service, wisdom and appreciation. Should the three be realised in our scientific endeavour, it would mean the largest paradigm shift in the whole 2 500 years' history of Western science!

\* \* \*

In the four preceding chapters, in a more or less abstract way, we tried (1) to understand something about the differences between African and Western culture, (2) to evaluate them both positively and negatively in order (3) that they may be mutually enriched by the strong points of both cultures. What we have done thus far, will become much more concrete in the next chapter. It will deal with real human beings, with how, in the encounter between African and Western culture, students are trying to formulate their cultural identity in a new South Africa.



## Chapter 5

### AN AFRICAN OR A WESTERN IDENTITY?

During the apartheid struggle prior to 1994 schools, colleges, universities and churches were imprisoned by particular cultural groups. In the new South Africa, subsequent to 1994 we have entered an open society, becoming a multicultural society in which religious, social, political and many other differences are acknowledged and respected. Where cultural diversity had formerly been seen as rather an embarrassment - even a threat - it now offers opportunities for mutual growth and enrichment. In the new rainbow nation at the southern tip of Africa the different cultural "colours" should not clash but complement each other.

Whether this is really practically possible is more difficult to assess. This question is at present being raised and discussed in religious, social, political, economic and many other spheres. We will limit this discussion to the educational area in which I personally have more experience.

In the past, for example, teaching and studying at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education was much simpler. Were tertiary education to be defined as "A lecturer guiding a student towards attainment of a specific goal by way of certain norms", it had been a Christian Afrikaner lecturer who had to guide (mainly) white young people from (mainly) the three Reformed Afrikaans-language churches in accordance with Biblical norms towards attaining their calling in life.

Today the University still maintains its Christian character. Lecturers thus have to be professing Christians, but they are not necessarily white Afrikaners any longer. Students from different cultural and religious backgrounds are admitted - although they are expected to respect the Christian character of the University. We are also beginning to realise that Christianity can assume many cultural shapes, such as, for example, a Western or an African shape. As a result of the new socio-political-economic realities in the country a realisation has also dawned that the calling or task for which young people have to be prepared has not remained the same.

If today (1996) we should pose the question as to *who* the student is, according to *what* norms he/she should be guided, with *what* purpose in mind, then the difference with the past should be abundantly clear. The

responsibilities of both the lecturers and the students are not that simple anymore.

In contrast to the so-called neutral South African universities, the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education has, however, a unique opportunity, because it can be open to and critical of *all* cultures from the Christian point of departure. It can in its own humble fashion work on the transformation of *all* cultures in the light of Scripture, and in this way it can force students out of their cultural isolation or imprisonment and thus make a contribution to a new rainbow nation which could possibly share common values.

This is no easy task, however. *How* to do this remains the question.

I have been asking myself in recent times how both students and lecturers can be assisted in this process. What follows below is a first effort in this direction. It is simply a report on a small experiment undertaken during two months in 1996. It is no thorough scientifically based study such as would be done by an anthropologist, sociologist or psychologist with questionnaires, statistical computations, etc.

## 5.1. **The scope of the experiment**

### 5.1.1 *The aim*

The objective of the experiment was very practical: to determine how students from different cultural backgrounds (especially white, Western-oriented and black Africa-oriented students) would perceive and experience their own cultural identity in the new multicultural South Africa. The knowledge obtained from the experiment should also enable lecturers more readily and fully to understand the general behaviour of students and their reaction to subject matter and learning methods. It might also help lecturers to keep in touch with cultural diversity in the design of curricula and teaching methods.

In South Africa (and the rest of the world) multiculturalism is not a vague possibility any longer - it has become a hard reality. Intercultural skills have therefore become an important concern in education, because culture not only determines the way in which students learn, but also how lecturers teach. Lecturers increasingly have to understand the important role played by cultural differences in the communication process in the classroom.

They should not only know and be able to describe the cultural differences, but should also be able to interpret and understand them.

### 5.1.2 *The class*

The experiment was conducted with a class taking an introductory (first-year) course in Christian Philosophy. This is (in the Faculty of Arts) a compulsory course for all students and was introduced because of the Christian character of the University. The course briefly involves a systematic introduction to a Reformational vision of life, anthropology and philosophy of society. In my own course attention is also paid to the issue of culture and cultural differences.

The students were all aged between 18-22 and were mostly Christians. The class consisted of about 80 white students (75 Afrikaans-speaking and 5 English-speaking), 20 black students (mostly Tswana-speaking), 3 coloured students and 3 Indians (of whom two are Muslim and one is a Hindu) - it was, therefore, really diverse. The important common factor was that they were all young South Africans who had to determine and carve a niche for themselves in the new South Africa.

In earlier times the apartheid policy defined us, determined what we would be, viz. whites and blacks, and also with whom we could have contact, viz. our own cultural group. As a result of this policy of racial apartheid we noticed skin colour rather than the person. Today we have to redefine ourselves, and must personally determine whom we would like to have contact with. Furthermore, we also realise that the cultural differences are not merely skin-deep. And with the differences we also have to acknowledge the unity! Some people tend to strongly emphasise individual and group differences. Others want to emphasise our unity as a new nation. The critique of the first on the second viewpoint is that it does not recognise the differences (of the smaller groups), which implies discrimination. The second, however, in turn blames the first of discrimination against other groups because of its emphasis on the own group!

### 5.1.3 *The experiment*

The lecturer wanted to determine, in a variety of ways: (1) How students saw their own identity in the midst of a newly-constituted multicultural society. (2) Whether they were feeling uncomfortable or happy about it. (3) Should they not be happy about their own cultural identity, whether this was serious enough that it could be described as a cultural identity crisis.

The presupposition was that students who - following the profound changes which had occurred in the course of the past two years in South Africa - did not experience some measure of uncertainty, doubt or even crisis, might find it difficult truly to adjust to the new South Africa. Conversely, a crisis of some sort might offer more hope for a multicultural South Africa.

#### 5.1.4 *Different steps in the experiment*

This consisted of three phases:

- The lecturer first taught a number of classes about culture (what it involves), as well as the differences between traditional African culture and Western culture.
- The students had to write a class test in which they had to answer one of the following questions: "How I, as a black African, experience Western culture (positively or negatively)", or "How I, a white African, experience the African culture (positively or negatively)." In their answers they had to give evidence of having internalised the material given to them by the lecturer as well as other information in the textbook, and this had to be revealed by way of a personal vision.
- The students then had to write an essay about how they each experienced their own cultural identity in the new South Africa. The assumption was that the new South Africa would entail a reorientation and even a crisis both for those who had earlier opposed apartheid and those who had supported it.

The tests and the essays had to be reciprocally supplementary. Once one has thought about other cultures, it is possible to have a clearer perspective of one's own cultural identity and to describe it. Conversely, one can only determine one's own identity in conjunction with the other cultural identities in the country.

Margaret Mead correctly writes in one of her books: "As the traveller who has been once from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so knowledge of another culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinise more steadily and appreciate more lovingly our own."

The tests and essays also served as counterbalances and checks in the process of determining exactly what students meant by their responses.

## 5.2 The first step: classes by the lecturer

In actual fact the lecturer should, prior to giving the students any information about culture and cultural diversity at all, have asked the students (by way of a test or an essay) to write about how they experienced their own and other people's cultures. This would have shown more clearly how little/how much students really know about their own and other people's cultures. When the possibility was mooted, however, the students objected strongly that it was a too difficult task, and indicated that they first wanted more guidance from the lecturer.

### 5.2.1 Introduction by the lecturer

The help which I offered the students consisted mainly of the following:

□ *An explanation of what culture involves.* Culture could metaphorically be compared with an iceberg of which the tip is visible, while the larger part is submerged. We are not allowed, however, to limit ourselves to what is superficially visible. I also used another image to indicate that culture consists of different "layers", viz. that of an onion. From "without" to "within" the following layers can be distinguished: (1) habits, (2) behaviour, (3) customs, (4) material and spiritual creations, such as buildings, language and art, (5) institutions, such as marriage, economics the state and its laws, (6) values and norms, (7) a worldview, and (8) the religious convictions of a group of people.

The "outer" layers of a culture are more visible and are also more easily changed, while the "inner" layers are not quite as visible, are more difficult to express in words and also do not change so easily. It is precisely these "deeper" layers, however, which play an important role in the determination of the character of a culture. This does not rule out the fact that the more "external" context, for example the economic situation - either poverty or affluence - does not shape, sometimes in a decisive way, a culture at a specific time.

□ *A few important characteristics of culture were mentioned, including the following:*

- Each culture is to a large extent inherited and learned.
- No one easily changes the culture into which one was born.

- No culture is static, but changes all the time. The change can be the result of (1) contact with other (sometimes stronger) cultures, and/or (2) changes in the socio-political and economic conditions. Such a change can be fairly superficial, in the sense of the acceptance of "outer" layers (for example, habits, behaviour, customs, clothing of another culture), while the deeper facets (worldview and religion) might remain unaffected. Or the "deeper" cultural layers themselves - which co-determine the entire cultural pattern - might be affected. It is usually in this latter instance that real tension develops and that one can speak of a cultural crisis. The outer cultural layers, such as habits, are usually replaced without much anxiety.
- No culture is homogeneous - there might be subcultures within a specific culture.
- No culture is unique - especially not in the modern world with all its means of communication. There are communal or shared traits.
- The lecturer laid special emphasis on the fact that there is no perfectly good or wholly evil culture. As a result of sin there is no perfect culture, but as a result of God's redemptive work there is also no totally corrupt or evil culture. No culture may be uncritically idealised or over-critically rejected. Each culture has the tendency to exaggerate what is basically good, so that it goes awry. We will therefore have to learn to distinguish, in each culture, between the essentially good and the bad.

Prior to the dissemination of the gospel in Africa, African culture had already revealed very positive traits as a result of God's "general" revelation. And in spite of the fact that the West has known the Gospel for 2 000 years, there are still many traits in Western culture which do not reveal the influence of the Gospel. Western culture is increasingly becoming secularised. Therefore traditional African culture cannot simply be called "barbaric" and Western culture described as "civilized". As Christians we have the unique privilege and task that we do not merely have to weigh the one against the other, but that we should be able to evaluate each critically from a third, higher perspective, the Word of God, and try to move to the point where we may share the same cultural values.

□ *The most important differences between traditional African and Western culture were explained by way of a schematic diagram and the implications of the differences made clear to the class. (For more details about this, the reader is referred to the two textbooks used in the class:*

Van der Walt, 1992:189-204 and Van der Walt, 1994a:196-231.) The differences between Western and African culture were deliberately somewhat exaggerated by the lecturer, so that the differences would be clearer to the students. There was no allowance made, for example, for the acculturation which has occurred during more than 350 years. (From the tests and essays of the students, however - cf. points 5.3 and 5.4 below - it emerged clearly that a large degree of acculturation has already occurred - especially the influence of Western on African culture.) I discussed the following differences between the two cultures with the students:

- The importance of the (supernatural) world of the spirits in traditional African thought as against the emphasis on the natural physical world in the West (according to which belief in the spirit world would be mere superstition).
  - A more holistically oriented religious orientation in Africa as against a dualistic view of religion in the West.
  - A spiral vision of history and a resultantly traditionalist attitude among Africans, as against a linear view of history among Westerners with a concomitant belief in progress.
  - Differences in terms of temporal perspectives. In Africa, today becomes yesterday, one waits for the right time (Greek: *kairos*), time is "made", is determined by human needs, future planning is not so important, and the attitude towards life is therefore tranquil and relaxed. In the West today becomes tomorrow, time is chronological (Greek: *chronos*), time is used, determined by the clock, planning is important, and the result is a lifestyle filled with tension and stress (the rat race).
  - Africa's strong communalist style, versus the mostly individualistic mentality of the West.
  - Possible differences in the mode of thought of the two cultures: traditional Africa is more concretely-practically-synthetically directed, while the people of the West think more abstractly-theoretically-analytically.
- Finally we had a brief discussion of racism, for example how racist theories came into being in the course of history, how racism is internalised, the negative effects of racism and the different stages in the development of

a positive, non-racist racial awareness. (For more detail, see Van der Walt, 1995:65-74.)

When the experiment was conducted with the students, my model of how to understand and evaluate cultural diversity (as described in chapter 1) was not yet available, because I only conceptualised it at a later stage. On the one hand it was unfortunate, because it may have been of great help to them. On the other hand it was good, because it forced them to grapple, unaided, with the question of how to evaluate cultural diversity.

### 5.2.2 *Observations during class discussions*

From the students' questions and class discussions with regard to the above information, the following already emerged:

- After 350 years black and white know very little about each other. The knowledge which we do have is limited to the outer cultural layers (customs, behaviour, habits). We have not penetrated the invisible world (the deeper cultural layers) beneath the visible (outer cultural layers). Even though this is difficult and can only occur gradually and never completely, it is the key to a better understanding of each other.
- White students especially had previously known little of African culture. Probably because of the fact that the white Western culture had until recently been the dominant culture, it was simply accepted as the criterion and white students did not regard listening to African culture as being important.
- There were clear signs that both black and white students on the one hand had been forced to think more critically about their own culture and on the other hand to be more sympathetic to the "foreign" culture.
- Few, if any, students doubted that apartheid had been wrong. The lecturer had to explain to them, however, that even an anti-apartheid attitude was not enough. What is now needed is that the two different worlds (Africa and the West) should really meet and understand each other. It would not help to suggest that we are simply the same under different coloured skins. Naturally we are all human beings and there are generally universal characteristics which should also be stressed. The essential cultural differences may not be ignored, however. And this can be done



without reverting to old racist patterns of thought. (Multiculturalism does not automatically imply a nonracial attitude!)

The question can again be asked as to whether the experiment might not have been more successful should the students have given their ideas totally "innocently", that is, without any prior guidance by the lecturer. To what extent the lecturer affected their views or influenced them to say what they might have thought the lecturer wanted to hear, would be difficult to determine. In any case, the information given by the lecturer gave the students some guidelines according to which they should write their tests and essays.

### 5.3. The second step: a test by the students

As has already been said, they had to write about the positive or negative assessment which they had of the culture to which they did not belong. (The Eastern cultures were excluded, with sole concentration on those of the West and Africa.) The intention was of course to force students out of their own cultural isolation and to let them reflect on another culture of which they knew very little. They were allowed to make use of some of the insights which they had acquired during the preceding classes. Many of the students made use of the schematic representation of differences between Africa and the West which the lecturer had supplied.

In what follows, let us look at the answers of some of the black and then the white students. A few general impressions of the relevant group are given and specific issues are then isolated.

#### 5.3.1 *Black students' opinions about Western culture*

##### 5.3.1.1 *General impressions*

The general impressions found in all the tests are the following:

- *Students are aware of the enormous influence of Western culture on their (traditional) culture*

A female student, for example, wrote: "I think that as a black I do not have any choice but to surrender to Western culture, even though I do not like it, because Western culture is being forced on to us and that is very depressing." A male student wrote: "It became clear to me that most blacks accepted the Western culture although, when asked, they refuse to confirm or deny it."

- *Students are in general more positive towards Western culture than white students are towards African culture. (Cf. detail later.)*

The following expression is typical of many: "As far as Western culture is concerned, I understand it more positively than negatively".

- *Appreciation is especially expressed about the fact that Western civilisation has been brought to Africa.*

In this regard reference is made to things such as education, modern technology, health services, food, hygiene, clothing and higher standards of living, in other words, the visible manifestations of Western culture. Because such things imply "progress", they are rarely critical towards the deeper cultural layers of the West.

- *From the tests it does not clearly emerge (as it will from the essays - see below) whether students also experience a degree of tension between the old (traditional) and the new (Western).*

Most of them rather look for a balance, for example: "I am using both African and Western culture so that my life should be well balanced." Or: "As an African I acclimatise myself with both the black and white culture." Slight tension is to be found in the following: "I have a very positive feeling toward Western culture, because it suits me best and I enjoy it. But I cannot change my identity by birth. I am an African and nothing will change that, I will always be like that."

#### 5.3.1.2 *Specific points of appreciation or criticism*

With regard to more specific points, the following can be raised:

- *The world of the spirits and its concomitants*

Blacks do not like it when whites do not realise that funerals are very important to them and that they should be given enough time off by lecturers/employers even though (according to Western views) it might be a distant relative who has died. Whites regard their belief in witch doctors (*sangomas*) as superstition. Whites are also viewed as being very materialistic.

As regards ancestral worship - perhaps the strongest core in their traditional faith and worldview - this does not emerge very readily in the test papers.

(In their essays, in which they could write about their own identity it is very prominent in the work of all the students.) It would seem that some black students reject this belief. A female student, for example, says of the whites: "The most important of them all, they brought true religion to the Africans. We used to pray to our ancestors and we believed they brought us to this world. We did not know that God was the Creator of mankind. Now that we know, we no longer pray to our ancestors". A male student first says: "Christianity has contributed to the upliftment of Africa ... we no longer believe in the ancestors", but later it emerges that he believes in both God and the ancestors.

- *The strong influence of tradition*

Students would not seem to be entirely happy about this aspect of their own culture. They say, for example, that "African norms and cultural rules must be practised generation after generation and should not be changed. That is barring to us, the youth". Another one says that "The continued search for new methods of improving lifestyles is enough to desire and adapt to Western culture". A subsequent one says that whites prepare their children well for the future. In the case of most students Western education is highly regarded, for example: "The most important thing is that the Westerners have brought education to Africa. Most of the important people in our country are important because of education. They are what they are because they are educated. What if the West hadn't brought education? Then we would still be going to traditional schools in the mountains".

- *Notions of time*

It is interesting - and probably very encouraging for Westerners! - that many black students say that they prefer the Western notion of time over the African one. They have appreciation for Western "time management" and "punctuality". Somebody says: "We don't have to spend so many long hours in church". (Church services in black communities can in fact last for many hours.) This tendency (together with what will be mentioned under the next heading) may be an indication that the two different cultural worlds are changing, moving closer to each other, perhaps making shared values a real possibility.

- *Communalism versus individualism*

It is remarkable to note how many students say that they prefer Western individualism and to note the reasons that they provide for this view: "I

appreciate their striving for individual achievement. This enables the person to work hard by himself, not depending on others". Or: "Group opinion should not be so important". A following one says: "I want to be responsible for my own deeds and achieve anything I like". Yet another one says: "I have to think about myself first before I think about someone else". A following student says: "If you could serve yourself first, then you could serve the community later". Still another one: "What I like most about the white African culture is the way they view community. They say that community is there because of the individuals. In African culture other people totally dominate a person. Therefore they become lazy and no more willing to think". A subsequent remark by a student shows appreciation for individualism because, if one is working in a group, you cannot be blamed if something goes wrong.

From those aspects that they do not appreciate about the West it also emerges, however, that they do not accept Western individualism without any reservations. They do not like being alone. Some say that they like large families with many children. They cannot understand how neighbours can live next to each other for a month without greeting or touching each other. Or how whites can solve a problem without everybody being consulted. The next black strongly criticised Western individualism: "You only look out for your own progress. Everything turns on you and your own family. As long as you get ahead, the bad fortune of another person does not affect you. Everybody lives just for himself ...."

- *Human relationships*

The black students, as was to be expected, had a lot of negative things to say about whites' human relationships. Whites are selfish, egoistic, do not show enough love, care and respect for their neighbour, are not patient and forgiving. "All in all I can say that I think Western people have no manners, they are very disrespectful and ill-mannered. So I wish I could stick to our culture and forget about theirs." This statement deals (as can be expected) specifically with the actions of whites towards blacks. Whites appreciate somebody according to what he owns and not what he is. Whites regard blacks as "irreliable fools", "stupid, poor and dirty", "labourers and slaves". "What I hate most, is that they (the white Westerners) always make a black person feel inferior" sums up the general feeling. One student rightly says: "We don't respect each other's culture because we are full of racism".

### 5.3.2 *White students' views of African culture*

#### 5.3.2.1 *General impressions*

Before we look at specific things which they evaluated positively or negatively, first a few general impressions.

- *Most students acknowledged that they knew very little about African culture, were used to stereotyping and would like to find out more about African culture - they were therefore grateful for the lecturer's classes.*

"As a white African this is the first time that I have had to read about and study African culture to any extent." A following one says: "African culture never bothered me much. It is not as if I were unaware of the culture, also not that I was wholly against the people and their culture. It is more a case of it always having been there and me never being in direct contact with it". Another student says that "as a typical white I grew up without knowing one single black person by name or having a black friend. I never found this strange or questioned it. Since then I have begun to realise that there is good in each culture, something which can be appreciated". A subsequent student says that "I have learned a lot and I am a fuller person who can look at both cultures with broader insight". A similar testimony says that "I have come to a deeper insight of the African's culture. Now I can try to accept the African for what and who he is, because I see that my culture is not the only one. I need not take on his culture, but I can make room for it". A further student mentions that "I find the opportunity to learn more about African culture very exciting. After 300 years we still do not know a lot or really enough about African culture. There are many prejudices on the road to true understanding. It is especially the apartheid-era which has put blinkers on the whites. As part of a new generation I have the desire to become more part of Africa and make that which I experience as positive aspects of African culture part of my vision of life and existence".

Many acknowledge that because they know so little about African culture, they find it difficult to determine their own position with regard to African culture. Most, however, are of the opinion that a lack of knowledge and understanding of each other's cultures constitutes one of the most important factors causing division. Knowledge and understanding on the other hand can promote good relationships.

- *Because each culture has strong and weak points, African culture should also be respected, such as emerges from the following statements:*

"White Afrikaners were used to imposing their culture on the others, and until recently we were the dominant party. This was an error. We should respect each other's cultures, because there is no one perfect culture. Now we can get a balance between African and Western cultures by studying and selecting the negative and positive aspects of each of them." A subsequent vision: "The ideal is that we should learn from each other. But first we should take the trouble to understand and accept each other".

- *Although not one white student was pointedly negative towards African culture (perhaps the influence of the lecturer's classes?) some did have mixed feelings and some felt (the only honest ones?) that when they thought about African culture they thought predominantly about the negative aspects of African culture.*

This emerges from the following: "I have mixed feelings about African culture. I cannot say that I have only positive or negative feelings, because that would not be true." In the following statement the tension is clear: "I personally think that Western and African culture have positive and negative points. Perhaps my Western culture has more negative and positive points ...". A similar statement says that: "If I look back over everything which I experience as positive and negative in African culture, I realise that I experience more issues in African culture positively rather than negatively. I also note that I tend to praise African culture more than I do my Western culture. But in spite of that I still prefer my own culture, the white Afrikaner culture. The culture within which I was raised is the one that I love".

In the following quotations the conflict is even clearer: "I am willing to learn from their culture, but they must then also accept the good from my culture". And: "The African is not wrong, but I am also not wrong. I am not going to force him to change his views, but then I am also not going to change mine." A next student: "Perhaps we should learn to understand each other's culture, but not in such a way that the one is influenced by the other". Or "We as Westerners should experience but not adopt African culture, so that we do not banish the norms and values according to which we were raised". A last student is not in favour of a fusion of even the positive elements from both cultures, because "this will lead to one superficial culture coming into being of which we cannot be proud any more".

Fortunately there were also students such as one white female student who said that she had not only been forced to reflect on what is positive and negative in African culture, but also to reflect anew on her Christian faith.

- *Not one white student was willing to exchange his/her culture fully for African culture (the lecturer also did not expect this). Most sought - as did the black students - for a balance*

"We can polish each other like diamonds. Let us fuse all the positive elements and constitute a positive South African culture of which each South African can be proud". His classmate maintains that "if we can find a merger of all the plus points of both cultures, I think, we would have the ideal culture." A final example: "I feel that, if we can bring the two cultures together, we can have a wonderful culture. There are so many good and positive things in both cultures. We should, however, prevent the one from smothering the other".

Following these general impressions, we can now look briefly at specific issues in African culture which are appreciated either negatively or positively by Western students.

#### 5.3.2.2 *Specific points of appreciation or criticism*

- About the *world of the spirits and the religious views* of the African (ancestral worship, witch doctors, initiation practices, etc.) no white student had anything positive to say. The standard reaction was that these were pagan superstitions.
- *View of history and bonds to tradition*

This was also adjudicated negatively. Westerners clearly do not like a static vision where development, dynamism and progress are absent.

- *Notion of time*

The fact that Africans tend to be late for appointments was regarded negatively, but the more tranquil tempo of life in African culture was welcomed.

- *Communalist attitudes*

The shadowy side of communalism (such as enormous group pressure and the resultant lack of initiative) was criticised and rejected, but the positive side was praised, for example the strong sense of community, personal relationships, interest in and caring for each other, sharing, and so forth. An English-speaking female student, for example, said: "I think the Africans are in touch with themselves and their feelings and are still concerned with the important things in life. I believe it is wonderful that they don't worry about tomorrow and make time for everybody. I believe a bond exists between the Africans and they are still concerned about each other". This person clearly saw the weaknesses of her own individualist Western culture.

- *Customs*

Apart from the fact that the often large families among black people are not acceptable to whites, there are also other habits which are irritating, such as the fact that black people talk or call to each other very loudly over long distances.

#### 5.4 **The third step: an essay by the students**

This clearly was not an easy task for the students, in spite of the help given beforehand by the lecturer. Many had probably not had any experience in describing their own identity. It must have been even more difficult to be critical of it and to say whether one was satisfied with it or not.

It was stated clearly to the students in advance that, although one could not make a watertight division between the two, their essays had to deal with their cultural-social (more collective-public) identity and not their personal (more psychologically-private) identity. They also had to keep in mind that identity is determined by the following factors: (1) the monologue with yourself, (2) the dialogue with your fellow human beings, both those close to you (family, friends etc.) and the wider socio-political-economic community, (3) the dialogue with your god/God (cf. John Calvin's statement that self-knowledge is dependent on one's knowledge of God). To take only one factor into consideration would be one-sided.

We will once again first note what the black students had to say and then look at the results in the case of the white students. (The concern here is



with a comparison between the experience of own cultural identity from two angles: Africa and the West.)

#### 5.4.1 *African identity*

##### 5.4.1.1 *General impressions*

- *Immense tension between the old (Africa) and the new (the West)*

It is especially when one compares the black students with the (apparent?) certainty which emerges from the essays of the whites that one is struck by the uncertainty which they reveal about their own identity. Only two students made it clear that they did not experience an identity crisis (whether this is really true is difficult to determine). One student said, for example: "There is no point of a person being in a crisis. What you are taught in your culture should be your guideline". Another said: "We don't experience an identity crisis as we know where we belong".

Among the majority of students who were uncertain, I would like to have their own voices heard:

"I do not know whether to follow the norms of Western culture or to fall into the tracks of my forefathers' culture" (a female student). A next one: "I am totally lost amidst the old and the new". A male student asks: "Should I become a Westerner and abandon my culture or remain an African and not keep up with the times? I need an idea of who I am!" A subsequent one maintains that "The new South Africa has brought cultural confusion, because it is said we are one nation. It is wrong, because every nation wants to preserve its cultural traditions". Yet another one says: "I have to know where I came from in order to know where to go".

One after another the students openly acknowledged that they were not happy with their identity: "I am not satisfied, I am experiencing a crisis and want to change". Two more students explain the reason for the crisis as follows: "We live like the Westerners live. We can't go back to the ways our great grandfathers lived". And: "There is no simple solution which could be provided for me being in an identity crisis, because I still live with my parents and still have to take part in our family's cultural practices".

A subsequent student said that he felt and acted like a Westerner on the "outside" but on the "inside" (deep in his heart) he felt himself to be an African.

A final example (one of the very best assignments by a female student) describes the tension which she is experiencing between the traditional religious and Christian customs, and then she says: "Presently I am fighting a losing battle to find where I am from. I cannot precisely state how ... I am having conflicting ideas of my correct place of abode". Later on she says: "I do not say I want to turn the clock back, to go back to my roots will not solve the problem ... I have to liberate myself from the Western influence to lead my own life. I hereby conclude that I am still at loggerheads with myself".

- *It is especially in the field of religion that the tension emerges strongly*

Because the inner layers of a culture cannot be changed so easily - while this is precisely the area that matters so much in many people's lives - it is especially the traditional beliefs which cause enormous tension in black students' experience of identity. When dealing with customs during crises such as illness (medicine, traditional healers), death, funerals or important transitional ceremonies such as initiation and marriage (with the preceding *lobola*) then the belief in the ancestors (the core moment of their traditional faith) emerges strongly. In spite of the fact that most of them are Christians, it would seem that it would be difficult for most to relinquish their faith in the ancestors without ending up with an identity crisis. (Further on we will find a parallel phenomenon among white students: they too, in the midst of uncertainty, seek to find certitude in the deepest level of their culture, in their case Christian religion.)

Seeing that we will later discuss the issue of the world of the spirits and the ancestors in more detail, I would at this stage only quote some remarks: "I don't know whether to pray to God or seek help from my ancestors. In times of real crisis I revert to my ancestors". A subsequent student writes: "Today I am torn between the two horns of a dilemma: I do not know which God I should worship. If I worship the ancestors, people will always refer to me as uncivilized and primitive". Another student confirms the tension: "Attending ritual dances, going to initiation school, offering to my ancestral forefathers, is a real dilemma to me. After such occasions I am always at tenterhooks on what would happen to me if the priest should hear or learn about it. I have to lead a double standard life: ancestor on the one hand and church on the other". Another student, who first wrote about various traditional customs regarding illness, death, funeral, initiation, *lobola* and witch doctors, concluded with: "In our African tradition, Christianity is mainly influenced by ancestral spirit worship". This is reiterated by another student. One student tells of how he participates in traditional

cults, but on Sunday, as it behooves a good Christian, he goes to church. He then says: "I know I have to choose between our cultural beliefs and Christianity, but I won't tell my parents straight that I won't practise our cultural beliefs".

I always knew that ancestor reverence played an important role in Africa, but I honestly did not expect that it would still occur so readily among our students. This only confirms again that the deeper worldviewish and religious layers of a culture do not change easily or readily.

The fact that some students experience a tension between belief in Christ and in their ancestors, is a promising sign. Unfortunately, however, most students simply want to combine the two - to my mind - conflicting beliefs as will now be indicated.

- *Most students choose an accommodation between Christianity and traditional religion*

There was not one student who directly said that he/she rejected Christianity. Only one student said that many people no longer believed in God and prayer to God, but rather made a mockery of it and preferred to go to the traditional witch doctors. (I could not deduce from his essay whether he himself did this.) There were only three (out of twenty) students who revealed that they rejected traditional religion.

One student subsequently discussed the traditional doctors (whom she said she never consulted), *lobola* (which she also rejected) and also ancestral worship, of which she said the following: "If a member of a family dies, e.g. mother, father or grandparents, you should be worshipping them every year. That's what I learnt from my culture, but I don't see the reason why. These people are dead. The only thing left with us is their spirit and actions. My parents told me that if you don't worship them, that person will turn his back on me. I will have bad luck. But I realized that is not true. ... If you are dead you are dead". Later she continues: "If only these people could throw their superstitious culture away. I see that God is the only one who can help me. Let us throw our beliefs away, let us accept Him".

This woman is also very negative towards African culture in general. She complains that she would like to know why she should do everything that her parents force on her, but they are unable to answer her. And then she

says: "I am not going to follow this culture or learn it to my children. Instead I am going to throw it away. It has no meaning to me or future".

The second student says that her traditional culture creates tension for her because "I am a Christian and I don't believe in spiritual ancestors". And the third says that "traditional culture is full of things which oppose the will of God".

As has been said, most students, however, opt for accommodation of Christianity in their traditional culture. I also definitely get the impression that most of them see this as something natural and do not experience any tension as a result of the synthesis between their faith in *Modimo* (God) and the *badimo* (ancestral spirits).

One student says that he is proud of being a Christian. Just after that he, however, describes how their family, each year on Good Friday, goes to clean the graves of their ancestors and perform the necessary ceremonies, because "We believe in the ancestors, and do everything to satisfy them so that if we have problems they can help us". Another student also appreciates the Christian faith but adds: "Our contact with God is through our ancestors to whom we pray". A subsequent one solves the problem (meaning my problem with the easy synthesis) by regarding God as superior to the ancestors. Yet another one tells how on Sunday, prior to sunrise, they first visit the graves of the ancestors and then go to church. Because the ancestors speak to God on our behalf, they are our intermediaries. A next student makes the statement that "Christianity is fused with African ancestor worship", and illustrates this by saying that such a ceremony is started by reading from the Bible!

- *Most students experience the enormous influence of the Western culture* (cf. what was already said about this.)

One student quotes the Tswana proverb that a child who is carried on the mother's back, and who does not cry when he is hungry, will die. With that he wants to say that they have lost their culture because they did not protest against Western culture. Another student, in some desperation, says: "Let us document the remnants of our culture to help future generations not to be in a worse state of confusion". Another one says: "I need my culture as an African back - even to collect the little that is left". A further student says: "Stick to your own identity, because it can be an asset. No conformity in the new South Africa will be possible. Don't try to be white - it has done too much harm to the African culture". Another

student feels that he must dress in Western clothes otherwise others will laugh at him. A next one says that he is willing to learn from others, but without having to regard his own culture as inferior.

#### 5.4.1.2 *Some more specific issues*

- *Communalist attitude*

Although not much was said about this explicitly, it is clear from other issues which have been propounded (e.g. the "extended family" and parents who expect children and family to participate in ancestral worship) that the community plays an important role and that group pressure is commonplace.

It was clear that it is much more difficult for a person who grew up in a communalist society (where identity is dependent upon and prescribed by the group) to write about his/her personal identity. It required a deliberate effort to try to break away from the group and to view oneself as a unique individual.

According to one student the most significant difference between Africa and the West is that of communalism as opposed to individualism.

- *View of history, conception of time and mode of thinking*

Not much in this regard emerged from the papers, most probably because it is difficult to write about these more abstract issues - students rather wrote about concrete customs and events. One exception is the spirit world, which is a very real world for the majority.

- *Spirit world*

One student quite rightly states: "The deepest belief in African culture is the spirit world". A great deal has already been said about this (see above) when ancestral worship was discussed and its combination with Christian faith was indicated.

It should be repeated now that this belief is deep-rooted in most students and that they not only mention it but describe it in detail. For example, one student writes as follows: "The ancestors are alive in the life of every African. The ancestors are most important for the Africans. We believe that if we slaughter an animal, the ancestors will be very happy and that

they can easily solve our problems. The ancestors are happy because they think that we are remembering them". Therefore the ancestors must be kept informed of all the most important events (e.g. births and marriages).

Another student tells how he sometimes has nightmares when he dreams (dreams are a means of communication for the ancestors). Because *sangomas* communicate with the ancestors, he consulted one. The *sangoma* then told him that his father and mother (who had already died) were not satisfied with him. He then slaughtered a cow, sheep, buck or chicken and poured some beer at their graves. After this he could sleep well again!

A male (Tswana) student (who alleges not to have an identity crisis) says that he believes that ancestors should be served, because they have supernatural powers. They are our contact with heaven - as the Bible teaches (!). During the Easter weekend they usually go to their graves and gratify the ancestors in various ways, such as the pouring of beer and especially by means of sacrifices, because ancestors are capable of giving us health, wealth, joy or harmony. They should also be kept well-informed (as mentioned before). Even during a funeral, as the coffin is lowered into the grave, the ancestors are told: "Here is your child". They reveal themselves to us in various ways, but especially by means of dreams (as indicated earlier).

Other students simply describe the customs and do not explicitly state whether they themselves believe in them. "Ancestors appear to be very important, because they are mentioned more often than Christ. It is believed that they are active, the rulers of the universe. Communication with them continues ... It is believed in the black African community that no one can withstand the punishment of the ancestors ..." Another student states: "Ancestors are man's closest link with the spirit world and it is universally believed among African tribes that death does not write 'finish' to human life. There is communication between the dead and the living".

As indicated earlier on, ancestral worship usually coincides with Christian faith. For example, a Tswana student writes: "Jesus Christ is the Head of everything - also our ancestors. He helps them to give us what we ask from them. He is not an ordinary ancestor to us, but a divine one". A Zulu student asserts the same belief: "I believe that the ancestor's spiritual powers come from God. For example the Israelites used to say: 'God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. If I lose respect for the ancestors, my life will be miserable. We are still offering sacrifices and home made beer to the dead. By so doing we ask protection and good luck from

them. I believe that the ancestors are God's messengers". Another student states boldly: "Traditional African cultures believe in ancestors, but this doesn't mean that they are not Christians".

The identity crisis caused in some cases is apparent from the student who states that he goes to church on Sundays but when he is ill or experiences any other problems, he goes to the *sangoma*. However, he experiences an identity crisis and is not satisfied: "I can only say that I do not know where I stand or what is going to happen to me in future because of my mixed feelings ..."

A female Tswana student tells the long story of her aunt's sick child who could not be helped by the Roman Catholic priest's prayer but by the *sangoma*. (She does not mention whether they had consulted with a Western medical doctor.) This causes great tension in her life: should she believe in the God of the Bible or in the ancestors? "I do not know who to believe in."

#### 5.4.1.3 *Intermezzo: a principal reflection regarding ancestral worship*

The information with regard to ancestral worship discussed in detail above, is very important. It indicates that prominent African theologians who want this to be an inherent part of African Christianity, are not merely fabricating - it is a living issue also for ordinary people. (Those interested to know more about the viewpoints of African theologians in this regard may consult, among others, the following: Nyamiti, 1984; Mugambi and Magesa, 1989).

My question is whether this synthesis may be allowed. I realise that I argue as a Western Christian. In the current debate the reconciliation between faith in God (especially Christ, the Mediator) and the ancestors is regarded as an important part of the process of indiginisation or Africanisation of Christianity. My question is, however, whether ancestral worship is not a part of the African culture which clashes inherently with the essence of Biblical faith and may thus not be accommodated, but must rather be rejected.

In a recent edition of the South African journal *Challenge* a black theologian (B. Tlhagale, 1995) pleads for exactly what my black students also proposed. A white theologian, K. Nürnberger (1995), could not accept this. Since I agree with him, I will briefly discuss his viewpoint.

As an introduction he mentions that everyone does, of course, have the freedom to choose his own faith. He also says that it is important to distinguish between culture and religion, even though these cannot be separated in watertight compartments. Playing drums instead of an organ during the church service, making consensus decisions or allowing members of a polygamous family in church, are acceptable examples of Africanisation or inculturation. But when other religious authorities take the place of God, as revealed in Christ, then we are dealing with a totally different issue, namely a change in religious commitment.

In the case of religion the following issues are basically at stake: From whom do you desire life, health, children, and all other things of importance? Whom do you regard as important enough to bring sacrifices to? Whom should you fear if you have erred? With whom must you make peace in the case of drought or illness? For Christians this is clear: God, as revealed in Christ and present in the Spirit.

One thus has to *decide* who to serve or follow (*badimo* or *Modimo*) but one may not *confuse* the two or trust in *both*. One must decide in freedom whether one wants to be, in the deepest sense, a traditionalist or a Christian, and be honest about it.

God and the ancestors may not be confused or served simultaneously, because they themselves do not want it that way. Ancestral spirits have authority and do not tolerate competition - also not from Christ. Once they have a person in their power, they do not easily release him.

The God of the Bible does not tolerate competition either. We only need to think about the very first (and most important) of the ten commandments. The consultation and worshipping of ancestors are explicitly prohibited in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 19:31; 20:6 and 20:27; Deut. 18:11; 1 Sam. 28; 2 Kgs. 21:6; Is. 8:19 and 19:3). The New Testament also warns against such practices. Jesus says that the dead must bury the dead when we have to choose between loyalty to God and them (Luk. 9:59ff.). Paul emphasises that a Christian believer cannot simultaneously be involved with Christ and other religious powers (1 Cor. 10:14-22). Powers controlling people outside of the church are subject to the raised Christ (Eph. 1:20ff. and 3:10ff.).

There is thus no way in which the Bible allows shared religious loyalty.



Of course one's deceased family is important. You may not forget them, but they are dead. They cannot exercise power over you anymore. They are not *saviours* but *sinners*, who themselves need salvation in Christ. You may thank the Lord for what He gave you in them. And if they lived a good life, their lives may be an inspiration to you. But a Christian follows Christ, not his ancestors.

Many of the African theologians say that the Roman Catholic Church - an originally Western institution - does honour or venerate the saints. As a Protestant, however, I do not believe that recourse to the saints can be justified on the basis of the Bible.

Some refer to the Bible itself, for example the cloud of witness in Hebrews 11, which can inspire us to stand fast in faith, like them. There is nothing wrong with that. But when we call upon them or ask them to mediate between us and God, then we reject the power of the risen Christ for the sake of the weakness of his deceased followers.

Even the saints of the Roman Catholic Church are not our biological fathers and mothers, but our fathers and mothers in faith. They are regarded as saints, because during their lives they were exemplary examples of devotion to Christ.

The debate also rages as to whether the ancestors are only venerated or worshipped. Personally I do not see a great difference between the two words. As indicated by D.J. Hesselgrave (1991:227), this play upon words does not resolve the essential problem about the description of the attitude to the ancestors: "As for 'ancestor worship', it may be true that the term suggests too much. However, the alternatives seem to suggest too little. More than 'honor' and 'remembrance' is involved. Like the deities in various polytheistic systems, ancestral spirits which are not remembered are thought to be personally deprived, and may retaliate in kind. Furthermore, the persistence of ancestral practices, even when the true God is known and his teaching concerning the subject is taught, indicates that the practice rivals true worship rather than complementing it. The term 'ancestor-devotion' may be a happy compromise for some, but it will probably be too strong for those who insist that the ancestors are not being worshipped, and too weak for those who insist that they are".

God thus demands a definite choice from us - however traumatic that might be. (Our own Germanic forefathers also believed in ancestral veneration. This is not only unique to today's Africa, but also occurs in the East.) It is

liberating, however, to be free from the power and the fear of the ancestors and to serve only Christ. The choice put before the nation of Israel by Joshua (24:15) is equally valid today for the Christians in Africa.

#### 5.4.2 *Western identity*

The impressions from this group can be summarised as follows:

- *The first, most striking trait in most students is that they maintain that they are not experiencing an identity crisis*

If one compares this with what emerged from among the black students, the difference is remarkable. Some initially describe the big changes that have occurred in South Africa in recent times and then they continue to say that they have no uncertainty about their own cultural identity!

Because one can scarcely believe that so few Western-oriented students experience an identity crisis, one looks for possible explanations. I have thought of the following:

- It may be as a result of the dominant role which Western culture played in Africa. Western culture was, until recently, accepted as the norm. Because of that, blacks have already been experiencing a crisis for a very long time, while for the whites in South Africa the crisis is only beginning.
- Students have not yet really experienced the cultural shock of being exposed to other, different ways of life.
- They have not really begun to analyse and understand themselves honestly.
- Are they perhaps more adaptable than black students? I doubt that.
- Does racism perhaps play an important role here? This did not really enter into the discussion of the students, and no student would like to be called a racist, but I do not believe that this has completely disappeared. Research done on racism clearly indicates six different phases in the development of a positive (non-racist) racial identity among white students. (Cf. Van der Walt, 1995:71,72.) It is only in the fifth and last phases that such a student tries to define his/her own identity and to ask what exactly it means to be a white person in South Africa.

□ Lastly it is, of course, difficult for anyone to define one's own identity and especially to regard it critically from a distance. Many of the papers did not yield much original material or reveal the students' own, personal opinions. They were simply summaries or rewritings of the lecturer's classes and other material provided by him. (This may, of course, hide a deeper identity crisis.)

In any case, self-assured pronouncements like the following: "I have absolute certainty regarding my identity" or "Long live the white Afrikaner culture!" are typical of many of the papers.

In addition many students said that identity grows and develops and that they therefore do not need to experience a feeling of crisis at a time of change. The birth of a new South Africa must be accompanied by some birth pangs!

Many notice the negative aspects of the past (e.g. apartheid) and would prefer to build on the positive.

- *One gets the impression of a relatively closed attitude and not too many signs of an open attitude.* This applies not only to the students who are clearly right-wing (and who see the Afrikaner youth as being threatened by various probable and improbable "enemies"), but to most of the white students. In spite of indicating appreciation for the African culture in their tests, little of this is revealed in their assignments.

Students who do not only state that they have an own identity (without saying exactly wherein it is lodged!), but rather describe specific traits of their own identity, would for example emphasise the following (the *scheme* but not the *content* came from the lecturer):

□ *Habits and customs:* rugby and "braaivleis" on Saturday afternoons, the manner in which birthdays, Christmas, etc. are celebrated.

□ *Behaviour:* etiquette, courtesy and formality

□ *Material and spiritual creations:* the Afrikaans language (very prominent), the different art forms and achievements in this regard, buildings such as the Voortrekker Monument and other national monuments, the Cape Dutch style of architecture, the sandstone buildings of the Free State, etc.

- Own *fatherland* and *history*.
- *Institutions* such as marriage, church, state, schools, universities, political parties and cultural organisations in which the Afrikaner holds a conservative viewpoint. Also economic stability.
- *Symbols* like the (previous) national flag and national anthem, etc.
- *Values and norms*: conservative with regard to clothing style, morals and upbringing.
- *Life view and religion*: Protestant-Calvinist (the three Afrikaans churches).

Most stated that they did not want to remain with the Voortrekkers, ox-wagons, "kappies" (bonnets), campfires and "boeremusiek". One student says that he has the feeling that young Afrikaners - especially teenagers - are ashamed of their culture. Another student says that he sometimes feels that the Afrikaner is an empty shell wrapped in a white skin! (This may also be valid for his fellow students, because some of them still regard the typical aspects of Afrikaner culture as simply consisting of beer, "braai-vleis" and rugby).

One student feels that politically and culturally narrow-minded Afrikaners might have great difficulty finding a broader identity. This is probably true.

- *Many students admit that they would have to assume a broader identity: not only Afrikaner, but South African.* Most do not say, however, exactly what constitutes this South African identity - except for repeating the lecturer's example. A few students, however, distinguish between race, people ("volk") and nation (as biological, cultural and political terms) and say that one should distinguish between identities regarding race, people and nation. They want to emphasise the latter. "A few years ago we still talked about Afrikaner, Englishman, Zulu, Tswana. Today we talk about South African". Another student says: "I am more patriotic towards my country than towards my people".

- *Here and there strongly individualist traits emerge.* For example, some students emphasise that there is no such thing as "the Afrikaner". It is a myth rather than a fact. There are differences between Afrikaners from the country and those from the cities, between various regions (e.g.

the Cape Province and what used to be the Transvaal), and between old and young (because parents and children have different experiential worlds). Another student states that there are, at present, many differences of opinion among Afrikaners and that these are tolerated in the new South Africa. Another distinguishes between the outdated, the compromising, the liberal and the coming-of-age Afrikaner. There is, of course, also a student who wishes not only to be called an Afrikaner, but a *Boere*-Afrikaner. (The type of literature she used only served to confirm the suspicion that she is a fierce supporter of the *Volkstaat*.)

Some English-speaking students say that as they do not regard themselves as "pure" Afrikaners, they do not experience any identity crises.

An even stronger individualistic trend emerged with some of the students. One says for example: "You should find your cultural identity yourself and not someone else's, or it might be forced upon you". It is to be expected that the earlier collective identity of the Afrikaner is currently fragmenting into more individual identities.

- *From the essays it once again becomes clear how apartheid has isolated the different cultures and people in South Africa from each other.* Many students mention that they only made real contact with black people once they had attended university. Another one says that, although she has black (girl)friends on the campus, she dares not take them home since this would be unacceptable to her parents

- *A more important point is that practically all of the students emphasise their Christian faith as an important aspect of their identity.* We might be dealing with a similar phenomenon as we had with the black students (who emphasised faith in the spirit world of the ancestors so strongly): during times of crisis one reverts to the deepest layer of one's culture, one's religion - one's ultimate security. One student states that she has an identity crisis because Afrikaner culture is not Christian anymore. She has therefore decided rather to find refuge in her Christian belief. (She did not realise that Christianity always assumes a particular cultural shape.)

Another student asks deeper questions such as: Should one's identity be connected with one's own interest and self-preservation? Do the Scriptures not teach that one who wants to cling to his own life, will lose it? Must we chase after self-preservation and the preservation of our people or should we rather emphasise our much wider Christian calling because the Bible is not in the first place interested in peoples but in the glory of God? One

female student states explicitly: "My basic identity is lodged in the kingdom of God and not in the country of my birth".

- *Students who do experience an identity crisis and the reasons given*

From the following material which the students provided, it is abundantly clear that especially white, but also brown students' culture, has already in a decisive way been influenced by the new socio-economic-political context of contemporary South Africa - and this will occur to an even greater extent in the future.

#### *Coloured students*

The three coloured students are all three experiencing a crisis. Although one (Afrikaans-speaking coloured) reports that he does not have a crisis, he says in the same breath: "Coloured people never really had a place - previously not among white people and now neither among black people". The other (Afrikaans-speaking coloured) also feels aggrieved, because he stands alone and is not being accepted by whites or blacks. He regards himself as being an outcast, full of insecurity and suffering from an inferiority complex. He regards himself as being without past, present or future. He, however, does not ask for sympathy, only justice and neighbourliness. The English-speaking coloured does not know whether to call himself an African or a Western person. He calls himself an African, but this does not satisfy him.

#### *English students*

As previously stated, some English students allege that they do not experience an identity crisis because they have been raised to be more "multicultural". (Some of them are from bilingual homes and have attended both Afrikaans and English schools.) There are, however, some English-speaking students who are experiencing difficulties. One female student says that she has a serious problem: "Adapt or die in the new South Africa". She concludes: "I am uncertain of my present role as female and European in the New South Africa. I am thus experiencing a cultural shock, an identity crisis and the resultant emotional stress caused by the need for change in myself".

Another female (Portuguese, Roman Catholic): "Confusion, uncertainty, turmoil and even embarrassment are just a few descriptions of answers some South Africans may respond with when asked about their cultural

identity". Even an English-speaking student from a wealthy home, who has travelled extensively overseas and grew up in cosmopolitan Johannesburg, declares: "I am confused about what my cultural identity is".

### *Afrikaner students*

Afrikaans-speaking students gave the following opinions. A female student: "Am I who I used to be? Am I what I think I am?" Another student emphasises the necessity for self-analysis and self-understanding. A male student says: "I am currently on a rocky path looking for a cultural identity of my own - as I have discovered many others are doing". Another proclaims: "I have difficulty deciding whether to be proud of my Afrikaner origin or if it is a millstone around my neck. However, I do not really feel bad about my confusion, because it seems as if my people as a whole are experiencing a cultural crisis". A female student puts it briefly: "I need to rethink my own identity anew", and then relates the shock of having contact with people of colour for the first time at university.

Another student describes the reasons for the Afrikaner's identity crisis: The Afrikaner is no longer the most important role player in the country who can dominate everything. He has lost his power and suffers from a feeling of powerlessness. Economically he is still strong, but this will not be the case for long, because politics will finally determine the economy. People therefore start to doubt themselves.

Another student latches on to this idea and says that today people are looking down on the Afrikaner due to his past, and especially apartheid. The new dispensation does not provide for the Afrikaner's norms and values - one only needs to watch television! Doubt, pessimism, even fear are the order of the day. He thus feels that we would necessarily have to make adjustments if we want to preserve Afrikaner culture.

Another student builds on this idea by saying that the Afrikaner culture will not survive in isolation (a laager mentality). As one continuously changes and adds to one's own house, one should also change one's cultural home. He regards the new South Africa as a radical revolution, because the Afrikaner is no longer on top, not even equal, but at the bottom. The safety net of the state, which has always protected the Afrikaner is gone. However, one must first be something before one can be of value to someone else. If only we were secure in our identity we would also be able to work together towards a broader national unity. We should neither be guilty of spiritual inbreeding (isolation, closeness, exclusivity) nor disap-

pear into a general, vague culture. Retain what is unique, but share it with others and also learn from them. He mentions examples (e.g. Jews) who could maintain themselves in the past without the power and protection of a state.

Another student sings the same tune: "Personally I see the Afrikaner as a once over-assured and now uncertain human being. The Afrikaner will have to rediscover himself, determine his place anew and redefine his function".

The next student asks the question: "Where do I belong? Where am I going?" She then states that it is not a unique phenomenon for the Afrikaner to consider his/her own identity, because it has always been a threatened "species". In the past, however, this was incorrectly approached: aggressively and like a heretic-hunt (who belongs with us?). Building barriers around one is a dangerous way of determining one's identity. It is wrong to look for distinguishing characteristics in a narrow-minded, exclusive fashion. What one culture has in common with others is equally important. More emphasis should be placed on co-operation and national loyalty. Respect for tradition may not impede encouragement to search for what is new.

These then are the results of the three-part experiment undertaken with the students. The important educational implications will still have to be indicated - not an easy task at all!

### 5.5 A brief summary

Looking back, which were the most important similarities and differences between black and white students?

The following *similarities* became evident during the experiment: (1) both groups knew very little about each others' cultures; (2) the little they did know about the other culture touched on rather superficial issues; (3) both groups expressed a desire to learn more about each other's cultures and also wanted to respect the other's culture; (4) not one of the groups were willing to fully exchange their own culture for the other, but wanted to achieve a kind of balance between the two.

The most important *differences* were: (1) the black students knew more about Western culture than the white students about African culture, probably because black students in the past were forced to take notice of



Western culture; (2) black students were more positively disposed towards Western culture while white students had a more negative attitude towards African culture; (3) while most black students acknowledged that they, to a greater or lesser degree, were experiencing an identity crisis, most white students maintained that they were not experiencing a cultural identity crisis.

## 5.6 The value of the experiment

This experiment was decidedly valuable for the students. Writing about your own identity is not easy, because in essence it is self-interrogation - perhaps even more difficult than being interrogated in a court. It forced them, for example, to think critically about their own culture. In addition, it could not take place in isolation from other cultures. It was necessary, however, because Ralph Linton said somewhere: "Those who know no other culture than their own, cannot know their own".

Furthermore the experiment has definitely broadened their perspectives and made them willing to appreciate and respect other cultures. Hopefully it equipped them for the new multicultural South Africa. I would thus like to recommend experiments such as this to other lecturers.

As improvement to my first experiment, I would like to recommend the following: (1) that the students themselves should have closer contact with each other by way of multicultural discussion groups; (2) that these discussion groups should be well planned and should also last much longer - at least one full semester - than the brief period during which my own experiment was conducted.

In this conclusion I wish to focus on the value which such an experiment might have for the lecturer himself/herself. It can have far-reaching consequences for our syllabi which are still almost 100% Western, as well as for the way in which these syllabi will be treated in class (teaching methods), the different learning styles of students, the ways in which we communicate with students and evaluate their work and much more.

At this stage I would like to indicate the value of the exercise only at an elementary level. I am convinced that such an experiment may help white lecturers to understand our black students (whose numbers are on the increase and may be in the majority within five or ten years) better. I am under the impression that we as lecturers are not yet really aware of the

tremendous influence one's culture and experiential world (context) has on behaviour, communication and learning styles in the world of education.

To make this clear, I will mention a few concrete class situations (lectures to black students), which will be inexplicable for most white Western trained lecturers because they are not properly informed about the African culture and the circumstances in which their black students live. I will try in each case to provide also my own explanation for the inexplicable behaviour (for the Westerner) on the part of the black student. I do not assert that my interpretations are correct. With my own limited knowledge of African culture I am also seeking explanations. I am not denying that factors other than those of a cultural nature may also play a role. In some of the cases one could, for instance, ask the question: to what extent is the students' behaviour still a result of the old apartheid ideology? I arrange the examples according to the main points of my characterisation of the African culture earlier on in this chapter.

#### 5.6.1 *The spirit world*

From the preceding part of this chapter it was evident how important the influence of the world of the spirits is to black students. This is again confirmed in the following cases.

- *A student is caught with crib notes during a class test and he pleads innocent*

His apology boils down to the fact that each time he has to write a test, he forgets everything he has studied. He consulted a *sangoma* who told him that another student has put a spell on him by sucking all his knowledge from his head the moment he walks into the class. He thus has to compile notes, so that he does not forget everything.

Is this ordinary dishonesty? Is it perhaps a clear example of a student from a disadvantaged community who cannot cope with the pressure of performing academically? Or should we take the student's own explanation seriously: his behaviour is based on the African worldview that all things have a cause. Empirical evidence or natural causes make a weak impression in a world controlled by spiritual powers. Furthermore, one can do very little about these magical causes - someone else is usually blamed. (This has recently happened even in the case of a murder. The accused asked the question: "Who made me pull the trigger?" Even more: "Who allowed the bullet to hit the unfortunate victim?!")

- *A student who has progress problems, enrolls for more subjects than required in order to obtain his degree*

The consequence was of course that he once again failed in the examinations, because he could not manage all the work. His argument was, however, that he would have better "luck" in passing at least one of the three subjects.

This is probably the consequence of the fatalistic attitude that "bad/good luck" (determined by spiritual powers outside the individual's control) plays an important part in one's life.

### 5.6.2 *View of history and idea of time*

The typical African perspective on history and time previously explained, is illustrated in the following class situations.

- *Students show no appreciation for the chronological sequence of events*

Although this may be due to lack of factual knowledge, it may also be the consequence of the traditional vision according to which history is a number of links of "and then", "and then" - the opposite of the Western chronological linear vision.

- *Students arrive late for appointments, classes, tests, even examinations, do not have enough time to complete exam papers or do not show up for tests and examinations at all and the medical certificate submitted afterwards shows the diagnosis as "tension headache"*

Many obvious contextual factors could have played a role here, such as problems of transport from black townships. Or writing an examination in a language other than one's mother tongue. Or the cultural shock of Western scientific practice. The question should be asked, however, as to whether the cause may not perhaps lie much deeper, namely a different cultural attitude with regard to time. As explained in detail in chapter 3, time in traditional Africa does not have to be used all that punctually, because it will be there again tomorrow. Time is also not clockbound but manbound. For really important things such as your relationship with your neighbour you make time. Time is an event, an occasion. Things are done as they come and not because the clock says so. You begin when you are ready and end when you have finished and not when the bell rings or the whistle blows. Africans are more orientated towards the present: they do not pay

attention to something if it is not in the present. They have an organic view of time, adapted to the natural rhythm of life and not a mechanical, clock-orientated one. The Western view of time (of being exactly on time for examinations and completing the exam paper within a certain timespan of two or three hours) can cause a tremendous cultural shock and therefore give rise to a tension headache.

### 5.6.3 *Communalist attitude*

The communalist attitude of Africans as opposed to the more individualist attitude of Western people is possibly the most important cause of inter-cultural differences, misunderstandings and conflicts as will be evident from the following examples. (This communalist attitude, I believe, is not only the consequence of recent or present socio-economic circumstances, such as poverty, as J.C. Kotze (1993) proposes, but at the same time the result of the still very strong influence of traditional African culture.)

- *Two first-year students copied each other's assignments and submitted identical papers. When the lecturer called them in, they could not understand why it was unacceptable*

"We worked together on the assignment and handed it in separately, because you said each one must hand in a paper." Is this simply blatant dishonesty? Could they perhaps not succeed in collecting enough material from the library, because they did not know how to use a library? Or is it perhaps a remnant of the traditional African culture in which people were used to working together rather than alone?

- *"If one passes, everyone must pass"*

Again, something unheard of for Westerners. According to Western academic standards which use individual achievement as measurement, this type of demand sounds ridiculous. In Africa, however, everyone must be treated equally - also those who worked harder than the others. If you achieve more marks than I did, you are "guilty". A person who achieves well, may even be accused of having a "zombie" who works for him/her. He/she also subjects himself/herself to tremendous jealousy - even measures of revenge.

- *"I am willing to give away 10% of my good semester marks, so that my friend who does not have admission to the examinations may also write."*

*He promised to study diligently, so that he will attain more marks than are necessary to pass and will thus be able to return my marks"*

For a Western lecturer this is unadulterated trash. For an African student this may be the most normal, obvious behaviour, because *everything* must be shared - if it does not happen, I may even take what is due to me. To be selfish is a-social - the greatest possible sin in African culture.

- *A long, stretched-out class discussion on an unimportant matter, because everyone must state his opinion before consensus is reached and one student can finally talk for the class and state which one of the six test marks should not count for the semester mark.*

Is this simply students' tactics to pass the period? Or is it typical African culture which values consensus highly? Or is it group pressure (which may sometimes result in intimidation), because after class the mouthpiece informs me that he actually did not agree with the group!

- *Students' assignments show very little original thought, they find it difficult to take a critical position with regard to other viewpoints and tend to simply summarise the lecturer's textbook or to repeat what he said in class.*

Is this a case of blacks being unable to think critically and being "parrots" by nature who can simply repeat? - quite a racist idea! (The same could be said about many white students.) Or is the reason perhaps lodged in their culture of politeness? Good human relations are priority number one and one should therefore be very careful to overemphasise one's point of view or to criticise another directly. Furthermore, traditional African culture strongly emphasises the authority of superiors and the obedience of inferiors. Thus: what is written in the lecturer's textbook and what he says in class, must be true and should be accepted.

#### 5.6.4 *Communication*

Non-verbal communication plays an important role in every culture. Although the different emotions (like anger, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, etc.) occur with all people and in all cultures, every culture has its own rules determining how to reveal emotions. Every culture determines, for example, when, where and to whom one may reveal one's emotions. A few examples to think about.

- *Lecturer to a student who looks nervous about the test: "Are you ready for the test?" Student: "Does Professor think that I am not feeling well?"*

Again the question should be asked: What lies *behind* the immediate suspicious reaction of the student? It may be a result of the apartheid policy which conditioned blacks and whites not to trust each other. Perhaps a feeling of incapability because of apartheid which regarded blacks as inferior? Perhaps the African custom of being very polite, considerate and positive and not telling someone the naked truth? (If you do not want to do something, you say "yes" while you really mean "no" - all for the sake of good human relations).

Silberbauer (1975:32,35,36) explains: "... in polite African society it is not good manners to ask direct questions and to give direct answers. Matters that are due for discussion are approached obliquely, and enquiries and answers are given in a roundabout manner of speech ... How frequently in the work situation the African is given an instruction and is asked if he understands. He says 'Yes', but then does the wrong thing. His custom dictates that he must give an answer which is pleasing to superior people ... he tries to frame an answer that would give pleasure and contentment ... He is not being dishonest; he is trying to be polite".

The result, however, of this politeness, is suspicion: there must be hidden negative motives behind the simple, sympathetic question from the lecturer!

- *The "clever" professor has difficulty working with the overhead projector. A student in the first row gets up and helps him - to the visible embarrassment of the lecturer. The entire class bursts out laughing loudly - while all of the lecturer's jokes thus far could not draw a smile from them!*

The explanation is probably that humour and culture are closely related. What one laughs at - and of course also cries about - echoes one's view on life, betrays what one believes in. Losing one's stature in the community and feeling embarrassed about it, is something which is very difficult to cope with in communalist Africa. Seeing someone in that position gives the onlooker great pleasure - while all the Western orientated jokes from the lecturer left them unaffected and could not induce them to laugh.

J.C. Kotzé (1993:16,17) explains the difference as follows: *"In the case of individualistic consciousness humour assumes a specialized form; in the*

*case of collective consciousness humour features pervasively as part of everyday life situations.*

"The difference between collective and individualistic consciousness is also embodied in the manner in which humour operates. Inasmuch as people with individualistic consciousness make a deliberate practice of creating and telling jokes at times specified as appropriate, and of creating jokes around certain themes, episodes and incidents, their humour tends to assume a specialised nature. To people with collective consciousness, humour revolves less around fashionable or situationally appropriate jokes than around everyday life situations. To them humour is inherent in social life and not something which functions alongside social life. The difference is more subtle and less stark than phrased here, but it is there. Imagine persons with individualistic and collective consciousness gathered together at a party. Although those with individualistic consciousness also make fun of one another and of incidents which concern those gathered together, they regularly amuse one another with jokes. And though those with collective consciousness may tell jokes, they are more prone to laugh at one another's expressions and predicaments."

#### 5.6.5 *Way of thinking*

A learning style is the fixed behavioural pattern according to which a person approaches the educational process. It includes cognitive, affective and physical behaviour and determines how the student perceives, thinks, participates and reacts to the learning situation. These are all determined by the student's cultural background influencing his/her gifts and specific kind of intelligence. (Cf. chapter 4.12.1.)

- *The white lecturer has difficulty to explain to black students and to gain their acceptance that differences can be important. For example: the differences between human beings and animals, between different types of Christianity or even between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions.*

Are they simply too unintelligent or does the cause once again lie deeper? As a Westerner the lecturer is used to thinking in an analytically-oppositional way (either-or). The African is apparently more apt to argue in a synthetically-inclusive fashion (and-and). Not the differences, but the similarities and coherence are important. While the Westerner thinks in terms of the duality of opposites, the African would rather regard differences as

complementary. As opposed to the Western emphasis on the rigid and the static, the African regards reality as more flexible and liquid.

- *Black first year students especially experience much difficulty with abstract concepts and formulations, logical sequences of thoughts and the systematic exposition of their writing.*

I say *especially* black students, because the same goes for some white students. But this is common among black students. Why? Because black students are not intelligent enough? Most probably black students only think in a different manner: more concretely-practically with visual experience playing a more important role, while white students find it easier to think in an abstractly-theoretical way. Black students think more in affectively-symbolic terms while the white students place emphasis on objectively measurable, countable and testable knowledge. Black students are *involved* with reality, white students *observe* it. (From the later development of black students it, however, became apparent that they can master the Western way of thinking.)

## 5.7. Conclusion

In all of the above-mentioned cases I did not try to give final explanations or solutions. Not because I did not want to, but because I am unable to do so. What I tried to do, was to make lecturers more sensitive to problems occurring regularly in the classroom situation. We must be careful not to give stereotypical answers such as: "This is typical of black students." The reasons for the sometimes strange behaviour usually lie deeper than we tend to think.

Education in a multicultural situation may be difficult - a real challenge - but with the right attitude of sincere interest in other cultures it may also be an enthralling and enriching experience!

\* \* \*

The next chapter will endeavour to apply the insights of the previous chapters to yet another area of life: What could be the implications of our rich cultural variety for economic development and the management practices of South Africa?



## Chapter 6

### HOPE FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA?

Many readers, having read up to this point, may react in the following way: "Very interesting stuff indeed! But what are the concrete implications of the differences between African and Western culture for my daily responsibilities? What, for instance, is the significance of our cultural diversity for the badly needed economic development of our country? How can I practically implement the information provided in the previous chapters if I am involved in the management of a factory, industry, business enterprise, state department or university ...?"

This chapter is an attempt to provide an answer to these types of questions. There is no way that it can be exhaustive. At most I can try to make an application to *one* area while what has been given in the previous chapters, should be applied to *every* area of our lives.

Attention will be given to the following: (1) a brief discussion of the relationship between culture and economic development. (2) The importance of transforming our organisations, institutions and societal relationships into real human communities. (3) The urgent need for a paradigm shift in our predominantly Western ways of management to include more aspects of African culture.

#### 6.1 The relationship between culture and economic development

Because culture encompasses everything we do - also our economic activities - it is not necessary to waste any time asking the question whether culture influences economic development. One should actually be surprised about the fact that many people - especially economists - who are concerned about development, in a very narrow-minded way think that economic development is a purely economic issue in which the broader cultural factors could simply be ignored.

The general statement (that culture influences economic development) can, however, not simplistically be applied in the case of specific cultures. For example: Is the African communalistic culture responsible for the underdeveloped state of our continent? Or is individualistic culture the reason why the Western world is economically highly developed? There are

many people who will reply affirmatively. A correct answer, to such a complex and difficult issue will, however, not be so easy.

There are many books on the African crisis in general and especially its political-economic background, such as Achebe *et al.* (1990), Davidson (1995), Kinoti (1994), Muriithi (1996), Museveni (1992) and Ndegwa and Green (1994). They sometimes mention the cultural aspect of development, but do not discuss it. The only book which I could find on the relationship between culture and development in Africa was the proceedings of a conference held in 1988: *Philosophical focus on culture and traditional thought systems in development*, edited by J.M. Nyasani. Even this publication was not of much value, because it is either not critical enough about African culture or not specific enough about the positive or negative role that different cultural practices in Africa may have on development.

I am not suggesting that I will be able to provide a satisfactory answer either. The following theses are a first effort to attain more clarity.

- *Cultural factors are not subjective or even mysterious things, beyond human description and influence.*

Many economists and managers still hold this view and therefore rather prefer to ignore culture, in stead of realising that it cannot be done. In spite of the fact that one should always be careful not to stereotype, the differences between cultures and the characteristics of specific cultures can be described. If needed, cultures can also be changed.

- *Culture is not the only reason for development or underdevelopment.*

If all human activity is described as "culture" - which will be quite correct - culture will be the only factor. If, however, for the sake of greater clarity, we distinguish between, for instance, the historical, political, educational, economical, social etc., we could say that numerous other factors (apart from culture then understood in a very limited sense) determine economic success or failure.

- *Some cultures are more and others less amenable to modern economic development.*

This statement is made by a well-known sociologist P. Berger (1994:53). Economists sometimes use the term "comparative cultural advantage".

Others speak of cultural traits which are "functional" or "dysfunctional" in terms of economic development.

Berger first mentions an example of a culture that: (1) encourages sustained hard work; (2) is characterised by frugal consumption in order to save for the future; (3) emphasises education as much as possible and (4) has a relatively restricted notion of kinship obligations. (Extended family members have no automatic right to participate in an individual's income and wealth.)

An example of the second type of culture would be more or less the opposite: (1) A hedonistic rather than an ascetic culture, relaxing and enjoying life. (2) One that does not particularly value disciplined work and economic success above other human activities. (3) Does not have a strong tradition about or is indifferent towards book learning. (4) A kinship system that militates against private property and individual entrepreneurship. (Every time an individual takes one modest step on the ladder of his own economic development, many extended family members will move in on him!)

- *We are not passing judgement on an entire culture.*

We are not saying: "You people have a bad culture, and that's why you can't make it." (The previous chapters clearly indicated that no culture is either totally evil or hundred per cent perfect.) The previous thesis was very specific: Certain cultures are less open or amenable to *economic* development. Its economic failure does not render an *entire* culture as "bad" or "useless".

The above example of care for the extended family may serve as an illustration. On the one hand it is a beautiful custom to be appreciated. It is much more humane - and Biblical - than Western individualism where everyone only looks after his own wellbeing. Even from an economic perspective it is a most powerful way to survive in conditions of poverty. When you are in need, your family will have to help you. To be able to depend on each other is the "wealth" of the poor!

On the other hand it is a fact - many of my African friends have openly confessed it to me - that such a kind of culture may result in one's family becoming parasites, prohibiting any personal economic progress.

In summary: Wealth should not be confined to economic wealth (affluence in the West) - one could also be rich in human relationships. We fully acknowledge this, but our focus here is specifically on *economic* development.

- *A specific kind of development*

How important it is to keep our specific focus in mind, can also be explained in another way. Words such as *developed* and *underdeveloped* are loaded with subjective value judgements and emotions. It is therefore necessary to qualify *what kind* of development or underdevelopment we have in mind.

We should distinguish between inter alia social, economic, intellectual, educational, political, technological and many other kinds of development. This will help us to realise that Africa (according to Western standards) may be economically underdeveloped, but socially (in interpersonal relationships) highly developed, while the West may economically be highly developed, but (according to African standards) may lack social sensitivity and care for each other.

Economic development only will not guarantee fullness of life. At the same time it is often a prerequisite to attain development in other vital areas of life such as health, education, etc. It cannot be ignored - especially not today when Africa has become a part of our "global village".

- *Cause and effect is not clearly distinguishable from each other*

Many Westerners believe that African (communalistic) culture is an important contributory reason for the economically underdeveloped state of our continent. Characteristics mentioned are, for example: (1) the power of the community over individual initiative; (2) personal responsibility is shifted on to the group; (3) inefficient planning for the future; (4) unproductivity etc.

How much truth does this viewpoint contain? Are *all* communalistic cultures economically underdeveloped? Is the obverse not equally true: Poverty is not the result of a communalistic attitude, but a communalistic culture is the consequence of severe poverty? (People who are not rich, have to rely on each other to survive.)

A similar question could be asked about Western individualism. Many believe that the individualism of the West is the main reason for its affluence. One could, however, also say that affluence leads to egoistic individualism.

Cultural causes and economic effects therefore cannot be clearly separated. Real life is much more complex than our theoretical distinctions! Economic life is not something separate from culture - it is a part of culture!

The most which could be said, is therefore that a communalistic culture *may* be a cause of economic underdevelopment. The next question will then be: *Can* it also lead to economic development?

- *Traditionally communalistic cultures may become developed.*

Japan is a country with a culture which is in many respects similar to African communalism. In spite of that, it has become one of the major economic powers in the contemporary world.

In the original Afrikaans edition of this book I have made a detailed comparative study between Africa and Japan in order to determine the possible secret of Japan's phenomenal economic growth. I could finally find only two differences between them.

The first was that Japan kept its traditional concept of time (similar to that of Africa) in its personal family relationships. When dealing with the Western economic world and its technology, it, however, accepted the Western concept of time. The Japanese are also much more oriented towards the future than Africa and well-known for their longterm planning.

The second difference between Japanese and African culture is that, apart from their communalistic attitude, the Japanese display remarkable individual initiative and have a very highly developed sense of personal responsibility and accountability.

No culture - including African culture - should therefore be regarded as totally negative towards economic development. But cultures which are less inclined towards economic development, may learn from other cultures which are more amenable to development. I therefore suggested (in the original Afrikaans version of this book) that Africa may learn from Japan. The two factors mentioned may be the cultural "keys" to unlock Africa's economic potential.

Therefore my concluding thesis is:

- *Economic development requires the linking of traditional culture and modernity*

There is no recorded case in history (at least as far as I am aware of) where development succeeded without the support of the community, without it being rooted in the cultural heritage of the people. A nation should remain true to its culture in order to develop. Development should be based in its own cultural foundations. It should not discard its own culture in favour of development models which are culturally foreign or alien, and imposed from the outside.

At the same time it should also be stated clearly that an uncritical acceptance of every aspect of traditional culture will not bring about economic development. We will have to re-examine our heritage critically and redefine it for the future. The secret of the East Asian "miracle" (the rapid development of countries such as Japan, Malaysia and Korea) was that these "Asian tigers" have built their economies by linking their traditional cultures with certain aspects of Western culture without rejecting their own cultures.

The cultural mix which we have in South Africa provides an ideal opportunity to achieve what the "Asian Tigers" have done!

My vision for South Africa is that its economic development will not be dehumanising - as has happened in many Western individualistic countries. It should be development which restores and enhances our full humanity. Two ways to try to achieve this ideal are: (1) to transform our organisations and businesses into real communities, and (2) to have a critical look at our management practices. Let us deal with each one of them separately.

## **6.2 Transforming our organisations into real human communities**

In front of me lies four recent books on South African management: Mbigi and Maree (1995), Boon (1996), Lessem and Nussbaum (1996) and Lessem (1996). All four of them, each in its own way, try to develop a management and leadership culture which will be more appropriate for our South African conditions and friendly to African culture. They, however, have one message in common: our organisations, businesses, factories etc. need to become genuine communities to which people could really belong.

### 6.2.1 *A few voices from management experts*

The following statements from these authors need no further comment:

- "In essence, the firm in South Africa has to be more than a mere economic unit and become a thriving, enterprising community ..." (Mbigi & Maree, 1995:46). "The task of change agents in South Africa is to transform companies from being alienating economic units into enterprising communities". (*op. cit.* p. 106). Towards the end of their book they write the following: "There are issues such as the need to create trust, multiple stakeholder accountability, group care and loyalty. There is also emphasis on participation and inclusive structures and governance ... This is a clear testimony that the mechanical, scientific attempt to marginalise human feelings and run organisations purely on rational logic has failed. Indeed there is a clarion call for community creation ..." (*op. cit.* p. 118).
- Lessem and Nussbaum (1996) stress the fact that organisations should be people-friendly, places where the workers feel they belong, a kind of family. People should not be regarded simply as labourers working for a weekly wage or monthly salary. "It is critical that ... management sees people rather than human resources - things that make profits for the company. People are important in the African traditional setting and anyone who wishes to see people as people has to contend with their culture, their background and what motivates them" (p. 82).

Therefore organisations and businesses should be seen as communities and not as structures of power and positions (p. 221). We should move away from Western management styles which can be very legalistic, cold, hard, rational and functional.

A last quotation from this book reads as follows: "Businesses are in fact communities to which individuals have committed themselves with hopes, expectations, commitment and plans for self-actualisation. Work, in the African sense, is not a simple contractual relationship. It could be much more: it could be a real commitment to a new community" (p. 224).

- With his idea of interactive leadership Boon (1996) basically emphasises the same idea that the organisation should become more of a real community. In order to be able to achieve this, managers should become leaders. "Democracy forces managers to become leaders. They are now accountable not only to their superior for their staff's performance - professionally and behaviourably - but also to the community" (p. 130).

• Lessem (1996:57, 168, 170, 239, 240) provides us with interesting comparisons between the Western individualistic and African communalistic cultures and their resultant management styles which again clearly emphasise the need for community. In the following table I have combined a few of his comparisons:

<b>Western Individualism</b>	<b>African Collectivism</b>
1. Inclusive	1. Exclusive
2. Self-reliant	2. Co-operative
3. Self-interest, self-actualisation	3. Community interests, acceptance by the community
4. The more I have, the more I am	4. The more I have, the more I share
5. Owning, accumulating	5. Sharing, giving
6. Wealth and status	6. Dignity and respect
7. Individual competition	7. Group co-operation
8. Individual control	8. Team co-operation
9. Demanding	9. Sacrificing
10. Alienation	10. Solidarity
11. Rational	11. Emotional
12. Goals and deadlines	12. Vision and faith
13. Reward and punishment	13. Recognition and rejection
14. Management oriented	14. Leadership oriented
15. Directive style	15. Participative style
16. I look you in the eye and challenge you	16. I bow my head and show respect
17. Aggressiveness	17. Perceptiveness
18. Production concern	18. People concern
19. I demand productivity	19. I prefer a climate in which people will be willingly more productive
20. Profit is derived from self-interest	20. Profit is a vote of confidence in my community

This comparison clearly indicates that African and Western people have a different view of what a firm, factory, business or company should be. Their ideas of how such an organisation should be managed, will therefore also be quite different.

Before we, however, discuss what management should look like in Africa, we have to know what the nature of a genuine community is. We cannot



uncritically accept the Western idea about community. Neither should we (as most of the writers referred to above) simply accept the African (family or village) idea of community. If we wish to build real communities in future, we should carefully guard against falling into the trap of either Western individualism or African communalism as the ideal model.

### 6.2.2 *The nature of a genuine community*

#### *The business as a community*

As an introduction I wish to state that a business enterprise (of whatever kind) is also a community. I do this because readers may well agree that the family and the church are communities, but that this does not necessarily apply to a factory, company or firm. I define a business as follows: "It is a community of people (employers and employees) who, in reciprocal co-operation and with the aid of available means at reasonable remuneration, provide meaningful labour as well as rendering goods and services to the community (consumers) at reasonable prices" (Van der Walt, 1994a: 441).

From this simple definition it is clear, in the first place, that a business consists of *people*: managers, workers, shareholders (providers of capital) and clients (consumers). Secondly, it is a *community*, not a "production unit". And thirdly, it is an *economic* community, not a family.

This third aspect is very important, because we cannot - in order to realise the ideal of a genuine community - simply transplant African ideas about the family or tribe to that of business. A government does not run a country in the same way as parents rule their families or as churches are governed. Similarly we should not try to manage a business in the same way as parents run their homes. When we want to advance real community, we should therefore always be clear about *what kind* of community we have in mind. "A community" is an abstraction. "Community" should be *qualified* - it is always a *specific kind* of community, *different* in nature from other communities or societal relationships.

#### *Organisation cannot be a substitute for community*

In the Western individualistic world the meaning of "community" has been changed to indicate a collection of individuals organised to be able to pursue a common interest and nothing more. As indicated above, organisation plays a very important role in the Western world of today. In

the absence of real communities they attempt to meet human communal needs by way of social organisation!

A few examples to illustrate this tendency are the following: Instead of communal consultation they substitute professional research by individuals to determine people's needs. Instead of communal leadership they substitute hierarchical, authoritarian structures. Instead of communal decision-making they substitute winner-take-all voting procedures.

In doing so they use social organisation as a substitute for real community. Of course any community or societal relationship needs a measure of organisation to facilitate its functioning. But the organisation will always be subordinate to the community, a mere means to an end and not an end in itself. The nature of a community is something more than organisation! Man should not exist to service the organisation. The organisation should be there for the benefit of human beings.

#### *Five characteristics of a genuine community*

In the following five theses we will attempt to clarify the nature of a community.

- *The basis of a community lies in the fact that people share a common interest under circumstances which make it possible for them to pursue this interest together*

A shared interest is the first requirement for a community. It could be diverse in nature: from stamp collecting to a just political order or Christian education or the provision of goods and services.

In the second place circumstances should make it possible to advance the natural interests. For example, in a marriage it is necessary that marriage partners should live in a relationship of intimacy. Other kinds of interests, however, may be pursued by people who live apart from each other, as for example in the case of national and international organisations or multinational companies.

In the third place a community only exists where people function together and pursue their common interest together.

- *The shared interest and the possibilities to pursue it together set specific boundaries to a community*

The above-mentioned examples have already indicated that different societal relationships exist for the attainment of *limited* interests (stamp collecting, political justice, Christian education, or business). For this reason the societal relationships themselves will also be limited.

We therefore reject the communalist viewpoint which sets the boundaries so wide that they embrace the whole life of members of a community (clan, nation etc.). All of life is brought within the boundaries of a single, all-embracing community such as the state. This inhibits normal human development because (1) the individuality of the members of a community is stifled and (2) the development of different life-enriching societal relationships is prevented.

Human life cannot develop to its rich fullness within any single societal relationship or community. It can only develop where there is room for a diversity of mutually complementary societal relationships functioning side by side. A societal relationship functioning in subordination to another can never develop to its full potential. This will happen, for example, when a school exists in subordination to a church, a business enterprise to a government, or a university is regarded as a "subdivision" of the state.

It is also important to keep in mind that the only proper conditions for membership in a community are the sharing of a communal interest and being able and willing to participate in the life of the community. No-one who meets these requirements should be excluded from any societal relationship.

- *A community exists where two or more people function as a single, enduring unit*

A genuine community has an identity and a character of its own, distinct from the individual identities and characters of its members. It is not simply the result of the collective will of the individual membership (the individualistic viewpoint). Therefore the membership can change, but the identity of the societal relationship remains unchanged. It has an enduring identity.

A group of individuals acting together, even harmoniously, is not a community. The reason for this is that members of such a group still function as individuals and their acting together depends on their individual consent.

What distinguishes a real community is that its members function as a single unit - not as a cluster of individuals. The members do not think of themselves as individuals with a right not to participate or support a communal endeavour. Having participated fully in the communal decision-making process, each member regards this decision as his or her own.

For those brought up in the values of Western individualism this is difficult to accept. Because they have accepted the false identification of "person" with "individual", they regard any situation in which they do not retain an absolute right of individual decision as diminishing their personal integrity.

Our integrity as persons, however, is neither diminished nor threatened by the limitation of individual rights that follows on genuine communal commitment. What really robs us of a full experience of human life is our failure to surrender ourselves to real communal relations!

The surrender of this false belief in the absolute rights of the individual, however, does not mean the surrender of individuality. As indicated above, the boundaries of all societal relationships are limited, leaving enough room for individual action.

Apart from this, even within communal life, we are not called to suppress or surrender our individuality. Our individuality is part of our contribution to the societal relationship of which we are members. Each member can make a unique contribution!

This individuality, however, should *serve* and not *disrupt* the community. A societal relationship should be governed by communal interest and not by individual interest and will. In any societal relationship one acts, with one's individuality intact, not as an individual but as a member of that community.

- *Every member participates in shaping the life of a community*

The so-called democratic decision-making process of Western social organisations creates a great barrier to real communal life. Because the procedure is deeply rooted in individualism, it is designed to determine the sum of the judgments of a group of individuals. The agreement of a majority of individuals is taken as a mandate for action on behalf of the group. Basically it is a winner-take-all process. Organisational power is concentrated in the hands of a few office-bearers or managers skilled in

winning the vote of the majority. It is a process that generates parties and factions which compete for control.

Participatory democracy (which submits all important decisions to a vote of the members) merely places greater emphasis on the majority vote. It does nothing to foster a genuinely communal decision-making process.

In order to understand communal relationships, we will have to change our thinking in terms of a *group of individuals* in favour of a *living organism*. Then the members of a societal relationship are like the interdependent "parts" of a living organism. In a healthy organism the members do not *compete with* one another, but *work together* in promoting the well-being of the organism. It is self-destructive to both the community and its members when in communal affairs the members of a community compete against one another.

In the Bible the image of a variety of members working together for the benefit of the one body is often applied to describe the nature of the church (cf. Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27 and Eph. 4:14-16). This provides a totally different perspective on a human community in which each member has an important contribution to make and is an active participant in shaping communal life.

There should be an open discussion of the viewpoints of all the members of a societal relationship. The purpose of this debate, however, should not be to win votes in support of my proposal against some counter-proposals by others. Everyone should contribute to the discussion in order to form a communal judgment. I should have no interest in winning a vote, but in giving my very best to help the community reach a responsible judgment. Nobody should therefore be asked - as happens so often - to choose between competing proposals. The whole purpose of the exercise is to reach *agreement* instead of *division*!

Voting procedures may therefore have a place in the decision-making of a societal relationship, but their purpose is to test the measure of communal agreement on an issue rather than to decide (on the basis of majority support) between competing proposals.

According to a Biblical philosophy of society, each member has an office - not just a few "officers" at the top of a societal relationship. Each one has a particular way of serving the community. This viewpoint provides a perspective totally different from the modern model of social organisation.

An important consequence is a fundamentally different style of leadership. The office of leadership in a societal relationship is not a mandate to direct the affairs of the community according to the judgment of the leaders alone. Leadership is a calling to serve (not to dominate!) the community by fostering and nurturing communal life, enabling and encouraging each member to contribute according to his/her office, gifts and talents. And in the matter of communal decision-making the leader(s) has the calling to guide the whole community in the formation of a real communal judgement.

- *In the area of communal interest, the interest(s) of the members is one with the interest of the community*

While some human purposes can be achieved by the action of individuals, other purposes require the combined efforts of more than one individual.

The family is an example. Only a genuine communal environment like the family, where the interest of one is the interest of all, can provide the security, love and discipline that is necessary for the effective nurturing of children. The radical individualism of the West has weakened family life because it views the family as a group of individuals. They merely share a base of operation, the chief purpose of which is to facilitate their individual purposes! Renewed awareness of community as a fundamental requirement for healthy human life is a basic requirement also for a recovery of genuine family life. Its members should have a common interest, purpose and will. The personal interest of each member should be one with that of the family community. As 1 Corinthians 12:21-26 indicates, the frustrations and disappointments of the members are the disappointments of the community - as the successes are shared by the community as a whole.

If the members really have the interests of the community at heart, our world of business will become totally transformed. Employers and employees (trade unions), for instance, will no longer be regarded as opponents of one another!

Therefore in healthy societal life each member will be supported and encouraged in developing individual gifts and talents to the highest level. The purpose, however, is not that of gaining personal glory, privilege or status as a reward. Every effort is directed towards advancing the interest of the community. Many examples of this could be mentioned from traditional Africa, whereas Western man will regard it as being unrealistic.

However, achieving a real experience of community requires a fundamental change in values that breaks the stifling dominance of individualism. Communal values are also basic values of the Gospel.

Abandoning the values of individualism does not mean accepting communalism. It also does not imply ceasing to value individuality, individual judgement, action and achievement. It simply means that alongside individual values, we should also allow for the equally important communal values, so that human life can be experienced in its richness and fullness.

Equipped with a deeper insight into what "community" really means, we are ready to move on to the third main section of this chapter, which intends to be more practical:

### **6.3 A cultural paradigm shift in management practice**

We will concentrate on business or industrial management, mainly making use of information from the above-mentioned books. It should be noted, however, that much of what is to be said, will be applicable also to other spheres of management and administration. Examples are different government departments, all kinds of (primary, secondary and tertiary) educational institutions, recreational organisations and many more.

#### *6.3.1 Some characteristics of the paradigm shift*

A few characteristics of the paradigm shift in management will be the following:

- *Not merely techniques*

What we need, is not a few more management techniques, but a totally new approach or mindset, a transformation, a paradigm shift. "The challenge of organisational transformation in South Africa is not about implementing techniques. The greater challenge is about managing a paradigm in shift" (Mbigi & Maree, 1995:57).

- *Management is not "objective" or "absolute"*

Most managers in South Africa still think that there is only one possible managerial style: the so-called efficient Anglo-Saxon North American one. It is international and normal - there is no other way. What we will have to realise, is that management - like everything else - is socially and culturally

determined. Our way of organising life is typically Western. African cultural ways of managing life has been marginalised and excluded from the workplace. The consequence was often a communication breakdown with resulting mistrust, resistance, pretence and even conflict.

- *Emphasis on African cultural values does not imply rejection of Western values*

Because African cultural values have been more or less totally denied in the factory or industry, they now have to be emphasised and introduced in the workplace. This does not imply that we simply capitulate to the slogan of the "Africanisation" or "ubutuisation" of everything.

I like the concept of "South Africanizing" used by Sachs which includes the ingredients of all the cultures of South Africa. He writes (in Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996:152): "I prefer the term 'South Africanizing' business to the term 'Africanizing'. South Africanizing is a more embracing concept and it excludes the possibility of replacing one form of hegemony or domination with another. It is based on the principled position that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and that we all have a contribution to make. We must bring into the new South Africa what we have, what we are, rather than compel ourselves to be subordinate to a pattern or model that someone else has established, be it European, African, Asian or whatever. All the ingredients of what we call the rainbow nation have space, can articulate themselves and can contribute to the overall mixture of the broth, or the streams flowing into a single river, or the flowers that make up the bouquet. These are images that favour the idea of mutual enhancement rather than domination and subordination."

- *It is a cultural and not an ideological paradigm shift*

The management debate in South Africa in many instances still continues along the lines of capitalism versus communism, privatisation versus nationalisation - or even white versus black. Both of them are Western ideologies and have apparently had their day. It already became very clear in the case of communism. But many people realise that capitalism is not a solution either. The new paradigm shift we need in South Africa is not a movement away from one *ideology* to another, but from the domination of one *culture* (the Western) to include also another *culture* (the African) in our way of administering life.



- *Managers themselves will have to change*

Top management in South Africa is still largely in the hands of white Westerners. They mostly do not accept the need for change because the way in which they have always "ruled" is regarded as normal. However, the starting point of corporate renewal has to be the deep personal transformation of the people governing our institutions. Managers themselves will first have to change! It will not be totally wrong to compare this change with conversion in the case of religion.

- *Professionals will have to become leaders*

This shift from management to leadership as well as the difference between the two is very clearly formulated by Boon (1996:103) in the following way: "Management, by its very nature, implies control and coercion, whereas leadership implies offering an example others will follow willingly. Management implies command, whereas leadership is personal example, facilitation and persuasion, discussion and challenge. Leadership is the ability to encourage colleagues and followers to challenge - vigorously, persuasively and actively - and, after discussion, to accept the best course of action, which may not necessarily be the leader's own."

This new type of manager realises that one can only manage things, not people. One can, however, create a cultural climate in which people manage themselves and take responsibility. No one can demand productivity from anyone. But a cultural climate can be created within which an employee is willingly productive. One cannot simply demand quality from people. But a leader can create working conditions whereby quality work is a product of the worker's pride - also in his own culture.

What we actually need is visionary leaders. Leaders with a vision as explained in previous chapters of this book. A vision in which the best from every culture is used to build a better future for our whole nation.

- *A workplace with a more humane face*

If one treats people with human kindness, they will, in return, respond in the same way. If managers can change their organisation into a real *community of people*, they will unlock the real potential of people - which entails much more than the output of machines.

If we really "South Africanize" management - giving African culture its rightful place, without rejecting the good from Western culture - it will not be able to remain formal, rigid, factual and unemotional. For instance, the traditional methods of contracts, memo's, notice boards, handing out of printed notices, payslips, reports, statistics, etc. are not very meaningful to most of our black people and therefore not very effective either. Africans - and I think that also applies to many whites - prefer a more personal touch in communication.

Mbigi and Maree (1995:114), for instance, suggest the following: "The communication by leaders must not be factual but must make extensive use of symbols, story-telling, music and rituals. When an event happens it must be accompanied by pomp, ceremony and ritual. Bring in a choir when the company results are announced or have a braai. This will facilitate the bonding and development of the company spirit. The managing director must not suppress the rhythm of the African spirit, therefore dancing, food and story-telling are important elements of a mass rally."

- *A few characteristics of the new style*

From the little I could read, I have compiled the following twenty features of a new South African management style:

- Negotiated agendas
- Consensus decision-making
- Participative government
- Inclusive structures
- Co-operation in stead of confrontation
- Trust, respect, harmony in stead of adversarial relationships characterised by a high degree of mistrust, intolerance and polarisation
- Personal and not formal, legalistic
- Empowering and not controlling people
- Harnessing the community spirit in stead of only concentrating on individuals

- Collective and not only individual training and education
- Encouraging teamwork apart from individual achievement
- Making room for the emotional in stead of a cold rational-factual approach
- More visible, face-to-face leadership in stead of a withdrawn, unapproachable attitude
- Give in stead of take - servant leadership
- Careful, courteous listening to replace the "always very busy" syndrome
- Morality (dignity, solidarity, sincerity) more important than role, function and status
- Persuasion and not coercion
- Enabling and not demanding
- Accountability and transparency
- Employing different aspects of African culture (story-telling, music, dance, proverbs, symbols, rituals, ceremony, rhythm) to achieve the above

### 6.3.2 *Concrete examples*

To conclude this chapter, three examples of how African culture could become part of managing a firm or company in a concrete way. (With the necessary adaptations the examples are also relevant in managing other societal relationships.)

#### *Story-telling*

People of every culture enjoy stories, but they seem to occupy a special place in the hearts of Africans. Traditionally, stories brought people together, helped them to get to know and tolerate each other and created a strong sense of community.

When applied in management, administration and business, stories can fulfil the following important functions:

- They help to make abstract concepts more concrete. They can, for example, explain the organisation's vision, mission and values in concrete terms.
- The essence of an organisation's identity and corporate culture can be shared much more easily by way of telling stories from its past and present history - both failures and achievements - as well as the histories of people who play(ed) an important role in the organisation.
- They help to establish trust.
- It is an excellent way of learning, especially in the case of illiterate employees.
- While "cold" facts like notices, reports, statistics etc. only stimulate the intellect, stories awaken the power of imagination. They are not easily forgotten but "stick", motivate and inspire.
- They can also be used in sales and marketing projects.
- Apart from the above, stories are good entertainment in a sometimes very monotonous and dull work environment.

Different types of stories could be distinguished. Lessem and Nussbaum (1996:132-133) classify them into the following four groups: (1) the anecdote (short experiences, incidents and even jokes), (2) accounts, (3) biographies (the organisation's origin, past life, present functioning and its likely future) and (4) myths (legends, parables, fables). All these stories may be told in different ways. One of the most effective ways is to dramatise them (the so-called industrial theatre).

The case studies of how two South African firms (Dulux and Brollo) employed story-telling, indicate how powerful it could really be. (See Lessem & Nussbaum, 1996:137-142). These case studies will also assist the reader to be imaginative and employ stories and dramas in his/her own organisation.

## *Music and dance*

As is the case with stories, music and dance can humanise and energise the workplace, enhance productivity, empower workers, decrease the sense of alienation and be tangible expressions of the company's mission and values.

Story-telling, music and dance are not uniquely African, but they play an important role in African culture: If you can talk, you can sing; If you can walk, you can dance!

Music and dance were inherent parts of traditional African culture and played a vital role in all the important life stages such as birth, death, rites of passage, religious life and work. One example which I can still remember very well from my own childhood is how Africans used songs to transform tedious work into more enjoyable activities. Well-known songs such as *Shosholoza* were composed in the gold mines for this very reason! A West African proverb says: "If the trees are to be cut, you must sing; without the song the bush knife is dull."

Rather than being an intrinsic part of social life, as in the case of Africa, dance and music is regarded by the West as peripheral extras. In the West these acts are separated from everyday occupations and relegated to times of leisure. It is furthermore often left to the artists who have to perform for and entertain - on special occasions - the rest of the public!

Also the character of music and dance in Africa and the West is quite different in the two cultures. African melodies are cyclical in form. "A song will generally consist of a short, repetitive declamatory 'statement' (melodic pattern) to which other cyclical melodies will respond in specific harmonic and rhythmic relation. This principle of multiple parts (polyphony) which interact with one another in a cyclical, call-and-response format, is fundamental to both vocal and instrumental music in Africa" (Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996:230). Western music, in contrast, is linear rather than cyclical and most often based on one rhythmic configuration only.

Lessem and Nussbaum (1996:232) distinguish the following three main functions which song and dance could fulfil:

- *Developmental*

Song and dance could contribute towards education, socialisation, the building of morale, trust, team-building, motivation, mobilisation, solidarity, productivity and even marketing campaigns.

- *Preventive*

Song and dance can contribute to maintaining psychological health and social harmony. African culture has a high degree of interpersonal sensitivity and direct expression of feelings and emotions are not permitted. Song, dance and other arts, however, provide a socially sanctioned means for expressing complaints and criticism of others. What you cannot outrightly say, you may dress up in art - sing it in a song or say it in a proverb! Music, songs and dance could therefore be valuable ice-breakers or tension-relievers.

- *Remedial*

Song and dance are also important when a situation has arisen which is potentially or actually damaging to the organisation. It is a very effective response for solving such problems and restoring effective functioning.

There are many functions. There are also a variety of company songs and dances possible. Old protest songs and even *toyi-toying* can be adapted to energise workers and support the aims of the company! Experience has already proven (see the different case studies in Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996:248-256) that the process of creating a company song could be as effective, if not more powerful, than creating a mission statement or writing down company values.

### *Consensus*

In the new South Africa, managers will have to learn that autocracy is no longer feasible and that democratic management is essential. Democracy implies that the need for addressing matters such as consultation, participation, transparency, respect, tolerance, fairness and - in the African context - especially consensus, is recognised.

White Westerners have difficulty in adapting to the principle of consensus. One of the reasons is that consensus may take time while white people are usually in a hurry and want instant results. But very often these rapid

results fail. When everyone is included in the decision-making process, we may not only reach a better decision, but people are more likely to adhere to the decision because they have been party to it.

There is, however, another reason why managers in different areas of life are afraid of democratic consensus. It is the negative, unruly, destructive "mob factor". Mob rule is the opposite extreme of autocratic rule. But mob rule is not the same as consensus in traditional African culture and it also cannot be identified with true democracy. What, then, is the difference?

- Democracy operates with order, discipline, dignity, care and compassion, while mob rule employs threat, coercion, intimidation and even brutal violence.
- Democracy is tolerant, while the mob is extremely intolerant, suffering no opposition.
- Democracy seeks to give, while the mob simply wants to take.
- Democracy carefully considers the viewpoints of minorities, while in mob rule minorities are eradicated as quickly as possible. Mob rule can easily, in this way, hijack democracy and call itself "democratic", because "the majority has decided".

Consensus, however, does not simply mean rule by the majority - it is the opposite of mob rule. It suggests collectiveness and inclusiveness in decision-making in which not the majority decides, but everyone agrees.

Boon (1996:75,76) explains: "Consensus is an extremely advanced and sophisticated system that goes beyond simple majority rule and looks for a broader inclusiveness. It carefully listens to and considers everyone's views, and always bears in mind that the group is trying to do what is right. It tends to overcome the polarisation of opinion that can occur within a purely democratic system - the thought that, if the majority thinks something is right, everyone else must be wrong. It demands a very high level of accountability from every individual. What needs to be pointed out, however, is the fact that it does not come easily and requires a great deal of hard work."

How consensus is achieved in practice, is explained by Boon (1996:106 ff.) in detail. In his own company (Group Africa) *umhlangano's* (discussion

groups or interactive forums) were established, gathering and grouping departments or sections which work together. These groups involve everyone in the department - including managers and union officials. No one is excluded or exempted, rank does not exist and nothing has greater priority than these meetings.

In many other companies similar approaches have been implemented with great success. They may be called by a different name, such as *indaba*, but their basic aim is the same: to achieve maximum consensus. (See the two case studies in Lessem and Nussbaum, 1996:180-186.)

\* \* \*

I think this chapter has clearly illustrated that the information provided in *Afrocentric or Eurocentric?* is not abstract, theoretical and academic. It has concrete relevance for something as mundane as economic development and business management. Business people can no longer simply say that they should confine themselves to the "material" aspect of life. They will have to know, understand and use the cultures of South Africa in their daily activities if they want to be successful!

\* \* \*

In the next concluding chapter, a few themes, only touched upon briefly in previous chapters, will be dealt with in more detail with the aim of finally explaining what a culture which honours and glorifies God should look like.



## Chapter 7

# TRANSFORMING CULTURE TO THE HONOUR OF GOD!

The importance of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism is, today, accepted all over the world. There is a general quest for identity and a demand that one's own identity be acknowledged. Amongst many other reasons for this phenomenon, the following two could be mentioned. In the first place, a growing consciousness of one's own individuality and authenticity. In the second place, on the social level, is the decline of hierarchical, authoritarian models and the spread of more democratic systems.

In South Africa also "multiculturalism" has become significant, especially since 1994. How should we understand and evaluate cultural plurality? - that was the key question throughout this book.

When we look back on the previous chapters, the author - and perhaps the reader even more - realises that we have merely scratched the surface of a very complicated problem. Not nearly enough has been said about the cultures of Africa and the West and their mutual encounter. And what was said, remains too general and too much from a Western perspective.

The question marks concluding the title of this book as well as the preceding six chapters, indicate problems which will continue to ask for solutions in the future!

In spite of that, I have the impression that these question marks are not as big and as threatening as they appeared to me at the beginning. We can start straightening some of them to make them look more like exclamation marks, because our struggles in the previous chapters definitely bore fruit and brought more light.

### 7.1 No longer sceptical or embarrassed

- In the first place we can be *more positive*.

It may be the case that the reader - like the author - started off by being sceptical. Africa and the West will never be able to understand each other - haven't we already known for the past 350 years that the differences between the two cultures are far too radical?

At the moment I myself am more positively inclined - and I do hope that the same will apply to the reader - towards cultural diversity. Of course, in many respects it remains an embarrassment, but I would in the first place like to see it as an opportunity.

Many South Africans, I realise, regard it as a privilege to live only amongst people of their own culture. In the light of what we have discovered in this book, I doubt whether such a viewpoint could be correct if we keep in mind that a culture, apart from being something beautiful and good, also contains limitations, defects and errors - which are not easily noticed by the participants in that culture.

It should be a privilege to belong to a culturally diverse country such as South Africa. If one deals with cultural diversity correctly, it could help one to be freed from one's isolation, to be corrected by other cultures and enriched through the goodness they contain. The obverse is also important: one's own culture could be of value to a much wider group of people by helping them to see more clearly the positive as well as the negative aspects of their cultures and also sharing with them the goodness in one's own culture.

- In the second place, we are *equipped with a clear perspective*

We need not be embarrassed about what our calling in our multicultural country entails. We are, for example, liberated from the simplistic dilemma of thinking either Afrocentrically or Eurocentrically. We have a much broader perspective and can consider cultural plurality in a principial way. We have an explanation for cultural diversity. (Different responses to God's creational revelation.)

Apart from that, a criterion was given to enable us to evaluate the different cultures. We now know that, on the one hand, no culture may be rejected simply because it is different from our own or could not be described as "Christian". On the other hand we now also realise that no culture - not even a so-called Christian one - may be regarded as perfect and ideal. We are not permitted any longer to accept a "black-white", "bad-good" idea of *any* culture, because in *every* culture the good and the bad are mixed. Our calling therefore is, on the one hand, to determine what is beautiful, dignified and legitimate in all cultures, to confirm it and, on the other hand, to be conscious of what is unacceptable, in order to avoid it.

I realise that this book is written from an explicitly Christian perspective. At the same time I am sure that the viewpoint about cultural diversity expoused here, is not secretarian, but more universal, because it is based on God's creational revelation which is general in nature, open to all human beings. The criterion for judging one's own and other cultures should therefore be acceptable to most religions.

The main task facing us in this last chapter is to recall central themes, touched on in previous chapters, but not dealt with sufficiently. We need greater clarity about the following: (1) the principle of cultural diversity and unity, (2) the meaning of Africanisation, as well as that of transformation and (3) what cultural reformation implies, to enable us to explain what a culture, which serves God and contributes to his honour and glory, would look like.

## 7.2 Unity and diversity

What is the connection between multiculturalism and unity and diversity? To indicate the relationship, let us have a look at three different forms of multiculturalism.

### *Kinds of multiculturalism*

- In the first place there is a *closed, forced, institutionalised, regional* kind of multiculturalism of which old apartheid South Africa will be a good example. A metaphor to describe it will be a plate of "boerekos" (country fare) of which the ingredients are prepared and served separately. Here we have separate monocoloured cultures. Diversity is over-emphasised and unity is neglected.
- In the second place there is *closed, forced "melting-pot" multiculturalism* with which the United States experimented and also Canada today, (which is in fact bicultural). We could compare it to a dish of soup: it is prepared from various substances, but it is finally impossible to recognise the separate ingredients. In this case we have one dominant, monoculture. Unity is over-emphasised and diversity neglected.
- The third possibility is *open, free multiculturalism* of which Switzerland may be an illustration, where Germans, French, Italian and other cultural groups live in peace. An image from the cookery book in this case will be cheese, tomato and macaroni - one dish but the separate ingredients are still visible. In this case *both* unity and diversity have been accepted.

The danger of apartheid was that, instead of *healthy diversity* it promoted *unhealthy laceration*. It viewed *diversity* as *divisive*.

Unity, however, could also be viewed incorrectly with the result that a healthy aspiration towards *unity* could result in *uniformity* or similarity. The Afrocentric as well as Eurocentric approach will be contemporary examples of this danger: unity is not something open and sought freely, but it is forced, usually by the majority on minorities.

### *The correct relationship between unity and diversity*

Apart from the fact that both unity and diversity could be understood incorrectly, it is also possible to misinterpret the relationship between the two. But before I try to explain their correct relationship, let me formulate in a nutshell my own viewpoint: Diversity should be *enriching* unity rather than *cancelling* it. Unity should be *emphasising* diversity rather than *abolishing* it. As a principle I would therefore like to speak of *unity in diversity*. (Unity *and* diversity too often deteriorate to *either* unity *or* diversity.) Different people may understand it differently, but this may be what is meant by calling South Africa a rainbow nation: many colours *in* one rainbow or many cultures *in* one nation.

Let us now have a look, first at cultural diversity and then at cultural unity in more detail.

### *Cultural diversity*

Cultural diversity comes into being because different people deal differently with creation. (And creation - the word already indicates it - is God's revelation.) Because creation offers such a wide diversity of ways for its cultivation (in other words: to respond to God's revelation), all people do not walk the same route from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem! Being different as such is therefore not sinful. The question is rather how we should experience these differences: as an *embarrassment* or as an *opportunity*?

An important prerequisite is that each cultural group should approach its calling not in arrogance or with an attitude of superiority, but in humility, always aware of the limitations and deficiencies of one's own culture. No culture is *sacred* - all have to be *sanctified*!

This does not mean that cultures cannot be judged. When we judge, however, the first question should not be what is wrong with a culture according to *my own* (Western or African) viewpoint, but what about the particular culture may be wrong in the eyes of *God*. Further: Let God first be the Judge of your own culture, before you use the criterion of his Word for judging other cultures. Should we stop "playing" at being God ourselves, we can immediately be released from unnecessary stereotyping, suspicion, arrogance and even fear.

Apart from God's Word, other cultures can also offer the opportunity to evaluate one's own culture critically. In this way one's own culture can of course be immeasurably enriched. Locking oneself up in one's own culture always leads to impoverishment. An Indian proverb says that: "When you build walls around yourself or your own culture, you exclude far more than you include".

An example by way of illustration: African people, we have discovered in this book, attach great importance to personal relationships and are therefore very sensitive to interpersonal relations. They are community people. The Westerner is an individualistic activist. On the other hand, he is technologically creative. There is the danger, however, that he can become addicted to technology and increase his pace of life even further. Can't we use the same technological aids (such as the telephone) to slow down the tempo and to create warmer, closer human relationships? Then reciprocal enrichment of two cultures will already have taken place!

In South Africa - today still - we often find the idea that human diversity is the cause of division among people. This is not the real reason, however - the reason is to be sought in the *sinfulness* of all people.

Seen in a Biblical perspective, diversity is the true condition for human unity. (Unity is always the unity of a diversity!) An example from the Bible is Paul's metaphor of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:14-31). For a body to form a unity and to function as one, it cannot consist of only one limb, but should have a variety of limbs. More: Precisely because each limb retains its own character (a foot remains a foot, an eye an eye), they can contribute to the unity. The eye cannot tell the foot that it is not needed. A body which is only an eye is not a body! The church is therefore a unity on the basis of the diversity of its members or limbs - thus an integrated diversity.

According to the Bible, people and cultures differ not so that they can *oppose* each other, but exactly the opposite: so that they can *serve* each other, each using his or her own gifts and talents to do so. This is the way to create true communion.

And because diversity as such is not sinful, we may also find it on the new earth. Just think of the thronging multitude before the throne of the Lamb - consisting of each nation, tribe and language (Rev. 7:4). Or of the kings and their nations who carry their cultural treasures into the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 24-26). This is an open city (verse 25) - the good out of the cultural labour of nations over thousands of years is welcomed.

For South Africans it is important to realise that in spite of our cultural differences we are all humans. Deeper than our differences is our shared humanity. Each person is not only *different from* but also *similar to* all others. This then brings us to the second point, which is cultural *unity*.

But before this is dealt with, first a résumé of what has been said so far: Diversity *enriches* unity rather than *eliminates* it. And the obverse also holds: Unity *emphasises* the diversity rather than *suspends* it.

### *Cultural unity*

In spite of the efforts of apartheid theologians to indicate that the Bible places great stress on (cultural-ethnic) diversity, this is simply not true. It has been said above that the Bible does not deny diversity - it is a condition for unity to exist. But at the same time Scripture does not over-emphasise it. Perhaps the Word of God presupposes that man's sinful nature will inevitably see to diversity assuming its rightful place!

Where does one find the unity in the midst of all the diversity?

The apostle Paul had to struggle with the problem of cultural division. When the Judaists did not want to accept the converts from among the ranks of the heathens - unless they would first become "Jews" culturally - and threatened to create a schism in the church (Acts 15), Paul fought against this cultural chauvinism for the sake of the unity of the church. His statement in Galatians 3:28 is well-known: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". The same emerges from Colossians 3:11: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcized or uncircumcized, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all ...".

Paul does not only apply this to others. Listen to what he says about himself: "... circumcized on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law a Pharisee ..." (Phil. 3: 5). Applied to us, this could be: "I have been baptised, I am by birth a white, from the nation of Guise and Huguenot, a true Afrikaner, a Nationalist in my politics ...", OR "I am by birth a black man from the tribe of the Bahurutshi, a true Tswana, a supporter of the ANC ...".

But listen how Paul evaluates his impressive cultural genealogy in the light of his Christianity (verses 7-9): "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I had lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

For that reason Paul did not stand on his own identity. For the sake of serving the kingdom of God, he was willing to "adopt" other cultural identities. For the Jews he became like a Jew and for the Greeks like a Greek (1 Cor. 9: 20).

Scripture does not therefore choose one specific culture as the only valid criterion according to which cultures should be judged. It is the X-ray which is turned on all cultures. One should therefore not ask somebody to reject his culture - he should serve God *from within* and not *without* his culture. At the same time every culture should *continuously* be *reformed* in the light of God's revelation in creation and Scripture. It should also be a willing instrument in the *service* of God's kingdom and not be a *stumbling block* in its way.

Because language at the moment is such a hotly debated issue especially amongst Afrikaans-speaking people, let me use it as an example to illustrate what I have in mind. There is no such thing as a sacred language - not even the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek of the Bible. Language is simply a cultural means which should not stand in the way of effective and the widest possible service to God's kingdom. The view that many Afrikaners have of language reminds me more of the Old Testament model of Babel than of the New Testament model of the Pentecost. At Babel languages, because of sin, became a means of *division*. At Pentecost the linguistic variety (because of God's grace) is used to bring the *same* Gospel to *everyone!*

## *Unity in the essential issues*

To make the above viewpoint about unity in diversity even clearer, two questions should be answered.

The first question is: *In what should we strive for unity?* The answer should be in the essential matters. But what is essential in nature? Stated differently: what are the *norms* to be applied to achieve real unity?

The second important question is: *What norms* are applicable to effectively handle the *diversity*?

I will again answer these two questions from a Christian perspective. I am, however, convinced that, because the norms applicable are universal in character, they will also be acceptable to people of other religions.

The answer to the first question is that unity can be achieved by adhering to the following three requirements: justice, love and humility.

- *Justice*

The principle here is a summary of the law and the entire teaching of the Old and New Testament: "...do to others what you would have them do to you ..." (Matt. 7: 12). Stated negatively: "Don't do to others what you would not like them to do unto you". Abraham Lincoln applied it in the following way to slavery: "Because I will not like to be a slave myself, therefore I will not have one."

This summary of the law is repeated at various places in the Bible, for instance in Matthew 19:19; 22:36-40 and Romans 13:8-10.

Starting from the summary of the second table of the ten commandments (Exod. 20:12-17) we could refer to the last six commandments, providing in more detail norms for our conduct in relationship to others: honour your father and mother, you shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, give false testimony and not covet something which does not belong to you.

If we obey these basic norms - not only in what they negatively prohibit, but also in what they positively require - then we will be able to reach unity across cultural barriers. The Bible is very clear in many places that this central command of justice does not merely apply to the manner in which one has to deal with people from your own tribe, culture, nation or religion,



but especially to cross-cultural situations. Christ's parable of the merciful Samaritan is only one example.

It is very simple indeed: If we are just and do justice, we will be united! (The opposite, injustice, drives people and cultures apart.)

I want to repeat that the six guidelines (fifth to ten commandments), summarised in "do to others as you want them to do unto you", are not only applicable to Christians. They are transcultural and transreligious by nature.

- *Love, mercy, kindness*

Christ provides his followers with a *new* law: "Love one another" (John 13:34). This is a *new* commandment, because in the old dispensation repaying another or retaliation was the rule. The contents of this new commandment is spelled out in, for instance, Rom. 12:9-21: do not repay anyone with evil for evil, do not take revenge, overcome evil with good, etc.

If God were to deal with us according to the principle of justice only (do to us as we have done to Him) we would be lost. He is not only a just, but also a merciful God. In the same way our understanding of justice should be tempered by love. This is beautifully illustrated by the story of an ancient king from the East. He promulgated a law which he regarded as of such importance that everyone who transgressed it would be severely punished by the loss of both eyes. The first person who disobeyed, was his own son. The king combined justice with the love for his son by permitting the judges to remove one of his son's eyes and one of his own eyes! Justice and loving kindness or forgiveness should never exclude each other.

To reach unity amongst diversity, we need love and kindness towards each other. This *new* commandment replaces the *old* relationship of suspicion, intolerance and hate and opens the possibility of a *new* relationship - that of unity amongst different cultures. We should not only love those who love us, but even our enemies (cf. Matt. 5:38-48; 7:12a and Luk. 6:27-36)!

- *Humility*

This principle was also evident in the life of Christ. He who was God, became man, accepting the status of a slave. (Phil. 2:6-8). He was prepared to wash his disciples' feet - the task of a slave (John 13:1-13). In his letters to the seven congregations (Rev. 2 and 3) Christ always begins

first with a word of appreciation and praise. Only then does He warn and reprimand them.

We should have the same attitude: "... in humility consider others better than yourself". (Phil. 2:3). God who is perfect and knows everything can judge fairly. However, as sinful human beings we should always be humble about our own cultural viewpoints. Not only Paul (Rom. 12:10, 16), but also James (4:6) and Peter (3:8;5:5) again and again emphasise the necessity of humility in our relationships to others. Following the example of Christ, we should treat others - and their cultures - in a kind and humble way. Even when we differ or have to tell them that they are wrong, the truth should be spoken in love (Eph. 4:15) and not in superiority and pride.

This principle is not only very difficult to adhere to in our personal relationships, but it also challenges the pride and arrogance typical of every culture. (Most humans believe that, because another culture is *different* from theirs, it is also *inferior* to theirs!)

These three basic principles for unity is summarised in a single text in the Bible: "What does the Lord require from you? To *act justly* and to *love mercy* and to *walk humbly* ..." (Mic. 6:8).

According to what norm(s) should we, in the second place, approach the question of diversity?

### *Tolerance with regard to diversity*

Also in this case we are encouraged to do as God did and is still doing to us. God is a good, long-suffering God. He lets his sun rise and set on good and evil alike; He lets his rain fall on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). He is also patient and gives people the opportunity of conversion (John 4:2; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9)

We should have the same attitude towards our cultural differences. A Biblical example is provided in Romans 14:1-6. The Christians in Rome were intolerant and looked down on each other because of different eating habits - in the same way as we look down on and are intolerant towards people with different cultural habits. Paul warns them and asks them not to pass judgement but to be tolerant, to show compassion and charity.

Tolerance, however, should not cancel the basic principles of unity (justice, love and humility). God's patience does not imply that He approves of

evil. We should also not be tolerant towards what is wrong, sinful and evil (Cf. Mark 9:43-47; 1 Cor. 5:1-13 and 2 Cor. 6:14-18). Tolerance does not mean relativism!

Biblical tolerance is also something different from indifference, aloofness or neutrality towards others' cultures. Neither is it an opportunistic attitude of "lets tolerate each other for the sake of peace". The Biblical idea of tolerance is not a negative, but a positive concept.

Furthermore it is not something passive. Tolerance implies that one should actively affirm the culture of another. Instead of looking down on him or putting him down, his talents and the good in his culture should be acknowledged and respected. This affirmation should be mutual.

The following seven steps are important: (1) seek the common ground, (2) give recognition to what is good in the other's culture, (3) ask clarifying questions in order to understand each other better, (4) genuinely try to understand the other person's point of view, (5) explain the mutual differences clearly, (6) be kind to those who disagree with you, (7) speak the truth in love and don't try to force someone to agree with you.

Recapitulating, we could say that in the encounter between different cultures we will get the best results if (1) we aspire towards *unity* with regard to the essentials in which unnegotiable values such as justice, love and humility are at stake, (2) we have a positive, affirming, tolerant attitude towards non-essential *differences or diversity* to enable us to discern the good in other cultures and (3) we have the wisdom to know the difference between the essential (1) and what is not essential (2)!

The writer of Proverbs (27:17) described long ago what I have in mind: "As iron sharpens iron, so the one man sharpens the other". In the same way cultures can grind and polish each other with the result that after this sharpening process, each one of them looks much better than before!

I don't think we always realise what unique opportunities we have in South Africa to achieve exactly this. No other country on the continent has such a large number of Western people. They can have a strong influence. Vice versa they can accept the good things from African culture in order to become real (white) Africans instead of simply Westerners in diaspora.

This brings us to the second important theme of this chapter:

### 7.3 Africanisation and transformation

In chapter 3 (3.1.2 and 3.1.3) it was indicated that the concept "Africanisation", even amongst its most fervent advocates (Africanists who think Afrocentrically), remains very vague, not clearly demarcated at all. Nobody actually knows what it means and even less what it should mean. Many emotionally subscribe to the ideal to be different to Europe (the negative), but exactly *what* it implies and *how* it should be achieved (the positive side) they really don't know.

Jansen (1996:27) correctly writes: "There are few words in the post-colonial lexicon which have generated more nonsense statements than 'Africanisation'. Since Ghanaian independence in the 1950's, the term has become a slogan to advance a range of continental causes parading in the interests of transformation ... Its slogan status bedevils attempts to transform universities."

#### *Different meanings of Africanisation*

We could at least distinguish the following five different connotations:

- *A racial or ethnic meaning*

According to this viewpoint "Africanisation" literally means "more Africans". ("Africans" will be those classified as Africans during apartheid.) More black people should be appointed in what were previously white positions. We do not have any objection to this kind of affirmative action because blacks, in the past, were (inter alia because of work reservation) kept out of important positions.

The question, however, is whether this will bring us any further than an *outward* form of Africanisation. Hiring more African staff and admitting more African students, simply because they were historically disadvantaged, will still leave the university and science itself unchanged, because the perspective from which scholarly work is done will remain Western. We will have a black African university with a white, Western heart!

- *An organisational meaning*

The organisational connotation is closely related to the previous meaning but goes a step further: black African people should not only be appointed but also be placed in charge so as to influence important decisions.

Kinoti (1994:77-86) first mentions the fact that powerful influences from outside have resulted in Africa not really being in charge of its own affairs. However, he also emphasises the fact that the Africans are disorganised and he calls for democratic, fair, disciplined and corruption free governments. Africans should get rid of their apathy, passivity, hopelessness and laziness and start working on a better future.

This call is made, however, 30-40 years after most African countries gained independence. Many whites are therefore very sceptical about Africanisation in its organisational meaning. Even if blacks are in charge, Africanisation can remain something superficial on the surface: instead of whites, the blacks now enjoy travelling on the gravy train!

- *A cultural meaning*

This meaning of the word was already explained in chapter 3.1.2, implying that traditional African culture should be revived. If it simply implies an uncritical return to the past (repristination), it cannot be healthy. It may even be impossible! If, however - as has been the argument throughout this book - it implies a critical look at the past, accepting only what is good, it will be a positive step.

This cultural meaning is closely connected to the idea of authenticity. Kinoti (1994:92ff) correctly emphasises, for example, the fact that the church in Africa should become truly, genuinely African in nature: "In the final analysis Christianity will succeed in Africa to the extent that it is authentically African." He illustrates this with concrete examples and concludes (1994:95): "My main point ... is that theologies and church agendas developed in the West for Western Christians may not only distort Christianity in our circumstances but they also make it peripheral to the needs of the African people. Therefore, I appeal to African theologians and pastors to make Christianity at once truly biblical and truly African - truly African in expression and relevance ... truly meaningful to the worshippers and, I believe, to God."

Cultural Africanisation implies that Africans want their own, unique culture - much more than only the colour of their skins and their type of hair - to put its stamp on the whole of life. They don't want an imported, borrowed, foreign church, government, economy or university, but something of their own, something original. I can fully agree with this ideal.

- *An intellectual meaning*

With this connotation we are moving, to my mind, even closer to a really important meaning of Africanisation. Kinoti (1994:76,92) emphasises that in all areas the African should start thinking independently. He believes - and I agree - that Africans are not intellectually inferior, but have all the capabilities to visualise a much better Africa than the present. According to him, Africans need a new vision. A vision requires, firstly, intense dissatisfaction with the present situation and, secondly, a quest for an alternative.

According to Kinoti Africans, however, will find it difficult to think independently. In the first place, because of what happened to them in the past, they themselves lack confidence. In the second place there are those who will do their best to stop them from thinking for themselves: (1) powerful foreign interests which have a lot to lose if Africans take charge of their own destiny in Africa. (2) Those who do not believe that Africans can think for themselves. (3) Others who consider it unnecessary to do so because the West has already figured out all the solutions - if only the Africans will accept them. (4) The ruling African elite who benefit from the fact that their subjects are not thinking for themselves, accepting the mismanagement, backwardness and poverty.

I am very enthusiastic about this fourth (intellectual) meaning of Africanisation. It does not only apply to blacks but also to whites in South Africa. We should recognise the unique problems of our country, focus our attention on them and find the relevant solutions. To help us in doing so, Western science should not be excluded.

This brings us to the last meaning of Africanisation:

- *A contextual meaning*

"Relevance" is a key concept in the striving towards Africanisation. We should scratch where it itches! We should answer the questions with which the people of Africa are really wrestling and not waste time by giving answers to questions asked by the Western world which are irrelevant to the African context.

There are totally unrealistic ideas about Africanisation, for instance that Western science should be Africanised completely - whatever that may mean. Realistic, responsible Africanisation will be contextual: Western

institutions, science, technology or whatever should be adapted in order to be relevant for African conditions. This is one of the most important ways in which I would like to view Africanisation.

In this way the contribution of white Westerners is not excluded beforehand. The following example will illustrate what I have in mind. Is an African philosopher only a person of African stock, born in Africa, who grew up in the African cultural world and thinks and writes about it? Or can an African philosopher also be a white Westerner, European by birth, schooled in Europe, but with an intimate knowledge, sensitivity and understanding of African religion, culture, dynamics, problems etc. and who reflects and writes on these? In the last sense we will also be able to speak of African economists, jurists, natural scientists and many more.

*An example: my own cultural identity*

In order to give more concrete substance to the above, it might be helpful to indicate how I view my own identity.

- *I am an Afrikaner* who loves my language and writes, sings and prays in that language. I also know that apart from the standard Afrikaans (which I try to speak) other varieties of Afrikaans are also beautiful - such as Cape, Griqua, Namaqua and Hillbrow Afrikaans. I share my language with Eugene Terreblanche (a racist), Breyten Breytenbach (a Buddhist), Adam Small (a Christian), Achmat Davis (a Muslim) and Brahm Fischer (a Communist).
- *I am a South African*, who can watch a boxing match on television and be on the side of the South African of whatever race - fighting an American opponent. I like to cheer Josaiah Thugwana, Ezekiel Sepeng, Penny Heyns and Marianna Kriel for what they have achieved at the Olympic Games. I tell my students about the history of Paul Kruger, Hendrik Verwoerd, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, F.W. de Klerk and many others who helped to shape our history and our country. I can do no other, because my life and the lives of my students are inextricably entwined with the histories of all these South Africans.
- *I am an African*, who can tell my students of my first meeting with Kenneth Kaunda in Lusaka in 1987, and of all my visits and lectures in many other African countries. It broke my heart to think of the situation in Rwanda and the theological students there whom I still taught a week prior to the start of the terrible genocide in 1994. When books by Robert

Mugabe, Samora Machel, Kwame Nkrumah, Oliver Tambo and Steve Biko were banned in South Africa, I collected and read them - because I like knowing how people think on this continent. I like Shona sculpture, the bright colours of African art and their rhythmical music. I feel much more at home among the tranquil, hospitable people of Africa than among the tense individualised Westerners. I love the unspoilt beauty of this great continent.

- *I am also a citizen of the whole world*, who prizes a wide range of contacts with Christian scholars across the world, because my own mind would be so much poorer without it.
- Above all, *I am a Christian*, a child of God. My Christian identity is the most important to me.

As regards the other aspects of my identity, I would not like to lay them out in order of rank. At times I am first an Afrikaner, as for example when my grandmother told me about the time when the English herded them into a concentration camp at Potchefstroom like animals. At other times I am primarily a South African, proud of the fact that our country finally has a democratic government and no longer needs to be the polecat of the world. Then again I am an African, furious when I read how the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank exploit Africa.

My personal story is inextricably interwoven with all these other stories. They all form part of our past and for that reason also an inherent part of our future.

Identity to me is not a static thing - it is dynamic. It should be a verb rather than a noun. Identity is that with which you can identify yourself. For that reason it changes all the time, as one's experiential world broadens and one comes into contact with other people, cultures, faiths, thoughts and ideals. Identity can either be very limiting - and impoverishing - or very broad - and enriching!

Africanisation is usually closely connected to the present process of transformation in our country - our next theme.

### *Transformation*

In chapter 3.1 we have already discovered that white Westerners and black Africans understand this concept differently.



### *The two viewpoints*

The idea of the whites was compared with that of a chameleon which changes its colour in a different environment. In the same way, whites adapt to the new situation in South Africa. Transformation is not radical change but more or less cosmetic in nature. It is - to use another image - rather painting the "house" (government, university, etc.) in a new colour.

The blacks have a much more radical idea of transformation. Previously it was compared to the metamorphosis of a tadpole to become a frog - it is not a cosmetic but a radical change.

There are, however, degrees of radicality. To use an image again: Some blacks want to alter the house, while others want to demolish it and erect a totally new building. Some still want to negotiate peacefully, while others (such as certain students' organisations) in a revolutionary way simply demand capitulation so that they can take over. If it suits them, they may use slogans like Africanisation and Afrocentrism.

### *The reaction*

In these circumstances whites, not only at universities, but in all areas of life - have only one of two choices: either accommodate or capitulate and consequently isolate themselves. However, to accommodate transformation in the sense of revolution is wrong. And to isolate ourselves will also not be a solution.

With the task given to Adam and Eve in paradise (Gen. 1:28 and 2:15) to inhabit the earth, rule over it, develop it and take care of it, God declared humans to be cultural beings. Creating culture belongs to our essence. (That is the reason why monks and nuns who withdraw into a cloister continue to create culture even in seclusion - sometimes culture of outstanding quality.) Cultural isolation, therefore, is not a solution - it is in fact impossible.

Culture is not something "worldly". It is a divine calling! It is not something which, if we prefer, we may be engaged in *next to* or *apart from* our religious activities. It is an inherent part of our service to God. He calls us to serve Him *in* and *with* our cultural activities. Therefore our task is, apart from isolation, also not accommodation. We cannot simply accept everything which our own or another culture offers. Our task is to *reform* every culture.

This brings us to the last theme of this chapter.

## 7.4 Reformation

Many radical students think reformation is not the appropriate word for the present transformation process in South Africa. They regard it as cosmetic window dressing. I, however, believe that the old word "reformation" is exactly what we need to guide us also in this new multicultural situation. The message throughout this book was - without mentioning the word - a message of reformation. In conclusion therefore an exploration of what is meant with this concept to indicate how we should visualise a culture which serves and honour God.

To state as clearly as possible what reformation entails, it will be compared with four other viewpoints about the Christian's relation to culture. It is interesting that these four viewpoints plus that of reformation occurred again and again throughout history. (Compare Bediako, 1992; Niebuhr, 1951; Veenhof, 1994; Van der Walt, 1991:159ff; 1992:76ff and 1994a:100ff.)

### *Four non-reformational viewpoints*

I will first sketch the four, according to me, wrong viewpoints, followed by what I regard to be the correct Christian attitude towards culture.

- The first viewpoint is that basically there is no difference between Christianity and culture - they are *identified*. If something is good, it is also Christian! The Christian simply has to try his best. Christian culture does not really demand an intense struggle. This optimistic attitude, which we will not discuss in more detail, is encountered among so-called liberal Christians. They don't realise the devastating influence of sin in every aspect of our lives.
- The three more orthodox Christian viewpoints, however, are aware of the tension between the Christian and the world or the Christian and his cultural calling. They are consequently more pessimistic about a Christian culture.

They start by dividing reality into two areas or spheres (an ontological dualism). Something in God's creation is regarded as higher, better and of more importance than the rest of creation which has a place only on a lower, inferior level. This basic dualism is reflected in numerous distinctions such as "soul and body", "spiritual and material", "church and world",

"religion and culture" etc. According to this perspective something, a part of creation, is sinful. They do not clearly distinguish between creation and sin *in* creation. Something in creation *as such* is regarded as inferior, of less importance and sinful.

The correct viewpoint, however, is not to divide creation into two *domains* or *spheres*: a holy, sacred, supernatural one on the one hand and a profane, secular or natural one on the other. The Biblical viewpoint is that *in the whole of creation* we have to distinguish between two religious *directions*: a *positive* direction of obedience to God and a *negative* direction of disobedience.

Sometimes these two directions can be localised. (Adultery and murder, for instance, will be clear examples of the concrete results of disobedience.) It is impossible, however, simply to divide the whole of creation into two realms of which the one will be bad (disobedient direction) and the other good (obedient direction). In his parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30) Christ Himself warned that we live in a mixed situation where good and bad is found simultaneously. We also saw in the previous chapters that cultures cannot simply be divided into good and bad cultures, because they contain both good and bad elements.

The first incorrect step taken by the three orthodox Christian viewpoints is therefore that they depreciate part of God's creation - human culture included. This is not Biblical at all, because God made everything good (1 Tim. 4:4; cf. also 1 Cor. 3:21). Christ also did not come to fight against or destroy part of God's creation, but to fight against the work of the devil *in* creation (cf. 1 John 3:8). Redemption in Christ is not something "supernatural" against creation, "nature" or culture, but it is against sin *in* creation and culture.

In the second step the three orthodox Christian perspectives each takes a different route. One of them places salvation in Christ *next to* creation, nature and culture. The next viewpoint places grace *above* nature and culture. The third is more radical, because it views God's grace and redemption in Christ as situated *against* creation, nature and culture.

- The result of the first viewpoint (the Christian *next to* culture) is that redemption in Christ has no significance for culture. Christian faith and culture develop *parallelly*. The Christian is not permitted to influence culture, because it is regarded as an independent, autonomous and secular

area which should be ignored. As a Christian and as a human being one is two quite different persons!

- The second viewpoint believes the Gospel, salvation in Christ, Christian faith and the church to be *an addition over and above* secular culture. Culture has to be elevated, complemented, fulfilled and perfected by the Christian element. If it is, for example, placed under the supervision or authority of the church or theology (which by nature is regarded as Christian!), it becomes sanctified or consecrated. Also in this case really in-depth influence from Christ's salvation and Christian faith is not possible. The Christian's faith remains like oil on top of the water, gravy on the meal or icing sugar on the cake of culture. Culture is more or less uncritically accommodated.
- The third Christian viewpoint is radical: redemption in Christ is *against* culture. Therefore the Christian has only one of two options: As a Christian he either has to *withdraw* himself from (worldly) culture, isolate himself or he has to *fight* it. None of them, however, provides a solution. If one withdraws oneself into an introverted faith, one can have no influence on "worldly" culture. And if one attacks "evil" culture you are also mistaken, because - as was shown throughout this book - no culture *as such* is evil, it contains both good and bad elements. Therefore the goodness in a culture has to be affirmed and only that which is wrong should be fought against.

#### *A reformational perspective on culture*

The fifth, in my conviction, correct perspective on culture is that Christian faith is not something *next to*, *above* or *against* culture, but - like salt and yeast - it should be involved *in* culture. The Gospel should not be *apart* from culture, not simply be an *addition* to culture or be *hostile* towards culture. God's grace, his redemption in Jesus Christ, is intended to *free* and *redeem* culture of its limitations, one-sidedness, imperfection and sinfulness. It has to *restore* culture to be able to answer correctly to God's revelation. It should not *destroy* but *renew* culture!

This Biblical-reformational viewpoint about culture is, however, only possible if we *totally* reject the ontic dualism which is the basic starting point of the three orthodox Christian viewpoints. Because in this dualistic, two realm approach something in God's creation is depreciated or disqualified. The wrong ontological tension between grace and *nature* should be replaced by the Biblical tension between grace and *sin*. As already explain-

ed, tension does not exist between two (ontic) areas in creation, but between the two (religious) directions of obedience or disobedience to God.

In the reformational viewpoint God's creation and human culture are not *despised* but *restored*. Therefore we cannot ignore, despise or fight them. They are also not made acceptable simply by ecclesiastical sanction.

The three wrong Christian viewpoints finally result in the secularisation of culture. They don't really provide a perspective according to which God can be served *in* our cultural activities. The reformational perspective, on the other hand, believes that culture - every culture - should continuously be *reformed* to enable it more correctly to respond to God's will as expressed in creation and Scripture.

I am convinced that this is the only way. God is the Creator - also of man, the creator of culture. God did not drop his creation when it lapsed into sin - He continued to love it and redeemed it in Christ. Christ also did not despise creation - He became part of it and died for it. He also did not despise the body - after triumphing over sin and death, He rose bodily from the grave. He did not redeem only our souls and the church - He redeemed the entire creation.

To be truly Christian, therefore, simply means to be fully human again. Christian culture implies ordinary, human culture, fulfilling one's daily tasks in all the different areas of life.

Many Christians in South Africa, however, think they have to sacrifice their faith in order to be "human". They advocate a *worldly, secular* culture. Other Christians again think that being human should be sacrificed to being a Christian. In this way they become *strangers in the world*, they advocate a culture foreign to our daily tasks in this world.

Both a *worldly* and a *world-flight* culture is wrong. What we urgently need is a *world-reforming* culture!

Against the *optimistic* view of the more liberal Christians and the *pessimistic* viewpoints of orthodox Christians, the reformational perspective provides a *realistic, balanced* viewpoint for Christian involvement in culture. It recognises the goodness in every culture, without becoming optimistic. It also sees the imperfections and sinfulness of every culture, without becoming pessimistic about it.

*Reformation: protological as well as eschatological*

The word *re-form* suggests that something should regain its original form. In our reformational endeavours our task, in the first place is to regain something of the original, sinless situation in paradise. Adam and Eves' relationships towards God, towards nature, between the two of them and also towards themselves were perfect. They did not overemphasise one relationship at the expense of the other. Reformation therefore has a protological side. It aims at the restoration of culture according to the original model. It, however, also has an eschatological dimension.

The original cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve (in Gen. 1:28; 2:15) is repeated by Christ (Matt. 28:16-20). I do not regard this only as a call towards evangelism, but as a cultural command to teach the whole world to serve God in *all* areas of life.

When, in Revelation, we read about a new paradise, something amazing is said. We read (in Rev. 21:24-26) that the splendour, glory and honour of kings and nations will be brought into the new Jerusalem. I don't think it will be wrong to say that part of this will be the cultural treasures of the different nations. The twelve gates of the city will be open day and night in all directions to receive the goodness which, through thousands of years, the cultures from every part of the world have brought forth.

As the wise men from the East honoured Christ with their best gifts (Matt. 2:11), now the nations are bringing the very best to the new city where God Himself is present. Note that only the good things of every culture are acceptable - nothing impure will be permitted to enter (cf. Rev. 21:27). What an amazing sight this will be!

This eschatological perspective should not be left for the future, but should be an inspiration for the present. Already *now* we are preparing for this great day. Already *today* we should ask ourselves how we are going to honour God with our culture. Which aspects of our culture will be permitted to be brought into the holy city? What should our cultural activities look like to be acceptable to Him?

Certainly not an individualistic culture. Neither a communalistic one ...

From Scripture we can learn much about a culture which will glorify God. That, however, was not the real focus of this book. The emphasis was on something which Christians tend to under-emphasise or even ignore: God's

will as expressed in his creational revelation. God also reveals Himself in human culture. As explained in this book, from the response of different cultures to God's creational revelation, we may gain a glimpse of that type of culture which will be welcomed in the new Jerusalem.

May it be that one day, when we enter through one of its twelve gates into the new Jerusalem, the culture which we will bring along will not be the culture which we are familiar with now - one-sided, imperfect, distorted, sinful - but a better, richer, more balanced, beautiful culture - a culture to the honour and glory of God!

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

The debate on Afrocentric or Eurocentric? has only started and it will most probably grow in intensity in the future. At the moment we do not even have clarity about the exact meaning of the two concepts. This book explores the problem and gives advance warning that extremism (either Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism) will not provide a solution.

While it is in the first place intended to assist white South Africans to have a better understanding of African culture - and their African identity - it may also be useful to assist black South Africans in getting a grip on Western culture. The aim is to be of value to both groups to see clearly both the strong and weak points in their own culture as well as the "other" culture - enabling them to achieve mutual enrichment.

In spite of the fact that the book concentrates on educational issues, it is relevant to all areas where black and white encounter each other and have to work together. People's differing views on society, conceptions of time and ways of thinking influence all the aspects of their life. By way of clarifying the differences, the intention of the author is not to stereotype or drive black and white apart. On the contrary, his aim is to contribute towards a better understanding in building a new South Africa.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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