



The Christian gospel as a basis for escape from poverty in Africa

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Abstract

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*Economically sub-Saharan Africa seems to be in a hopeless state. There are many reasons for this situation. The thesis of this article is that **one important factor** contributing to this state of affairs is the basic philosophical presuppositions of the traditional African world view. This world view includes inter alia the following aspects: the idea of the limited good (which discourages initiative because those who prosper expose themselves to suspicions of having appropriated more than their due portion of the good), belief in magic (which makes it difficult for people to see the real connection between input and result), ancestor veneration (which perpetuates traditionalism and resistance to family planning), and the remoteness of God (which gives rise to a humanistic ethic). This article indicates how in every case the Gospel provides an avenue of escape from the chains which bind Africa to this fate, especially where it can inculcate a Puritan work ethic. The conclusion is that, even apart from considerations of eternal salvation, it is very important that there will be a genuine revival of biblical Christian faith in Africa, if in the short term this continent is to make economic progress.*

1. Introduction

A friend of mine reports after a recent visit to a central African country: “Roads, telephones, hospitals, schools and other public services are collapsing. There are acute shortages of about everything ... The rate of inflation is 120 percent ...”

The same disheartening picture presents itself in most African countries. In Nigeria, one of the richer African countries, “government services have grounded to a halt. Hospitals are mere shells without equipment, medicine or personnel.

Schools have no benches, blackboards or books. Roads fall into disrepair” (Boer, 1992:4).

Why is Africa failing to cope economically, while Eastern nations such as Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong and South Korea are enjoying affluence with far less resources and more population pressure?

There are many reasons for the dire poverty in which most African countries find themselves.

An important reason is the system according to which the International Monetary Fund operates (Vallely, 1990:161-162), and the way in which international *aid* is geared towards the advantage of the rich rather than the poor nations who are supposed to benefit from it (Vallely, 1990:74-83) – a system which has landed many African countries in a situation in which they have no hope of ever repaying their debts. The outflow in the form of repayments of debts now exceeds that of the total income of most countries (Boer, 1992:4).

One is seriously confronted by the question to what extent the peoples of most African countries can be held responsible for the repayment of debts incurred by corrupt leaders, who in many cases were not elected by those peoples and never consulted them over incurring those debts. Many loans never even reached the people, but were simply transferred to the bank accounts of the leaders (Boer, 1992:5).

The churches of the First World should awaken to their calling of acting as the conscience of their peoples. They should seek to be informed about the facts of loans and international aid, and indicate ways which are more in conformity with the gospel.

Another important reason is the *population explosion*, which even in relatively affluent African countries such as South Africa makes it more difficult every year to provide jobs and essential educational, health and social services for the masses.

In many cases, such as that of Zaire and Zambia, *bad and corrupt government* or inefficient administration have contributed much to the collapse of the economies of the countries.

An important factor is *the lack of knowledge and skills* necessary for production and development.

Then there are *other important factors*, such as the declining prices of commodities, civil war and crop failures. These, however, are temporary factors and are not peculiar to Africa. They occur in other countries, which seem to be

able to overcome the results of these calamities. In Africa these factors have a worse effect, because they combine with the other, more permanent factors and aggravate the effects of those.

One encouraging trend is that African nations seem to be finally coming to grips with reality and have stopped blaming all the ills of our continent on colonialism, exploitation by Western nations or capitalism. The sooner we realize that Africa will be no better off if Europe or the USA were to vanish from the face of the earth, the better for Africa. At a conference of the Africa Evangelical Fellowship in Windhoek in December 1991, representatives from long independent African countries were asking the question: What has Africa done with its independence in 25 years? It is time we stop looking for scapegoats in colonialism and start looking at ourselves and our own mistakes. It is time we take the responsibility for our policies and actions. The economic problems of Africa are not going to be solved by any Santa Claus from outside Africa, the solution will have to come from inside.

I do not believe that the *human resources* of Africa are inherently inferior to other peoples. God did not create inferior peoples. Africans, when taken out of their traditional background and integrated into a modern Western society, cope quite well. The reason for our failure to cope is not to be sought in our *genetic makeup*, but in our *world view* and our attitude towards creation.

I therefore propose in this paper to focus on one specific factor, and that is, the effects of the traditional African world view on the economic state of African countries, and then to indicate how the Christian gospel can provide a new basis for a healthy economic dispensation.

Oosthuizen (1985:84-85) demonstrates in a very interesting paper that technology and industry are culture-bound, arguing that *industrial mentality is a psychological orientation of the mind* which puts the latter in an adventurous frame within which the mind becomes truly the architect of its own future, systematically “conquering” obstacles confronting it in the process.

In order to be able to cope in modern society, people need adaptability, a spirit of initiative and innovation, whether individual or communal, dogged perseverance in pursuing goals set, responsible, conservation-minded exploitation of resources, punctuality and an appreciation of the value of time, integrity of government, responsible family planning under the looming threat of the population explosion. None of these vital requirements for success or even survival in modern society has a place in the traditional African world view, rather, all of them stand in direct contrast to it. Yet if these traits cannot be developed in Africa, its future is bleak indeed. Africa will be doomed to consist of a vast proletariat, infected with the greed of European society, but without the means to satisfy that greed. This is

due to leave the people of Africa seething with dissatisfaction and frustration, resigned to the apathy of hopelessness, or ready for crime, violence and constant destructive revolution, caught up in a vicious circle of self-perpetuation poverty.

2. The idea of the limited good

Many phenomena and aspects of African spiritual culture can be explained from the presupposition of the idea of limited cosmic good. Good in this case does not refer in the first place to goods in the sense of material possessions, but rather to vital force, power, prestige, influence, health, good luck (Van Rooy, 1978:7).

This idea is typical in subsistence level societies, where natural resources are seen to be limited. In expanding societies, such as modern industrial countries, it does not make sense any longer.

Since the cosmic good is limited, it is believed that the amount of good possessed or controlled by a particular person or people can only be increased at the expense of others. On the other hand, when it seems to decrease, the logical conclusion is that it must be in the process of being drawn away to somewhere else.

An instance where power and influence may be legitimately increased is that of a chief or leader, since such persons are regarded as the incorporation of the communal good, the pivotal point of the vital force of the group. This idea is projected onto prestigious church leaders such as Shembe and Lekganyane. The new tribe, the church, shares in their prestige and vital force.

This idea of the limited good is certainly a factor behind much of the reasoning that whites in Africa, and European countries in their dealings with African countries, can only prosper at the expense of Africans and African countries.

Against this background it becomes clear why so many African leaders are more or less compelled by the views of their own people to nationalize the sources of wealth, so as to prevent the enrichment of foreigners at their expense.

2.1 Witchcraft

Belief in *witchcraft* is stimulated and confirmed by the idea of the limited good. As soon as a person prospers because he is somewhat more hardworking than his neighbours, he is almost automatically suspected of drawing away the life-force of someone else – and that is what black magic amounts to. If the children of one man by different wives differ in their health, prosperity, scholastic and other achievements, the less fortunate one will naturally suspect the other one of witchcraft.

2.2 Jealousy

Africa is *a jealous continent*. People who surpass others are viewed with suspicion: Why did he pass the examination when I failed? Why are his crops better than mine? Why did he get a better job than I? Why did he escape the disease that infected me? Why are her children more successful than mine? Why does the manager like him better than me?

People do not tend to consider that the other person might be more diligent in his work, that the envied children have a more intelligent mother, that the favoured worker might just be more dependable, that chance might also be a factor in contracting diseases or escaping them; the logical explanation in Africa is that the more prosperous ones use black magic for the purpose of enhancing their own life-force, or that those whose crops and stock do well, use zombies to work for them at night. In February 1990 many innocent people were killed in the country of Venda in an outburst of vicious jealousy and hatred for precisely this reason. The killers were in most cases educated youths from secondary schools.

During the apartheid years, black school children sincerely believed that only a limited number of candidates were allowed to pass their final examinations, and they used to blame the white-controlled Department of Education for it.

2.3 Socialism in Africa

I do not think that pure capitalism is an ideal system. There should be social care and security for the less fortunate who are not so through their own guilt (Vallely, 1990:266-268). The jealousy that is characteristic of Africa has a very favourable reverse side: that of the absence of stinginess, the tendency to share everything with one's friends and family. The Venda proverb says, "The children of one man share even the head of a locust". This is praiseworthy and Africa needs a system of government that incorporates these ethical principles. Radical socialism, however, will have and has had baneful effects in Africa. It has consistently failed to fulfil its promises, and has world-wide become totally discredited (Gemper, 1991:540). Countries such as Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique have seen its effects and discarded it.

Unfortunately radical socialism seems to fit in very well with the traditional African world view of sharing everything and of a weak sense of private property. In a certain sense it even accommodates the jealousy of Africa, penalizing the diligent by taking from them the fruits of their labour and rewarding the indolent by giving it to them. The effects of this system have been dramatically demonstrated in the recently liberated countries of Eastern Europe. In Western Germany, the characteristically German self-discipline, devotion to duty and the love of hard work have combined to make that country an economic super-power. In Eastern Germany, forty years of socialism have all but destroyed those

characteristics, with the result that the great worry in the united Germany is now how Eastern Germans may be motivated again (Bordewich, 1990:80).

Conditions in Africa have up to very recently not contributed to an ethic of devotion to duty and hard work. In the first place it was relatively easy to survive in Africa. There are few places with really severe winters. Game used to be plentiful. The continent was underpopulated and it was easy to move from one place to another when the fields became overgrazed, firewood became scarce or the fertility of the soil was exhausted. It was possible to practise slash and burn methods without permanently destroying vegetation.

On the other hand the climate of the greatest part of Africa is enervating. People are not encouraged by the climate to work more than is absolutely necessary, especially since the results of one's labour would merely serve to arouse the jealousy of others. In conditions like these, it does not make sense to work more than is necessary for providing for the basic needs of one's family. Add to this the many debilitating diseases and parasites which plague Africa, and one can really not blame Africans for not having developed a work ethic like those of the Germans, Chinese or Japanese.

Taking all these facts into account, one has to conclude that, if even the Germans with their admiration for hard work made a failure of socialism, in Africa its effects are bound to be totally disastrous. It would simply stifle the last traces of initiative and industry without which no country can survive economically.

2.4 The Biblical alternative

Christians have a great mission in modern Africa. Looking at history, there seems to be little scope for anything but despair. Uhuru has not lived up to the high expectations that the people of Africa placed in it. Socialism has been shown to be a dismal failure, but even a free market economy cannot solve the problems of Africa by itself, because, quite apart from the many evils accompanying this system, while it can provide the scope for prosperity for a section of society, it cannot change the attitudes of people. But I am convinced that there is still hope for Africa, provided it is willing to listen to the message of the Bible.

I hope to demonstrate that the Bible has the only answer for all the ills of Africa. At this point let me just refer to the teaching of the Bible about the limited good.

In this respect we have a lot to learn from the first chapters of the book of Genesis, the revelation of God about creation. In those chapters we learn nothing at all of the idea of the limited good. On the contrary, we see God's bountiful, loving care for man. He plants a garden for him. He provides everything that man needs. There is more than enough for everyone; no one needs to lack anything.

But how does man receive those wonderful gifts? By working faithfully and wisely! That is why we read in Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it”. The garden is a gift from God, just as is this beautiful continent of ours. But Eden does not mean that man may be idle all day and be fed from heaven. No, man has to work and develop the garden, otherwise he will have to go hungry. This is what Paul confirmed in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

The result of obedience to this command of God would naturally have been that man will prosper. Unfortunately sin and death has crept into the picture. This is the revelation in Genesis 3. Man no longer automatically reaps the fruits of his labour. There now is a curse upon the soil. It brings forth thistles and thorns (Gen. 3:18).

Yet, in what can be called God’s common grace, life has not become unbearable. Despite the fall of man and the curse upon the soil, God still causes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). God still grants man his blessing on his labours. This blessing is now often mixed with affliction and disaster, but normally man is still rewarded according to the measure of his obedience to the command of God to work the soil and take care of it. That is the promise of hope for Africa.

But there are more than one element in this command of God. The human race is not only to work the garden, but also to *take care* of it. That means that they are expected to work the earth in a responsible way. Humanity was created in God’s image, as his representative, his viceroy on earth. They were told to subject the earth and rule over it (Gen. 1:20). This command is coupled to another command, which is to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But this command has also to be obeyed in a responsible way. If human fertility runs wild, it can become a cancer and the earth can become so overcrowded that the resources of one country after the other simply have to collapse under the population pressure. In Kenya, for instance, women used to have an average of 6.2 children in 1960. This increased to 7.2 children per woman in 1970 and 8.3 in 1980, in a country where the population pressure has already reached a critical stage!

Van Niekerk (1994:24) may be right when he mentions as one of the reasons for the population explosion in Africa, the fact that the birth of a child can never be experienced as a disaster, but rather as a triumph of life over death.

The result of these factors is that humanity finds it almost impossible to take care of the earth as the viceroy of God. We have become plunderers of God’s creation. We destroy it. Two percent of the trees in Africa is cut down every year, which means that at this rate in forty years from now there will not be a tree left in Africa – unless the trend can be reversed! Twenty million hectares of forest

disappear from the world each year. In the Sahel region, south of the Sahara, more and more trees are cut for firewood, with the result that the cooling effect of vegetation steadily diminishes and the desert steadily encroaches on inhabited land.

One species of animal and bird after the other is becoming extinct. At the present rate, the last rhino in Africa may disappear for ever in six years from now, and the elephant shortly after that. Thousands of species have already become extinct. Until recently, destruction of forests has been much worse in Northern America than in Africa. Now, because of the abject poverty and the growing population of so many African countries it has become very difficult for them to do much about conservation. When there is no other way of cooking one's food than cutting trees, then one will cut trees. Interest in ecology has always been the prerogative of the affluent.

3. Concepts of causation

A major aspect of the ideological background of Africa which prevents it from coping in the changing world, are the ideas of causation which are so deeply rooted in the minds of our people. I refer specifically to *magic* and the *belief in the influence of ancestors*. I know that in many of the major historical denominations, where the authority of Scripture is no longer accepted, ancestor veneration is regarded as quite acceptable. It is common knowledge that this is openly and aggressively propagated from pulpits and at theological conferences (Kgatla, 1997:633-640). I personally believe that veneration of ancestors cannot be harmonized with truly biblical religion, and that it has a baneful affect, not only on the spiritual life of people who call themselves Christians, but also on their social and economic life.

3.1 Magic

The belief in magic has a paralyzing effect on the healthy development of Africa. This paralysis comes from more than one angle.

On the one hand magic all too often furnishes *an excuse for failure*. Instead of examining one's methods of working, planning, marketing techniques, principles of production, or perseverance, in case of failure, it is very easy to look for and find a scapegoat in the person of someone practising black magic against one. This not only leads to endless animosity and jealousy, but it also robs one of the opportunity to face reality and profit from a realistic assessment of one's mistakes. There is always someone to blame. But how can any business, industry or farm stay competitive if it is not willing to evaluate its policies on a regular basis?

On the other hand, it is still a general practice among school pupils and even university students in Africa to buy *amulets* from traditional African doctors, which are supposed to help them in their examinations. One of the most popular kinds of fetish is that which makes the examiner blind to a candidate's mistakes. There are even catalogues sent out by charlatans, of medicines, at exorbitant prices, for assuring good crops, or warding off bad luck, or preventing traffic accidents, or making one irresistible to girls, or keeping one's wife at home. But if one puts one's confidence in these fetishes, it becomes unnecessary to prepare for examinations, or to "care for" one's fields and put something back into them, or to drive carefully, or to eliminate one's unfavourable traits of character, or to really work at building up a healthy marriage, or even to run a country efficiently. Magic will take care of all that in an instant! There are even cases known of ministers of the Gospel who have their churches treated by "doctors" to ensure a good relationship with the congregation!

And when the magic fails, there is no other remedy than just to fatalistically accept the inevitable. *Fatalism*, one of the greatest curses of Africa, goes hand in hand with belief in magic. And together with this fatalism, there is the ever-brooding envy and hatred against those who in some way or other have succeeded where oneself has failed. They are believed not to have succeeded because they deserved it, but because they have stronger magic, because they have by magical means acquired more than their proper share of the limited good ("... the dominant value system in a traditionalist environment treats the pursuit of private gain as a punishable offence ..." – Nürnberger, 1994:138).

One way of obtaining guaranteed success in a business venture is by procuring medicine made from parts of the body of another person. These parts have to be removed from the victim while he/she still lives. In this way the vital force of the victim is believed to be harnessed by the person who buys the medicine. This medicine is believed to be very potent. For this reason many persons are still willing to take the risk of being discovered, and many persons are still killed in many parts of Africa for ritual purposes.

On the other hand, when a person really prospers, it is often taken for granted that the only possible explanation for his extraordinary success is that he used this kind of potent medicine. In February 1990 the land of Venda exploded in an orgy of paganism. Thousands of secondary school pupils were involved in the cruellest possible "execution" of suspects. Many were forced to swallow petrol and then put alight, or were simply hacked to death on the slightest suspicion. The fact that the victims had been successful, or perhaps had some anti-social traits of character, was regarded as sufficient proof of their guilt. They were supposed to have had medicine from ritual murders, or employed zombies, or practised some other kind of witchcraft.

3.2 Obsession with power

It should be comprehensible that a concomitant of the belief in witchcraft is the *obsession with power*. Power is sought for its own sake, not for doing good to anyone else, but only for doing good to oneself. This not only implies that people seek power for themselves, but also that people admire power for its own sake, and are impressed with power more than anything else. People do not admire self-sacrifice or devotion to noble ideals. They tend to regard that as foolishness, or suspect people who maintain those principles and follow those ideals of having sinister hidden motives. In an ethic where power has become the highest norm, suffering for what is good and right and noble does not make sense. Moral good as conformation to a universal norm for the common good or for the sake of obedience to God does not make sense.

This has many important repercussions for *African politics*. Let me quote Oosthuizen (1985:81-82):

It has been found that those people who utilize political power in order to achieve success on a personal level, in fact do not display the qualities essential for economic development, such as initiative and industriousness. Studies in the United States revealed that people in certain other professions advance far more rapidly than those who seek to succeed through political power. The big man, the strong man – often lacking business acumen and economic initiative – usually proves to be an obstacle to development.

Oosthuizen points out that the Afrikaner, after having held the reigns of politics in South Africa for forty-five years, is still lagging far behind English-speaking South Africans in the economic sphere.

President Sukarno of Indonesia was a powerful political figure, but he boasted that economics gave him a headache. He also boasted that his people would be willing to eat stones if he told them to, and he brought his country to a state where the people almost had to eat stones. Dr. Verwoerd of South-Africa was a very powerful political figure and an intellectual giant – Pres. Nkhrumah called him “the smartest man in Africa” –, but if one learns about his foolish economic policies for the so-called homelands, one doubts if he knew the first principles of economics – which is one of the reasons why his policy of apartheid was doomed to failure from the start.

One of the manifestations in Africa of this obsession with power for its own sake is the many dictatorships, presidents-for-life and perhaps even the many one-party states. There are still many dictatorships in Africa, and African peoples put up with whatever these dictators do with a remarkable degree of long-suffering, because the power of these people impresses them, and perhaps also because

they believe that in some way they share in the power and prestige of the big chief.

At present there are indeed a few benign dictators about, but the great problem with a dictatorship or a one-party state is that it makes it extremely difficult for the people to replace a corrupt, inept, self-seeking government with a better one.

There is, however, a much deeper problem with this whole idea of seeking power for its own sake, and that is that there is hardly anything more satanic than this principle. It could rightly be called *the satanic principle itself*. Satan has one obsession: power for its own sake. In the striving after that ambition he risked and lost his stature as an angel of the light and became the arch-enemy of the Creator. What is right in the kingdom of God – love, self-denial, being weak like Christ on the cross, doing what is right according to God’s norm of righteousness and holiness – all that is folly in the kingdom of Satan.

The church of Christ has always in the course of history been strongest and most vital when it dared to be weak according to worldly standards, and it has always been powerless when it was powerful according to worldly standards. Examples of the latter are the apostate church of the Middle Ages, and the Afrikaans churches which uncritically identified themselves with the apartheid policy in South Africa. Examples of the former are the persecuted church in the first three centuries, and the church in Russia during the last forty years.

The destruction of a hospital

One instance of what this obsession with power can do to the people of Africa was observed during the last half of 1990 at Siloam hospital in the country of Venda, where an outstanding team of Dutch doctors was chased away by a “crisis committee” on a list of accusations which every one knew to be false, and which even the instigators themselves afterwards acknowledged to be false. The hospital will never have a medical staff of that quality again.

The tragedy of the whole history is that it simply does not make sense except if seen from a satanic angle. The nurses had nothing to complain of. There is no disparity between the salaries of black and white nurses. The hospital was a model of good, efficient administration. The people of Venda had nothing to gain and everything to lose from a disruption of hospital services. The same people who chased the Dutch doctors away are now begging them to return.

The only way this can be explained, is the tragic trait of Africans to be impressed by destructive power. The only ones who will suffer for it are the African patients. The black giant of Africa will be bound ever more firmly to the rock of poverty, ignorance and despair, unless he can be liberated from this demon.

It is important that churches in Africa take note of this satanic sin of seeking power for its own sake, and be faithful in their witness against it, whether it is the power of whites practising apartheid or that of blacks exploiting their fellow blacks in the name of black power.

Few factors undermine progress and industriousness as badly as belief in magic. This kind of belief makes it very difficult for people to see the right *relation between input* (in the form of labour, study, skill, knowledge) *and result* in the form of success. Many of the strikes at educational institutions in South Africa are caused by this kind of attitude: the demand of “pass one, pass all”, ridiculous as it may seem to people who do not come from a background of magical beliefs, is quite logical when seen against that background. Young people from this background take it for granted that the government must have some hidden source of wealth from which it can provide salaries to people with formal qualifications in the form of certificates, whether those certificates enable them to render any necessary service or not. Therefore everyone that qualifies at all must go to university, where each one follows the easiest courses, quite apart from whether there is any need for those qualifications. Whereas in developed countries such as Germany, more than sixty percent of young people are trained in technical fields, black South Africans regards those fields as beneath their dignity.

Belief in magic undermines the possibility of devotion to work. In South Africa, the Volkswagen factory produces *seven vehicles per employee per year*. The world average is *twenty vehicles per employee*. In Japan it is *forty* per year (Von Keyserlingk, 1993). The same phenomenon manifests itself in professions, such as that of teacher and civil servant. In Japan, which is not a Christian country, there are cultural factors which make it possible to achieve this amount of success. One can mention the utter, life-long loyalty and devotion to one's firm and its well-being. This cannot be duplicated in other cultures. But a Christian work ethic can achieve much of this in a continent where Christianity is still growing rapidly.

3.3 The view of Scripture about magic and vocation

In Scripture, magical ideas and practices are strictly forbidden. Well-being is not to be sought by magical means, but God's blessing is to be obtained by obedience to him and by diligence in fulfilling one's daily task (Deut. 18:10-12; Lev. 16:9-10; 2 Thess. 3:10; Ex. 20:9). One of the practices for which the notorious queen Jezebel was hated was her practising of witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22).

According to the Scriptures, blessing and wealth is not to be gained by magical practices, which disregards God as the Giver of blessings, but by faithful stewardship of creation, which involves labour, and which honours God as the Owner of everything. Since the Reformation, theologians have emphasized the

dignity of any work. There are no higher and lower callings. All vocations should be fulfilled to the honour of God (Stott, 1992:140-141). One should be diligent enough to have something to share with the less fortunate (Ephes. 4:28).

4. Ancestor veneration

The idea behind ancestor veneration seems to be the universal human longing for immortality. People believe that as long as their offspring remember them and bring offerings to them, they will not vanish into oblivion and be cut off from the living tribe by death.

I believe that this is not the occasion for a theological evaluation of this phenomenon. We are interested in the contribution ancestor veneration makes toward strengthening the chains which bind the African giant to the rock of poverty and despair. In this regard I would like to indicate two factors which contribute to the enslavement of Africa.

The first concomitant of ancestor veneration is conservatism and traditionalism. (Nürnberg, 1996:149). The ancestors are the guardians of the traditions of the people, whether good or bad. The Venda proverb says, "The new hedgepole is supported by the old one". It cannot stand by itself. Old traditions may not be discarded. This traditionalism finds it very difficult to adapt to the new circumstances of the changing society. Of course, it is forced to adapt, but the adaptation is unwilling and unplanned. People do not consciously and positively adapt to changing circumstances, they are carried along willy nilly. Peoples who can keep the initiative while adapting, such as the resurging nations of the Far East, do very well indeed. Africa has not really *accepted* the changes, it merely *succumbed* to them. That is one of the reasons why the giant is kept firmly chained to his rock of poverty.

The second baneful factor is the population explosion. One of the most important reasons why a large offspring is Africa's ideal of happiness and blessing, is the belief that only through a large offspring can one ensure that one is not forgotten and neglected after death. For this reason, the resistance of Africans against family planning is often almost fanatical.

The Christian answer to this belief that one's salvation lies in many children is to be found in Jesus Christ. He is the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Him will live, even though he dies (John 11:25). To die outside Christ is eternal death, to which offerings from one's grandchildren can make no difference; to die in him is life, to which offerings from one's grandchildren can add nothing. I can mention cases of African believers who before they died, expressly forbade their offspring to bring them any offerings after their death.

As for the belief that the ancestors can bring prosperity or adversity, the Bible is very clear on this point that no believer is allowed to trust in them or expect anything from them or communicate with them, but that believers must seek their salvation in God alone. See Deuteronomy 18:9-15. To trust in the ancestors causes people to neglect their work and expect blessings from their ancestors, which will not materialise. To trust in God means working diligently in expectation of his blessing, according to his command.

5. Perceptions of time

John Mbiti has analyzed the African concept of time in his well-known book, *New Testament eschatology in an African background* (1971). He has indicated that Africans are past-orientated in their concept of time. Europeans are future-orientated. The past is, according to Europeans, behind us and the future lies before us. According to the African world view, the future as an unknown factor is still behind us. We are looking towards the past, which we can see because it is known to us. Time to us is like a river in which we stand, facing downstream, towards our ancestors, traditions and personal history.

Mbiti takes as his model the concepts of time of his own Akamba compatriots. One can assume that for many other African peoples this is not valid. On the other hand, it might be a valid model for quite a number of peoples. In this conception, the future is hardly relevant. There can be very little orientation towards the future or planning for the future, which is so essential for achievement in modern society.

The Bible has a very hopeful message in this respect. Actually it is the revelation of God to Israel in the Old Testament through his prophets which first shattered the cyclical pagan Semitic concept of time and brought the dimension of history as movement to a future goal to man (see Berkhof, 1959:17-20).

The Christian biblical view on time and the future seems to be essential for the salvation of Africa in its traditionalistic orientation towards the past. If Africa is left to face the future without the biblical revelation about the future, the process of adaptation to the future will be much more painful, much slower and full of disappointments and setbacks.

The only factor which has in it the potential of fully liberating the African giant from the shackles which chain him to the past, is the acceptance of the kingdom of God which has already come in Jesus Christ, but which also opens up the dimension of the future with all its glorious possibilities under the rule of Christ.

6. Ideas of God

In a treatise on the Christian world view and ethics, this section would stand at the beginning, because God and his revelation is the foundation and centre of a Christian world view. In a treatise on the African world view, all the other factors that we have discussed so far are more relevant than God. God is indeed regarded as the greatest power, the highest in the hierarchical order (*Mwari, UNkulunkulu*), or the all-pervading impersonal force which pulses through the world (*Modimo*), but he is not involved in man's behaviour; the belief in him hardly affects the behaviour of humans.

The biblical concept of God differs radically from that of most African peoples. The God who reveals himself in the Bible is closely concerned with individual man and with his conduct. He is personal, he loves, hates, abhors evil, wills man to fulfil his commands, which express God's personal will. Man is created for the supreme purpose of living in intimate fellowship with this personal, loving God. God communicates with man in his word, and man communicates with God by listening to his word and answering him in prayer.

God's will has been revealed to man in Scripture, and that to man is a law of life. A person who or a nation which is obedient to this law, will prosper. That is one of the main themes of the book of Deuteronomy, and that is the message that evangelical Christians have to bring to Africa.

Let me quote one passage from the book of Deuteronomy. In a very important place in this book, right between the Decalogue and the well-known *Shema*', we hear these words:

These are the laws that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you. Obey them in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. As long as you live, you and your descendants are to honour the LORD your God and obey all his laws that I am giving you, so that you may live in that land a long time. Listen to them, people of Israel, and obey them! Then all will go well with you, and you will become a mighty nation and live in that rich and fertile land, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised (Dt. 6:1-3).

7. Ethics: man and God

In Africa ethical norms, rules of conduct, are not regulated according to a supposed divine law, but according to several other principles, such as the striving after power, the balance of cosmic good, obedience to the ancestors and their traditions. Apart from a high regard for virginity in brides, sexual morality does not disapprove of promiscuity if one can get away with it. Africa is a promiscuous continent, which makes it very difficult to combat diseases such as

aids. One fails to see how this scourge will ever be contained, unless a Christian morality can gain the upper hand in Africa.

What is perhaps the most important factor in African ethics has, however, not yet been mentioned, and that is *the priority of interpersonal relations*.

Character traits which are regarded as desirable in Africa, and which we are taught to cultivate from our earliest youth, are not those of honesty, industry, integrity, perseverance, initiative, planning for the future, individualism, ambition, idealism and other traits which are necessary if a people has to cope in a changing society, but rather regard for and consideration of other people, friendliness, sharing, loyalty to one's own group, respect for seniors and traditions, knowing one's place, pliability, compromise – traits which make one a pleasant person to get along with. These are what constitute the idea of *ubuntu*.

The ethics of Africa are thus mainly *humanistic*. Man is the norm, and especially man in his relationships with his own group.

This ethics promotes pleasant interpersonal relationships, but it does not make for efficiency in government or in places where skills and discipline are important. If one has the obligation to look after the interests of one's own people, nepotism is a virtue, and the norm is no longer who has the ability for the work but which of my relations needs the salary! The result is that administration and industry grind to a halt because of inefficiency.

The strong emphasis on being pleasant at all costs can have very negative effects in places like hospitals, or wherever discipline is needed. African sisters and matrons are very inclined to overlook negligence of duties, with the motivation: "I do not want to be hated". Because of this frame of mind hospitals under the administration of Africans are often in a chaotic state of inefficiency.

It is clear that *ubuntu* needs to be christianized.

The fact that group-consciousness is limited to the own tribe and family brings to the fore another bane of Africa, *tribalism*. Tribalism has resulted in utter hopelessness and despair with many in Africa.

The strong group-consciousness also partly explains the almost irresistible power of *peer pressure*, in which everyone is forced to take part in destructive actions, and the person who refuses to burn and kill is regarded as a traitor, an evil one.

The answer of the Bible to this exaggerated group-consciousness is given by Oosthuizen (1985:96-97): "... Abraham's calling out and away from his people with the command to go to a distant country is a symbolic act of breaking away

from the tyranny of the group and of tradition, in order to start a new venture ... And Africa needs must undertake this symbolic trek”.

As for the fear of other people, the answer of Scripture is: “Fear God!” (Matt. 10:28). It is vastly more realistic to fear God, who can destroy both body and soul, than to fear man, who can at most destroy the body. “Dare to be a Daniel!” is a very sound Scriptural teaching. Because Daniel feared only God, the pagan king could totally depend upon him.

I would, however, add another, even more important message from Scripture, and that is the concept of the new family, the brothers and sisters and mother of our Lord Jesus (Mark 3:34-35), the people of God, the elect (1 Peter 2:9-10), those who do the will of the heavenly Father. The answer to the ills of tribalism is to be incorporated into the new people of God, into which one is born by being born again. Apart from this message, which Christians should proclaim with all possible urgency, I see a very bleak future for Africa. But then Christians should demonstrate their unity in practical love and fellowship with each other across denominational boundaries. I do not advocate relativizing the truth of the Gospel, but recognition of God’s children in whatever denomination they are found.

8. Conclusion

If we agree with what has been said above, we shall also agree that Christians have a great calling in Africa. Apart from the message of the Bible, of reconciliation with God and with each other, of a new life of righteousness in Jesus Christ, of renewal through the power of the Holy Spirit, there is little hope for Africa. If we desire to preclude violent revolution in Africa, we must be the initiators of powerful and thorough reformation. We must urgently pray and work for revival, which only the Spirit of God can bring, and which alone can endow us with the power we need to be instruments of reformation.

Most of the other factors which economically and technically cripple Africa are not likely to change in the near future. The richer nations are not likely to become less selfish; there will still be droughts and catastrophies; the pressure of population is likely to become much worse before it slackens. But there is one factor which can change, if the church in Africa is faithful to its calling, and that is the attitudes of the people of Africa.

I would venture to say that, if all other factors change for the better, and this factor of an unbiblical world view does not change, Africa will remain chained in poverty. On the other hand, if none of the other factors change, but this one factor does change radically, Africa can become a shining example of freedom from poverty.

I am aware of the distaste that many people have for what they call “the Puritan work ethic”. Naturally, affluent people can afford the luxury of spurning the Puritan work ethic. If, however, one’s children go hungry, and one has to listen to them crying through the night, and to see one’s wife waste away, and there is lack of funds for education, and no official can be trusted, and corruption and graft has become a way of life, then the Puritan work ethic becomes something very desirable – a beautiful dream.

It does not seem to be possible to expect African employees to accept the work ethic that makes Japanese such formidable manufacturers, or the Chinese, for that matter. The roots of the philosophies of those peoples are foreign to African soil, and there is no strong motivation to accept those. But as long as the base of Christianity which has already taken root in Africa can be broadened and deepened – and that is what revival means – then the Christian ethic can provide a sound basis for new economic life in Africa, by at least removing many of the obstructions to economic development.

Revival means that God becomes real, great and holy to many people again. Where that happens, where the Holy Spirit grants genuine revival to the church of Christ, many instances can be mentioned of African communities which prosper, both spiritually and materially, precisely because of the new work ethic and social conscience. One thinks of Christians in Venda, or in the Tugela valley.

Professor Henry Krabbendam, who is a regular visitor to Uganda, told me in a personal communication that Uganda is one of the very few sub-Saharan African countries where there is a spirit of hope, and where the economy is actually starting to recover from the ravages of corruption and civil war. “There is now peace and stability, local democracy and a more disciplined army” (Ward, 1995: 98). It seems as if the main reason is the tradition of religious revival in that country, and the spirit of deep commitment to the Lord and personal responsibility before him which it has brought in its wake. President Museveni is by origin an Anglican who was very active in the *balokole* revival movement. Although he has since broken with institutionalised Christianity, “the training in leadership, intellectual debate and moral commitment which the revival gave him was important in his development as a politician” (Ward, 1995:99).

But liberal theology, which takes neither God nor his Word, the Bible, seriously, has never contributed anything to spiritual renewal. Revival is the fruit of those beliefs which have always been most prominent in times of spiritual awakening:

- a realization of man’s total inability to do anything for his own salvation;
- a deep sense of guilt and of one’s lost state before God;
- a total dependence upon the righteousness of Christ;
- a deep joy over the miracle of forgiveness and salvation;

- a deep love for the Bible as the Word of God;
- a deep concern for those who have not yet been touched by the Spirit of God.

Were it not for the Great Awakening in the time of Wesley and Whitefield in England and America, Britain would probably have followed the road of France in the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. Revival might still save Africa, just as it has saved Britain from the terrors of revolution in the past, and herald a new era of hope for Africa.

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